



# Challenges faced by preschool owners and parents during Covid19 in Oodi-Matebele Village, Botswana

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## Abstract

*COVID-19 is a global health pandemic that affected the social, economic and the mental well-being of people. The study investigated the psycho-social experiences that preschool owners and parents encountered during COVID-19. A qualitative research study using a semi-structured interview guide was conducted among 20 participants from Oodi-Matebele village in Botswana, comprising of fifteen preschool owners and five parents. Loss of income, unemployment and low enrolment were the worst challenges faced by preschool owners. Parents faced financial constraints forcing some of them to withdraw their children from preschool. Others experienced family disintegration through separation and divorce, illness and deaths of loved ones, domestic and gender-based violence. These experiences resulted in stress, worry, anxiety and fear. Coping strategies for preschool owners and parents included introducing online teaching, sending homework to parents, receiving government grants, having faith in God and counseling, but not all of them received psycho social support. The study recommends a holistic model that addresses the interlinkages of psychological, social, and environmental determinants of mental health status during COVID-19. The study concludes that the social, economic and environmental factors associated with COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions to control it should be holistically understood and addressed to ensure mental well-being of people.*

Keywords: Psychosocial, social, psychological, preschool owners, parents, preschoolers, Oodi-Matebele, environment.

## 1. Introduction

COVID-19 is a global health pandemic that was declared by the World Health Organization on 11 March 2020, affecting people, businesses and economic well-being. The world came to a standstill when people were forced to stay indoors except for essential workers and service providers such as, health workers, hospitals, clinics, pharmacies and supermarkets. Many people among other things, lost their lives, loved ones, self-esteem, jobs and businesses. COVID-19 also brought psycho-social challenges, for example, some people committing suicide, losing hope of life, stress and depression. No country or sector was spared from the effects of COVID 19. Early childhood



education and care was also affected by limiting access to services among children and their parents and crippling business and income earning for those who provide early childhood education and care services as a business. When there is a pandemic outbreak, extreme measures are reinforced to reduce the spread of virus and to mitigate its impact. According to Kawano and Kakehasha (2015), during the outbreak of 2009 H1N1, Kindergartens (preschools), primary schools, secondary schools, high schools and universities were closed to slow down the spread of the virus. When COVID-19 was declared, schools and universities were also among the services that were closed in Botswana.

The impact of COVID-19 had prevented children from getting their education off to the best possible start as early childhood education builds a foundation upon which every aspect of children's development relies. At this level of education, children develop physically, intellectually, emotionally and socially during face to face lessons. In most cases, primary and secondary schools and tertiary education institutions, resorted to online programs as a way of continuation with schooling. However, to a preschooler, having online lessons can be a challenge as the child needs to be supervised as they cannot do work on their own unless under the supervision of someone; their concentration span is short. In China, a study conducted on young children's online learning during COVID-19 pandemic, reported that parents generally had negative beliefs about the values and benefits of online learning and preferred traditional learning in early childhood settings (Dong, et al, 2020). The hardships caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has made children suffer (ibid), therefore, parents would choose to have their children stay out from learning till they were able to go back physically to preschool institutions. In a study conducted in Turkey, parents stated that the COVID-19 pandemic had numerous adverse effects on preschool education; even if they held art, science, mathematics and game activities to sustain education, they faced numerous challenges during the process (Yildirim, 2021).

According to research done in the United Kingdom, the pandemic impacted Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in a number of ways that include temporary and permanent setting closures, reduced demand for ECEC places and workforce challenges which had implications for the financial sustainability of the sector (Hobbs & Bernard, 2021). Also, according to the United Nations Education Scientific Cultural Organization, [UNESCO] (2021) Institute for Statistics (UIS) data collected in July 2020, over 18.6 million children in pre-primary education in forty-eight Sub-Saharan African countries and 4.4 million pre-primary teachers – eighty-five per cent of whom were women got affected by school or centre closures.

In Zimbabwe, many preschools faced economic difficulties amid the COVID-19 era (Nkiwane, 2020). Wills's study (as cited in Ebrahim, 2020), reports that an estimated one million children were out of early childhood education programs in South Africa. This is also supported with another study reporting that some South African preschool principals highlighted that the most significant negative impact of the pandemic was the loss of revenue from fees



since many parents were unable to pay fees due to economic challenges (Draper, 2022). It made a huge impact on those running early childhood programs as it reduced pupils' enrolment in preschools.

