Normative Exclusion of Students with Disabilities and Enforced Isolation of Healthy Adults during the COVID -19 Pandemic: A Thought-provoking Lesson

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ABSTRACT Due to the Corona virus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, the world in year 2020 experienced a significant upheaval in the lives of many. This study aimed at drawing parallels between the enforced isolation of healthy adults during the COVID-19 pandemic and the systemic exclusion of students with disabilities in educational systems around the world. Moreover, it presents an opportunity for people who have faced isolation during the pandemic, to better understand the feelings of students with disabilities. In this study, a sample of 22 people without disabilities from Saudi Arabia were interviewed to disclose their experiences and feelings during the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of quarantine on their social and psychological lives. Their responses were compared to many experiences of students with disabilities obtained from a systemic review involving many related studies. The main findings of this study reveal some isolating, psychological and social effects. This may lead stakeholders in legal and educational matters to rethink their perspectives on exclusionary practices that face many students with disabilities.

INTRODUCTION

In 2019 the global community was struck by the COVID-19 pandemic which paralysed the social formations and socio-political stabilities of many countries. It has affected the political, social, economic of many countries, and psychological spheres of people. The 2019 pandemic started in the province of Wuhan, China, and spread almost worldwide (Zhou et al. 2020). The outbreak of this virus had raised arguments about its causes between conspiracy theorists and those who purport the unintentional existence and the natural occurrence of this pandemic (Shahsavari et al. 2020). However, many medical specialists confirmed to the natural occurrence of this pandemic (Decaro et al. 2020). In the early stages of COVID-19, a study conducted by Lipsitch et al. (2020) found that 'the impact of an epidemic depends on the number of persons infected, the infection's transmissibility, and the spectrum of clinical severity'. The traumatic effects of the pandemic were seen in many countries where hundreds of thousands of people were infected, thousands were killed, and many were isolated in quarantine.

The pandemic affected not only people's health but also many other aspects of their lives as well (Madhesh 2021). It led to human mobility to become limited and restricted (Kraemer et al. 2020). In addition, the governments of many countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE, Australia, and the USA, enforced a full or partial lockdown to mitigate the spread of it. Although in some countries, people expected the lockdown to end within months (Alvarez et al. 2020), but instead, due to its extension, resulted to anxiety, depression, stress, and other psychological problems (Wang et al. 2021). Therefore, this study intends to investigate the reactions of people to this pandemic, examining their responses and develop a framework of making comparison of these experiences of isolating someone from others with those attained by students with disabilities during pandemic.

Glossary

Enforced Isolation: In this study it means the isolation of many people around the world due to measures made by governments' health instructions and rules as a result of COVID-19 pandemic.

Normative Exclusion: all types of exclusionary practices that are structured systemically as normal procedures that students with disabilities face.

Exclusion of Students with Disabilities

Despite international conventions and the affirmations of many national and international organisations against any form of exclusionary practice against students with disabilities, many students continue to face exclusionary practices in their daily lives. For instance, there are countries which have signed the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN-CRPD) (Rieser 2012) yet some of these countries still prevent students with disabilities from experiencing inclusive education. Most students with disabilities are taught in segregated classrooms (Brock 2018; Morningstar et al. 2017) even though studies have confirmed that these students achieve more positive outcomes when they are placed in inclusive general classrooms (Shogren et al. 2015).

Examples of exclusion and isolation of students with disabilities include the 40th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act) which states that about 50 percent of students with intellectual and/or multiple disabilities are excluded from general classrooms and that, at best, do not enjoy these placements for more than 40 percent of their daily time (U.S. Department of Education 2018). Furthermore, 'most students with developmental disabilities (in the USA) continue to spend the majority of their school day in separate classrooms or schools' (Brock and Schaefer 2015: 162). According to Brock (2018), over the past 40 years, most students with intellectual disabilities are isolated in restrictive placements (isolated classrooms or schools) and there has been no evidence of any change in recent years.

In Australia, the situation is similar or possibly worse. Despite legislative acts being implemented in Australia for the purpose of enhancing the rights of people with disabilities (including students), such as the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) and the Disability Standards for Education 2005 (DSE), the rate of exclusion of students with disabilities remains high (Dixon 2018). Additionally, most students with disabilities in Australia are unable to access inclusive education (Cologon 2013), even though ten years have passed since the DSE 2005 was enacted. The 2016 Australian *Education and Employment References Committee* (2016) report eradicated certain gatekeeping practices[1] from many Australian schools that had been designed to reduce the enrolment and participation of students based on their disabilities via Restrictive Behaviour Management Practices (RBMPs) (Poed et al. 2020).

