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Parents' Perceptions of the Influence of Interpersonal Trauma on Children's Academic Achievement in Low Socioeconomic Families During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

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M.Ed., Oakland University, 2020

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Developmental Psychology

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic intensified the challenges faced by families from low socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds regarding their children's academic development. Students during this time experienced disruptions in their academic development, further hindering their educational progress. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore parents' perceptions of how interpersonal trauma and SES challenges impacted their elementary-age children's academic achievement during the pandemic. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory served as the theoretical foundation, offering a framework to understand how environmental factors shaped children's experiences and academic development. Data were gathered through semistructured interviews with eight parents from low-SES backgrounds. Content analysis of the data provided insights into the intersection of trauma, SES disadvantages, and academic achievement, signifying the importance of parents' role in shaping their children's educational experiences. The social change implications include developing and promoting practices that encourage resilience and academic success for students affected by trauma and SES stressors, and policies that support children's needs.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother and granny, Brenda and Emma, who have been my constant source of love and support throughout my life. The two women raised me with unwavering dedication and have always been there for me, providing encouragement in every step of my journey. Their support, especially as a single mother, has been a pillar of strength. This work would not have been possible without their enduring love, wisdom, and belief in me. To my father, whose strength and resilience in the face of sickness and adversity continue to inspire me every day. This work is dedicated to my one and only child, my daughter Ginger, who challenges me and is my motivation. Thank you all for everything.

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I would like to express my deepest gratitude to God. Nothing is possible without him first. To my immediate family members, their unconditional love, sacrifice, and support have been the foundation of my strength throughout this entire journey. Mom, your strength, wisdom, resilience, and spirit have shaped me to the woman I am today, and I am eternally grateful for you. I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to my dissertation chair and committee members who have guided and supported me with patience and expertise throughout the research process. Your feedback, encouragement, and belief in my work have been appreciated. To my friends, thank you for your constant support and for believing in me. Your words of encouragement have made this journey more meaningful. Thank you to everyone who has played a role in this journey. Your guidance and support have made all the difference! Lastly, I would like to take this moment to express my deepest gratitude to my one and only daughter, Ginger. Even though you are only three, you are my inspiration, my reason for pushing forward, and my greatest motivation. My hope for you is that you always look up to me as your mommy and see the strength in the path I have carved. I want you to know that this journey, this legacy I am building, is as much for you as it is for me. Together, we will set a new trend for generations to come. I love you more than words can express, and I am beyond proud to be your mommy.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

This study explored parents' perceptions of the influences of interpersonal trauma on students' academic achievement in families from low socio-economic (SES) backgrounds during the COVID-19 pandemic. Interpersonal trauma, which impacts cognitive development and academic performance (Betthauser et al., 2023), was further exacerbated during the pandemic by additional stressors, including increased exposure to trauma and economic hardships, particularly among families with low SES. This research aimed to understand how these challenges shaped students' academic experiences, as perceived by their parents, who also navigated these challenges during this period.

There was a significant gap in the literature regarding parents' perceptions of their children and the unique combination of academic challenges faced by students from low SES backgrounds who had experienced interpersonal trauma during the COVID-19 pandemic. The potential social implications of this study include gaining a deeper understanding of how interpersonal trauma and low SES backgrounds may influence students' academic achievement during the COVID-19 pandemic, as perceived by their parents. This study may contribute to the development of effective educational and mental health interventions and may inform practices that improve academic outcomes for students who were affected by interpersonal trauma and SES challenges. This chapter lays the foundation for the study by exploring the intersections of interpersonal trauma, academic performance, and SES during the COVID-19 pandemic. The sections in this chapter include the background of the study, problem statement, purpose of the study, nature of the study, research questions, theoretical framework, nature of the study,

definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, significance, and a summary.

Background

In recent years, interpersonal trauma has been recognized as a significant factor in the development of various psychological disorders in childhood and adulthood (Betthauser et al., 2023). This trauma, which often stems from family or communities, can disrupt children's cognitive development, leading to difficulties in academic and social settings. The impact of such trauma is compounded by socioeconomic challenges, which further exacerbate the negative effects on children's well-being and academic performance, particularly during times such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Interpersonal trauma encompasses a series of traumatic experiences, including threats, direct harm, or violence (Reuben et al., 2021). Interpersonal trauma sometimes can include instances such as physical, mental, and emotional neglect, and even sexual abuse. According to the American Psychological Association (APA, 2022), interpersonal trauma is characterized by the presence of a direct threat and actual or intended serious injury. Students who are exposed to interpersonal trauma often face challenges in cognitive development such as decreased academic performance (Betthauser et al., 2023). Interpersonal trauma can lead to difficulties in concentration and memory, which directly affects their ability to learn and perform well in school (Betthauser et al., 2023).

Students from low SES backgrounds often experience inequality due to limited access to economic opportunities, educational resources, and social support. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these challenges, causing significant academic disruptions.

Kuhfeld et al. (2020) reported that by the end of the 2020–2021 school year, students had lost several months of learning across many subjects. This lack of access to educational resources, combined with academic setbacks, can increase the likelihood of students experiencing trauma and poverty (Patel & Shah 2021).). These students are frequently excluded from resource allocation, increasing the likelihood of marginalization, which often leads to discrimination when seeking educational opportunities (Patel & Shah, 2021). SES is a well-established predictor of academic achievement (Rosen et al., 2018). Research findings from the National Center for Education Statistics (2019) revealed that students from low SES households scored 21 points lower on the standardized math assessments, compared to their peers from higher SES backgrounds. This gap in achievement is also likely to present in other subjects where the discrepancy may be larger due to factors such as limited access to resources at home (Rosen et al., 2018).

In 2019, an outbreak of the infectious deadly disease COVID-19 rapidly spread worldwide, leading to a global crisis (Abdul-Ghani et al., 2023). Many students across the world faced significant challenges that caused widespread disruptions and trauma in their daily lives. Because of the prolonged disruptions, lockdowns, and emotional anxiety caused by the pandemic, Abdul-Ghani (2023) noted that students experienced significant intellectual development issues, which manifested as academic difficulties. Although the COVID-19 pandemic introduced significant disruptions to students' lives, factors such as low SES and interpersonal trauma may have further exacerbated these challenges, particularly in terms of academic performance.

There was limited research on how factors such as interpersonal trauma, low SES, and the COVID-19 pandemic intersect, especially from the perspective of parents. Although the COVID-19 pandemic introduced significant disruptions, these factors exacerbated many challenges, further impacting students' academic achievement. The current study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by students, with a focus on the perspective of parents. This research addressed a gap in the existing literature regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students from low SES backgrounds who experienced interpersonal trauma.

Problem Statement

During the COVID-19 pandemic, students from low SES backgrounds experienced increased interpersonal trauma and academic difficulties (Shal, 2024). However, a gap existed in understanding how parents perceived the influence of these factors on their children's academic achievement. Although existing research had established the negative impacts of interpersonal trauma and socioeconomic challenges on students' outcomes (Betthauser et al., 2023; Patel & Shah 2021), few studies explored these issues through the lens of parents' experiences and perceptions during the COVID-19 pandemic, and most of those were conducted outside of the United States (Shal, 2024). This gap was significant because the full impact on students' academic performance could not be fully understood without considering the parents' perspective. Parents were primary caregivers during the pandemic, experiencing firsthand the challenges their children faced, and their insights were crucial in understanding the long-term academic repercussions as children returned to school.

Research examining interpersonal trauma and socioeconomic challenges highlighted their significant impact on children in low-SES households, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to long-term consequences for their academic development (George et al., 2021). However, previous research focused on the direct experiences of children using quantitative measures, leaving a gap in qualitative insights from parents (Betthauser et al., 2023). Addressing the gap was essential because caregivers/parents were uniquely able to manage and observe the many challenges that their children faced during the prolonged school closures, online learning, and other pandemic-related stressors.

The current study extends insights from the past 5 years that underscored the critical role of family and environmental factors in lessening the negative impact of interpersonal trauma on academic development. Raffa et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of parental involvement and perceptions in fostering academic resilience among children facing adversity. However, this study focused on general parental involvement and did not examine the unique intersection of interpersonal trauma, SES factors, and pandemic-related disruptions.

By addressing this gap, the current study aimed to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how interpersonal trauma and SES challenges during the pandemic negatively impacted children's academic achievement, from the parents' perspectives. This focus aligned with the discipline of education by emphasizing the importance of parental perspectives in addressing academic disparities. This study also holds significance for the broader context of educational equality and trauma-informed

interventions, and may offer insights that can help guide educators, parents, and other professionals.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore parents' perceptions of how interpersonal trauma influenced the academic achievement of elementary-age students from low SES backgrounds during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study focused on the experiences and insights of parents to uncover the unique challenges faced by students during this time, and how the challenges negatively influenced their academic development. Understanding parental perspectives helped bridge the gap in existing literature on the impact of interpersonal trauma and SES challenges on academic development.

Research Questions

This qualitative phenomenological study was designed to explore parents' perceptions of how interpersonal trauma influenced the academic achievement of elementary-age students from low SES backgrounds during the COVID-19 pandemic. To address the research questions in this study, I chose a phenomenological design following Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological data analysis. The following research questions (RQs) guided this study:

RQ1: What are the parents' perceptions of the influences of interpersonal trauma on their children's academic achievement, as experienced personally by them, in low socioeconomic backgrounds during the COVID-19 pandemic?

RQ2: What challenges did families from low socioeconomic backgrounds face in supporting their children's academic needs during this time?

Theoretical Framework

The theory chosen to support this research was Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, which provided a lens for understanding how environmental systems interact and influence children's development. This theory emphasizes the importance of relationships between children, family, and other economic systems. In this theory, the mesosystem connects microsystems, or relationships between parents and teachers, school, and home. The microsystem is the closest environment, including immediate family members and school environments and peers who directly influence behavior and development. Exosystems are external factors that indirectly affect the individual, such as community and parental employment, shaping the framework for development. The macrosystem encompasses broader societal and cultural contexts, norms, values, and economic systems. Additionally, the chronosystem focuses on changes over time, such as life transitions and historical events influencing how individuals experience and react to their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These systems were relevant for understanding how interpersonal trauma and low SES challenges affected academic development. This study addressed the many factors that contributed to students' academic experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nature of the Study

The nature of this research was qualitative with a phenomenological design to explore parents' lived experiences and perceptions regarding academic development

faced by their children (see Moustakas, 1994). The data were collected through semistructured interviews with parents of elementary-age children from low SES backgrounds who had experienced interpersonal trauma during the COVID-19 pandemic. This approach allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the parents' perspectives and identification of themes related to trauma, SES backgrounds, and academic performance. Data were analyzed using topic-based analysis to identify the patterns and insights that answered the research questions in the study.

Definitions

Academic achievement: The progress and performance of students as measured by test scores, grades, and participation (Betthauser at al., 2023)

COVID-19: An infectious disease caused by coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, which occurred in 2019 and led to a global pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic was one of the largest disruptions to learning in the history of the world (Betthauser et al., 2023).

Interpersonal trauma: A series of experiences of traumatic events that involve threats, direct harm, or violence (Marshall et al., 2020).

Low socioeconomic status (SES): Households that experience poverty, inequality, limitations in access to economic opportunities, educational resources, and social support (DeCarlo et al., 2009)

Assumptions

The first assumption was that parents would be reliable sources of their children's experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. I assumed parents would be willing to share their perspectives openly regarding their children and have accurate insights into

the challenges that were faced. The second assumption was that participants and their experiences would mirror broader challenges that were encountered by others of similar economic and traumatic contexts. The third assumption was that interpersonal trauma and SES challenges interact to influence academic development. These assumptions were necessary for conducting the study and interpreting the findings.

Scope and Delimitations

The target population was elementary-age children from low SES backgrounds who had experienced interpersonal trauma during the COVID-19 pandemic. The population also included parents who were recruited as the primary participants to share their perspective on how these factors influenced their children's academic performance. Participants were recruited from cities and small towns across Michigan through partnerships with local schools and community organizations and social service agencies that serve low-SES families. Outreach included participant recruitment from social service agencies that served low-SES families with elementary-age children. I used a purposeful sampling strategy to identify parents who met the inclusion criteria: parents of elementary-age children during the pandemic, residing in low-SES households and having experienced interpersonal trauma within the family context. I worked with agency directors to distribute flyers and promote the study virtually with parents who met the inclusion criteria. The samples were representative of the target population. Data were collected through eight semistructured phone interviews, ensuring the safety and comfort of all participants. Interviews were conducted until data saturation was reached.

