



Impact of COVID-19 on Caregivers of Children with Special Health Needs

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Purpose and Objectives

- Primary purpose:
 - Explore the effects of COVID-19 on caregivers of children with special healthcare needs in comparison to the isolation that was experienced prior to the pandemic.
- Objectives
 - To compare the changes in routine of caregivers of children with special needs due to COVID-19 and identifying if these were positive or negative changes
 - To explore how an increase in resources such as tele-health appointments, grocery delivery, online school, etc. can help reduce stress and provide support to this vulnerable population

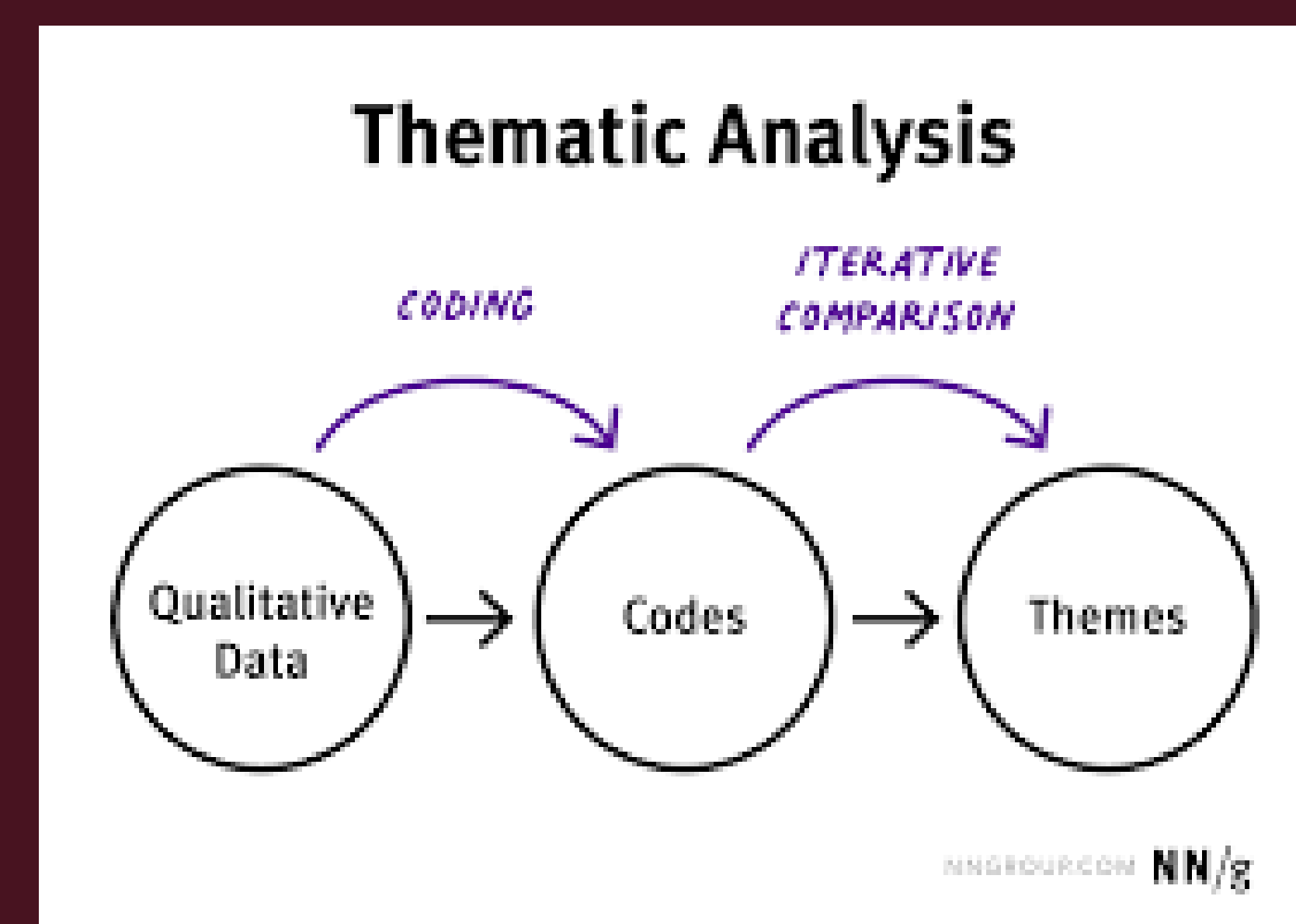


Introduction

- Caring for a child with special needs is a full-time job that can create an abundance of stress on caregivers
- These children are usually cared for by someone related to them
- These caregivers tend to work from home
- Caring for children with special needs can be isolating due to the effort and time demanded
- A majority of these caregivers experienced either no impact from COVID-19 or a positive impact.
- COVID-19 caused many more resources to be accessible from home
- These caregivers no longer needed to leave the house for appointments, school, groceries, etc.

Methods

- Participant Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria:
 - Primary informal caregiver to a child with special healthcare needs
 - Primary informal caregiver to a typically developing child
 - Not excluded based on relationship or physiologic/psychologic diagnosis
- Recruitment
 - Flyers on community boards
 - Flyers distributed through day cares, schools, and physicians' offices
 - Social media parenting groups
 - Parent support organizations
 - Caregivers who participated in previous studies were informed regarding participation this study
- Data Collection
 - 25 caregivers participated in this study
 - Participants were interviewed and asked about their daily routines, self-care measures, barriers to selfcare, and effects of COVID-19 on their daily lives
 - Participant responses were transcribed and coded via thematic analysis to determine common themes amongst the responses



Results

- According to coding via thematic analysis the following themes were noted:
 - Caregivers of children with special healthcare needs felt less effects of COVID-19 compared to other caregivers.
 - "You know, I think I'm completely opposite of everybody else that I think it made it better. It was going back to the real world that made it worse again"
 - "But I don't know, like, I sometimes forget, we went through a pandemic, like it wasn't, it wasn't that big of a deal to me. It did not impact my life, all that much."
 - Remote services assisted in time management, allowing these caregivers to have a more flexible schedule
 - "...A lot of them will do virtual if it's consultations or something where I can just do his vitals at home, so we save time in that way"
 - These families experienced increased precautions during the pandemic due to pre-existing health conditions
 - "I'm constantly wiping down covers, doorknobs, light switches and that. I make sure every day I go over everything with bleach water just to be safe it's just one of those extra things you know I want to make sure."



Discussion

- Although the discussion of COVID-19 typically focuses on negative and adverse effects, the results indicated that many caregivers experienced unexpected benefits and support during the pandemic.
- Many participants agreed that access to resources such as grocery delivery, tele-health appointments, and working remotely made their role as a caregiver less stressful.
- Many caregivers also agreed that the social isolation experienced during the pandemic was no different from their normal daily precautions, resulting in less emotional and social impact.
- By understanding the impacts of COVID-19 on caregivers of children with special health needs, individuals can work to improve health outcomes and provide support to this vulnerable population.

Limitations

- Limited sample size
- Not representative of a larger populations, cannot be generalized beyond studied sample
- Participants were predominantly middle class, white, women.

Conclusion and Future Research

- Caregivers of children with special health needs experienced a variety of both positive and negative effects during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Future research should focus on the physical health effects of COVID-19 on caregivers of children with special health needs

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