

Country Report
Factors Affecting Children's Resilience and Happiness (QOL)
During COVID-19 Pandemic in Thailand

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Introduction

Due to the continuing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Thailand's Ministry of Public Health implemented measures in 2020 to prevent and control the virus, including closing and restricting schools. Teaching and school activities have been provided since that time through online platforms, or in hybrid forms (partly online and partly onsite). These changes have greatly affected the daily lives of children and their families. Many children in Thailand live in places where there is no space for outside play. Moreover, online learning has been demonstrated to have a negative impact on the physical and emotional wellbeing of both children and their parents. The results of a 2020 United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) survey showed that 70 percent of children and adolescents in Thailand were suffering psychological problems because of online learning (or no schooling) during the pandemic, including stress, anxiety, and boredom.

Studies on the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to children reveal increasing stress levels and social inequality in children. This is a global problem. Economic and societal disruption resulting from the pandemic imperil children: the results include poverty, malnutrition, child abuse, child neglect, anxiety, depression, and education inequality (Fry-Bowers, 2020). Turning the focus to young children, toddlers and preschoolers have shown increases in negative behaviors, i.e., frustration, tantrums, lack of focus and attention in play, aggression, unreasonable demands, need for continual physical contact, and sleep problems.

These behaviors reflect the stresses on young children who only have contact with teachers and classmates online. This situation places increased responsibility on their parents, and can result in negative parenting behaviors (Imran et al., 2020). Children's play has changed due to the pandemic and the practices of social distancing. Since overstressed parents have become primarily responsible for young children's outdoor play and outdoor activities, the trend is that children are spending increasing amounts of time in solitary play and parallel play (Nakchuen & Khayankij,

2021). Furthermore, some young children are no longer living in safe environments, which are essential to fostering positive long-term development.

Child Research Network Asia (CRNA) researches the importance of social and emotional wellbeing as the foundation of young children's success in later life. CRNA's research studies focus on three perspectives: 1) family, 2) kindergarten or school, and 3) society or government. CRNA evaluates eight Asian countries, including Thailand, Japan, China, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore.

The aim of this report is to analyze factors that influence Thai children's happiness (Quality of Life, QOL) and resilience during the pandemic, in order to determine the best ways to promote the well-being of young children, i.e., how to create healthy environments that promote the development of resilience and happiness as the foundation for young children's success in later life.

Methodology of Report

Data for this report were collected online during the COVID-19 pandemic in October 2021. Samples were divided into two groups: mothers of 5-year-olds and mothers of 7-year-olds who enrolled their children in public schools in the academic year 2021. These schools included six schools from six provinces in Bangkok and metropolitan regions under online instruction due to the high risk of spreading COVID-19. The majority of study participants were also under lockdown. An infinite population with an error of 0.5 was used to calculate sample size. The sample size was at least 385 mothers. The researcher collected data from 250 mothers in each group, 500 mothers in total. Data returned rate were 403 mothers (80.6%), comprised 183 mothers of 5 years old (73.2%) and 220 mothers of 7 years old (88%). Stratified random sampling was used to analyze the samples.

Two sets of questionnaires were used for each group of mothers. Questions covered three aspects: family perspective, kindergarten or school perspective, and government perspective. Questionnaires included 154 items, including general information about children and families, the family's situation during the COVID-19 pandemic, children's happiness (QOL), children's resilience, mother's parenting style, mother's perception of and anxiety toward COVID-19, spousal support, school support, children's use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and parent involvement and ICT awareness, and children's daily life and play. The

questionnaires provided the same items for both groups, with the exception of five items that differed between the group of mothers of 5-year-old children and the group of mothers of 7-year-old children. Content validity of both sets of questionnaires was extremely high. Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) was 0.98 for questionnaires of mothers of 5-year-olds and 0.99 for questionnaires of mothers of 7-year-olds. An e-consensus form was distributed before collecting data from the samples via online questionnaires. Data analysis included frequency, percentage, standard deviation, t-test, and Pearson correlation.