Limitations

In this study, there were challenges and limitations. Limitations/challenges that were faced included challenges related to recruiting participants from the target population, managing the sensitive nature of the topic and mitigating recall bias or subjective interpretation. Because the sample was recruited from the urban areas of Michigan, generalizability of results to other geographical areas outside of this state was limited due to geographical differences and effects of COVID in these disparate areas. Also, the findings may not be generalized to all low-SES families. All efforts were made to lessen the limitations through data analysis.

Significance

This study is significant in that it may improve the understanding of cognitive development in elementary-age students, while addressing the impacts of SES and academic ability. This study may enhance the understanding of how trauma impacts cognitive development and academic performance in the context of COVID-19 in low-SES backgrounds. This study may inform mental health counselors and educational communities regarding interventions and decision policies. The study may also advocate for students from low SES backgrounds who are in need. This study may promote trauma-informed education and promote resilience in those who suffered.

This study may have the potential to contribute to the fields of education and mental health by its ability to provide valuable insights into how interpersonal trauma and SES background influenced academic development in children in Grades K–5. Sharing the parents' perspectives and voices, the research highlighted the need for trauma-

informed resolutions and interventions to support the unique needs of students from low-SES backgrounds. The findings in this research may inform policies designed to mitigate the impact of interpersonal trauma and strengthen the resilience in students.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the study. This chapter supplied information on the study's background, history, gap in research, and why further research was needed. Chapter 1 introduced the focus of the study on exploring parents' perceptions of elementary-age students and how interpersonal trauma and SES challenges influenced academic performance during the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter outlined the research problem, purpose, research questions, and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory as the guiding framework. This chapter also described the study's scope, limitations, and significance, setting place for a deeper exploration of the topic in Chapter 2. Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive review of peer-reviewed literature related to the study topic.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review examines the intersection of interpersonal trauma, low SES backgrounds, and the COVID-19 pandemic, exploring how these factors individually and collectively impacted elementary-age children. Additionally, the purpose of this study was to explore the parents' perspectives of how interpersonal trauma, low SES, and other factors influenced their children's academic achievement during the COVID-19 pandemic (see George et al., 2021). This literature review focuses on research exploring topics of interpersonal trauma, SES backgrounds, and the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the effects on elementary-age students' learning experiences, from the parents' perspective.

Students from lower SES backgrounds are at an increased risk of experiencing higher frequency and severity of interpersonal trauma, which tends to influence students' academic achievement (George et al., 2021). During the COVID-19 pandemic, there were higher levels of interpersonal trauma exposure overall for families (Dugal et al., 2016; Sonu et al., 2021) and an increase of low SES due to people's work absences for extended periods of time (George et al., 2021). During the same time, student learning was significantly disrupted due to transitioning to virtual learning resulting from school closures (Engzell et al., 2021). Students from low SES often lacked equal access to technology and internet for virtual learning or resources such as tutoring support or technology assistance (Kennedy et al., 2022), which further exacerbated inequalities in academic achievement. The combination of experiencing higher and more severe levels of interpersonal trauma, decreases in SES, and disruptions in students' schooling resulted

in many negative influences on students' academic achievement during the COVID-19 pandemic (George et al., 2021).

This chapter provides a literature review with a critical evaluation of scholarly resources. I used Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory as a framework to examine from parents' perceptions of the influences of interpersonal trauma, low SES, and the COVID-19 pandemic on their elementary-age children's academic achievement. The synthesis of scholarly literature facilitates the chapter's objective of elaborating on the multifaceted themes of interpersonal trauma, conditions in low SES backgrounds, and how parents perceived their impact on their children's academic achievement during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Literature Search Strategy

Information included in this literature review was obtained from the Walden University Library, local libraries, textbooks, the APA, and Google Scholar. The databases from the Walden University Library consisted of PsycINFO, ERIC, JSTOR, and PubMed. The search produced a great deal of information, as well as filtering regarding academic achievement, interpersonal trauma, socioeconomic disparities, and the COVID-19 pandemic. There was a volume and linking system that made the word connections easier to find and narrowed the search outcomes. Boolean operators were used to combine search terms with *and, *or, and *not.

The keywords search included *interpersonal trauma, child development, PTSD, trauma-informed care, cognitive development, academic development, executive function, socioeconomic disadvantages, social inequality, COVID-19, isolation, DV exposure,*

quarantine, remote learning, disruption of education and development, social distance, and education. I used quotation marks for phrases that I utilized. Synonyms and related terms were also used to help capture the wider range of relevant articles. I found a total of 45 relevant articles during this process; however, I was able to narrow down to the articles that were conducted in the last 3-5 years, except for Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory.

Theoretical Framework

The foundational theory that supports this study is Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (EST), also known as the bioecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This theory was developed in the late 1970's and the early 1980's by Urie Bronfenbrenner, a developmental psychologist explaining through a system of diverse environmental interactions. This theory posits that human development occurs within a complex interrelationship that is dictated by various levels of their immediate environment as well as outside of their immediate environments.

Major theoretical propositions for this theory are that the environment is categorized into systems such as microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The microsystem represents immediate environments such as work, school, peers, and family, which significantly influence a child's academic development and response to trauma. The mesosystem shows the interactions and connections between microsystems, which influences the home and school settings. exosystem involves settings indirectly impacting development, where a

child may not be actively engaged, such as parental workplaces or local government settings. The macrosystem refers to broader contexts, influenced by cultural values, laws, societal norms, and economic structures. Lastly, chronosystem comprises environmental events and changes such as the COVID-19 pandemic event, occurring throughout a child's lifespan and developmental stages (Crawford, 2020).

Microsystem

The microsystem entails an immediate environment consisting of family members, school settings, peers, and friends. These all shape the experiences of children and their development. These immediate factors play a crucial role in shaping children's academic experiences and overall development, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (Crawford, 2020). These immediate factors in the microsystem include the family, neighborhood, and school, which play a crucial role in shaping an individual's response to and coping mechanisms during the COVID-19 pandemic. From an EST perspective, the way parents perceive and respond to the pandemic is key in shaping their ability to support their children's academic and emotional needs (Nomura et al., 2023). If parents perceived the pandemic as an easy challenge and maintained a positive outlook, they would be more likely to create a supportive learning environment for their children at home, positively impacting their child's academic achievement (Arnold & Harmon, 2023).

Many parents felt overwhelmed, leading to increased stress and limited support for the child's education, hindering their academic performance (Arnold & Harmon, 2023). During the COVID-19 pandemic, interpersonal trauma increased as families faced

stress, sickness, and financial instability (Sonu et al., 2021). The increase in interpersonal trauma during the pandemic negatively affected children's psychological well-being, making it harder for them to focus, engage, and perform well academically (Cénat & Dalexis, 2020). The shift to virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted students' academic performance negatively, especially those from low SES backgrounds who lacked access to resources such as internet, devices, and quiet study spaces (Kuhfeld et al., 2020). The lack of resources in low SES households often leads to a decline in student academic achievement (Dutta-Gupta, 2024).

Mesosystem

The mesosystem is the type of connections and relationships between Microsystems that influence the child's well-being and development, such as interactions between different parents and teachers during the pandemic. These include the type of interactions that students experience in their domains of life. For this study, relationships between parents, teachers, and classmates are key. Specifically, parents' relationships with teachers during the pandemic is important. These interactions impact the quality of the student's academic achievement (Yang & Sanborn, 2021). The Mesosystem also emphasizes the importance of the relationships that students enjoy and how they impact their development and ability to excel in school and society.

Exosystem

The exosystem is the external environmental settings that indirectly affect a child's well-being and include the larger community, their parent's occupational organizations, and the neighborhoods (Bronfenbrenner, 2000). During the COVID-19

pandemic, governments had to implement various measures to control the virus's spread, including health and safety measures which were lockdown and quarantines, mask mandates and travel restrictions. These external settings can impact children's experiences and responses as well. These are interconnected systems, which although they do not directly interact with the students, have an impact on their well-being and their immediate environment. These factors include the places of employment of the parents which impact their earning potential and availability of jobs.

Socioeconomic status (SES) encompasses a family's economics, educational level, and occupational status (Navarro-Carrillo et al., 2021). These factors were influenced during the COVID-19 pandemic due to loss of work, reduced income and increased financial crisis. The unemployment rate reached a staggering 14.8%, the highest level since the Great Depression (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic heightened the existing inequalities in many low-SES families (George et al., 2021). The pandemic's impact on SES further deepened the disparities in academic achievement (George et al., 2021). Students from low-SES families are less likely to have access to the tools and environments needed for effective virtual learning, which leads to widening achievement gaps (Nerse, 2020). Economic stress can affect the ability of parents to support their children's education (McGill et al., 2022).

The increased financial strain and psychological stress caused by the pandemic impact home conditions and hinder parents' ability to fulfill their responsibilities, such as providing emotional support and meeting basic needs. The parents and primary breadwinners interact in various workplaces, which directly impacts their ability to

provide sustainable environments and livelihood for the children (Crawford, 2020). The Exosystem helps to explain how facilitative and enabling interactions in these settings promote the performance of students or hinder their well-being. This is essential in the context of COVID-19 where disruptions led to a loss of employment and economic activities (McGill et al., 2022).

Macrosystems

Macrosystems entail the broader societal system, such as cultural values and norms, that shape their perception of reality. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the world faced illness and high mortality rates and overwhelming healthcare systems. Governments implemented lockdowns, travel restrictions, and social distancing measures (Irwin et al., 2022). Economies experienced severe disruptions, leading to unemployment and financial instability altering life and routines. Education shifted to closures and online/virtual formats, while social interactions were significantly limited. The macrosystem indicates the direct association between the relationships with the immediate members and secondary systems such as institutions.

The COVID-19 pandemic served as a significant societal and global influence, that reshaped cultural norms, global influence and economic conditions, impacting all levels of the ecological systems. The pandemic's effects on the macrosystem are challenges that filtered down to affect students' academic performance. The shift to virtual learning, economic and social disruptions, created an environment where students struggled to maintain their academic performance.

Chronosystem

The chronosystem refers to the dimensions of time and its influence on development. Dimensions entail historical contexts, changes in life, and experiences as time evolves (Bronfenbrenner, 2000). The COVID-19 pandemic served as a critical chronosystem, also representing the historical time frame that affected student's academic development. The changes over time during the pandemic influenced students' environments and overall well-being, affecting their academic performance and personal development. Transitions and intersections cause difficulties in adapting and fulfilling life goals and activities. The changes during the COVID-19 pandemic and their effects on students' performance and well-being have significantly impacted their parents' perceptions (Meghani et al., 2022).

Applications of Ecological Systems Theory in Academic Research

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1978) has been extensively applied in previous studies across multiple fields ranging from sociology, education, healthcare, and psychology. The theory has been utilized in exploring student academic performance and how diverse ecological systems influence academic success. Crawford (2020) utilized the theory to explore how characteristics of the microsystem, such as family relationships and friendships, impact the academic outcomes of students. Mahmud's (2022) key findings included active parent engagement and education, both correlating with better academic outcomes.

Pestaner et al. (2020) examined how coordination between schools and families has been integral in enhancing the academic outcomes and performance levels of

students. In connection with ecological systems theory, Yang et al. (2020) mapped specific findings to align with the different systems of EST. Crawford (2020) perspective discusses the critical role of family engagement on student's academic success. Yang et al., (2021) emphasizes the importance of interconnected relationships between parent-teacher partnerships and schools in efforts to support students learning. By examining the roles of family, school, and community a comprehensive view was gained to understand how various environmental factors influence academic performance.

Bess et al. (2020) examined how various neighborhoods, and societal backgrounds impact the availability of technological, financial, and social resources for students in schools and their academic lives. He also discusses how external factors can indirectly influence students' development. Bess et al., (2020) perspective on Macrosystem shows how overarching cultural values, economic conditions, and political system shape children's learning development. Lastly, Bess et al., (2020) explored the connection to Chronosystem by exploring how changes over time, such as technological advancements or major societal events, can influence academic performance.

The rationale for utilizing this theory in the proposed study is that EST offers a comprehensive model that highlights the intricate interplay of these systems in shaping an individual's development. It emphasizes the significance of the child's environment in terms of quality and context. It provides a holistic and contextual framework for understanding children's development emphasizing the interconnectedness of many systems in shaping children's growth. According to Bronfenbrenner, as the child develops, interactions within their environments become increasingly intricate

(Härkönen, 2008). This complexity arises from the child's physical and cognitive growth and maturation of structures (Peters et al., 2025).