In Malawi, COVID-19 had a major impact on schools when school closures disrupted learning for five months (UNICEF, 2022). A study conducted in Malawi reported a high drop out of schools with a significant number of children not returning back (Chiwaula et al, 2021) when schools eventually opened. With the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 some parents were forced to withdraw their children from school as a coping strategy (ibid), a challenge to the preschool businesses as they faced challenges of low enrolment.

In Botswana, the need for the provision of early childhood care and education is even more compelling for both child development practitioners and academics (Maunganidze & Tsamaase, 2014). The country applied strict coronavirus containment measures that resulted in the closure of many services such as business operation, leisure centers, churches and schools (Samboma, 2020). From March 23, 2020, when schools closed, and the lockdown started from 2 April 2020, lasting 48 days; restrictions aimed at slowing down the spread of the coronavirus were gradually relaxed and all businesses and schools were cleared to reopen under government guidelines (VOA News, 2020). Schools re-opened in the first week of June. Schools were forced to close again the last week of July, 2020 due to the rising number of corona cases, and re-opened in the last week of August, 2020. COVID-19 was a cause of vulnerability for children in Botswana (Samboma, 2020). Contrary to expectations that lockdowns would have been opportunity for families to bond, Samboma (2020) observed that, it resulted in increased risks of abuse for children living in unsafe conditions. There was a 20 percent increase in defilement cases Mlilo (2020) and it was more rampant amongst women and children due to lockdown and social distancing (Samboma, 2020).

Education administrators, teachers and ultimately parents were faced with difficult decisions about how to help children to continue learning without setting foot inside a classroom (Winthrop et al, 2020). Lockdown took long to be uplifted as COVID-19 continued to take its toll, causing delays in the opening of schools. When preschools were eventually allowed to open, parents had to decide whether to allow their children to attend pre-school or stay at home. Others saw it as a risk to allow their children to go back to school, and preferred that their children stay at home. According to the advice given by the World Health Organization, the continuity of education for children was integral for their overall wellbeing, but that their health and safety had to be at the forefront of any considerations made (Richards, 2021). Therefore, many parents considered the health of their children first, before taking them back to preschool.

The researcher has observed and heard many small business owners lamenting of financial constraints due to businesses not fully functioning. Preschool owners were not spared, they also complained of money not being



enough due to the impact of COVID-19. There were many adverts of preschools being on sale, for reasons that include low enrolment which caused difficulties for preschools to remain operating. In Botswana, particularly the area of study, Oodi- Matebele, the high number of children enrolled in preschools in general indicate that many parents, have confidence in them. However, with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, some parents became hesitant to let their children attend preschool and were forced to stay with the kids during the day, something which they may not have been used to. There was disruption in teaching, learning and care which led preschool owners to get affected by diminished business, loss of income and livelihoods for families that relied on this business. The government lost revenues in terms of potential taxes as some businesses failed to remit tax. Many children stayed at home and stopped attending preschools with parents fearing that their children would be infected with the COVID-19 virus. Child sexual abuse (CSA) became high during COVID-19 pandemic due to economic insecurity, poverty-related stress, quarantines, increased exposure to exploitative relationships and reduced access to health services (Mlilo, 2020).

The study attempts to find answers to the following key questions:

- a) What psychological challenges have been faced by preschool owners and preschoolers regarding their education and well-being under COVID-19?
- b) What social challenges were experienced by preschool owners and preschoolers regarding their education and well-being under COVID-19?
- c) What are the coping strategies employed by preschool business owners and parents towards the impact of COVID-19?

## **2. Materials and methods**

The study applied the qualitative research approach, which focuses on the study of an individual's lived experiences within the world (Neubauer et al., 2019), eliciting individual narratives of perceptions, attitudes, behaviors, events and realities during COVID-19. This approach seeks to describe the essence of a phenomenon by exploring it from the perspective of those who have experienced it (Teherani et al., 2015), making sense out of what they say and constructing knowledge or understanding out of it. The qualitative approach is not based on a particular hypothesis but on research questions, aims and objectives that will be explored in the research being conducted. The approach was used in this study as it gave in-depth understanding which would not be gained from closed questions. The respondents were able to freely disclose their experiences, thoughts and feelings without constraint.