Report Results

Demographics of mothers in the two report groups

Mothers of 5-year-olds in the report group for the most part lived in areas of lockdown (88.53%) with their spouse (77.05%) and their child (66.12%). Nearly half of them had two children (48.09%), and the subject child was the first child (50.27%). The highest degree of education attained was a bachelor's degree (40.98%); nearly 40 percent of the mothers worked as full-time employees (38.80%). Over 40 percent of the spouses of these mothers held bachelor's degrees (40.98%), and over 40 percent worked as full-time employees (40.44%). Economic status was at a low level, with over a third of the group members reporting a household income of between 13,000 – 26,000 baht per month (35.52%). The restrictions of COVID-19 had reduced household income for a majority of the families (65.03%). Even though an overwhelming percentage of mothers of 5-year-olds had been vaccinated (93.99%), over half were very concerned about COVID-19 (58.47%), and close to half were dissatisfied with government measures that dealt with the pandemic (46.45%). Nearly 40 percent reported that they received no support from any government agencies (39.34%).

Mothers of 7-year-olds in the report group for the most part lived in areas of lockdown (81.82%) with their spouse (80%) and their child (70%). Half of them had two children (51.36%) and the subject child was their first child (51.36%). The highest degree of education attained was a bachelor's degree (42.27%); over 40 percent of the mothers worked as full-time employees (41.91%). Fewer of the spouses of these mothers held bachelor's degrees (27.27%), but over 40 percent worked as full-time employees (41.36%). Economic status was at a low level, with nearly 30 percent of group members reporting a household income of between 13,000 – 26,000 baht per month (28.18%). The restrictions of COVID-19 had reduced household income for a majority of

the families (60.91%). Even though a large percentage of mothers of 7-year-olds had been vaccinated (86.83%), over 60 percent were very concerned about COVID-19 (63.4%), and over 40 percent were dissatisfied with government measures dealing with the pandemic (42.27%). Over 50 percent reported that they received no support from any government agencies (50.45%).

Demographics of children studied: 5-year-olds and 7-year-olds

A slight majority of the 5-year-old children in the study were boys (50.82%). Over 40 percent of these children ranged between 5 and 5 years 2 months in age (41.53%). Slightly over half were the first child in the family (50.27%).

Over a quarter of these 5-year-olds slept approximately 9-10 hours at night (27.37%). Over three-quarters had their mothers as primary playmates (77.60%). Over a quarter of these 5-year-olds spent more than four hours outdoors to play with their mothers each day, followed by those who played for 30 minutes indoors (29.51%).

For roughly a quarter of these 5-year-olds, screen time included watching TV for one hour each day (22.95%) and using a smartphone for one hour each day (24.04%). [Over 20 percent (21.31%) of these 5-year-olds did not use a tablet.] During the period of the study, over a quarter of these 5-year-olds spent one hour a day studying at home (24.59%) and attended enrichment classes twice a week (26.23%). However, most probably because of restrictions imposed by the pandemic, a majority of the 5-year-olds in the study did not participate in local community activities (63.39%).

A slight majority of the 7-year-old children in the study were boys (51.82%). Nearly 75 percent of these children ranged between 7 and 7 years 2 months in age (73.18%). Slightly over half were the first child in the family (51.36%).

A third of these 7-year-olds slept approximately 9-10 hours at night (33.64%). Approximately 70 percent had their mothers as primary playmates (70.91%). Over a quarter of these 7-year-olds spent one hour outdoors to play with their mothers each day, and a third spent 30 minutes of indoor play with their mothers each day (33.18%).

For roughly a quarter of these 7-year-olds, screen time included watching TV for one hour each day (24.09%) and using a smartphone for one hour each day (23.18%). [Nearly 30 percent (29.07%) of these 7-year-olds did not use a tablet.] During the period covered by this report, nearly a third of the 7-year-olds spent four hours a day studying at home (32.73%), and a quarter attended

enrichment classes twice a week (25.46%). However, likely because of restrictions imposed by the pandemic, a majority of the 7-year-olds in the study did not participate in local community activities (61.36%).

Over half of the mothers of these 7-year-olds rated their children’s online learning performances as at a moderate level (57.27%), as well as rating their performances in both Thai and mathematics at a moderate level (53.64% and 52.27%, respectively).