The theory facilitates a holistic understanding of development and the interactions within these environmental subcategories. Since the present study focuses on the impact of interpersonal trauma on the academic performance of students from low SES during the COVID-19 pandemic, the theory is suited to understanding these interactions in the various environments within which students interact. Thus, it is suitable for evaluating the students, the family setting, the neighborhood, and the society.

The relation of the theory to the present study is the facilitation for understanding the complex interactions between interpersonal trauma due to the COVID-19 pandemic, socioeconomic status, and academic performance. Exploring this study within the foundation of EST enables comprehension of the influence of traumatic characteristics within the student's environment and existing socioeconomic adversity on their academic ability. The theory also helps to explore how dynamic associations between the various environments impact the student over time.

EST informs the lens through which this topic is examined. It provides an understanding of how various environmental factors to societal influences can shape a child's experiences and responses. The theory's recognition of reciprocal factors is important for understanding the many challenges faced by children in low SES backgrounds during the pandemic. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory focuses on the development that aims to explore the factors and influences on academic achievement and interpersonal trauma from the parents' perspective. This framework allows for a

closer examination of how different environments contribute to challenges posed by trauma.

Literature Review

Interpersonal Trauma

Interpersonal trauma is a series of experiences of traumatic events that involve threats, direct harm, or violence (Kohlboeck et al., 2023). Examples of interpersonal trauma are physical and emotional abuse or neglect, as well as sexual abuse (D'Andrea et al., 2012). Interpersonal trauma is determined by the presence of a direct death threat, actual or intended serious injury, actual or implied sexual assault or impacts from witnessing or caring for an acquaintance with such trauma (APA, 2022). Interpersonal trauma is related to traumatic experiences which are beyond the threshold that individuals can cope with and attain normal functioning in their day-to-day lives. The experiences could be a result of single and isolated experiences or repeated interactions with traumatic events that result in permanent or prolonged trauma (Cruz et al., 2022).

Interpersonal trauma refers to harmful events such as abuse or neglect within relationships. People may be exposed to interpersonal trauma due to existing in environments or surroundings where harmful occurrences are perpetrated or by accidentally encountering life-changing events such as a heinous crime, sexual abuse, or a natural disaster (García-Peñalvo et al., 2021). Further, interpersonal trauma may result from pain or emotional distress because of isolation or separation from loved ones, friends, acquaintances, and parents. In this case, the trauma is related to interactions with others or lack of thereof that were once commonplace but became disrupted during the

pandemic. Interpersonal trauma leads to diverse responses ranging from cognitive problems, emotional anxiety or numbness, physical wounds, maladaptive behaviors, and existential hopelessness (Boaz, 2022).

In general, interpersonal trauma can cause difficulties in concentration, memory, attention, and academic performance (Betthauser et al. 2023). It can disrupt a student's learning process due to the interrupted learning patterns and difficulties concentrating and focusing on tasks (Betthauser et al. 2023). Interpersonal trauma tends to influence students' academic achievement even more in lower SES backgrounds because they are at a higher risk of experiencing a higher frequency and severity of interpersonal trauma due to factors such as high levels of stress in the household, neighborhood violence, and limited resources (Rakesha et al., 2023).

Prevalence Rates of Interpersonal Trauma

According to the Global School-based Health Survey, 53.7% of in-school adolescents experienced interpersonal trauma, with the highest prevalence observed among those from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Aboagye et al., 2021). Reuben et al. (2021) established that physical, emotional, and community-associated interpersonal trauma were the most prevalent. 61% of the youth from low socioeconomic backgrounds have experienced interpersonal trauma (Dugal et al., 2016). A third of this percentage have experienced two or more forms of traumatic experiences that have adverse effects on them. 18% of the youth in low socioeconomic households, report being physically abused by their parents or caregiver (Dugal et al., 2016).

Chen et al. (2010) observe that children from low socioeconomic backgrounds are exposed to higher levels of interpersonal trauma. Daily stressors trigger health responses, including insecurity within the neighborhood, limited food access, unsafe drinking water, lack of healthy family support, inadequate housing, and increased incidences of domestic violence and interpersonal trauma. Repeated exposure to chronic stressors impacts the biological functioning and psychological well-being of the children in the family settings. Children who experience interpersonal trauma are more likely to suffer from learning difficulties in school and adverse childhood experiences (ACES) are associated with poor academic performance (Felitti et al., 1998). Additionally, the long-term effects of these difficulties have been noted into adulthood, influencing various aspects of an individual's life, including emotional well-being, social functioning, and overall health (Felitti et al., 1998). The disruptions by the chronic stressors impact cognitive functioning and promote incidences of mental challenges. Sprang et al. (2023) argue that even though certain amounts of stress are essential to focusing on life and developing appropriate mechanisms, the high chronic levels of stressors in low socioeconomic backgrounds have adverse effects on the brain and present long-term challenges to their performance and development.

Risk Factors

The risk factors for interpersonal trauma are elements which expose individuals to higher chances of experiencing trauma. Certain conditions, including psychological and emotional, can increase the potential of experiencing anxiety and depression for adolescents and youths to experience interpersonal trauma. Exposure to these risk factors

increases the likeliness that children in these environments will be victimized and experience one or more forms of interpersonal traumas (Marshall et al., 2020). In this context, the low socioeconomic status will be discussed as a risk factor for interpersonal trauma.

Economically disadvantaged, along with tension in living environments, can impact individuals' psychological and emotional well-being. Children who grow up in households that experience domestic violence and intimate partner violence, face a power imbalance which could promote breakups and separations (Howell et al., 2016). Interpersonal trauma tends to impact their welfare especially when the primary caregiver or head of the household is affected, reducing their ability to meet the financial and emotional needs of the children (Howell et al., 2016). Interpersonal trauma tends to impact on their welfare, especially during times when the parent or caregiver is affected, which reduces their ability to meet the financial and mental needs of the children (Marshall et al., 2020).

Understanding the Effects of Interpersonal Trauma

The effects of interpersonal trauma are extensive and can vary depending on factors such as the severity and duration of the trauma, the age at which it occurred, and the individual's overall environment (Marshall et al., 2021). The effects can be experienced immediately or later in life during the development of the individual. One of the effects is the development of post-traumatic stress disorder because of the events where individuals suffer from recurring effects of having flashbacks or nightmares (Boaz, 2022)). This promotes other psychological disorders and the possibility for individuals to

be suicidal or want to harm themselves (Felitti et al., 1998). Interpersonal trauma increases stressors including social isolation, financial strain, and disrupted support systems, which further correlate with lower academic performance and mental health challenges among students from low-SES families (Garcia et al., 2021).

Experiences of interpersonal trauma increase emotional stress on the person and may cause extreme mood swings, feelings of detachment from everyday activities and attachment issues (Sprang, 2023). Individuals may feel worthless or ashamed of themselves, which lowers their self-esteem as a result. These emotional effects impact on the overall well-being of the individual and may worsen already existing psychological disorders. In extreme circumstances, the effects could be physical pain with individuals of abuse having wounds, headaches, chronic illnesses, or insomnia. These impact the physical well-being of the children and adults (Ferrari et al., 2022).

Interpersonal trauma influences the cognitive abilities of victims as they are unable to focus on learning activities or may have maladaptive behaviors that hinder their academic achievement (Marhall et al., 2021). The development of children may be permanently impacted by delays experienced or development disorders later in life (Schofield & Beek, 2009). These also promote long-term effects such as intergenerational trauma where victims are likely to pass the traumatic experiences down to other generations through social learning (D'Andrea et al., 2012).

Rakesha (2023), highlights the adverse effects of trauma, including lowered academic engagement, decreased cognitive functioning, and disrupted learning in children from low SES backgrounds. According to Mahmud (2022), children tend to

carry the trauma that they encounter with them into their academics. Students who have performed poorly in school, had been negatively impacted by interpersonal trauma and tend to learn differently due to the negative effects on the brain (Mahmud, 2022).

Deng et al. (2018) show that children have higher incidences of anxiety and depression because of chronic stressors and proceed to have adverse impacts on their classroom outcomes. The adverse physical and mental health outcomes impact the stress-coping abilities of children, and this was highly noted in studies on the influence of the pandemic (Cheraghian et al., 2023). High stress and interpersonal trauma in low socioeconomic settings reduce the brain volume in areas that facilitate socio, mental and educational abilities (George et al., 2021). This research proceeds to note that children and families who were previously exposed to financial challenges experienced higher stress and interpersonal trauma during the pandemic (George et al., 2021). Their research noted the importance of exploring the relationship between stress levels on children's everyday functioning and interactions in school settings.

Low Socioeconomic Status

Households with low socioeconomic status face inequalities due to limitations in access to economic opportunities, educational resources, social support, and healthcare (DeCarlo et al., 2009). Their situation contrasts with those of higher economic status who have access to resources and opportunities for personal development (DeCarlo et al., 2009). Barakat and Konstantinidis (2023) argue that due to limited access to resources, individuals of low socioeconomic status are more likely to experience poverty and suffer

from chronic health conditions and other psychological disorders. Low SES communities are also highly segregated from civil planning and allocation of resources which increases the possibility for marginalization in development and investment initiatives (Heckman & Karapakaula, 2019).

Households with low socioeconomic status face inequalities due to limitations in access to economic opportunities, educational resources, social support, and healthcare (DeCarlo et al., 2009). Low-SES involves more than just income. It varies based on geographic location and many other factors. In the United States, low-SES is defined as families that earn below 100% of the federal poverty level (APSE, 2025). For example, during the pandemic, unemployment rates were disproportionately higher in low-SES households compared to middle and high SES households with studies showing in January 2020, the unemployment rate for the lowest earnings quintile was 4.4%, while the highest earnings quintile had a rate of just 1.8% (Birinci & Chien, 2020). Marginalization may also imply that individuals from low SES backgrounds face criticism and discrimination when applying for learning, job opportunities or permits to start businesses (Goudeau et al., 2023). Individuals with low socioeconomics often face significant economic challenges. The official poverty rate as of 2023 in the United States was 11.1% with 36.8% million people residing in poverty. Household spending is defined by earnings which is greatly affected by disruptions in the economy through shutdowns, natural disasters, or loss of jobs. The challenging economic situations promote potential for parents to neglect their children or academic needs, increasing stress levels and chances for altercations in the house (McGill et al., 2022). Children from these settings

have lower educational achievements as they are unable to concentrate in academic settings, access learning resources or compete fairly with other students (Hair et al., 2021).

The violence and chaos experienced in low-SES settings increase the chances for children and adolescents to be victims of gang violence, rape, death threats, physical harm or being homeless (Willey et al., 2021). For elementary aged students, traumatic experiences can disrupt and affect their development significantly. These disparities and experiences may impact their perception of peers from advantaged families, hindering their social learning and ability to engage them constructively (Goudeau et al., 2023). It is therefore evident that low socioeconomic status backgrounds are a major risk factor for experiencing interpersonal trauma due to the set of conditions to which individuals are exposed.

Academic Performance and Achievement

According to Frankel et al., (2023), the academic development of children who underwent the pandemic has suffered adverse effects. Frankel et al., (2023), explored how the boundaries between various settings, became blurred during the pandemic era due to the rise of virtual education, remote workplaces, and adherence to quarantine guidelines. Utilizing the framework of ecological systems theory, Crawford, (2020), demonstrated how children's academic development suffered from the dramatic changes caused by the pandemic, including reduced access to in-person learning, limited social interactions and emotional stress. The findings highlighted the compounding effects of socioeconomic disparities, which exacerbate the challenges for children from low-SES

households. With children from low SES households performing 25% lower on reading assessment compared to their peers from higher-SES households.

Exposure to various challenges during the pandemic added to the existing adversities and increased stress and challenges to student's academic pursuit. This exposure also reduced their academic potential and ability to compete on fair ground with fellow students. Frankel et al. (2023) further argued that witnessing effects of the pandemic on fellow students', and the deteriorating health conditions of their close kin had psychological impacts that influenced elementary-aged 5–11-year-old students' academic development. Children from low-income families experienced an average of a 12-15% decrease in academic scores, which was a significant contrast to their higher-income peers, who had a relatively smaller drop. Specifically, students who experienced stressors that showed math and comprehensions scores dropping 12-15% compared to the peers from high-SES backgrounds. Bess et al. (2020) elaborates on how the ecological systems framework aids in analyzing the diverse mechanisms by which poverty and associated factors impact educational achievements. Students tend to develop a feeling of belonging at schools, due to the different interactions between the ecological environments throughout time.

