

#InfanciasEncerradas

Survey of children and adolescents

Mexico City Executive Report



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1. Presentation

InfanciasEncerradas (“Locked Up Childhoods”, hereinafter referred to as *the survey*) was created by the Mexico City Human Rights Commission (CDHCM). It is based on the principle that children and adolescents have the right to participate and be included in social research and policy. The responses to the health emergency derived from the COVID-19 pandemic have exhibited a global adult-centered vision that considers children and adolescents as a promising resource for the future with little interest in making them feel heard in the present. What happened to billions of children and adolescents during this confinement? What did it mean to see their everyday lives halted? How did this season go by for them? For some, this period represents between five and 10% of their entire lives, and for some others, it reaches a fifth part of their age. Attempting to reach the answers to these questions is more relevant than ever as maintaining the adequate handling of the pandemic requires the set-up of social distancing rules and health measures that will continue to affect the lives of people under the age of 18 years in large part of the globe.

Concerns over an uncertain, unequal and violent environment preceded the current economic crisis and its imminent social impact. Hence, there is a need to safeguard the children and adolescents' rights in the public agenda and shine a light on this age group that represents on average a third of the global population.

#InfanciasEncerradas was drafted after a research study titled *Infancia Confinada. ¿Cómo viven la situación de confinamiento niñas, niños y adolescentes? (Confined Childhoods: how are children and adolescents coping with confinement?)* carried out in Spain during the month of April. Due to the sense of urgency, other than the survey structure, the design, research and practice methods may be adjusted as time goes by to go hand in hand with the ongoing situation we are living through. We take this opportunity to thank *Enclave de Evaluación y Enfoque de Derechos Humanos*, especially Marta Martínez, Iván Rodríguez and Gabriela Velásquez for their generosity in sharing their methodology approach.

This study gives us hope for ongoing solidarity and collective ethical and social action in the face of this pandemic. We would not have achieved the national coverage without

the solidarity of over 200 people, educators and institutions. We are deeply grateful to the over 19 000 children and adolescents from Mexico City who answered survey or sent a drawing. To them and for those who we could not reach this time: thank you!

Nashieli Ramírez Hernández
President of the Mexico City Human Rights Commission





RIGHTS
OF CHILDREN



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2. Introduction

On March 11, 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that COVID-19, the disease first identified in the province of Wuhan, China and caused by the virus SARS-CoV-2, was officially considered a pandemic. Within this context of uncertainty and urgency, nations took measures to prevent the spread of the virus: from closing down borders to contain it within their territory to the halt of economic, social and cultural activities. Most countries limited the mobility of people, restricting their activities according to basic necessities. Self-isolation measures meant schools, from preschools to university, and childcare facilities closed.

Along with the varied preventive and protective measures against COVID-19 put in place by nations, came the concern that, even under such extreme and exceptional circumstances, human rights of all people must be respected. It was immediately recognized that certain group populations are more vulnerable than others, especially those considered being at higher risk of contracting or suffering complications from the virus, such as the elderly.

Children and adolescents, considered as a generally unaffected group, fell into the background of this health emergency. Nevertheless, due to isolation and social distancing measures, their right to health (e. g. access to vaccines and treatment for pre-existent conditions) is threatened and they are at greater risk of falling victim of other forms of violence and exploitation. Furthermore, with the drastic change in lifestyle, children and adolescents' right to education as well as their conviviality with peers was impacted by the closure of schools. Public spaces were lost and, with them, play, leisure and socialization activities outside of the family unit. In other words, children and adolescents assumed the greatest burdens of the confinement.

Their perspective was not taken into account in the elaboration and implementation of emerging measures in response to the pandemic, despite its direct impact on their daily lives in a material, psychological and educational sense, among others. For that matter, children and adolescents' recognition as a priority care group is crucial, and the institutional efforts must be oriented towards insuring the preservation of their interests.

For the CDHCM is important to understand how children and adolescents in Mexico have lived this sanitary emergency. What are their worries, concerns, and difficulties in studying from home; how do they experience this confinement in material terms, and what do they miss from the outside world. The #InfanciasEncerradas survey is a local effort centered around Mexican children and adolescents' voices and experiences across the country. By recognizing and making their opinions heard, future initiatives may allow them to face the on going situation as well as the near future in the best way possible.