Mothers’ perspectives on childrearing, children’s happiness (QOL), and resilience

Factors evaluated and found to be related to children’s happiness (QOL) and resilience included parenting style, mother's perceptions of childrearing and anxiety about COVID-19, spousal support, school support, children's use of ICT learning, parents' awareness and involvement, and children's daily life and play.

1. Children’s Happiness (QOL)

During the period of data collection for this report, mean scores of happiness for children in both groups were high (5 yrs. $M = 4.09$, $SD = 0.28$; 7 yrs. $M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.35$). With regard to sub-areas, physical well-being had the highest mean score (5 yrs. $M = 4.31$, $SD = 0.14$; 7 yrs. $M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.10$), while everyday functioning had the lowest mean score (5 yrs. $M = 3.80$, $SD = 0.05$; 7 yrs. $M = 3.67$, $SD = 0.12$) (table 1).

Table 1

Mean and standard deviation of children’s happiness (QOL) during COVID-19 pandemic study

Items	5 yrs.		7 yrs.	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Children’s happiness	4.09	0.28	3.95	0.35
Physical well-being	4.31	0.14	4.27	0.10
Social and emotional well-being	4.26	0.05	4.10	0.07
Self-esteem	4.03	0.07	3.88	0.03
Family	4.16	0.04	4.07	0.13
Social interaction	3.95	0.05	3.71	0.05
Everyday functioning	3.80	0.05	3.67	0.12

2. Resilience

During the period of data collection for this report, the mean score of resilience for children in both groups was high (5 yrs. $M = 4.14$, $SD = 0.73$; 7 yrs. $M = 4.04$, $SD = 0.80$). With regard to sub-areas, personal resilience had the highest mean score (5 yrs. $M = 4.33$, $SD = 0.04$; 7 yrs. $M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.04$), while caregivers’ resilience had the lowest mean score (5 yrs. $M = 4.00$, $SD = 0.06$; 7 yrs. $M = 3.91$, $SD = 0.06$) (table 2).

Table 2

Mean and standard deviation of resilience during COVID-19 pandemic study

Items	5 yrs.		7 yrs.	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Children’s Resilience	4.14	0.73	4.04	0.80
Personal Resilience	4.33	0.04	4.23	0.04
Caregivers’ Resilience	4.00	0.06	3.91	0.06

3. Parenting style

Parenting style, as reported by the mothers, had a high mean score for both groups (mothers of 5 yrs. $M = 3.43$, $SD = 0.61$; mothers of 7 yrs. $M = 3.41$, $SD = 0.65$). With regard to sub-areas, the responsive attitude mean score was higher (mothers of 5 yrs. $M = 3.65$, $SD = 0.08$; 7 yrs. $M = 3.64$, $SD = 0.10$), than the punitive attitude (mothers of 5 yrs. $M = 2.92$, $SD = 0.04$; 7 yrs. $M = 2.86$, $SD = 0.09$).

4. Mothers’ perceptions in regard to child rearing and anxiety about COVID-19

Considering emphasized aspects in childrearing, both groups of mothers reported a very high mean score (mothers of 5 yrs. $M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.10$, mothers of 7 yrs. $M = 3.66$, $SD = 0.11$). With regard to sub-areas, social and emotional skills had the highest mean scores ($M = 3.72$ and 3.71 , respectively) followed by miscellaneous factors ($M = 3.67$ and 3.64 , respectively).

The level of satisfaction of the mothers’ lives during COVID-19 was high for both groups ($M = 4.43$ and 4.47 , respectively). With regard to each item, "I am satisfied with my childrearing" had the highest mean scores ($M = 4.63$ and 4.68 , respectively), while "I am satisfied with my work-life balance" had the lowest mean scores ($M = 4.19$ and 4.26 , respectively).