According to American Psychological Association (2022), the academic performance of students is greatly influenced by their level of exposure to interpersonal trauma, regardless of age. As a result of the higher amounts of interpersonal trauma, children experienced disrupted learning environments and unfavorable circumstances that disrupted their academic engagement. Thus, their cognitive function is greatly impaired

which disrupts their ability to engage in meaningful academic discourses. Mahmud (2022) argues that the trauma experienced by students in their surrounding environment is transmitted into academic contexts which serves as a hindrance to their performance outcomes. Research indicates that exposure to trauma can significantly undermine skills that are crucial for learning, especially reading comprehension (Fritze et al., 2024).

The research established a correlation between trauma levels, mental health challenges, and the disruptions caused by major pandemics or epidemics and academic failure. Students who face mental health problems, psychological health, and trauma associated with their environment develop inefficient learning patterns and struggle to match up academically with their peers from the high and middle classes in society (Marshall et al., 2020).

Crawford (2020) observed that as the pandemic progressed, the ability of elementary students to meet academic goals decreased. National data shows that students experienced a loss equivalent to 6 months in math and 4 months in reading (Locke, 2021). These indicators such as academic achievement, cognitive ability, and acquisition of skills and knowledge were impacted among the students. Students who were unable to cope with the requirements of distance learning were left behind or forced to skip some of the requirements that their fellows were completing. Resource loss, interpersonal challenges, and other disproportionate challenges dictated the learning abilities of different categories of students and their academic success. The COVID-19 pandemic may have had a detrimental impact on children's education by delaying anticipated learning progress or causing them to lose previously acquired information. According to

the research, children's reading and math proficiency suffered while schools were closed, and there was an overall learning deficit. For instance, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), reported that the average scores for 9-year-old students in 2022 declined 5 points in reading and 7 points in math compared to 2020, which makes it the largest score declining since the 90's (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024).

Effects of the Pandemic

In December of 2019, an outbreak of an infectious and deadly disease, COVID-19, expanded across the entire world causing a global disaster (Baxi et al., 2023) During the COVID-19 pandemic, students around the world were confronted with a remarkable set of challenges that caused pervasive disruptions, chaos, and trauma in students' everyday life. The COVID-19 pandemic was one of the largest disruptions to learning in the history of the world (Betthauser et al., 2023). Students of low SES didn't have equal access to technology and the internet for virtual learning. Pierce and Cleary (2024) showed that 50% of low SES households had a home computer and internet compared to 95% of high SES households. There was also an indication that there was an increase in the percentage of trauma exposure from 26.4% before the pandemic to 35.6% during the pandemic (Chambers et al., 2022).

Additionally, students from low SES backgrounds had limited access to resources such as tutoring support or technology assistance, which further increased students' academic achievement complications. The combination of experiencing higher and more severe levels of interpersonal trauma, decreases in SES, and disruptions in students' schooling can result in many negative influences on students' academic achievement

during the COVID-19 pandemic (Betthauser et al., 2023). The inability to match the needs of computer resources, and strong connectivity to the internet, has translated to the inability to access crucial learning resources. These challenges were faced in local neighborhoods, causing isolation from students and teachers, lack of financial resources, and uncertainty propagated during the period increased interpersonal trauma (Chambers et al., 2022). The trauma significantly affected the students' learning outcomes. 1 in 4 students from low-income households, lacked internet access, making remote learning nearly impossible (Rideout & Robb, 2020).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were even higher levels of interpersonal trauma exposure overall (Sonu et al., 2022; Betthauser et al., 2023) and decreases in SES due to many people being out of work for extended periods (Goudeau et al., 2023). For example, the overall rate of trauma exposure during the pandemic was approximately 35.6% versus 26.4% before the pandemic (Chambers et al., 2022). During this time, students were transitioning to virtual learning, which placed even more strain on families and children, due to social isolation and the mandated quarantine order. The COVID-19 pandemic had negative impacts on the performance of students and their ability to focus on academic settings. Students with low socioeconomic backgrounds were greatly impacted due to the elevated risk of exposure to interpersonal trauma. The exposure to situations that caused direct harm, threatened their well-being, emotional neglect, and sexual abuse due to the lockdown or movement restriction caused great harm to the students (Long et al., 2021).

As a result of the sustained disruptions, lockdowns, and emotional anxiety of the COVID-19 pandemic, Kuhfeld et al. (2020) claimed that students suffered significant intellectual development issues which translated into academic problems. This is because of a sudden and drastic change in the environment in society with requirements for remote working, telemedicine, virtual learning, and strict isolation and quarantine protocol (Bower et al., 2023). Authors argued that these drastic changes separated children from their support system and usual learning patterns which impacted their development and learning ability.

Post-traumatic stress symptoms have been connected to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has been defined as a potentially traumatic occurrence owing to its unexpected, intense, and extended nature, as well as the unknown and life-threatening characteristics it presents (Arnold & Kochanek, 2020). The CDC went on to report that risk factors for the development of post-traumatic stress symptoms include suffering from a severe case of COVID-19 as well as experiencing the pain and loss of others due to the virus. This compromises those who suffered from a severe case of COVID-19, saw the pain and loss of others brought on by the virus, learned that a friend or family member had passed away or was in imminent danger, and spent a lot of time exposed to negative situations (Peters et al., 2025).

Mahmud (2022) asserts that there were underlying causes influencing the poor academic performance of children affected by trauma of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, interpersonal trauma was seen to increase stressors such as social isolation, financial strain, and disrupted support systems. These aspects have been found

to correlate with lower academic performance and mental health challenges, specifically among students from low SES households (Garcia et al 2020). Thus, interpersonal trauma contributes to the increased stressors on children from low socioeconomic backgrounds and reduces their chances to enjoy equal opportunities, resources, and learning environments.

Parents' Perceptions

Parents' perceptions provide valuable insights into children's development and academic outcomes (Topor et al., 2010). Parents play a vital role in their children's learning and challenges that they may face. These perspectives offer holistic understanding of the factors that influence children's success. By incorporating parental views, educators can gain a deep understanding of the barriers to academic achievement (Topor et al., 2010). Understanding the parents' perceptions of these factors that influence their children's academic development, is important for identifying effective interventions, specifically in the context of interpersonal trauma and socioeconomic adversity (Topor et al., 2020). Parents are usually the first to witness and respond to the different effects of interpersonal trauma on their children, which can often make their insights invaluable (Topor et al., 2010). Parents views are fundamental for understanding the ways in which interpersonal trauma impacts children's academic functioning, far beyond the captured standardized testing and academic performance records (Shal, 2024).

Many families may have faced stressors and disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic, making it essential to capture how parents perceive the challenges that impact their children's learning experience (Chambers et al., 2022). Parents' level of

involvement, attitudes towards their children's education, and perceptions of their abilities can positively influence their academic outcomes (Masten, 2018). School closures, quarantine, and virtual learning created a situation where parents witnessed how their children's emotional and academic development was negatively impacted.

Changes to the learning environment that were immensely experienced by the students from low socioeconomic status during the COVID-19 pandemic illustrate their loss of the sense of belonging and formed study habits (Mahmud, 2022). The use of the ecological systems theory in a qualitative methodology provides strengths for its application in exploring patterns across samples (Mahmud, 2022). This approach facilitates generalization of findings to students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and nuances the lived experiences of individual students. The use of the theoretical framework and approach presents strengths in understanding the contextual factors that impact psychological well-being and academic achievement of students.

The choice of a qualitative study to explore the perceptions of the parents regarding the influence of interpersonal trauma on students' academic achievement in families from economically disadvantaged neighborhoods is appropriate to find suitable outcomes. The approach draws from qualitative methodologies and explores the complex dynamics in understanding the perceptions of parents and in correlating their understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on their children's performance (Kohlboeck et al., 2023). The methodology also enables the exploration of how the perceptions of parents relate to the existing literature on the influence of the pandemic. The methodology is also effective for understanding of diverse perspectives of parents and

comprehension of socioeconomic factors that parents face. This will also enable the proposition of objective interventions and support the implementation of mechanisms for targeted vulnerable populations and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Summary and Conclusions

This literature review has explored the major themes, concepts, and phenomena related to interpersonal trauma, academic performance, and low socioeconomic status during the COVID-19 pandemic. The review of the literature has identified the search strategy used to obtain literature and material for the study. These themes emphasize the relationships between interpersonal trauma, socioeconomic backgrounds, academic outcomes during the period of a global disruption COVID-19 pandemic. The use of keywords enabled a successful literature search that yielded valid and reliable sources for the exploration of study themes.

The theoretical framework proposed that ecological systems theory details appropriate propositions to be used for this study. A review of previous studies also indicates how the theoretical framework has facilitated successful findings and how this framework can be incorporated similarly in the current study. The conceptual framework defined key concepts and phenomena that are present in the current study. Evaluation of the writings of key theorists and philosophers contributed to the understanding of the application to the current research.

The literature review's key variables and concepts were assessed based on existing literature on the concepts, and how interpersonal trauma influences performance within low socioeconomic status was undertaken successfully. Ther has been several

studies explored on how the impact of interpersonal trauma and socioeconomic status on children's academic achievement, but very few have used qualitative methodologies to capture the perspective of parents. For instance, Kuhfeld et al., (2020) and Topor (2010) had quantitative data on the decline in math and reading for students from low-SES backgrounds.

The analysis of how different researchers have approached the topic in the past forms a foundation for grounding the current research. The identification of strengths and weaknesses in existing studies helps to inform and guide the current research. The limited resources covering the mechanisms that occasion the influence of trauma on educational performance indicate the importance of further studies. Studies such as Charmaz (2006) provided qualitative data through interviews and surveys. Further, studies should focus on providing supportive strategies that will resolve the negative outcomes because of interpersonal trauma in students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The literature review also identified the need for exploration that underscores the intersection between interpersonal trauma, and academic settings. The limited studies on interpersonal trauma, SES, and academic settings during the pandemic highlights the need for further exploration.

The literature review promotes the current study's implementation by identifying successful implementations in previous research that can be used as a guide in the current research and pitfalls to avoid. This is integral in the attainment of a reliable and valid study of the key concepts. By building upon this foundational information, the current study will proceed to Chapter 3. The formulation of the methods for the current study will

be based on the conceptual framework and acknowledged approaches of previous studies. The methods will facilitate the effective undertaking of the study and realization of outcomes that will progress scholarly discussion on the influence of interpersonal trauma among students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The chapter will outline the research design and establish the role of the researcher and the methodology for the successful study of the variables. This will be informed by the literature analysis carried out in Chapter 2 where scholarly articles and studies related to the current study will inform the adoption of approved and tested methods.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore parents' perceptions of how interpersonal trauma influenced the academic achievement of their elementary-age students from low SES backgrounds during the COVID-19 pandemic. By focusing on the experiences and insights of parents, this study aimed to uncover the unique challenges that these students faced during this time frame, and how the challenges negatively impacted their academic development. The parental perspective on students' academic development was a critical yet often overlooked viewpoint in existing literature, and understanding it would bridge the gap in the literature while contributing to more effective support strategies for children's educational growth. This chapter discusses the research design and rationale. This chapter also outlines the role of the researcher and methodology components, including participant selection logic, instrumentation, data collection, recruitment processes, data analysis strategies, trustworthiness measures, and ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

Before finalizing the methodological design, I carefully reviewed phenomenological research, which focuses on understanding the lived experiences of participants, to determine whether it was the most appropriate approach before finalizing my methodological design on narrative inquiry. This design aligned with the Moustakas's (1994) guidelines, which focused on how individuals make sense of their experiences with a phenomenon. The nature of the current study was qualitative, focusing on parents' perception derived from their personal experiences regarding the impact of interpersonal

trauma on the academic achievement of their children who were elementary-age students' during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study's eligibility criteria required children to have been elementary age during the COVID-19 pandemic from March 2020 to 2021. Additionally, these children were required to come from low SES backgrounds.

This qualitative design was ideal for exploring parents' perceptions of how the intersection of interpersonal trauma, low SES, and the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted their children's lives. Data were collected through eight semistructured phone interviews conducted to accommodate and ensure the safety, comfort, and ease of participants. Interviews were conducted until data saturation was reached. The nature of this study was qualitative with a phenomenological design to explore the perceptions of parents derived from their personal experiences regarding the impact of interpersonal trauma, low SES, and the COVID-19 pandemic on their children's academic development. Data were gathered through semistructured interviews with parents of elementary-age children from low SES backgrounds who had experienced interpersonal trauma during the COVID-19 pandemic. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What are the parents' perceptions of the influences of interpersonal trauma on their children's academic achievement, as experienced personally by them, in low socioeconomic backgrounds during the COVID-19 pandemic?