The survey has two main objectives: the first is to grasp children's opinions, feelings, thoughts, and wishes in the context of the pandemic. The second is to guide and nurture the different stages of the design and practice of public policy in the medium term, including immediate institutional interventions that take into account children and adolescents' perspectives. The value of this survey also relies upon being an example of both qualitative and quantitative intersectional and human rights-based research that respected and incorporated the right to participation of this group. Furthermore, it was designed to help reflect the children and adolescents' rights to leisure, access to education and culture within the context of quarantine and isolation where contact with scholarly community is limited. Ultimately, it allows efforts to prioritize the safeguarding of children and adolescents' rights, protection and care.





RIGHTS
OF CHILDREN





3. Context

3.1 The pandemic and the rights of children and adolescents

The effects of the pandemic and the global containment measures cannot be fully anticipated. However, it is foreseen different population groups will be impacted in varying degrees by this crisis. For this reason, several international organizations have called upon states to establish urgent measures in response to the current situation, taking into consideration the fact that some people are in a higher risk than others.

Although children and adolescents have around the same chance of being infected as any other age group, the risk of them developing severe symptoms and thus their fatality rate is low. However, there is currently not enough data worldwide to verify the pattern of the illness within this age group. The countries that have consistently reported disaggregated data are few, making it harder for international organizations such as the WHO and academic institutions to monitor the pandemic and report its global impact on children and adolescents. In Latin America, only Chile and Mexico have broken down their reports by detailed sub-categories such as by age and sex. In contrast, the rest of the countries carry fewer specific statistics. The lack of data in the region only encumbers the right to health of this group.

In respect to guaranteeing the right to education, this group has been severely affected by the global action to cease on-site learning. The implications have been devastating; the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) estimates that six of each 10 children in the world have not received any education in the last three months due to, among other causes, lack of technological tools and internet access. We are also facing an educational emergency if we consider that the return to school will require certain adjustments that can hardly be implemented equally by all educational systems around the world.

The increase of child labor because of the crisis is worrying, particularly in places where this continues to be a common practice. The United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) and the International Labor Organization (ILO) have emphasized this peak is due to the

loss of employment of breadwinners of the family; salary reductions; and the increase of precarious and informal labor; the cutbacks on remittances; and the difficulty to access loans.

Temporary closure of schools and the confinement of children to the home increases the chances of them being exploited through child labor. The gender gap widens as girls are expected to perform domestic tasks or work in the fields. Child labor also exposes them to a higher risk of contracting the disease, especially when caring for sick family members.

Another issue that raises concerns regarding the vulnerability of children is their exposure to violence in its distinctive forms. The United Nations' Special Rapporteur on Sale and Sexual Exploitation of Children and the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children stated that the confinement and self-isolation measures, mobility restrictions and the interruption of protective services to children make them more likely to become victims of violence and sexual abuse. This is especially true for young girls who are at a high risk of experiencing gender violence and being victims of other harmful practices, such as becoming child brides, even more when they live in underserved and marginalized areas or when they live with a disability.

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Faced with such challenges and risks, international human rights organizations once again called upon states to protect the rights of children and adolescents during this health emergency. One of which is the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) that recognizes the extraordinary challenges faced by the region in terms of inequality i. e. local obstructions to ensure economic, social, cultural and environmental rights.

For its part, the UN High Commissioner issued Essential Guidelines from Latin America to incorporate a human rights perspective for dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, and where special attention is required for children and adolescents. These guidelines also highlight the importance of giving children a safe space where their voices can be heard and amplified in the decisions that will ultimately affect their lives. This survey was created in an attempt to acknowledge children and adolescents' doubts, worries and emotions during this period, and act accordingly.

3.2 The pandemic and social distancing measures amongst children and adolescents in Mexico City

In Mexico City, as in many other big cities in the world, the spread of COVID-19 occurs with greater intensity due to the population density, among other factors. Since the start of the pandemic, the city and its metropolitan area have presented the highest number

of cases in Mexico and they are considered major contagion hotspots. It is no coincidence that the highest infection rates are concentrated in the most densely populated districts: Iztapalapa and Gustavo A. Madero. In addition to the number of inhabitants, other factors contribute to the spread of the virus such as the number of people living in each household, mobility within the metropolitan area and overcrowded public transportation.

Cases of children and young people represent 2.9% of the total number of infections in the city. Despite this, Mexico City does not occupy first place in fatality rates of child and adolescents. There has been one death in each of the municipalities of Mexico City, except for the municipality of Gustavo A. Madero, where there have been two.