Additionally, in the UK, exclusionary practices towards students with disabilities have continued, even though the UK has signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and has passed regulations against these practices such as the Education Act 2002, the Equality Act (EA) 2010, and the Children and Families Act (CFA) 2014 (Dupont 2019). For example, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2016 and 2017 expressed concern that many children with disabilities in the UK are excluded in 'special schools' or placed in isolated units in mainstream schools, and that many school facilities are not fully accessible to children with physical disabilities, leading to them being excluded (UN 2017). Daniels et al. (2019) argue that policy changes in the UK that push for excellence and competition in educational institutions have led to the enhancement of exclusionary practices against students with disabilities.

In the medial part of the world, and particularly Saudi Arabia, despite the government having signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), the majority of students with disabilities are excluded from general classrooms. For instance, Adhabi (2018) argues that most students with disabilities are in isolated placement in special schools or special classrooms inside general schools, while only a few studies inside inclusive general classrooms. In fact, in the entire Saudi education system, not a single deaf student is allowed within inclusive general classrooms (Madhesh 2019).

Students with disabilities are facing exclusionary practices not only in the above-mentioned countries but also in many other countries around the globe. In 2011, the World Bank and World Health Organization published the World Report on Disability that confirmed the continuity of the failure to reach inclusive education and all required rights for people with disabilities (Hegarty 2020).

Objective of the Study

This study aimed at drawing parallels between the enforced isolation of healthy adults during

the COVID-19 pandemic and the systemic exclusion of students with disabilities in educational systems around the world.

METHODOLOGY

This study used the qualitative methodology as main method by using two tools that are interview and the systematic reviews. They are discussed below.

Materials and Methods

To achieve the study objective, first, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 22 participants without disabilities from Saudi Arabia. Second, a systematic literature review was conducted of many peer-reviewed studies from the last 10 years. Themes were then extracted from the conducted interviews to discuss some collected statements from the reviewed studies that related to the theoretical framework of this study. The next sections discuss these methods in more detail.

Participants

Participants were recruited via a group of announcements on social media platforms Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Invitations for volunteers to participate in the study were extended using these platforms. The participants were required to be free from any disabilities. After three weeks, 26 responses were received; however, four were excluded due to connectivity problems, which left us with 22 responses.

After the messages were received, all participants were contacted and verbal consent was obtained. Then the purpose of the study was explained to the participants. The procedure for the interviews was outlined and confidentiality and anonymity were assured. Interviews were then scheduled.

Ethical Consideration

The Shaqra University Ethics Committee (SUEC) approved this study (ERC No. ERC_SU_202110029).

Interviewing the Participants

Semi-structured interviews were designed to investigate the experiences of 22 people from Saudi Arabia who had no disabilities and who had been affected by the COVID-19 quarantine. First, an approval of research ethics was obtained from Shaqra University. Then, pseudonyms were used to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. A communication application called Zoom was used to interview the participants. The interviews focused on the impact of COVID-19 on their lives. The initial question was, 'Has your life been affected by COVID-19? If yes, how? The participants were then asked about which aspect of their life was most affected. Did they feel isolated? What changed in their daily life?

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were read and the responses analysed. One hundred and thirty-eight unique statements were extracted and sorted into meaningful sentences. Interestingly, there were no variations in responses based on age, gender or employment status of the participants. Some of the common outcomes from the interviews, with their consistency ratios, are listed below:

1. Yes, my life has been affected by this crisis 22/22 (100 %).
2. Dramatically affected 20/22 (91%), moderately affected 1/22 (.05 percent), and slightly affected 1/22 (.05%).
3. Social life 22/22 (100%), daily life 22/22 (100%), work-life 18/22 (82%), family life 21/22 (95%).
4. My life has changed from being within a big world to a small world 22/22 (100%).
5. I lost access to many things 20/22 (91%).
6. This crisis confined me to a small world 22/22 (100%) and excluded me from many things in life 20/22 (91%).
7. This isolation is painful, and it has affected my psychological health 22/22 (100%).
8. I feel bored 21/22 (95%), I feel sad 19/22 (86%), I feel worried 19/22 (86%, I feel lonely 11/22 (50 %), I feel afraid 10/22 (45%), I feel depressed 9/22 (41%), I feel strange 5/22 (23 %).
9. The crisis limited my freedom 21/22 (95%).
10. My social life is affected 22/22 (100 percent), and my sense of social connection is affected 19/22 (86%).