### **Population and Sampling strategy.**

A population is the large group where research participants are drawn from. According to Babbie (1990), a population is the total of all the individuals who have certain characteristics and are of interest to a researcher. In this study, the population comprises of pre-school owners in the business of pre-schooling and parents whose



children attended preschools in the same area of study, that is, Oodi-Matebele village in Botswana. The sample, that is a subset of participants or respondents who took part in the study, was drawn from the larger population group. Sampling is the process of selecting participants who will take part in the study. Non- random, snowball sampling which is a technique used in purposive sampling was used. This is a technique where a known individual research participant is identified, who in turn identifies and leads the researcher to other research participants who fits the criteria of the research study. A sample of twenty respondents comprising of fifteen (15) preschool owners and five (5) parents who participated in the study was selected. One preschool owner was identified, who in turn, identified other preschool owners and so on until a certain number of respondents had been identified to make up the sample. Similarly, one parent was identified who in turn referred the researcher to another parent.

### **Research design**

A descriptive survey was used which like other forms of qualitative research approaches share the following characteristics: researchers study human actions in their natural settings, make holistic observations of the total context within which social action occurs, discover concepts and theories after data has been collected (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). A cross-sectional descriptive survey was used and data examined at one point in time, that is, collected, analyzed and interpreted (Brink, et al., 2012) within a defined time frame. The researcher established the experiences of preschool owners and parents during COVID-19. It is the best method for this psychosocial wellbeing study since it helps with extrapolating knowledge from an understanding of people's (Myers & Avison, 2009) personal experiences and perceptions and thus requires the researcher to obtain the required information directly from the participants (Takesure et al., 2013). Research findings were recorded in written form with data being obtained from interviews, observations of real life settings and archival documents.

### **Data collection instruments**

Data from preschool owners and parents was gathered using a guided semi-structured interview instrument. Such instrument is used to generate ideas in order to develop or change practice and yields rich data (Harvey-Jordan & Long, 2001). The questions were structured as open ended, enabling participants to respond without any limitations imposed on them by the researcher, and could share their emotions in a natural setting. The open ended questions were based on the topic of the study which was of interest to the researcher and provided opportunities for various themes or subtopics to develop (Harvey-Jordan & Long, 2001). It elicited different perspectives of the experiences of the participants within their particular contexts. Most of the questions asked among preschool owners and those asked among parents were related or similar, and this allowed for triangulation and cross validation of responses.

### **Data analysis and Interpretation**



Thematic analysis is a process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). It was used to analyze data; pertinent to the research problem, which was organized to answer each research objective and research questions. The responses to the interview guide for each participant were read and coded B1 – B15 for preschool owners and P1 – P5 for the parents. Collected data was interpreted and conclusions drawn following the interpretivist paradigm, drawing on ‘deduction and induction’ (Asyoll, 2013). In particular, the researcher applied ‘deduction’ to infer and interpret research findings that is, drawing on literature and the theories that guided the research study, to explain responses and extrapolate meaning from the fieldwork data collected within the particular context of the study. The researcher also applied ‘induction’, to give contextual meaning to observed themes that emerged from data pertinent to, and in some cases peculiar to Oodi-Matebele and Botswana. The participants’ thoughts and speech were put into written form. Some quotes from the participants were cited in a narrative fashion to emphasize the original views and experiences of the participants.

### 3 Results

The findings of the research study were based on empirical data that was collected. It responds to the research questions which sought to find out the psycho-social experiences of preschool owners and parents during COVID-19. The sample size in this study was twenty (20), comprising of fifteen (15) preschool owners and five (5) parents. Preschool owners comprised of women aged between 35 and 60 years, while parents comprised of two (2) men aged between 30 and 42 years and three (3) women aged between 25 and 50 years.

#### 2.1 Challenges faced by preschool owners and parents.

This subsection presents the challenges faced by preschool owners and parents of preschoolers in the study area, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Preschool owners were asked to indicate the psychological challenges they faced during COVID-19. The results indicated that preschool owners experienced stress, anxiety, hopelessness and fear with few experiencing low mood and poor sleep. The main causes which they cited were, low enrolment, financial constraints, business moving slowly, and uncertainty about the future.