2 036 694 people between the ages of zero and 17 years live in Mexico City and this group constitutes 23% of its population. There are more men than women and over a half of them are concentrated in the following municipalities: Iztapalapa (23%), Gustavo A. Madero (13.1%), Álvaro Obregón (8.5%) and Tlalpan (8%). The municipalities with less presence of this group are Milpa Alta (2%), Cuauhtémoc (2.5%), Benito Juárez (3.1%) and La Magdalena Contreras (3.1 per cent).

The local government of Mexico City established mitigation measures, most of them related to social distancing, to stop the spread of COVID-19. The call for voluntary and co-responsible confinement was backed up by the suspension of essential activities and a decrease in mobility (public transportation). Without question, school closures has been fundamental to implement restriction and confinement measures. In-person teaching activities were halted as of March 23 and have not operated for 14 weeks. This means 1 986 106 children and adolescents have not attended schools and have taken virtual classes and activities from home since then.



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4. Methodology

The survey introduced various modalities of inclusive participation and accessibility for different age groups and those in need of priority attention during this health emergency. It consisted of an online questionnaire aimed at children between the ages of seven and 17 years, and drawings of children between three and six years old. Children's drawings help understand cognitive, psychomotor and emotional processes, aside from being a means of socialization. They help visualize children's emotions and worries in relation to social confinement. The methodology is founded on exploring the circumstances under which children and adolescents feel joy, sadness or fear, as well as their wishes and ambitions for the future. It does so through an analysis of strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats (SMAT methodology and FODA analysis, by its initials in Spanish). In this child-friendly survey, the language used was simple and straightforward so people with disabilities could easily approach it. Additionally, children and adolescents of the deaf/hard of hearing community could request the aid of a Mexican sign language interpreter to respond the survey. Interpretation for indigenous languages was also available.

The survey is divided into five sections: the first was designed to understand the spaces and contexts in which children and adolescents live the confinement; the second was dedicated to diving into the kind of activities that they are doing inside their homes to have fun, to study, etc.; the third examines their fears and concerns; the fourth let us know what makes them happy; and finally, in the fifth, the participants could express what they missed about the times before the pandemic and the outside world. The questions were available on line from May 27 to June 15.





5. Findings

5.1 Survey of children and adolescents between the ages of six and 17 years old

THE PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR ENVIRONMENT

40% of the 40 427 children and adolescents between six and 17 years old who participated in the national survey are in Mexico City. Of these 19 004, 54% identified as girls, 44% as boys, 2% did not answer or replied as *other*. Of the participants, 52% are between six and 11 years old, 20% between 12 and 14 and finally, 19% are between 15 and 17.

Graph 5.1 Who answered the survey?

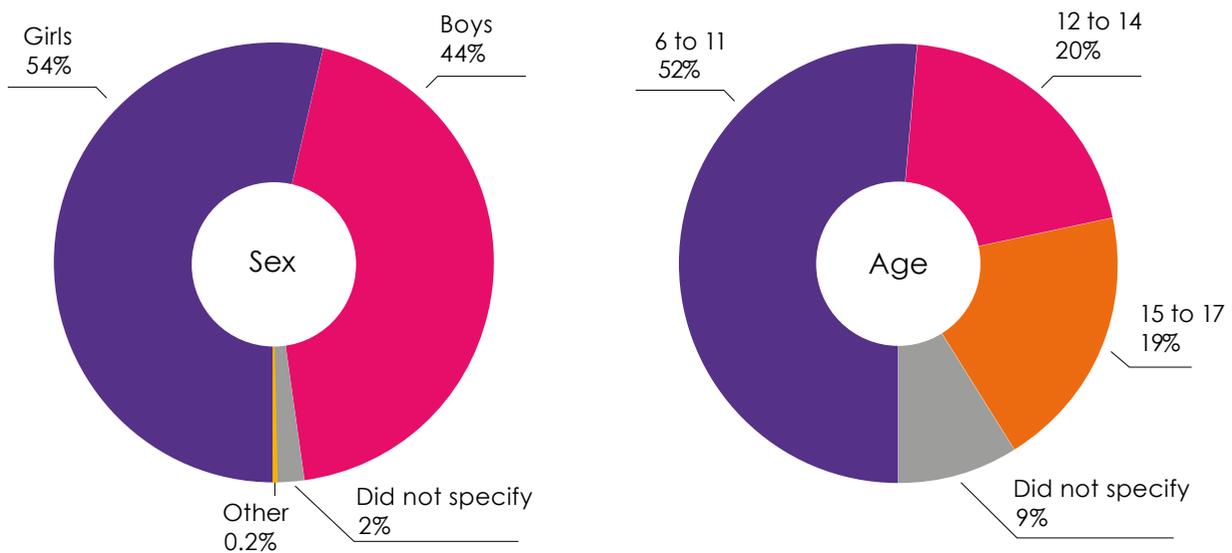


Table 5.1 Age range of the participants

	6 to 11 years	12 to 14 years	15 to 17 years	Did not specify	Total
Girls	5 104	2 177	1 906	1 037	10 224
Boys	4 513	1 565	1 681	596	8 355
Decline to answer	168	94	85	41	388
Other	13	9	14	1	37
Total	9 798	3 845	3 686	1 675	19 004