11. The sense of community is affected 12/22 (55%); if this crisis persists, my sense of belonging to the community may be affected 19/22 (86%).
12. Using alternative tools and ways to reduce the impact of isolation and exclusion due to COVID–19 22/22 (100%).

The selected responses were used to create three themes: isolating effects, psychological effects, and social effects.

The Systematic Literature Reviews

Numerous peer-reviewed studies and PhD theses from 2010 to 2020 were systematically reviewed. The analysed literature investigated the experiences of students with disabilities in terms of exclusionary practices in schooling systems. Keywords such as inclusion, inclusive, exclusion, students with disabilities, disabled, and disability were used to search databases such as Emerald Insight (174 results), Taylor and Francis Online (154 results), ERIC (77 results), Wiley Online Library (10 results) and ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global (170 results). The criteria for inclusion in this review were that studies should be peer-reviewed in the English language, conducted after 2010, published as doctoral theses for which full text was available, and include students with disabilities as participants (their voice). The focus was on the expressions of students describing their feelings towards exclusionary practices to which they had been subjected to. The exclusion criteria were non-English language studies, unpublished theses or dissertations, and reports and studies that did not have students with disabilities as participants.

From the 324 articles, studies, and theses identified, 32 were chosen for meeting the inclusion criteria, more specifically those that included direct quotes from students with disabilities. Most of these studies also investigated the attitudes of parents, teachers, and/or principals of schools. These studies are mentioned in Table 1.

RESULTS

Isolating Effects

During the interviews, the participants emphasised how they felt isolated and excluded as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Below are excerpts from the interviews:

This crisis isolated me, umm, honestly, I feel I was transferred from a big world to small world…. I could not obtain many things that were available to me before this crisis. (Ahmed)

Yes, [his daily life] has been badly affected; this global problem has led to the isolation of all people, and I am no exception, I was alone in my small flat, and this is like a tragedy. (Aleen)

I felt isolated, even at home … as I had to go out for work, but I found myself isolated even at work because of the safety instructions one must follow. Also, when I was back home, I had to isolate myself from my family to protect them from any infection. (Linda)

These statements from the participants reflect the restrictions and the exclusionary consequences of this pandemic. For instance, all participants claimed that they felt like their lives had changed from being inhabitants of a large world to being compressed into a small world. Due to their inability to access many facilities and services such as schools, universities, workplaces, institutions, people, zoos, parks, amongst others.

Psychological Effects

The feeling of being excluded during the COVID-19 crisis has had serious psychological effects on people around the world. People have experienced a significant change in their daily lives ranging from inhibited freedom of movement due to quarantine, to experiencing the lack of access to many things such as social activities, malls, sports, workplaces and obeying 'stay home' orders. These effects were clearly seen in the statements of the participants in this study. All 22 participants confirmed that their psychological health had been affected by the pandemic. For instance,

Honestly, it is a dramatic change in my life, it has influenced my health, I am worried, very bored, and sometimes I feel a sense of depression and anxiety… it is a very bad feeling. (Sam)

…. There are mixed feelings, starting with fear and anxiety about this disease; I spend many hours every day reading and watching all news about this virus, how many people are infected, how many are killed, and then I begin to feel anxious. And now, after spending four weeks of isolation at home, I feel bored and depressed. (Asma)