5. Spousal support

The mean scores of partner/marital relationships were high for both groups (mothers of 5 yrs. $M = 3.16$, $SD = 0.19$; mothers of 7 yrs. $M = 3.11$, $SD = 0.22$). With regard to the sub-areas, the mean score of childcare support (mothers of 5 yrs. $M = 3.18$, $SD = 0.08$; 7 yrs. $M = 3.13$, $SD = 0.07$) was slightly higher than the mean score of emotional support (mothers of 5 yrs. $M = 3.14$, $SD = 0.04$; 7 yrs. $M = 3.09$, $SD = 0.05$). With regard to each item, the highest mean score was "Considers how to cope with COVID-19 together" (mothers of 5 yrs. $M = 3.39$, $SD = 0.90$; mothers of 7 yrs. $M = 3.40$, $SD = 0.90$).

Spousal support in daily life was measured by two activities: 1) child rearing or childcare, and 2) housework. The results were significantly higher for the mothers of 7-year-olds, as follows:

1) 31.35% of mothers of 5-year-olds reported that their spouses or partners were involved in child rearing 80-90%, while 31.36% of mothers of 7-year-olds reported that their spouses or partners were fully supportive (100%) in child rearing.

2) 28.96% of mothers of 5-year-olds reported that their spouses or partners helped with housework only 50% of the time, while 25% of mothers of 7-year-olds reported that their spouses or partners fully shared housework.

6. School support

During the period of the pandemic when the survey was conducted, a majority of the children attended childcare or school in a hybrid style, a combination of online and onsite learning. (5 yrs. = 62.29%; 7 yrs. = 54.09%). Mothers of both groups rated the mean score of teacher support at a very high level (mothers of 5 yrs. $M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.60$; mothers of 7 yrs. $M = 3.59$, $SD = 0.53$).

7. Children's use of ICT and parent involvement and ICT awareness

7.1 Percentage of ICT usage time

This was approximately 60 percent for both groups (5 yrs. = 62.23%; 7 yrs. = 60%). Children engaged in six different activities: watching Video clips (5 yrs. = 46.45%; 7 yrs. = 53.18%), drawing and coloring (5 yrs. = 43.17%; 7 yrs. = 45%), listening to music (5 yrs. = 43.72%; 7 yrs. = 43.64%), playing games (5 yrs. = 36.07%; 7 yrs. = 42.27%), doing school

assignments (5 yrs. = 48.09%; 7 yrs. = 56.36%), and attending online classes (5 yrs. = 40.44%; 7 yrs. = 50%).

7.2 Parents' attitude and involvement during use of digital media

The mean score for parent involvement in digital media viewing was high for both groups (mothers of 5 yrs. $M = 2.97$, $SD = 0.22$; mothers of 7 yrs. $M = 2.96$, $SD = 0.18$). In detailed responses, mothers from both groups reported that "support(ing) my child so that he/she can do difficult activities" was the most important factor (mothers of 5 yrs. $M = 3.24$, $SD = 0.68$; mothers of 7 yrs. $M = 3.21$, $SD = 0.77$).

The percentage of mothers uncomfortable about using digital media before and after the restrictions imposed by COVID-19 was as follows:

1) 46.45% of mothers of 5-year-olds never had felt awkward and still did not feel awkward when using digital devices as a tool for entertainment, while 40.45% of mothers of 7-year-olds had felt awkward before the pandemic, but felt less so during the pandemic.

2) 46.99% of mothers of 5-year-olds and 41.82% of mothers of 7-year-olds never had felt awkward and still did not feel awkward when using digital devices as a tool for their children's education.

8. *Children's daily life and play*

During the period of data collection for this report, over half of the children experienced a decline in outdoor play time (5 yrs. = 54.65%; 7 yrs. = 60.91%). Over a third of the 5-year-olds experienced an increase in indoor play time (37.71%), while nearly 40 percent of the 7-year-olds experienced no change in indoor play time (39.09%). Approximately a third of both groups spent at least 30 minutes a day playing outside (5 yrs. = 32.15%; 7 yrs. = 35.43%). Differences in learning responsibilities at age 5 and age 7 partly account for differences in the amount of indoor play time and study time. Over a quarter of the 5-year-olds played for four hours a day indoors (27.32%), while over a third of 7-year-olds played indoors for only one hour a day (34.45%). Nearly 40 percent of the 5-year-olds studied for one hour a day (38.80%), while nearly a third of the 7-year-olds studied for four hours a day (32.73%).