RQ2: What challenges did families from low socioeconomic backgrounds face in supporting their elementary-aged children's academic needs during this time?

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher was an observer-participant in this study. I conducted semistructured interviews to collect data from parents of children who were elementary-aged during the COVID-19 pandemic, and who have experienced interpersonal trauma and come from low-SES backgrounds. I gathered qualitative data that reflected the personal experiences of the participants. I remained mindful of all potential bias that I could have brought to this study, as these biases could influence how I interacted with the participants and interpreted their responses. To manage any potential bias, I engaged in reflexivity throughout the process.

I worked to reduce any unconscious bias by revisiting the research questions and being open to other perspectives. I involved an external reviewer to provide on my interpretation of the data to maintain objectivity. I understand the importance of minimizing conflicts of interest by ensuring there are no prior or existing relationships with the participants. If any participants felt vulnerable due to the sensitive nature of the study, I emphasized that the participation is voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without consequence. I provided precise information on the purpose of this study. I aimed to create a safe and open environment with the participants for comfort. Additionally, I upheld clear ethical standards anonymizing participants' information to ensure confidentiality. All participants fully understood the purpose, their rights and the potential risks before they provide informed consent.

Methodology

Participant Selection

The target population for this study are the parents of elementary-aged children, who experienced interpersonal trauma and came from low socioeconomic backgrounds during the COVID-19 pandemic. I used a purposive sampling strategy to identify and select participants. This approach is well-suited for qualitative research, as it enables the selections of participants to fit specific criteria relevant to the study. The criterion for inclusion is that parents must have children who were elementary-aged during the COVID-19, come from low socioeconomic backgrounds and have experienced interpersonal trauma during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The parents were able to effectively communicate in English how these experiences negatively impacted their children's academic development/performance. To ensure that participants meet these criteria, I collaborated with agency directors and community organizations that work with low-SES families. This collaboration assisted with representing the appropriate and targeted population. These partners helped to distribute flyers and shared the study details with parents who fit the inclusion criteria. The flyers had my phone and email contact information for the volunteers in the study to reach me directly. Once the flyers were posted, my recruitment continued until the desired sample size of 8 participants or until the data saturation was met. This sample size was chosen because it allowed for a thorough of the participants' experiences to be focused on and managed. It also ensures that the data saturation can be achieved. Data saturation refers to when no new information is emerging from the data (Charmaz, 2006).

Participants were identified through a collaboration with agency directors and community organizers that assist low-SES families. The flyers (Appendix A) were shared by directors and organizations through both email and physical postings in their office locations, ensuring that the study details were accessible to parents who met the inclusion criteria. Once the participants expressed their interest in joining the study, I confirmed the participants' eligibility based on the inclusion criteria (Appendix A), screening questions and emailing them an informed consent form (Appendix C). Once the informed consent was received and participants were aware of their eligibility, I set up a mutually agreed time and date to conduct the interview by phone. The interviews were conducted in a way that respected the participants' boundaries. The participants were also informed that the interviews would be 45-60 minutes long and audio will be recorded.

A total of 12 individuals initially expressed interest in the study; however, they deemed ineligible. One participant attempted to participate solely to receive the gifts card incentive and created multiple email accounts. To receive the gifts cards, the participants tried to bypass the eligibility screening; the person declined to engage in the interview process and was excluded. Additionally, a few other parents were disqualified, because their children were either too young, or had not been enrolled in school during the COVID-19 pandemic. Of those, four were ultimately excluded for not meeting the inclusion criteria. These cases were respectfully excluded to ensure the integrity of the participant pool and adherence to the inclusion criteria. Any participant that did not meet the criteria, were thanked for their time and interest. As a result, the final sample

consisted of eight participants who met all eligibility requirements and completed the interview process.

Informed consent (Appendix C) was provided to participants who met the criteria. This informed consent contained information regarding the participants' rights as well as the purpose of the study. Given that the potentially sensitive nature of some aspects of this study including socioeconomic status and academic challenges, I took appropriate steps to maintain ethical standards and ensure participants feel comfortable and supported throughout the process. As a mandated reporter, I was required to report any disclosures of child abuse or neglect that are made during the interview process. All participants were informed about this requirement before they agree to participate through the informed consent process. This method of transparency was to help participants decide whether they would like to be a part of the study. This approach was to ensure that the questions remain ethical and non-invasive.

Instrumentation

All eligible participants participated in semistructured interviews to collect information on the topic and questions. These interviews were conducted by phone, to ensure the flexibility and comfort of the participants. The interview protocol consisted of a list of open-ended questions that are designed to explore the parents' perceptions of how interpersonal trauma and socioeconomic challenges have impacted their elementary-aged children's academic achievement, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Follow-up questions were asked as needed to further clarify on the participants' responses.

The source for each data collection instrument was researcher-produced and developed based on literature that is surrounded by trauma, academic development, parental perspectives and qualitative research methods. I consulted with existing literature on trauma-informed and socioeconomic factors that affect academic performance. The interview protocol has not been used in other research, but it draws upon prior published interview protocols that explore similar topics. These protocols have influenced the design of the current study. Depending on the extent of similarity, permission may be sought from the original authors.

Betthauser et al., (2023) and Ferrari et al., (2022) both have explored the effects of trauma and socioeconomics stressors on academic development, by using semistructured interviews. The interview protocol developed for this study was appropriate for the current research and the context for the participants. Given the sensitive nature of the subject, the protocol was designed to be culturally appropriate and respectful. The use of semistructured interviews allowed for flexibility in responses and ensures that the questions stay on task. A copy of the interview protocol is included in (Appendix D)

The content validity of the interview protocol was be established through the literature review and feedback from my dissertation committee members. The context and culture of the target population are the parents and children from low socioeconomic backgrounds who have experienced interpersonal trauma during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The interview questions were grounded in existing research about the effects of interpersonal trauma on academic achievement. Minor modifications were made to better suit the targeted population, ensuring that the questions remain respectful and non-invasive. A full list of the interview questions can be found in Appendix D. Additionally, a table is be provided where the research questions are aligned with the corresponding interview questions for clarity.

The interview protocol was sufficient to answer the research questions as it is designed to gather comprehensive qualitative data about the perspective of parents. The questions explored how parents perceived the impacts of interpersonal trauma and socioeconomic challenges on their elementary-aged child's academic performance. This directly connected the research questions regarding the effects of these factors during the pandemic. The flexibility of semistructured interviews allowed for the participants to elaborate on their experiences in their own words. All responses were analyzed to determine if the questions needed refinement.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

For this study, the semistructured phone interview with parents who met the inclusion criteria was the primary data collection instrument to answer the research questions. Participants were recruited through community organizers and agency directors who serve low-SES families. Flyers and study information were distributed via email, outlining the purpose of the study, the eligibility criteria, and how to express interest in participating. The data was be collected by the primary researcher. The

interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes. The interviews were recorded for transcriptions and analysis.

At the conclusion of the interview, the participants were debriefed. All participants were reminded that they could withdraw at any time, and that they will be provided with resources for additional support. A debriefing sheet (Appendix D) was provided with contact information of services for any emotional distress.

Data Analysis Plan

After the interviews are completed, the recordings were transcribed and analyzed. The data analysis followed a thematic approach, where the key themes will be identified and categorized. This data analysis was guided by Moustakas (1994) approach to ensure an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of the participants. Also, to answer research questions regarding the impacts of interpersonal trauma, in low socio-economic backgrounds, on academic development during the COVID-19 pandemic. The thematic coding was used to identify patterns in the responses are directly related to the topic. Data was transcribed and analyzed using coded qualitative data analysis software, specifically NVivo to transcribe the interviews. This software helped to maintain organization for the data and allow for efficient identification of recurring themes across the interviews. If there were responses that appeared to be contradictory with the main themes, those were noted as discrepant cases.

The data from all participants were thoroughly analyzed to identify any unique insights or patterns. Even responses that seemed unusual or less common were carefully examined, as they may offer vulnerable perspectives that enrich the understanding of the

study's focus. The outlier responses highlighted important variations in experiences, such as differences in the age of the children at the time of the pandemic, or the involvement of parents with diverse backgrounds. Each response contributed to a better understanding of how interpersonal trauma and socioeconomic challenges affected children's academic experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Once the themes had been identified, axial coding was used to link categories to see how they interrelate and form a more comprehensive narrative that answers the research questions. This approach ensured that all data was considered, and that the analysis remains grounded in the participants' own words.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Ensuring trustworthiness is essential in qualitative research, especially for establishing validity, reliability, and integrity of study. For this research study, there were various strategies implemented to strengthen four important key elements of trustworthiness which include: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Using these strategies ensured hat the findings of the study are reliable and reflective of the parents lived experiences with their children.

Credibility (Internal Validity)

To establish credibility, the following strategies were utilized: triangulation, prolonged contact, saturation, reflexivity, and peer review. Triangulation was achieved through the use multiple enhancing techniques such as peer debriefing, and participant background to gain diverse perspectives. Even though findings were contextualized in regard to existing literature on interpersonal trauma and academic development, these

comparisons supported the results interpretations rather than being served as a method of triangulation.

By applying the ecological systems theory (EST), as a guiding framework, this study analyzed how parents' experiences align with established research, ensuring a deeper understanding of how the intersection of these variables affected children's academic experiences (Raffa et al.,2023). Adequate time was spent interacting with the participants to build rapport and gain a deep understanding of their perspectives. The interviews consisted of 26 open-ended questions and was conducted over a period of sufficient time to ensure clarity, and for their responses to capture the essence of their experiences. A comprehensive review occurred with each participant during the interview, to confirm for accuracy and to ensure that their perspectives are represented correctly before transcription.

Data was still collected until the saturation was met, hence there was no new information emerging from the additional interviews. This was the indication that the data set was sufficient and comprehensive. Throughout the research process, I was fully engaged in continuous self-reflection to address any potential biases that could influence the understanding of the data.

Transferability (External Validity)

Transferability happens when the results from the study can be applied to other populations or backgrounds (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). For the transferability, I provided a detailed description of the research context, the participant characteristics, and the study method. This allows readers to make informed interpretations about how the findings

apply to other similar contexts or populations. I carefully selected participants from low socioeconomic status, and other relevant factors, to ensure that the study captivated a broad range of experiences and perspectives. This variation enhanced the generalizability of the findings to other backgrounds that share similar characteristics.

Dependability (Reliability)

I was sure that the findings were consistent by maintaining an audit trial during the study. I documented all decisions made in the process including data collection, analysis and interpretation. This allowed for transparency and helped others connect the findings to the data. Using triangulating data from sources enhanced the dependability of the findings and strengthen the reliability of the results.

Confirmability (Objectivity)

I was focused on ensuring that the findings are shaped by the participants' experiences rather than my own thoughts or preconceptions. I documented any personal biases, assumptions, or thoughts that may arise or influence my analysis. I reviewed this document periodically to assess the impact of my reflections throughout the process. To further minimize my personal bias, I sought feedback from my dissertation committee, who are familiar with these qualitative research methods.

Intra- and Intercoder Reliability

The primary investigator transcribed and coded all material, but sought clarity form the dissertation chair if necessary. I was sure to be consistent in my coding's independently revisiting as well as recording the data. To further support the reliability of the analysis, feedback was sought from the chair of this dissertation. These discussions

helped confirm that the themes were grounded in the data, ensuring that it aligned with the study.

Ethical Procedures

Prior to any recruitment or data collection, I obtained the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Walden University. Approval #06-03-25-1048785 from the IRB ensured that my study was ethical and adheres to the principles that involve human participation. The IRB reviewed my study to ensure and address all ethical concerns in order. The recruitment was facilitated with local agencies that serve low-income families. These agencies, who provide services to families from low socioeconomic backgrounds, played an essential role in identifying participants who met the inclusion criteria for the study. The agencies distributed the flyers internally via email to staff members, allowing them to share the information as well as in printed form through the agency. The flyer directed interested parents to contact me directly via email or phone to express their interest in participating.

During the recruitment process, I ensured that all ethical concerns were considered and addressed for transparency and voluntary participation. An informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the involvement of the study. I explained the purpose of the research, the potential risk, the nature of participation and how the data will be used. All participants were informed that they could withdraw from the research at any time without penalty. I ensured that the participants did not feel obligated or uncomfortable, by ensuring that there was no coercion. I had clear assurance

of confidentiality. The participants were provided with informed consent and signing the form that explained the study's purpose, the rights of the participants and the procedures.