Table 1: Systemically reviewed studies

Study	Type	Focus
Poed et al. (2017)	Conference paper	Exclusionary practices experienced by students and their families
Tanure Alves et al. (2018)	Article	Experiences of students with visual impairments in physical education classes in Brazil
Rutherford (2012)	Article	School experiences of disabled students from their and teacher aides' perspectives
Soorenian (2013)	Article	Experiences of two international students with disabilities
Soorenian (2018)	Article	Views and feelings of a group of students with disabilities on disclosing the nature of their impairments
Wilson et al. (2017)	Article	Lived experiences of 10 adults with intellectual disability.
Cunnah (2015)	Article	Impact of disabled identity on the inclusion of disabled students in higher education and employment contexts
Mutanga (2018)	Article	Academic and life experiences of 14 students with disabilities
Cardona (2013)	Article	Lived experiences of students with disabilities and some parents of students with disabilities in Malta
Vlachou and Papananou (2015)	Article	Educational experiences of students with disabilities and their social interactions with peers and teachers
Whitburn (2017)	Article	Voices of students with disabilities from two different schooling contexts in Australia and Spain
Moriña Díez (2010)	Article	Construction of social exclusion processes among young adults with disabilities
Hui et al. (2018)	Article	Lived experiences of inclusive education for children with disabilities in East and West Africa
Goodall and MacKenzie (2019)	Article	Educational experiences of two students with Asperger's Syndrome in a mainstream setting in the UK
Opie et al. (2017)	Article	Experiences of 7 students with vision impairment in Australian schools
Skillman (2014)	Thesis	Perspectives of students with disabilities about their experiences with bullying
Zambrano (2016)	Thesis	Experiences of registered and unregistered students with disabilities in higher education
Madhesh (2019)	Thesis	Extent to which related policy includes or excludes deaf students in Saudi primary schools
Duff (2013)	Thesis	Experiences of students with intellectual disability and their families in high school
Williams (2011)	Thesis	Experiences and perceptions of African American students with learning disability in higher education institutions
Ehlinger (2016)	Thesis	Experiences of 13 undergraduate students in postsecondary classroom environments
Delicata (2016)	Thesis	Academic and social experiences of 16 undergraduate women in postsecondary school.
Camara (2011)	Thesis	Experiences of four students with disabilities in higher education
Vroman (2019)	Thesis	Experiences of students with intellectual and developmental disability in an inclusive postsecondary program
Heck-Sorter (2012)	Thesis	Academic and social experiences of 7 students with ASD at one university
Winn (2010)	Thesis	Experience of learning for students with learning disabilities
Balogun (2014)	Thesis	Prior lived experience of 10 deaf students from an inclusive and a non-inclusive high school
Miranda (2014)	Thesis	Experiences of six students with disabilities attending an institution of higher education
Daiken (2012)	Thesis	Perceptions of three students with learning disabilities about their educational experiences in elementary and secondary schools
Fullam (2015)	Thesis	Patterns of social development and paths that led to improvements in social status for students with disabilities
Agarwal (2011)	Thesis	Educational experiences of students with disabilities in a Hispanic institution
Koerner (2016)	Thesis	Experiences of students with disabilities at higher education institutions

The problem is not COVID-19 itself, but its consequences, especially the quarantine. This quarantine has led to the isolation of people and I am one of them. I spend my days between the four walls in my small flat. This is killing me. I was a person used to socialising; but today, I feel alone and isolated in a very tiny world. My mental health is affected, and I started getting panic attacks two weeks ago. I think I have mild depression now. It is a tough situation. (Ali)

The above examples reflect the psychological impacts of exclusion and isolation that resulted from COVID-19. Indeed, all the participants in this study affirmed the negative impact of COVID-19 quarantine on their psychological health to some degree.

Social Effects

The COVID-19 pandemic has also affected the social life of people as seen from the interviews. Selected statements from the participants show how the crisis has affected them:

Ah ... you mean socially? Of course, my social life is strongly affected. Now, I cannot meet any of my relatives; we used to meet every weekend, but now, we are not allowed to, as per government instructions. My social life has become negligible, it has become restricted to a small virtual life. (Alesa)

No doubt, this crisis has impacted my social life. Within a few days, my social life changed from a huge and active life to almost nothing. After three weeks now, I feel a loss of connection with people in my community. I feel as if I am alone in a huge empty city…yes, I feel as if I do not belong to the outside world now. I am in my own world. It seems as if I am living in a horror film. (Hala)

My social life is definitely affected as a result of this quarantine. I used to gather with my friends and hang out, play football, swimming, shopping, etc. But, now, everything has changed, I am alone, no friends, and no family as I am an international student in this country. I spend all my time in my small room watching movies, playing electronic games, or reading. It is a painful feeling. (Rayan)

I notice how people avoid each other; friends and relatives used to meet and talk to me, but nowadays they do not, they avoid any chance of meeting or talking even during the free-movement

hours permitted by the government, they treat you as a sick person, everyone is scared of the viral infection. (Jaber)

The above examples show how exclusion and isolation after COVID-19 affected the social lives of the participants in this study. All 22 participants confirmed the negative social effects of this pandemic.