Factors affecting children’s resilience and happiness (QOL) at age 5

Children’s resilience and happiness (QOL) were found to be positively correlated at a moderate level ($r = .459, p > .01$). In consideration of each variable, responsive parenting attitude, social and emotional skills and miscellaneous factors of emphasized aspects in childrearing, and emotional support from spouses were found to be positively correlated to children’s resilience at a moderate level ($r = .404; r = .454; r = .435; r = .341, p > .01$), while non-punitive parenting attitude and childcare support from spouses were found to be positively correlated at a low level, as well as mothers’ satisfaction with current life ($r = .181, p > .05; r = .237, p > .01; r = .150, p > .05$).

In regard to children’s happiness (QOL), it was found that responsive parenting attitude and non-punitive parenting attitude were positively correlated at a moderate level ($r = .317; r = .310, p > .01$), while social and emotional skills and miscellaneous factors of emphasized aspects in childrearing, childcare support from spouse, emotional support from spouse, and mothers’ satisfaction with current life were found to be positively correlated at a low level ($r = .252, p > .01; r = .251, p > .01; r = .185, p > .05; r = .271, p > .01; r = .214, p > .01$) (Table 3).

Table 3

Pearson correlation of 5-year-old children

variables	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	X6	X7	Y1	Y2
[Parenting attitude] Responsive attitude (X1)	1	.124	.399**	.321**	.075	.158*	-.321**	.404**	.317**
[Parenting attitude] Non-punitive attitude (X2)		1	.181*	.120	.163*	.138	-.127	.181*	.310**
[Emphasized aspects in childrearing] Social and emotional (X3)			1	.752**	.120	.210**	-.285**	.454**	.252**
[Emphasized aspects in childrearing] Miscellaneous (X4)				1	.250**	.282**	-.195**	.435**	.251**
[Spousal support] Childcare support					1	.720**	-.210**	.237**	.185*

(X5)									
[Spousal support] Emotional support (X6)						1	-.168*	.341**	.271**
Mothers’ Satisfaction in current life (X7)							1	.150*	.214**
Children’s Resilience (Y1)								1	.459**
Children’s Quality of life (Y2)									1

Note: ** $p > .01$, * $p > .05$

Factors affecting children’s resilience and happiness (QOL) at age 7

Children’s resilience and happiness (QOL) were found to be positively correlated at a moderate level ($r = .622, p > .01$). In consideration of each variable, responsive parenting attitude, social and emotional skills and miscellaneous factors in emphasized aspects in childrearing were found to be positively correlated to children’s resilience at a moderate level ($r = .529; r = .492; r = .496, p > .01$) while non-punitive parenting attitude, childcare support from spouse, emotional support from spouse and mother’s satisfaction with current life were found to be positively correlated to children’s resilience at a low level ($r = .136, p > .05; r = .170, p > .05; r = .223, p > .01; r = .277, p > .01$).

In regard to children’s happiness (QOL), it was found that responsive parenting attitude, social and emotional skills, miscellaneous factors of emphasized aspects in childrearing, and mothers’ satisfaction with current life were found to be positively correlated to children’s happiness (QOL) at a moderate level ($r = .498; r = .444; r = .465, p > .01; r = .363, p > .01$) while non-punitive parenting attitude, childcare support from spouse, and emotional support from spouse were found to be positively correlated to children’s happiness (QOL) at a low level ($r = .287; r = .248; r = .275, p > .01$) (Table 4).