Respondent B who reported experiencing anxiety and fear had this to say,

*“I wondered if the business would survive and what would happen during the pandemic”*

##### 2.1.1 Unplanned multi-tasking as a source of mental health problems

Preschool owners highlighted that only skeletal staff had to be retained at the schools due to low enrolment, while other staff members were retrenched. As a result, they were forced to take up most responsibilities by themselves, with others being reported by retrenched teachers to labor offices for unfair dismissal; this strained the mental health of preschool owners. One preschool owner, who was participant D alluded that,



*"It hasn't been easy because I'm doing admin work, teaching managing the preschool and helping with cleaning that by the time I go home, I'm very tired and sometimes sick"*

### **2.1.2 Loss of revenue as a result of low preschool enrolment**

For a business to function well, it has to make profit. In this case, preschools registered low enrolment, hence were receiving little income. This became a constraint to preschool owners as they could no longer meet the expenses of running the business. Consequently, they became stressed, thinking of what to do and whether the business would cope or not in such an economic environment. Fearing that they could get infected with COVID-19, parents were taking their children out of school, which in turn costed revenue for preschool owners with participant J commenting:

*"Things are tough and I'm not sure if the business will cope or not. I'm not making any profit and it is difficult to operate with a low number of children because there is little income being generated".*

Parents also faced a lot of challenges. Responding to the question requiring them to describe the challenges that they faced as a result of COVID-19, parents indicated that they experienced stress, fear, anxiety and hopelessness. They narrated knowing or hearing of too many deaths and sicknesses which created fear in them, with participant E saying,

*"I had fear of death because last year, everyone was prone to be a statistic".*

Another parent (participant C), had the same concern,

*"We didn't know exactly how we will be impacted and how long this will last or how bad things might get".*

A review of the findings indicates that some parents did not receive any help on the challenges they faced, while others got help from their peers in the form of encouraging each other not to lose hope, getting professional counseling, exercising, observing COVID-19 protocols and focusing on the good things they had experienced in life for which they were grateful. Participant K who reported, having experienced depression said,

*"I went for counseling because I had lost a loved one due to COVID-19".*

Preschool owners were asked of any social challenges they might have experienced during COVID-19. Results indicated that most of them experienced social detachment, isolation, loss of income and financial challenges reportedly as a result of lockdown, curfews and social distancing. Participant G stated that,

*"We failed to visit our friends and relatives as we were forced to stay indoors and to confine ourselves within boundaries of our areas of residence; and this thing of not being in close contact with people, makes you feel distant from them, no closeness at all".*



The other participants reported that their social challenges were caused by lack of social life, border closures which made many people being isolated from their families, and as shared by one participant (H),

*“There was no social life, felt very lonely. I will never forget when borders were closed that I spent nine months without visiting my family in my home country, I was depressed most of the times”.*

When asked on the severity of these challenges, preschool owners mentioned it to be high with some participants saying there was a lot of setbacks in the lives of people and businesses, debts accumulated and some staff members tested positive. One preschool owner explained thus,

*“I accumulated debts of rentals, bank loans and money I was borrowing from people. I was nearly kicked out of my house by the landlord and he even brought a debt collector to demand rent money”.*

Some preschool owners reported pupils going on isolation, shortage of food in the shops, no salaries for staff, retrenchment taking place and bank accounts closed as there was no cash to deposit in the account.

When asked to describe the social challenges that they had experienced as a result of COVID-19, parents reported family disintegration, gender-based violence, death, illness of self and family members as having been the most common challenges. One parent highlighted the pain experienced when,

*“We lost friends and relatives and could not attend their funerals or visit them in hospitals because of COVID-19 restrictions”.*

The same sentiment was shared by another parent who lamented saying,

*“Illness of a family member was worrisome, wondering how many people we are going to lose due to COVID-19. I felt isolated because I was lonely while other family members were on quarantine”.*

### **2.1.3 Rise in family disintegration and gender-based violence.**

When asked what they meant by family disintegration, one parent explained that,

*“There were a lot of breakups due to quarrels, incompatibility and divorce resulting in children being separated and kept by either the mother or father alone”.*

The same concern on gender-based violence was reported by another parent, thus,

*“A lot of violence was happening as spouses and partners spend more time together which they were not used to and sometimes children being sexually and physically abused”.*