The consent was sent to the participants in advance of the interview, allowing for any questions. They were informed that all the information received will remain confidential, and that I would be the only person with access to the information. All data collected was treated as confidential. The audio recordings from interviews were stored and will only be accessible to me and my research advisor. I stored the data in a password protected environment. Data will be stored for 5 years and will later be destroyed. All participants were advised to ensure complete confidentiality, coding P1, P2, P3, etc.... replacing their names so that there are connections to them.

Summary

This qualitative phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences of parents regarding the influence of interpersonal trauma on the academic achievement of their elementary-aged children from low socioeconomic backgrounds during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study involved semistructed interview with parents and provided a comprehensive understanding of the challenges that their children faced at that time. To ensure ethical practices are being used, a purposeful sampling strategy was utilized to identify future participants. An informed consent was created and obtained for participants as well. Participants were able to electronically sign by emailing "I consent", which served as a signature for the purpose of the study.

This chapter includes the ethical procedures, including informed consent, resources for emotional support, and confidentiality. The recruitment process consisted of

agency involvement to assist with email outreach, a screening process for eligibility and inclusion criteria. Chapter 4 will provide the setting, the demographics of the participant, data collection, analysis procedures, evidence of trustworthiness, and the results of the study presenting the findings and results based on the data collection.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore parents' perceptions of how interpersonal trauma influenced the academic achievement of elementary-age students from low SES backgrounds during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study focused on the experiences and insights of parents to uncover the unique challenges faced by students during this time, and how the challenges negatively influenced their academic development. The research questions were the following:

RQ1: What are the parents' perceptions of the influences of interpersonal trauma on their children's academic achievement, as experienced personally by them, in low socioeconomic backgrounds during the COVID-19 pandemic?

RQ2: What challenges did families from low socioeconomic backgrounds face in supporting their children's academic needs during this time?

In this chapter, I describe the results of interviews with the parents of elementary-age students who resided in low-SES backgrounds during the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by a detailed description of data collection and analysis. This chapter is organized by research questions and associated responses. This chapter also includes the results, organized by research questions and themes.

Settings

The participants were recruited through a nonprofit agency, where the IRB-approved flyer was distributed by directors through virtual and email outreach. In some instances, participants noted hearing about the study through agency members and other parents who had received the flyer. This informal sharing occurred within the agency's

community, originated from the approved method. The interviews were conducted via phone. Most of the participants were engaged in the interviews without the presence of children. All participants conducted their interviews in a quiet setting such as their living room or office space. The recordings were free from background noise, which made transcribing the recordings a relatively smooth process.

Demographics

A total of eight parents participated in the study, all of whom were caregivers or parents of children who were in elementary school during the COVID-19 pandemic. All participants came from low SES status backgrounds and had children in various stages of elementary education at that time. The children's ages ranged from kindergarten through fifth grade during the pandemic. Although this study did not specify gender as a recruitment criterion, all participants who volunteered were women. Table 1 presents the details regarding the participants in the study, including their age, education level, gender, employment status, and relationship to the child. The following participant demographics are provided to contextualize the results:

Table 1

Participant Demographic Summary

Participant	Age	Education level	Gender	Employment status	Relationship to child
P1	25	High school diploma	Female	Assistant doula	Mother
P2	42	Nursing degree	Female	Hospital	Godmother
P3	30	Some college	Female	Unemployed	Mother
P4	32	High school diploma	Female	Unemployed	Mother
P5	44	Some college	Female	Essential worker medical	Mother
P6	40		Female	Chrysler	Mother
P7	43	Trade school	Female	Unemployed	Mother
P8	56	GED	Female	Unemployed	Grandmother

Data Collection

The solicitation of participants was recruited with IRB-approved procedures. The flyers were shared by directors and organizations through both email and physical postings in office locations. In some cases, participants reported learning about the study after the flyer was discussed among the organization, shared to formally and informally increase awareness within the agency community. Data was collected from eight participants through semistructured interviews, which were conducted virtually and over the phone. Each interview lasted between 30-60 minutes. Participants reached out to through phone call or email to discuss the parameters of the interviews. I emailed consent forms to all potential participants and asked them to reply with their consent to proceed. We then either scheduled the interview times over the phone or by email. All interviews were conducted via telephone and recorded with an audio recorder. Interviews were

transcribed by using NVivo qualitative data analysis software. The interviews were successfully completed, and all data was collected within the proposed timeframe. A review of the transcripts were reviewed with participants to review for accuracy. There were no changes made to the transcripts by interviewees.

Data Analysis

During the transcript process, I highlighted certain words and phrases that were relevant to the research purpose and the problem. This coding of transcripts was helpful for identifying recurring themes. I utilized excel spreadsheets to insert transcripts. I then coded the data by grouping codes into categories and grouped the categories into themes. I obtained 70 unique codes from the raw data (Appendix D). The codes were grouped into eight categories: emotional dysregulation, academic disengagement, pre-existing learning challenges, social isolation, technology issues, financial barriers, parental educational gaps, parental anxiety and stress, parental responsibility and support. I then grouped these categories into themes which were: emotional and behavioral struggles, amplified pre-existing challenges, social isolation and academic disengagement, limited technology resources, support and resources, financial/basic needs stress, parents' educational limitations, parental engagement and role strain, and psychological stress on parents.

In qualitative research, discrepant cases often refer to data points that deviate from the common themes identified from majority of participants. These cases can offer insightful knowledge regarding diverse experiences. A few discrepant cases emerged during this study, in the context of the parents' experiences with virtual learning and their

perceptions of the support that was provided by the school during the COVID-19 pandemic. These outliers were examined to ensure that their experiences were also integrated into the overall findings highlighting the various challenges that were faces by families during the pandemic.

These discrepant cases were incorporated into the data analysis to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic. Although there were general themes emerging from the data, the outliers served to illustrate that families faced adversity from different levels. The inclusion of the discrepant cases, allowed for richer interpretation of the data.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

This study followed measures to ensure for the accuracy of the data and analysis. Ensuring trustworthiness is essential in qualitative research, especially for establishing validity, reliability, and integrity of study. Triangulation was used by integrating data with supporting literature and the guiding frameworks to ensure trustworthiness. I implemented various strategies to strengthen four important key elements of trustworthiness which include: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Using these strategies ensured that the findings of the study were reliable and reflective of the parents lived experiences with their children.

Credibility

To ensure credibility, I first employed triangulation by integrating data from participants interviews, existing literature on interpersonal trauma and academic development. This allowed me to have more of a holistic view of the parents' experiences

and helped ensure that the findings were well rounded and reflective of the reality. Raffa et al. (2023) suggest that triangulation can enhance the credibility of qualitative research by incorporating different perspectives. In this study, triangulation was applied through the use of existing literature and theoretical frameworks for the interpretation of themes that emerged from the parents.

I made significant efforts to build rapport with each participant. I engaged in meaningful conversations and asked open-ended questions, allowing for the participants to feel comfortable sharing their perspectives and gain a deep understanding of their experiences. I also conducted interviewee checks by sending them the transcripts for review. I encouraged all participants to ensure that their voices and experiences were accurately represented in the findings. I maintained consistency in the interviewing process and used the interviewees to verify that the transcription accurately reflected the participants experiences. I also reviewed the data for patterns and contradictions to ensure that all findings were represented accurately from the parent's perspectives.

Saturation was achieved by continuing to collect data until no new information was found during the interviews. Once I reached this point, I felt confident that the data set was comprehensive enough to address my research questions. Reflexivity played an important role throughout the study, while I engaged in self-reflection to ensure that my own personal bias did not influence or shape the interpretations.

Transferability

Transferability was achieved through selecting participants from diverse backgrounds. A detailed description of participant demographics is provided in Table 4.1.

This helps ensure that the findings are applicable to the other families who experienced similar challenges during the pandemic. I ensured that the study captured a broad spectrum of perspectives. Transferability happens when the results from the study can be applied to other populations or backgrounds (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Dependability

To achieve dependability, I took very detailed notes and recorded all interviews for a detailed description of the data collection process. All interviews complied with a consistent format, and the analysis was conducted with transparency in how the themes were derived from the data. I maintained a clear audit trail of decisions made during the research process. I also used triangulation, which involved combining data from multiple sources, ensuring that the findings are shaped by the participants' experiences rather than my own thoughts or preconceptions.

Confirmability

To minimize biases and preconceptions, I maintained a journal throughout the study to document any thoughts, assumptions or biases that could have arisen during the process. Doing so allowed me to assess the impact of my personal thoughts on the interpretations of the data.

Results

The results of the interviews are organized below by research questions. Each section included the key themes that emerged from the interviews. Supported by directed quotes, illustrates the perspectives of parents. Discrepant cases are noted where

applicable. Each section includes a few of the key themes to illustrate the lived experiences of the parents.

RQ1: What are the parents' perceptions of the influences of interpersonal trauma on their children's academic achievement, as experienced personally by them, in low socioeconomic backgrounds during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Theme 1: Emotional Dysregulation

The negative impact of interpersonal trauma on children's academic achievement was a recurring theme throughout the interviews. Parents shared their personal experiences of trauma, including health problems, financial strain and emotional stress, had an influence on their children's ability to success academically. Five out of eight participants shared that their children had experienced new behavioral challenges and emotional dysregulation during the COVID-19 pandemic and some were pre-existing concerns. These parents described that their children had increased frustration, fatigue, restlessness and could not focus during their virtual learning sessions.

Most of these emotional responses were connected to interpersonal and instability that the children may have experienced at home. They also expressed how trauma exacerbated any existing learning or mental health concerns. Children who typically loved school became socially disconnected, which hindered their interactions and academic motivations. Interviewee 5 stated

> right at the beginning of the COVID-19 my father passed away. My child was grieving too. That was very traumatic having to deal with the loss of your parent…your grandfather, which was almost like a father, because he lived here.

> He's been in the household since my child was born. I could tell it was affecting his work. It affected his schooling…to lose him on top of being at home with no one else but his sister. He would sit at the computer but couldn't focus, and it made me feel like I wasn't doing enough.

Theme 2: Academic Disengagement

These data associated with RQ1 positions parents as experiencing emotional barriers to supporting their children's academic achievement, due to interpersonal trauma during the COVID-19 pandemic. Parents described how their personal struggles affected their ability to focus or engage with their children's learning. Parents expressed how their children had displayed emotional difficulties regarding school and complicated engagements. Themes of interpersonal trauma, such as grief, health problems, financial instability and emotional stress hindered children's ability to focus on academic during the pandemic.

Interviewee 1 stated, "she struggled a lot…she would cry and refused to do the work". Interviewee 6 said, "He struggled really bad. He would sit at the kitchen table in front of the computer and would not pay attention at all. He was basically at a pre-school level even though he should have been in kindergarten. COVID-19 made it worse." Interviewee 2 stated, "I had to tell teachers he had an IEP, because he struggled. He needed help and he couldn't get the help by being online".

Theme 3: Social Isolation

Four out of eight parents expressed how the lack of social interactions and the disconnections from in person school environment contributed to the lack of learning

participation. Due to the loss of routine and in school structure, created a void for many children. Interviewee 7 stated, “being away from friends and teachers was the most traumatizing part for my daughter. She loved being at school but hated to be stuck at home”.

Theme 4: Parents’ Educational Limitations

Throughout the study, parents indicated that their own educational backgrounds made it difficult to assist with homework and school assignments, specifically as the curriculum changed. One parent in particular reported mental strain, work balance, trauma and supporting academic cause psychological stress for her. Interviewee 7 shared, “math changed so much I had to relearn it myself to even try to help her.” Interviewee 2 shared “He needed help, and I couldn’t give it the way the teacher could. I didn’t know what else to do besides be present.”

Another parent expressed how helping her child forced her to confront her own educational insecurities past traumas. Interviewee 6 stated, “I had to learn along with him because I hadn’t read like that in years. It brought up things about my own school that I didn’t even know were still issues.” Interviewee 7 shared, “I almost felt useless when I couldn’t even help her with math. It was like having to go back to school myself.”

Theme 5: Psychological Stress on Parents

Four out of eight parents experienced psychological stress, all while providing academic assistance and caregiving responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Interviewee 4 expressed, “I was so overwhelmed with being laid off and pregnant. It was a lot going on.” Interviewee 7 also shared, “It was hard doing everything on my own, and

I had no one to talk to. Sometimes I would cry trying to help, because I felt like I was failing."