The survey received nation-wide coverage, with the participation of every state of the country and all the municipalities of Mexico City. Four municipalities concentrated over a half of the responses: Iztapalapa (22%), Gustavo A. Madero (14%), Álvaro Obregón (9.6%) and Tláhuac (6.4 per cent).

3% of the participants from Mexico City indicated to have some form of disability, of which the majority (40%) answered that they had a *visual impairment*; 14% mentioned they live with an *intellectual disability*, 14% lives with a *physical disability*, 14% did not specify what kind of disability they live with and the remaining 19% indicated to have a *psychosocial, hearing or multiple disability*.

WHAT DOES CONFINEMENT MEAN TO THE PARTICIPANTS?

Most referred words were related to *boredom* and *sadness*. The word *family* was frequently mentioned in association with joy, security and cohabitation. For other children, the feeling of concern over insecurity deepens and surpasses that of boredom. In this context, they are worried about material losses, the loss of their house or of their loved ones.

Adolescents are more concerned about academic activities. They also express a wider array of emotions and resources to adapt to this situation. While they repeatedly manifested the feeling of *sadness*, the feeling of *stress* was also interpreted through their most referred words, especially in adolescents between 15 and 17 years old.

WHAT ARE THEY DOING AND HOW ARE THEY ENTERTAINING THEMSELVES?

86% of the participants reported to have stayed home and followed the recommended measures by the Mexico City government, while 9% cannot stay at home.

Half of the participants responded they consider they are able to perform their schoolwork at home but they end up very tired of work, while one third part feel they have a lot to be done and are not able to finish their homework. Only one of each 10 consider he has a little work. Schoolwork is the most performed activity by children and adolescents in the confinement. Almost 36% reported doing it several times a day and four of each 10 almost every day. The next activity they frequently dedicate their time to is helping with household chores. In this sense, almost seven of each 10 confirm they help with setting the table, cleaning and cooking, among other chores. As to entertainment activities, four of each 10 practice sports several times a day or almost every day. Also, four of each 10 play videogames on the computer or in a mobile phone, and that same proportion practice a hobby. Only two of each 10 use this time to read.