Parents indicated that family support, consoling others and adjusting to the situation had helped them to cope. Prayer and having faith in God Almighty also helped as put by one parent,

*“This corona is beyond our control and all we can hope for is to pray and look up to God for His mercy”.*

COVID-19 forced many people to go into isolation as the cases increased day by day. It disturbed the social life of people which in this case, resulted in some not attending funerals of their relatives, friends and loved ones or even



visiting them when they were sick. As lockdowns were implemented, people were confined to their homes and could not go on with their normal daily lives; in some cases; people lost opportunities and sources of livelihood. Not having any physical contact, made people to be rather de-attached to one another.

Both the preschool owners and parents were asked to describe their perceived challenges faced by preschoolers regarding their education and well-being. Preschool owners acknowledged that pupils were facing their own challenges during this era of COVID-19. Adhering to COVID-19 protocols was new and difficult to children, especially wearing of masks in the classroom. Sitting on their own and maintain social distance was difficult as children tend to want to play and interact with others. Children could not fathom being prohibited to go outdoors to perform physical activities and play. Children were affected by the disruption of learning and preschool routine. Some pupils did not finish their last year of preschool education and went straight to primary level which made them to skip the important milestone of preschool education.

#### **2.1.4 *Convergence among preschool owners and parents on concerns for children.***

A cross examination of responses from preschool owners and parents depict some convergence in their concerns and perceptions of risks to child well-being. Preschool owners reported that teachers would sometimes not come to work because of sickness; it disturbed the children at school when they did not see their teacher. On the other hand, preschool owners also got reports from parents that children would not be happy when they could not attend preschool. It would therefore appear that children- alongside the preschool owners and parents, got worried about their teachers' ill health as well as their own compromised learning and development

#### **2.1.5 *Skepticism and blame on sources of infection for children***

Meanwhile, preschool owners reported that some parents were skeptical of sending their children to preschool for fear that they would contact COVID-19 virus since they knew that it was difficult for the pupils to maintain good hygiene especially when they had to handle food. They could not trust that the preschools would have adequate and effective COVID-19 prevention capabilities. Indeed, responses from parents confirmed that they found it difficult to let children attend preschool during COVID-19 because they believed that they were not going to manage wearing masks all the time, which would expose them to the virus.

On the other hand, preschool owners believed that parents infected their children, which would cause them to stay at home in isolation away from school. Preschool owners however conceded that in other cases, children would get infected with COVID-19 virus at preschool.

#### **2.1.6 *Innovative online learning for preschoolers***

According to one respondent,



*“There was no way of giving the preschoolers online programs...parents could not physically meet with the schools’ authorities to access teaching materials for fear of getting infected with COVID virus”.*

However, very few preschool owners used social media to share activities with parents and also enabling parents to pick up teaching materials for homeschooling at the appointed times. In the words of one preschool owner,

*“We introduced online learning where we provided assignments or activities for preschoolers to carry out with the help of their parents at home via online platforms such as Microsoft teams and they would submit back to school their homework”.*

Preschool education plays a vital role in the life of a child as many developmental milestones can be achieved at that stage. COVID-19 came with challenges which affected people along the entire life cycle from the young to the elderly. Adhering to the stringent measures for its prevention was not easy for anyone and especially children. COVID-19 transformed the way of life, for instance, people required to spend time wearing masks, learning from home, and for children, not being allowed to go out playing became difficult to adjust to. The well-being of the child was put at risk as they could be infected with the virus or sometimes being told not to come near a family member who is infected. Their care became compromised when their care givers were infected or ill and isolated, or dead from COVID-19.

### **3. Coping strategies employed by preschool business owners and parents.**

When asked to describe their coping strategies during COVID-19, both preschool owners and parents reported experiencing difficulties to cope, while narrating some of the coping strategies that they employed as described below.

Preschool owners narrated their coping strategies as follows:

Getting subsidies from the government which helped in paying local teachers’ salaries even though it was not in full. Use of social media helped in delivering lessons with parents having had to pay a fee. This money helped to pay some bills. Negotiating with parents to pay what they could afford than stopping the child going to preschool. Self-supporting the business. Classes were merged and some teachers retrenched to cut off the expenses.