RQ2: What challenges did families from low socioeconomic backgrounds face in supporting their children's academic needs during the pandemic?

Theme 1: Limited Technology and Resources

Low socioeconomic status was a key factor in challenges, that families faced while supporting their children's educational needs during the pandemic. One out of eight parents indicated that although schools provided devices, there were issues with connectivity, and digital literacy remained a concern. Financial instability forced many parents to prioritize essentials over school materials. Interviewee 8 stated: "They gave us laptops with internet, but it was not very service. I had to get my own internet, which I could barely afford."

Theme 2: Lack of Institutional Support

Several participants described to feelings in the dark or unsupported by their children's school. One parent expressed that even resources such as laptops had challenges. This parent expressed frustration about the lack of responsive help or instructions. Interviewee 3 stated

> when his computer broke, it was very hard to get someone to fix it. The schools did not help and everywhere was so expensive. It finally took weeks for the schools to even set things up, it was like were forgotten about.

Interviewee 1 stated, "the schools sent emails, but no one called on checked in. It felt like they forgot about us."

Theme 3: Financial and Basic Needs Stress

Financial instability forced many parents to prioritize essentials over school materials. Two out of eight parents expressed that they had to prioritize basic needs over academic support. These parents felt unorganized and unprepared, due to limited access to curriculum materials, as well as their own educational limitations. Interviewee 4 stated: "we had to pay for tuition even when schools were shut down. While being laid off and pregnant, it was so overwhelming." Interviewee 3 stated, "everything was backed up. DHS (Department of Human Services) wasn't available and everything felt paused."

Theme 4: Parental Engagement and Strain

Seven out of eight parents expressed that they felt mentally and emotionally exhausted. Having to balance work, home responsibilities and support their children's educational needs all while managing trauma and uncertainty was overwhelming for them. Interviewee 5 stated, "I was stressed and worrying about bringing COVID home as an essential worker. It was just too hard to even help with school."

Theme 5: Amplified Preexisting Challenges

Two out of eight parents in the study, shared how their children had existing academic and behavioral difficulties. They also expressed how they worsened by due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and trauma. Interview 2 shared that her son had previously had an IEP and had to communicate with the school. She stated, "I had to tell the teacher about his IEP, because he was struggling. He needed help and he couldn't het the help by just being online." Interviewee 6 shared, "He struggled bad. He would just sit at the

kitchen table and not pay attention at all. He was basically at a preschool level, even though he should have been in kindergarten. The pandemic made it worse.”.

Outliers

During the interviews, many themes directly answered the research questions, however there were several other noteworthy patterns that had emerged from a deeper insight into the parents’ lived experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some parents observed their children becoming unexpectedly proactive in seeking help, despite the barriers. Interviewee 2 stated, “my son was the only one reaching out to the social worker himself. I was amazed that he could even advocate for himself, even though he needed so much help”. Another parent interviewee 4 shared that, “having everyone in the home we were together all day. Even though it was stressful, it brough us closer together as a family.” The answer from every participant illustrated additional insights regarding experiences of families.

Discrepant Data

There were not many discrepancies found during my study; however, I did find it interesting that everyone did not experience all the negative barriers. While most participants struggled with financial hardship, limited resources and emotional deterioration, three out of eight parents’ had divergent perspectives. Interviewee 6 stated, “they continued to pay us, and I was saving because it wasn’t much to spend on. Financially it was fine, we got unemployment and sub-pay, so money wasn’t always a problem”. Interviewee 5 stated “I didn’t experience financial strains the entire time we did okay.” Interviewee 3 stated, “once the schools figured it out, he did okay with the

laptop, but it was still hard". I did not discover there were a any discrepancies, until after the data analysis was done.

Ecological System Theory

For this study, ecological system theory (Brofenbrenner, 1979), served as a guiding framework giving a lens of layered interpretations of the influences of interpersonal trauma on children's academic achievement within low socioeconomic backgrounds during the COVID-19. By learning and applying the parents' experiences through the lens of ecological systems theory, this analysis provided a comprehensive understanding of how the various environmental layers actively interacted to shape children's experiences, and academic outcomes during a pandemic.

Microsystem

The microsystem includes an immediate environment consisting of family members, school settings, peers, and friends. These all shape the experiences of children and their development. These immediate factors play a crucial role in shaping children's academic experiences and overall development, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (Crawford, 2020). These immediate factors in the microsystem include the family, neighborhood, and school, which play a crucial role in shaping an individual's response to and coping mechanisms during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This theory examined the immediate environment such as the child's home, parental interactions and online experiences. This highlights how family dynamics and interpersonal trauma both directly impact children's behaviors and learning experience. Parents in the study often described how family dynamics directly impacted their

children's learning. For an example, Interviewee 1 shared, "she struggled a lot…she would cry and refused to do the work" as well interviewee 6 explained, "he would sit at the kitchen table in of the computer and would not pay attention at all."

Mesosystem

The Mesosystem is the type of connections and relationships between Microsystems that influence the child's well-being and development, such as interactions between different parents and teachers during the pandemic. These include the type of interactions that students experience in their domains of life. During the study, there were explored connections between the microsystems such as the relationships with the parents in the household, and the schools.

There were inconsistencies and inadequate communications which resulted to academic challenges. By integrating the (EST) allowed for the findings to align with the established literature on interpersonal trauma, the COVID-19 pandemic, SES backgrounds and academic development, reveal how inequalities intersect with parents' experiences of their children academic achievement. The study revealed how the inconsistent communications between the schools and the parents, left to confusion and disrupted learning. Interviewee 2 noted, "I had to tell the teachers he even had an IEP, because he struggled. He needed help and he couldn't get the help by being online."

Exosystem

The Exosystem is the external environmental settings that indirectly affect a child's well-being and include the larger community, their parent's occupational organizations, and the neighborhoods (Bronfenbrenner, 2000). During the COVID-19

pandemic, governments had to implement various measures to control the virus's spread, including health and safety measures which were lockdown and quarantines, mask mandates and travel restrictions. These are parents or caregivers' workplaces and outside community resources. In this study, this includes work-from-home, unemployment, essential workers, inaccessibility to resources and lack of support during the pandemic. Interviewee 5 shared, "I was stressed and worrying about coming home COVID as an essential worker. It was just too hard to even help with schoolwork."

Macrosystem

Macrosystems entail the broader societal system, such as cultural values and norms, that shape their perception of reality. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the world faced illness and high mortality rates and overwhelming healthcare systems. Governments implemented lockdowns, travel restrictions, and social distancing measures (Irwin et al., 2022). Economies experienced severe disruptions, leading to unemployment and financial instability altering life and routines. This system addressed the broader factors such as SES backgrounds and cultural factors such as poverty, disparities in access to education and stressors exacerbated by the COVOD-19 pandemic. Parents were deeply affected by poverty and systemic inequalities. Interviewee 8 commented, "They gave us laptops with internet, but it was not very good service. I had to get my own internet, and I could barely afford that."

Chronosystem

The Chronosystem refers to the dimensions of time and its influence on development. Dimensions entail historical contexts, changes in life, and experiences as

time evolves (Bronfenbrenner, 2000). The COVID-19 pandemic served as a critical chronosystem, also representing the historical time frame that affected student's academic development. The changes over time during the pandemic influenced students' environments and overall well-being, affecting their academic performance and personal development. This system reflects on major events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, major school closings, prolonged remote learning and family stress which all cause for children's academic difficulties. Interviewee 5 reflected on the disruption stating, "to lose my father on top of being at home with no one else but his sister, affected his schooling." The duration of the pandemic had long-lasting effects on families.

Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore the parents' perceptions of how interpersonal trauma has influenced the academic achievement of elementary-aged students from low socioeconomic backgrounds during the COVID-19 pandemic. To answer the research questions, eight semistructured interviews were conducted with parents or caregivers. Through these lived experiences, several key themes emerged including emotional and behavioral struggles, pre-existing challenges, limited access to technology and recourses, social isolation and parental role strain. This research analyzed the parents' experiences of how to their children's academic development was impacted due to disengagements, low-SES background, COVID-19, frustrations, and interpersonal trauma. These findings show how the intersection of these factors, disrupted academic engagements and development for many children.

For RQ1, participants discussed how their children had a hard time managing their emotions. Their children felt anxious, nervous, burnout, angry, or shutting down completely during online classes. Parents shared that the stress and trauma made issues that their children already had like intellectual delays, or learning disabilities worsen. Parents described their children as feelings cut off from the world, family and friends and teachers making the school experience even hard. While feeling this way, this left children less interested in online school and more disconnected from their education overall.

For RQ2 parents explained the major concerns and struggled that they face while trying to support their children schooling during the pandemic. Most parents could not rely on the school's technology/equipment because of it not working properly. Most parents wanted to continue to focus on keeping their families fed and bills paid, so they did not contribute financially for better WIFI or equipment, which made complicated to keep up with virtual learning. Parents expressed that they felt unprepared or didn't feel supported by the school. Parents shared that they did not understand the new school teaching styles of subjects, which caused for me stress. A few parents described different experiences, such as steady income or children adjusting well. This shows that not everyone went through the same thing.

Together these findings were analyzed through interview data to find the answers to the research questions. They also offered insights on how intersecting factors shaped children's learning and parental capacity to provide adequate support. Trauma, emotional challenges, lack of support and resources created a significant amount of damage on

children's learning. In chapter 5, it will provide an interpretation of these findings, discuss the study limitations, connecting the interpretations to existing literature, the ecological system theory, explore implications for positive change, and discuss how schools, communities, and policymakers can support families that have faced similar challenges whose children are still affected.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore parents' perceptions of how interpersonal trauma and low SES during the COVID-19 pandemic influenced their children's academic achievement. This study sought to fill a gap in the literature by exploring how parents from low SES backgrounds perceived the impact of interpersonal trauma on their children's academic development during the COVID-19 pandemic. Focusing on the parental perspective, this study aimed to provide a deeper understanding of the unique challenges these families faced and how stressors such as low SES backgrounds, interpersonal trauma, and the COVID-19 pandemic shaped children's learning and school involvement.

Findings from this study revealed that interpersonal trauma during the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated preexisting challenges for children and parents, particularly in areas such as emotional regulation, attention, and motivation for learning. Parents described technology issues, resources limitations, emotional exhaustion, and feeling helpless regarding supporting their children. This intensified the already present challenges on both children and parents. Parents expressed feeling confused, unprepared, and unsupported throughout their children's academic experience during the pandemic. These emotions compounded what they described as academic regression, such as difficulties focusing, lack of motivation, and developmental delays. One parent noted that their kindergartener was doing decent work that resembled Pre-K levels, indicating concerns that their child had fallen behind academically.

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings in this study confirm the existing literature on the intersection of interpersonal trauma, SES, and educational development (Heckman & Karaoakula, 2019). Parents' perceptions reflected a clear pattern of how these factors undermined their children's academic engagement. The findings of this study offered supporting evidence, shared from the voices of the parents, regarding how trauma related to health crisis, financial barriers, and social isolation during the pandemic intensified these risks. The findings align with research by DeCarlo Santiago et al. (2009) who described how exposure to stress and trauma in low-SES households can contribute to emotional dysregulation and reduce motivation for students' academic tasks.

Consistent with the Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological system theory, school closures and the lack of teacher support, a microsystem disruption, combined with parents' unemployment exosystem stressors to create a context in which children's learning was negatively impacted. These results extend the knowledge by providing insights and a nuanced firsthand description of how interpersonal trauma can linger in the day-to-day lives of families and children during a crisis. This study also contributes to the literature that suggested that caregivers/parents felt either discouraged or empowered to support learning during the remote education experience (Irwin et al., 2022).

Six out of eights parents expressed feelings exhausted, overwhelmed and helpless, especially regarding the technology complications. They expressed how the sudden shift to virtual learning compounded different challenges by introducing new barriers which increased parental stress. Several parents also shared that they experienced mental health

struggles which interfered with their ability to provide academic support for their children. The parents were able to recount the stories of their children's experience of being frustrated and struggle with virtual platforms, which echoes the findings of Pestaner et al. (2023). This highlights the need for interventions that addresses parental mental health to assist with children's academic needs.

Interpersonal trauma emerged as a huge key factor regarding the shape of children's daily academic experiences. Parents in the study described their children having difficulty concentrating, behavioral management, emotional withdraws and fatigue. This researcher found that parents observed their children sense of isolation, which caused a lot of interpersonal traumas. Literature discusses the importance of teacher and parent collaboration, yet in the study, many parents described that the lack of partnership that they felt. The parents felt alone in their effort to navigate through virtual learning while addressing their children trauma related challenges, which suggest the need to strengthen school home relationships during a crisis.