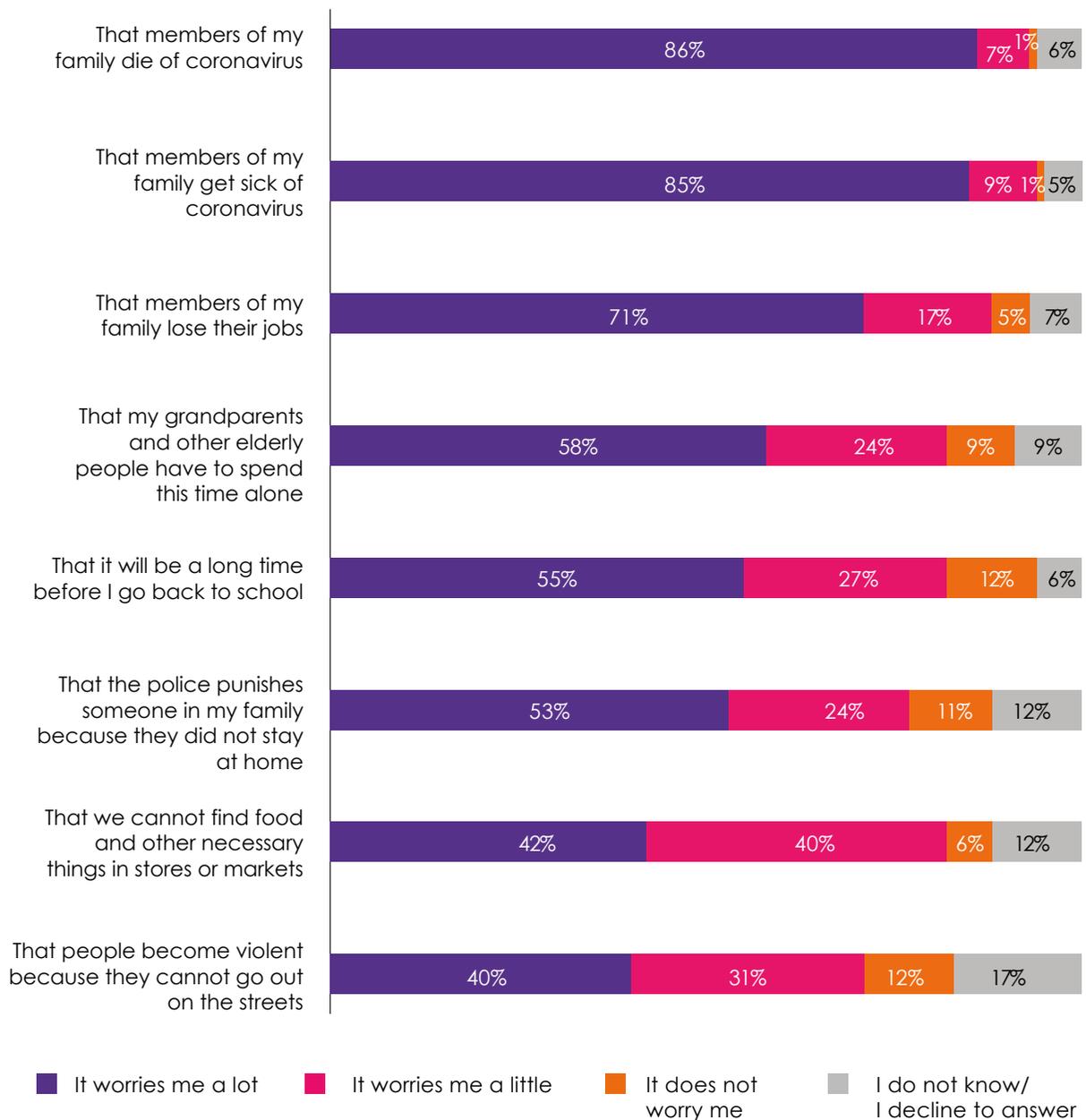
WHAT WORRIES THEM?

The possibility of someone from their family get sick or die from COVID-19 represents the main concern for nine of each 10 children and adolescents. After health issues, eight of each 10 are concerned that any family member could lose their job. This is consistent with seven of each 10 children who are worried that their family will have less money once the lockdown is over.

For those who do not identify as girls or boys but as other, these same troubles surface but with less intensity. For example, while nine of each 10 girls and boys are worried someone from their family could get sick from coronavirus, for those who identify as other this figure is of seven of each 10.

Children and adolescents did not manifested in close questions being worried of people becoming violent due to confinement. However it is a concern reflected in the open-ended question. Nevertheless, the type of violence that frightens children and adolescents in Mexico City is related to the prevailing unsafe environment in the country. There is a clear state of fear due to the possible threats to personal integrity, mixed with health concerns.

Graph 5.2 What worries you?



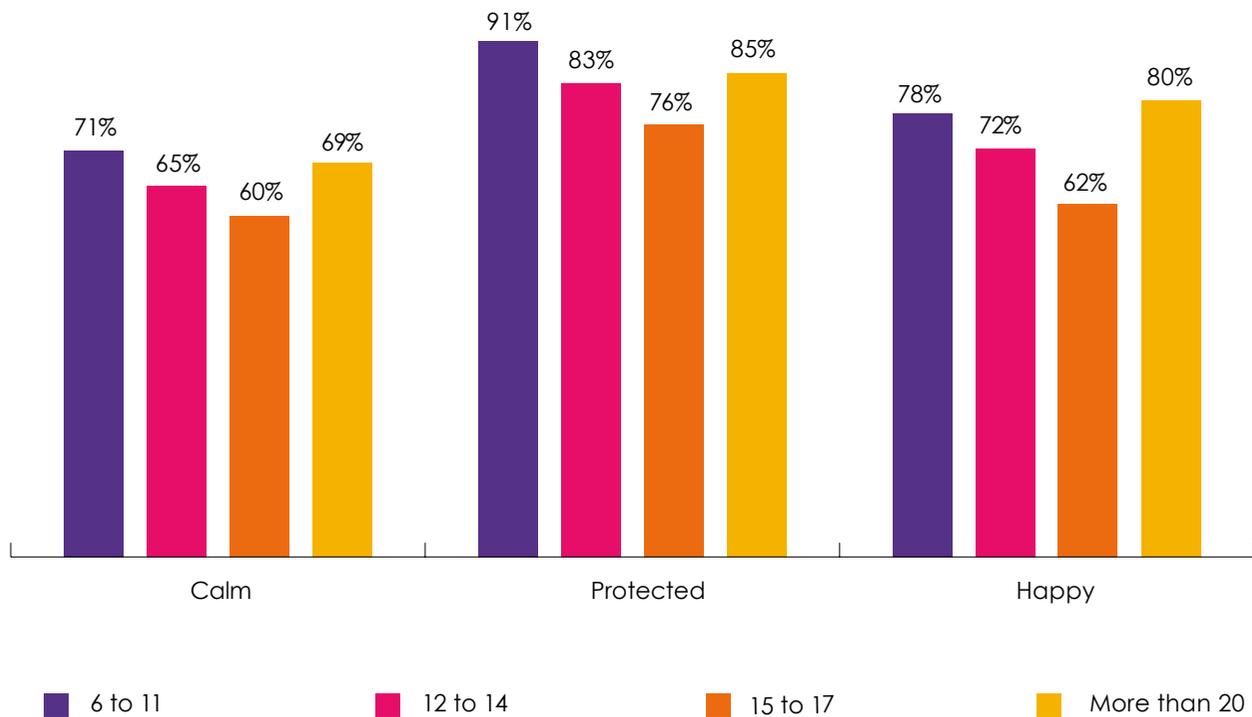
HOW ARE THEY FEELING?