However, while nationals who owned preschools acknowledged the subsidies from the government, the foreign nationals did not benefit and reported that they found it unfair that they could not be included as beneficiaries.

Describing the government subsidy, one respondent highlighted that,

*“It was only for the local employee but not benefitting the business to pay bills. Normally when one does not come to work, they don’t get paid so it should have been like that”.*

Another foreign national complained that,

*“We pay tax to the government but help was only given to locals which was not fair considering many companies, local or not, contributed to the COVID-19 fund”.*

One parent narrated the following as their coping strategies:



*“Wearing of masks and sanitizing has become part of the new normal such that if followed with a positive attitude, we can cope. Further still, having hope help us to always look forward to each day knowing that one day it will be over”.*

Individual positive coping helped some to overcome the situation they were in. Some reported having had to break from watching or listening to news broadcast concerning issues of COVID-19. Preschool owners generally found it difficult for their businesses to cope during the pandemic. Meanwhile, acceptance of the situation and challenges brought by COVID-19 helped some to become resilient to cope and plan around the reality that exist. `

### **3.1 Home childcare and learning options**

While parents indicated that they observed children somewhat adjusting to staying at home instead of going to school as they were used to, they also raised concerns that academically, children were falling behind which was of great concern. Those parents who did not have anyone to leave their child with at home while they go to work faced childcare challenges as they could not leave their children in the care of strangers. As summarized by one parent (Participant E):

*“It was very challenging since the child had no one to remain with at some point”.*

Some parents had to innovate to keep their children busy with activities. For example, some parents reported looking for learning activities and options that the child would engage with at home as a way to cover the gap of or compensate for not going to preschool.

### **3.2 Faith as a coping measure**

When asked if they got any kind of help, some respondents indicated that they resorted to prayer, trusting God to intervene in their situation. Counselling from nurses helped others to manage these challenges with one preschool owner (Participant L), alluded that,

*“Our school is near the clinic, so whenever I have stress or anxiety I go to the clinic and get counseled by the nurses”.*

Other respondents indicated having accepted the situation as there was nothing they could do about it; they could only try to manage their work to the extent possible to ease the burden of multi- tasking.

## **4. Discussion**

### **Challenges faced by preschool owners and parents.**

The results indicated that most of the preschool owners and parents experienced anxiety, hopelessness, fear and stress. Although they were not many deaths and not very high number of COVID-19 infections, according to the preschool owners, lockdowns and low enrolment resulted in them experiencing financial challenges. Parents lost jobs while others, had their income earnings reduced. As noted under findings, preschool owners explained of



hardly making any profit because the expenditure was more than the income. This confirms findings from other studies conducted globally indicating how COVID-19 pandemic and its associated lockdowns and restrictions have created widespread economic challenges which, for many, have led to increased financial stress. The findings of the study also resonate with the Conservation of Resources (CoR) theory which argues that when financial and other resources are lost, it leads to psychological stress (Hobfoll et al, 2016). Preschool owners and parents lost income and had financial resource challenges that resulted in them having stress.

Parents reported of gender-based violence and family disintegration narrating how a lot of break ups happened during the lockdown period due to various reasons that include changes in family income, divorce, abandonment and death of one of the parents. According to the CoR theory, resources such as marriage and family ties are important determinants of mental well-being and would therefore have been expected to define how individuals were able to cope with pandemics such as COVID-19. Ironically in some cases, conflict and gender-based violence was reported to have arisen from family members and couples who were not used to spending a lot of time together, now being forced to be confined to homes together. Ideally, it would have been expected that spending more time together would have resulted in family members and couples bonding together more. This is in relation with the study carried by Abu-Elenin, et al (2022), who stated that, along with the COVID-19 pandemic, the home was turned into a dangerous place for victims of intimate partner violence, because they had to spend prolonged hours with their partners and detached from people who support them.

Assisting young children with preschool learning from home was not easy for most parents, who preferred to prioritize and concentrate on supporting older children in primary and secondary school. The reasons for their preference were not followed upon during interviews and have not been established. However, literature from the works of other researchers such as Jalongo (2021) suggests that some parents may not have had enough resources to conduct homeschooling and the participants in this study reported internet services being a problem for many parents to implement online lessons. It would appear as suggested by other studies, and drawing on the personal experience of the researcher as a professional infant teacher and preschool owner, that it is often found difficult to give work to a preschooler to do on their own as they need very close supervision, patience and guidance on what to do; these support requirements would not have been easily available among parents and caregivers at home away from the preschool.

