

Schooling status during pandemic predicted parents' resilience

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Parents accustomed to home schooling felt more resilient during the COVID-19 pandemic than those whose public-school children were suddenly housebound, according to a Rice University study.

That was particularly true for home-schooling parents who stayed physically active. But those who experienced increased stress because students were at home—and whose workout regimens suffered—likely had a different experience.

The report by lead author Laura Kabiri of Rice's Department of Kinesiology, recent Rice alumna Annie Chen and Brian Ray of the National Home Education Research Institute polled 123 parents of school-age youth in 2020. They found the type of schooling students received pre-[pandemic](#) had a direct impact upon parents' perceived [resilience](#).

"We knew the importance of [physical activity](#) to promote physical health benefits like disease prevention and weight management and even [mental health benefits](#) like reduced risk of depression and anxiety," Kabiri said. "However, we now also know that public-school parents who did not get enough physical activity during COVID-19 also perceived themselves as significantly less resilient."

The study appears in the *International Journal of Educational Reform*.

The rise in stress on parents suddenly working from and teaching their children at home has been a recurring theme of the pandemic, noted Kabiri, an assistant teaching professor and sports medicine adviser at Rice. But nobody to date had quantified how resilient they felt themselves to be.

"Psychological resilience can be defined different ways," she said. "Generally, resilience helps individuals handle challenging situations in a constructive way and find and access resources that promote their own well-being. This resilience was especially important for parents during the prolonged stress of the COVID-19 pandemic."

The study notes COVID-19 increased the number of home-schooled children in the United States from 2.5 million to as many as 5 million by January 2021. That number does not include the millions more who attended virtual public-school classes from home.

The pandemic provided a unique opportunity to study the relationship between parents' stress and resilience based upon their circumstances. The study draws a clear line between parents accustomed to the regimen and those whose children were studying at home for the first time, Kabiri said.

"We were surprised to see just how differently parents who were physically active perceived their own resilience compared to those who were more sedentary, particularly among public-school parents," she said. "We were less surprised but pleased to quantify that home-school parents did indeed feel more resilient than their public-school counterparts.

"Being a parent of public-school students and experiencing the education disruption myself, I had to wonder if [parents](#) already schooling their [children](#) at home or those keeping up regular exercise routines were responding differently," Kabiri said.

The good news, the researchers point out, is that "resilience is a process rather than a personality trait."

"We can all benefit from physical activity and improved resilience," Kabiri said. "For now, walk yourself. And with your kids. And maybe even the dog for at least 150 minutes a week. Or run them for 75. The benefits will extend beyond [physical health](#) into mental health as well."

More information: Laura S. Kabiri et al, Effects of Schooling Type and Physical Activity on Resilience Among Parents of School-Aged

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