A crucial aspect of the isolation and confinement is its emotional impact. Nearly eight of each 10 children reported feeling good and very good with their family life. Eight of each 10 answered feeling good and very good about where they live, as well as about their life in general. Four of each 10 do not feel good with their friends due to confinement.

Between children and adolescents, there is little variation in the different areas in which they feel good and very good. The most important difference is present in the group of people who do not identify as a girl or boy, as they report feeling good about themselves 28% less than girls and boys. They also report feeling good with their life in general 20% less than girls and boys and 33% less with their family life. The only aspect in which they do not seem to be feeling any differently to girls and boys is in the way they feel about their friends.

The most common feeling in children and adolescents in Mexico City is that of feeling safe and *protected*; and feeling happy every day or many times a day. Their sense of *calm* is frequently present (68%). When these feelings are disaggregated by age groups, interesting changes are noted.

Graph 5.3 How are you feeling? Broken down by age



We asked open-ended questions about happiness, what brings the participants joy and what makes them laugh. Most associated words were *play* and *family*, followed by *friends* and *mom*, that generally illustrates the predominant gender role that women play in the development and care of children and adolescents.

It is remarkable that for children and adolescents in Mexico City, pets are a source of joy and entertainment that help with their emotional state.

On the other hand, when we asked open-ended questions about what causes them sadness, children frequently mentioned the following words: *not be able to go out*, *school* and *family*. Some answers revealed situations of family violence or economic concerns that cause sadness

"I am sad because I can't help my mom with the household costs, and I am worried that families won't have enough to eat"

Girl, 8 years old.

"Not be able to go out and that my parents won't find jobs so we will get kicked out of the house"

Boy, 8 years old.

"Not go to school, not play, and not see my parents during the day because they go to work every day"

Girl, 9 years old.

"My mom does not have enough money to buy my brother and me a piece of candy"

Boy, 8 years old.

"They took away my favorite toy and I can't see my friends"

Boy, 10 years old.

"I'm punished when I don't obey"

Boy, 9 years old.

"People don't understand 'Stay at home' is for everyone's safety, I can't visit my cousins in my hometown, I can't go to school and people are dying because they don't listen"

Girl, 11 years old.

"We can't see our loved ones and sometimes I get bored and a lot of people are dying from coronavirus"

Girl, 9 years old.

"That I get told off, and that my mom and my sister take too long time to come home"

Girl, 9 years old.

WHAT DO THEY MISS FROM THE OUTSIDE WORLD?

One of the main adjustments in the daily life of children and adolescents in Mexico City has been to restrict their activities into the family place. Four of each 10 are dominated by uncertainty since they do not know when they will see their friends again.

What they miss the most is doing outdoor activities, such as going to the movies, playing soccer and doing exercise. Going to school, going shopping and being out of the home is mentioned by at least seven of each 10 children. Girls miss activities, such as shopping, more than boys and non-binary people, while the latter miss school more than girls and boys.

Finally, in order to find out children and adolescents' wishes, especially for the near future, we asked about their dreams and aspirations. Generally, children express their desire to "go back to everything as it was before", and perform in a specific profession. Their desires relate to the end of the pandemic, a vaccine being found, being able to go out, playing, going back to school, seeing friends and family, and living safely.