Table 4

Pearson correlation of 7-year-old children

Variables	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	X6	X7	Y1	Y2
[Parenting attitude] Responsive (X1)	1	.130	.414**	.481**	.323**	.375**	-.161**	.529**	.498**
[Parenting attitude] Non-punitive (X2)		1	.223**	.246**	.098	.107	-.161*	.136*	.287**
[Emphasized aspects in childrearing] Social and emotional (X3)			1	.787**	.201**	.248**	-.202**	.492**	.444**
[Emphasized aspects in childrearing] Miscellaneous (X4)				1	.293**	.316**	-.204**	.496**	.465**
[Spousal support] Childcare support (X5)					1	.836**	-.133*	.170*	.248**
[Spousal support] Emotional support (X6)						1	-.107	.223**	.275**
Mothers’ Satisfaction in current life (X7)							1	.277**	.363**
Children’s Resilience (Y1)								1	.622**
Children’s Quality of life (Y2)									1

Note: ** $p > .01$, * $p > .05$

Discussion of Report Results

Most mothers of the 5- and 7-year-olds interviewed for this report were vaccinated, but lived in areas in Thailand under lockdown during the time that this data was collected. Many Thai schools in urban areas implemented hybrid learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Outdoor play time was reduced for both groups, while indoor play time increased for the 5-year-olds; the 7-year-olds' amount of indoor play time remained the same, but their hours of study quadrupled, from one hour a day to four hours a day. Increased screen usage among both groups was a source of concern for mothers, who felt it might lead to a lack of social play skills—as stated by Nakchuen and Khayankij (2021)—and this concern possibly was confirmed by the increase in the amount of solitary and parallel play among both groups during the pandemic.

This report found a number of factors that were positively correlated to children's resilience and happiness (QOL), including parent perception in child rearing, early childhood education and care quality and support, spousal support, activity/play time, ICT usage, and parent involvement in education. Children's resilience and happiness (QOL) were found to be positively correlated at a moderate level across both age groups. The quality of early childhood education and school support were found to be positively correlated to children's resilience at a moderate level, but were more positively correlated to 7-year-olds' happiness (QOL) than to 5-year-olds' happiness (QOL). Most 5-year-olds spent 30-60 minutes a day on online learning, while most 7-year-olds spent three to four hours a day on online learning, due to having higher-level educational tasks. When teachers were able to increase engagement with children during online learning, this was a positive outcome for children.

For 5-year-olds, responsive parenting style and parents' emphasized aspects in childrearing including promoting social and emotional skills and miscellaneous i.e. providing aesthetic experiences, have positive effects on resilience; however, both parenting styles, responsive and punitive, had more positive effects on children's happiness (QOL) than did parents' emphasized aspects in childrearing. For 7-year-olds, responsive parenting style and the emphasized aspects in childrearing, as well as mothers' satisfaction in current life had greater positive effects on children's happiness (QOL). Interestingly, Thai parents frequently provided more structure for 5-year-olds and placed more demands on them than on 7-year-olds, despite the fact that many parents were authoritative. According to Charoenjit and Ngermlangtawee (2021), the most common parenting style of Thai parents is authoritative (59.6%), while only 17.2% of parents can be

described as authoritarian. The difference is that authoritative parents are strict yet warm, and explain rules to their children, while authoritarian parents are strict and cold, and expect their children to obey without question.

Positive relationships between teachers and children in terms of caring, respect, and warmth, along with partnerships between teachers and parents, are critical in promoting strong emotional wellbeing in the early years. Moreover, spousal support, expressed as emotional support, is effective for 5-year-olds' resilience because it relieves mothers' stress during critical times such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Kurian et al. (n.d.) commented that in the time of COVID-19, parents are the most important people in charge of young children's daily routines and learning at home. Teachers could support parents in their efforts to respond appropriately to the needs of their children, including playing with them. This had positive effects on children's emotional and social wellbeing. According to this report's findings, parental involvement with their children in using ICT had a positive impact on their children's resilience and happiness (QOL). The impact was greater for 7-year-olds, who were engaged in higher-level educational tasks.

In summary, parents in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic should increase their sensitivity in order to form deep connections with their children, as well as spend more time engaging with them than they did in the past, when their children could rely more on teachers and peers. On the other hand, parents should take care of themselves, because their wellbeing affects the wellbeing of their children. Families should be supported by schools and governmental structures; as suggested by Baçeli et al. (2021), families require three types of support: educational, information, and psychological support.

Findings and Limitations of This Report

This report collected data only from six schools in the Bangkok Metropolitan Region. More samples should be included in the next report to confirm the correlation of variables, and qualitative research should be conducted to gain greater in-depth understanding of mothers' perspectives.

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