Preschoolers were disturbed in their education and wellbeing. The study revealed that children were reportedly worried with what was happening around them. Other studies have revealed children exhibiting various stress reactions (Jiao et al, 2020), and in some cases separation anxiety and worry (Charu et al, 2020) during COVID-19. Reports from parents indicated that children were not happy that they could not attend preschool during lockdown. In the absence of internet and online teaching services for many, and in an effort to maintain physical teaching of preschoolers, other preschool owners resorted to physically giving homework to parents to administer



to their children. This ensured that teaching and learning as a resource for child development and wellbeing, and for addressing unhappiness among children and worries among preschool owners and parents on the learning of children continued in the middle of lockdowns. However, other preschool owners did not provide any teaching and learning services at all during lockdown, reportedly for considering it as risky to get infected with COVID-19 if they were to come into contact with parents to exchange physical copies of homework. Such fear stifled innovation and was a source of stress for those who succumbed to it.

### **Coping with the impact of COVID-19.**

The environment played an important role in the way children could have reacted to COVID-19 pandemic, with some children not understanding what was taking place. Witnessing death of their family members would have affected children. While homeschooling became an alternative, the study revealed that it had challenges, and only few children may have benefited from it. This concurs with the study conducted by Motshabi (2020) which argued that the use of technology depended on the socio-economic background of children. As noted earlier, some parents did not have access to the internet services, and for some, this may have been dependent on their geographical location of their homes, with some places having poor internet and network coverage. Some parents had financial problems and could not afford purchasing internet bundles, with others not having the right gadgets to be used for online lessons.

According to Psychological Stress theory (Krohne, 2001), stress is caused by stressors in the environment and COVID-19 is appraised as a stressful event. As noted earlier, the theory explains that, if resources are not sufficient enough, it leads to stress, while implementing the coping strategies, help to overcome stress. The findings reveal various strategies implemented by business owners and parents to help in managing stress caused by COVID-19. For business owners the resilience they developed and the coping strategies they implemented helped most to keep their preschools from failing to continue and permanently shutting down. They used the little resources they had to manage the preschools and as some reported, by reducing their expenditure. Coping strategies used by parents also helped them to have a positive attitude by accepting what was happening around them, and thus overcoming anxieties or fears brought by the pandemic.

## **5. Conclusions**

The study sought to enquire the psychosocial challenges preschool owners and parents faced during COVID-19. Findings from chapter 4 provided answers to the study research questions and as a result followed by a discussion and deduction on the findings in chapter 5, and consequently the following conclusion have been drawn: Preschool owners and parents experienced stress, anxiety, hopelessness and fear. They lost income and faced financial resource challenges. Low enrolment in preschools led to financial constraints to preschool owners with some not yet recovered from the losses incurred during lockdowns. With parents losing their source of income, they could not afford sending their children to preschools resulting to low enrolment. Preschool owners and



parents experienced social detachment, and isolation. Prayer and faith in God helped preschool owners and parents as a coping strategy. They seek counselling services, having resilience, accepting having COVID-19 and following COVID-19 protocols to reduce the spread of the virus. There was a lot of learning and teaching disruption that took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some preschoolers dropped out of school as parents could no longer afford paying for the preschool services and others being protected from getting infected of the virus at preschool. Therefore, many missed some developmental milestones that they could have achieved at preschool. The pupils that returned back to school had problems of following the COVID-19 protocols. Homeschooling was not favorable among many parents, with few pupils benefitting learning from home during forced school closures.

“Conceptualization, L.D and B.M.; methodology, L.M & B.M. investigation, B.M.; resources, B.M.; writing—original draft preparation, B.M.; writing—review and editing, B.M and L.D; visualization, B.M, and L.D; supervision, B.M and L.D; project administration, B.M. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** “This research received no external funding”.

**Data Availability Statement:** The researchers got into a data sharing agreement.

**Acknowledgments:** we acknowledge Oodi Village for responding to all our concerns.

**Conflicts of Interest:** “The authors declare no conflict of interest.”

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