"I wish COVID-19 didn't exist and I could pass all my classes"

Teenage woman, 15 years old.

"Before, I would have asked to go to my favorite artist's concert, but now I only wish for a vaccine to be found soon so we can all go out"

Teenage man, 16 years old.

"I wish none of this had happened, my family would still be alive, I would not have failed my semester, I would be with my friends, I could live with my parents, not go hungry and I would have a normal and happy life"

Teenage man, 17 years old.

5.2 Survey of children in early childhood (one to seven years old)

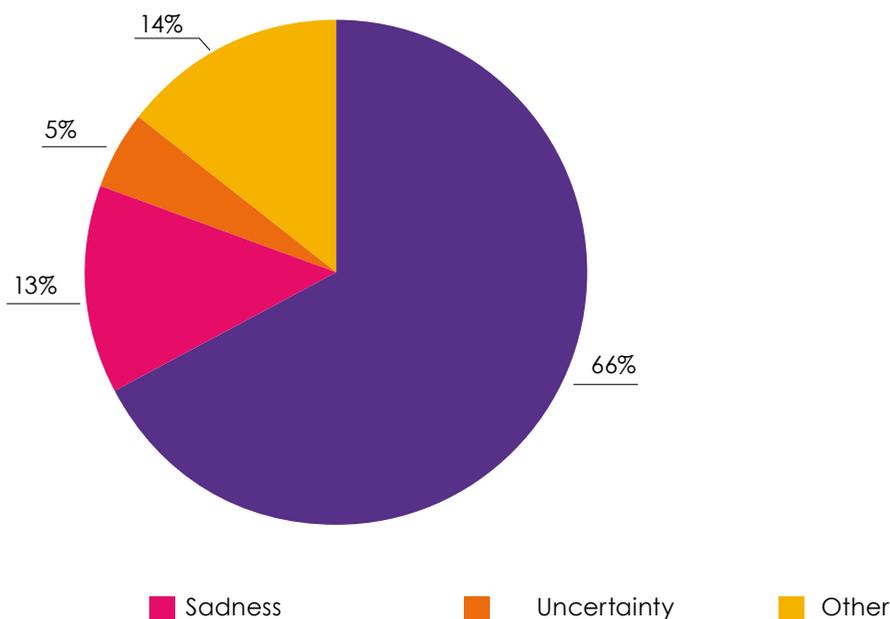
THE PARTICIPANTS

116 children from Mexico City submitted drawings, of which 53% were girls, 44% were boys and 3% were participants who did not specify. The age of the participants who submitted drawings fluctuates between one and six years old; 59% were boys and girls between the ages of four and five years.

HOW ARE THE CHILDREN FEELING?

Of the submitted drawings, in regard to emotions, these were the trends: children expressed joy (66), sadness (13), uncertainty (5) and other types of feelings (14). This range and distribution of emotions identified in the drawings submitted by children in Mexico City coincides with the national results of the survey.

Graph 5.4 Emotions identified in the drawings



WHO IS PICTURED IN THE DRAWINGS?

In 61 drawings the children drew themselves, while in 40 they drew themselves as part of a group. In the majority of these 40 drawings, the human figures represent a family member. Whether it be in the drawing or with a brief written explanation, the children reflected on which relatives they have a better relationship with at home, such as their siblings, cousins and caretakers, and with their mother or father.