Another important insight was how trauma influenced parents' perspectives on their children's academic development. Many parents shared that they felt their children were falling behind during their kindergarten or early elementary years and were fearful that they would have long lasting consequences (Bower et al., 2023). This highlights the long-term effect of academic gaps. Many parents shared their determination to being their children's advocate, demonstrating resilience despite the limited resources. This is a more complex idea that challenges the deficit-focused research abut low-SES families.

This study offered a lens of how parents from low SES backgrounds perceived their children's academic challenges, while experiencing interpersonal trauma, during the COVD-19 pandemic. This study centered the lived experiences of parents who faces these barriers. The findings reinforced very important takeaways: first that interpersonal trauma intertwined with academic challenges, second, parents carried majority of the emotional weight, while navigating both their children's education and personal survival mode; and lastly academic support during a pandemic should consider the parents context, and not just the student's. these findings were mentioned consistently in the findings in chapter 4 and in the interpretation in chapter 5.

Limitation of the Study

This study faced many limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. One limitation was the sample size. Although I completed eight in depth interviews, a larger sample could have captured a broader range of experiences and perspectives among parents from SES backgrounds. The biggest limitation of this study was relying on the parents' memories of the events that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, which was 5 years ago, introducing recall bias (Oyebode, 2011). Details such as the timeframe of the school resources, supported and the specific emotional reactions, may not have necessary been remembered accurately. Another limitation was that all participants were voluntary, which may result in a broader population sample of low-income parents, which doesn't fully represent the entire population. For instance, including participants from diverse geographic locations, family dynamics, or with different levels of resource accessibility, could have revealed how interpersonal trauma

and socioeconomic hardship shape children academic outcomes during the pandemic. A broader participation pool could have increased the likelihood of capturing the voices of all parents who may have been less connected from their children's schooling. Expanding the voices could allow for a deeper understanding of the lived realities and parental perspectives

Lastly, while all participants met the criteria for the low-income families all identified as African American mothers or caregivers and some residing in urban communities. A result of this, is that the findings may not fully represent the experience of the fathers, non-black families or parents in rural areas who challenges may differ. These limitations suggest that when generalizing the results it requires for caution. Especially for the results that are beyond similar backgrounds. This underscores the need for more inclusive research to captivate broader spectrums of low-SES families experiences. The limitation affected transferability, but the trustworthiness of the study was supported through triangulation, which included prolonged engagement with participants, peer review and alignment with existing literature strengthen trustworthiness.

Recommendations

A few recommendations for future research are further exploration of the parents' perceptions of their children and the unique combination of academic challenges faced by students from low SES backgrounds who have experienced interpersonal trauma during the COVID-19 pandemic. Future research could benefit from including teachers' perspectives and their direct observation of the children's online engagement during the

COVID-19. While this study focused on the parents' perceptions, incorporating teachers' insight would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the student's academic behaviors. Comparing the two perspectives would reveal either an alignment or disconnection between home and school observation, which gives a holistic view on how these factors affected students during this time. A study should be explored on trauma informed trainings and strategies in online learning. These strategies can help identify the best techniques to support children that are negatively impacted by trauma when in person school isn't an option. Future researcher could also expand on the support system and how community organizers, advocacy organizations and extended family member assist with the effects of trauma on academic development. Additionally, further study could research the experiences of the other marginalized groups and families who may have language barriers. They may have faced different challenges that were not fully captured in this study.

Implications

Several implications for practice derive from this study, including implications for positively impacting educators, parents, families and policymakers. At an individual level, comprehending how trauma experienced during a pandemic can contribute to emotional and behavioral challenges in children, allows for both parents and professionals to recognize the early warnings and intervene effectively. Many parents in the study shared powerful stories regarding their children's mental health, which unfortunately went unnoticed and misunderstood by educators. Training educators with

trauma informed workshops, could allow for them to identify these concerns quickly and refer the children to the appropriate services, preventing long term academic setbacks.

For parents and families, this study shows the significance of mental health support and trauma informed care for their children, who've experienced any interpersonal trauma. Many parents expressed their feelings as overwhelmed and unprepared to assist their children's online learning. Incorporating parent trainings and workshops at school that specifically focus on building resilience and coping mechanisms in the face of trauma could encourage caregivers. All programs should be accessible and designed with low-SES families in mind to reduce any barriers of participation.

In the aspect of resources and community, schools can develop effective policies for crisis situations. Many parents expressed that school were inconsistent or delayed in contact, making it difficult for them to understand their expectations, and how to access support. Having a more detailed plan of communication and pro-active steps from teachers could improve academic continuity and reduced parental anxiety during an emergency.

From a policymaker level, this study points to the need of educational equity. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed more of the existing disparities in education, reliable technology, and mental health resources, disproportionately affecting those residing in low-SES areas (Weissman et al.2022),. Policymakers can use these insights to support and advocate different programs that provide free or affordable and working internet. They can also advocate for funding school success coaches and counselors that families need during a crisis.

Implications of this study's finding for positive social change can be found from the listed implications for various stakeholders. This study offers a way to create systems that acknowledge and respond to the challenges that are faces by many parents that are affected by trauma and low socioeconomic status. Methodologically, this study demonstrates the importance of centering the voices of parents in research on academic achievement, during a widespread crisis. Theoretically, applying the (EST) in this study highlights the importance of examining the multiple environmental system and theories that influences a child's learning experience, particularly in the context of interpersonal trauma. It also draws attention to the intersectionality of various factors such as SES, family dynamics and resources, that shapes academic outcomes for children exposed to interpersonal trauma. Also, the findings are shown then through the connections between home, school, family and community resources, children struggled emotionally and academically. The results from this study offer a systematic approach to acknowledge and respond to the challenges. Making the emotional well-being for children, their academics, supporting parents and the improvement in communications a priority, policymakers can work towards minimizing the disparities and help children thrive in the face of adversity.

Conclusion

Before I began this I study, I knew that I wanted to have a better understanding of how parent from low-SES backgrounds experienced the overlapping challenges of interpersonal trauma and academic disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The literature reviewed in this study demonstrates that both interpersonal trauma and

socioeconomic hardship can negatively affect a child's learning experience. However, there appears to be lack of research primarily on, on how parents perceived these impacts and the ways in which they navigate the challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic (Arnold & Harmon, 2023). Through this research study, I was able to gain a better understanding and hear from the parents firsthand. Listening to their experiences and their stories, provided a deeper and more human perspective on the struggles, the resilience and resourcefulness that left such an impact on their children academic experience.

This study centers the voices of the parents and draws connection together between socioeconomic disparities, interpersonal trauma, and educational outcomes. Listening to these stories is far more than just what test scores and statistics could show, instead it shows the true testament of heartbreaks and the dedication of the parents that did their very best at trying to help with children with their learning. I am hopeful that these stories will be a reminder that, behind every statistic regarding the learning and the pandemic setbacks, are families that are trying to stay afloat, without the resources that they need. This study gives insights on the importance of parental perceptions (Chambers et al., 2022), as well as fills the gap in existing literature, offering practical insights for educators, policymakers and mental health professions.

As I close this chapter, my hope is for this work to contribute as both the call and action, for the development of more compassionate and equitable systems that can support and accommodate children and parents and not just during a crisis. By hearing the stories and learning from the parents' voices, schools and communities can be created

to where all children matter, no matter their socioeconomic backgrounds or unfortunate challenges they face. These stories could spark meaningful considerations and change. Hopefully this study inspires others to act on what is revealed and allow for all children to reach their fullest potential even when life is at its worst.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

DO YOU HAVE CHILDREN?

Seeking Parents for Research Study

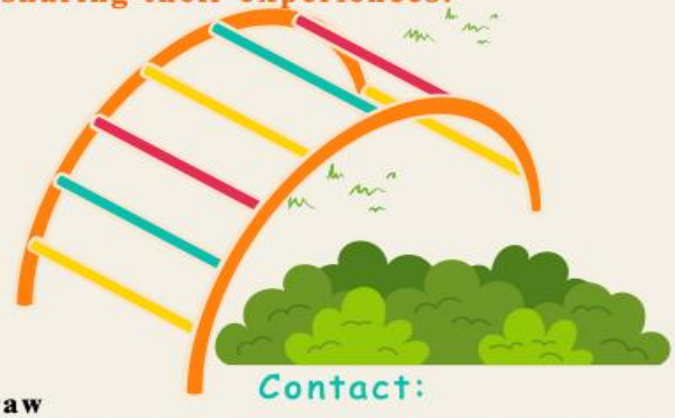
Are you a parent of an elementary-aged child who has faced challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic? We want to hear from you!

Eligibility Criteria:

- **You are the parent or guardian of an elementary-aged child (ages 5-11) who attended school during the COVID-19 pandemic.**
- **Your family has experienced challenges related to trauma or low socioeconomic status.**

Earn a $25 Gift Card

Eligible participants who complete a one-time interview will receive a $25 Visa gift card as a thank you for sharing their experiences.



Participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without any consequences. All information shared will remain confidential.

Contact:
brandi.walker1@waldenu.edu
586-788-3593

Appendix B: Screening Questions

Dear [Participant's Name],

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study! Please answer the following questions to determine your eligibility for the research:

1. Did your child attend elementary school during the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020–2022)?
2. During the COVID-19 pandemic, did your child experienced any significant challenges or stressful situations that may have impacted on their academic well-being?
3. Would you consider your family to be from a low socioeconomic background, which may include limited access to educational resources or financial hardship?
4. Are you willing to participate in a 30–60-minute audio recorded interview via phone with me to discuss your perspective of your child during that time?
5. Would you like to be contacted to learn more about the study or to schedule an interview?

Thank you for your response. If you are eligible, I will follow up with you to discuss the next steps. Your participation is greatly appreciated!

Appendix C: Email Response

Dear [Participant's Name],

Thank you for expressing interest in my research study. Based on your responses, you are eligible to participate in the study on how interpersonal trauma and low socioeconomic status have impacted your child's academic achievement during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Here are the next steps:

1. **Informed Consent**: Please find attached the informed consent form, which provides more details about the study, your rights as a participant, and how your information will be handled confidentially. After reviewing the form, please reply to this email with the word "I consent" if you are willing to participate.
2. Once I receive your consent, I will coordinate a mutually convenient time for the interview. The interview will last approximately 30-60 minutes and will take place via phone, based on your preference.
3. Sharing Results: In alignment with Walden University's social change mission, I will share a summary of the study results with all participants after the research is completed. This 1–2 paragraph summary will be written in plain language and sent to you via email to ensure that you are informed of the key findings.

Please feel free to reach out if you have any questions or concerns.

Thank you again!
Brandi Walker

586-788-3593 | brandi.walker1@waldenu.edu

Appendix E: Data Codes, Themes, and Categories

Codes	***Categories***	***Themes***
She cried every day. *He threw tantrums* *She didn't want to log on to Zoom.*	Emotional Dysregulation	Emotional and Behavioral Struggles
He couldn't focus. *She wouldn't sit still* *He hid under the table.*	Academic Disengagement	Emotional and Behavioral Struggles
IEP was ignored. *Teachers didn't help with his disability* *He was already behind* *He couldn't keep up with the work.*	Pre-existing Learning Challenges	Amplified Pre-existing Challenges
Grandma helped. *Community gave food/gifts cards and the schools.* *My mom lived upstairs.* *My siblings were home to help me with my kids.*	Support System	Support and Resources
He had no one to play with *No friends.* *He missed his teachers.* *Isolation made him sad.*	Social Isolation	Social Isolation and Academic Disengagement
The internet kept cutting off. *Laptop broke, no help.* *School tablets were useless.*	Technology Problems	Limited Technology/Resources
I felt responsible for teaching. *I had to supervise everything.*	Parental Responsibility	Parental Engagement and Role Strain

I couldn't pay rent. *I couldn't afford food.* *Worried about paying rent.* *We were almost evicted during COVID.*	Financial Barriers/Strain	Financial/Basic Needs Stress
Math changed. *I didn't know how to teach him.* *I was learning along with him.* *I had to figure out Google classroom.*	Parent Self-Efficacy	Parents' Educational Limitations
I was scared to bring COVID home. *I felt overwhelmed and scared.* *I tried to work while managing kids, but it was impossible.*	Parental Anxiety Stress	Psychological Stress on Parents