Editorial

This editorial is being written at the time of a global crisis generated by the spread of COVID-19. The distinctive nature of the impact of this pandemic on children and young people cannot be understated: they have been branded and used as “virus vectors” then criticised for continuing to socialise; had their schools shut and exams cancelled; are unable to play, including participate in sport, and/or meet their peers in person. Moreover, the adverse consequences for some children (those in poverty or with less access to digital platforms, children in care, those whose parents and siblings are living in separate households, those in youth detention and children with “underlying health issues”) are likely to be both greater and distinctive. Being confined to their homes, when this may not be a safe place, creates additional risk; they are even less visible to the authorities than they were before because of limitations on welfare visits and support. Hundreds of thousands of children across the world whose births have never been registered or who are awaiting determination of their immigration status will have little or no recourse to vital funding and support during this emergency and in its aftermath. These issues raise significant concerns about children’s rights to development, education, health, social assistance (including support for their parents) and safety, as well as their overarching right to have their views sought and taken seriously in matters affecting them.

The papers featured in this edition of the *Journal* highlight some of the core children’s rights issues that affect children always. COVID-19 has served to expose a range of inequalities and adversity that have always disproportionately affected children across the globe. Some are enhanced (e.g. physical punishment). Some may be adversely and irreparably impacted (education). Some are disrupted and delayed (asylum and immigration status; adoption). And, of course, it is clear that the burden will not fall equally: children who are already vulnerable and marginalised may experience much more severe impacts from lockdown and its economic consequences.

This crisis presents challenges, opportunities and, indeed, responsibilities for researchers in the field of children's rights, both in terms of its focus and indeed the methods employed. Decisions (such as how to credit cancelled examinations; whether and how they get to see a non-custodial parent) have been taken, are being taken and are likely to be taken in the coming weeks and months without understanding of their lived experiences and views. Researchers have begun to capture some of these diverse experiences, employing both tried and tested methods (such as online surveys) and newer forms of enquiry (such as video diaries). This research must be conducted in ways that do not in itself breach children's rights and, in particular, ensure that children are able to participate safely. Ethical scrutiny is crucial.

COVID-19 has generated new ways of working for everyone including our research community. We send our best wishes to everyone in the children's rights academic community, particularly those balancing caring with their academic responsibilities from home. We are conscious of the research emerging that confirms that the onus here does not always fall equally: some will enjoy additional time to get their publications submitted while others struggle to combine work with family life. We understand that our authors and reviewers may need extra time just now and will be sympathetic to all such requests. We look forward to publishing the knowledge acquired during and after the crisis abates in future issues of the *Journal*.

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