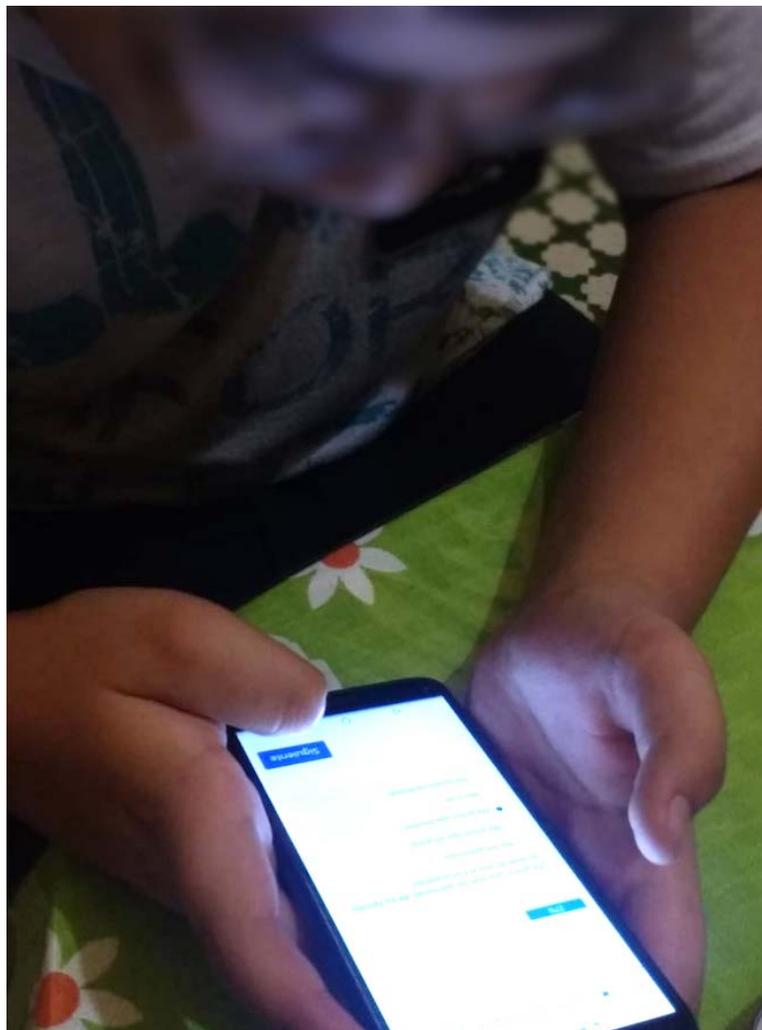
HOW ARE THEY TAKING CARE OF THEMSELVES?

Of the 28 drawings that illustrate coronavirus, 23 represent it as a threat that can be faced with the company of their family and within their home.

The drawings submitted by children in Mexico City match the nationwide trend of drawing coronavirus outdoors or outside of the home and with the company of someone from their family. Children drew facemasks, illustrated hygiene measures and the *Stay at home* campaign.

WHAT ARE THEY DOING?

Children in Mexico City drew the spaces where they play: in open green areas with grass and trees (5), inside their home (5), without specifying (2). The games represented were balls (4), toys (4), slides and swings (3), singing and dancing (2). They also drew themselves playing with adults (5), with other children (4), on their own (4) and with their pets (3). Other subcategories were study, care and daily activities, consistent with national findings.





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6. Conclusion

InfanciasEncerradas gathered the opinions of children and adolescents in Mexico about their situation in the context of the pandemic and the emergency measures derived from it, especially social isolation. The participants' answers reflect their fear over losing a family member and so a desire for the COVID-19 situation to end. The survey reflected their awareness to their right to life, to be able to go out and have a routine life again, as well as the desire to see family and friends, and that those family members who have lost their jobs can reclaim employment.

In the drawings of children in early childhood, coronavirus is represented as a character that attacks or takes over the world, the family or the house. Related to this, the house remains a safe haven.

The family is mentioned as both a source of joy, contentment and security as well as a source of concern because of the risk that something could happen to those who integrate it. For children and adolescents, health concerns of their family's financial wellbeing prevail over any other fear or cause of sadness.

These results therefore reflect the need to work for supporting and accompanying children and adolescents from a thanatological perspective for the management of grief and loss. They have been exposed to deaths, through the loss of relatives, but they have also lost normality. For instance, some of the children were not able to conclude academic and essential stages for their development. These are emotional processes that strengthen the personality and promote resilience.

Regarding violence within households, the survey results do not suggest an increase or intensification of the phenomenon. Violent disciplinary and educational methods in Mexico were a pre-existing problem before the pandemic, thus the few references of this type of situation may point to their normalization inside the home.

For children and adolescents, family time is an opportunity for playing, having fun and getting distracted. They reported being happy to stay with the family during the confinement since, for many, having their parents at home is a rare occurrence under ordinary conditions.

On the other hand, the lack of certainty regarding future scenarios, even immediate ones, is a source of anguish.

#InfanciasEncerradas allowed us to gather information from a direct source, in a methodological and intersectional manner, about a significant portion of the population that is rarely considered or included in participatory efforts. This study is a milestone and a valuable deposit in itself. The results of the survey are far-reaching, so the possibilities of analysis are vast. Furthermore, from the perspective of governance and public attention to matters of this nature, this information has instrumental value. It is useful for shaping government actions, nurturing the design of public policy, and therefore, moving forward on the guarantee of children and adolescents' rights. The CDHCM's survey serves as a guide to meet people's needs primarily based on age, gender, disability, or at the intersection of one or more of these variables.

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