The loss of belonging to the community was a factor evident in the literature and this study. It was mentioned four times by participants. For instance, Fatimah claimed that 'of course, my [sense of] belonging to the community is affected; the feeling of being a stranger has increased'. Sara stated, 'The big issue is that my long and isolated stay at home has started to impact my belonging to the outside world'.

DISCUSSION

Isolating Effects

The findings of this study reveal the isolating effects of the quarantine caused by COVID-19. For instance, as mentioned in the findings section, all participants in this study were isolated in their homes during COVID-19 quarantine, they felt excluded and like they were living in a small world. Such feelings are comparable to those felt by students with disabilities who have been facing exclusionary practices for years. Below are examples from the studies analysed, where students with disabilities mention similar experiences to those felt by people during the COVID-19 crisis. In a study by (Vlachou and Papananou 2015), Spyros, a student with disability, states, 'Inaccessible! This could be the main characterisation of each school I went to' (p. 81). Another student tells his story of exclusionary practices even within the classroom: 'Throughout elementary [school], I had teachers who just put me on the side of the room because they would be like, oh well he's not smart' (F, m, p. 1, line 23-24) (Williams 2011: 62). In the same study, Robert, a student with dyslexia, explains his experience of exclusion saying, 'While everyone was in language class, I was alone, away from the other kids in the class, as if [they were] pointing to my dyslexia' (Williams 2011: 62). Meaningful words were spoken by NMJ2, a participant with disability, in Miranda's (2014) study, summarising the situation of students with disabilities around the world,

'Look here... inclusion ... How nice inclusion! [in a sarcastic tone] Where had I seen inclusion? In the textbooks. Where do you see inclusion? In the laws; in the essence of the laws... Ahh! All that is theory... I have never seen real inclusion with equal access or nothing like what we have talked about' (p. 313).

The experiences of ordinary people around the world who felt excluded in their lives due to COVID-19 mirrors the experiences of students with disabilities and their feelings at every point in their lives. Indeed, as we move into 2020, many children with disabilities remain excluded in small isolated classrooms in the so-called self-contained or 'special' schools. For instance, Madhesh (2019) argues that all deaf students in Saudi primary schools are excluded from general classrooms and placed either in self-contained classrooms or special schools. Further examples include the US, where more than half the students with intellectual and/or multiple disabilities are excluded from general classrooms and at best they can attend the general classrooms for less than 40 percent of the day (U.S. Department of Education 2018). Similarly, in the UK students with disabilities are isolated from mainstream classrooms and some school buildings are inaccessible, according to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2017 (UN 2017). Graham (2020) confirms that 'the segregation of students with disability has increased in countries such as England, the United States, and Australia'. In many other countries such as India (Kujur and Aradhna 2019), Nigeria (Adeniran et al. 2019), and Australia (Dixon 2018), conditions are similar for students with disabilities.

The exclusion and isolation of students with disabilities is not accidental or unintended, but rather is systematic and deliberate in many cases. The exclusionary practices still systemically operate in many educational systems around the globe in spite of their rhetorical commitments and signatures of international agreements that ensure inclusive education as a pillar of the educational system (Allan and Persson 2020; Riddell et al. 2017; Tomlinson 2012). Indeed, inclusive education is partially applied or non-existent in many countries around the world (Florian 2019).

Psychological Effects

Although the findings of this study reflect the psychological effects of non-disabled people affected by COVID-19, similarly, many students with disabilities suffer from isolation when they are excluded from access to education and/or other rights. In this study, all participants expressed their psychological impact resulting from isolation due to the pandemic's quarantine. In the same vein, many students with disabilities psychologically suffer from systemically isolation and exclusion in the education system or other partially applied areas of their lives below are examples from the analysed studies. In the study by Wilson et al. (2017), Jack, a student with disability, speaks of the consequences of being excluded, saying he would 'sleep a lot, 'cos I was bored and all I can do is sleep and sleep and sleep… just wasting my life' (p. 853). Ro, a student with a disability, speaking about the psychological effects of isolation claimed, 'I was isolated and separate, in like a bubble of depression and anxiety' (Goodall and MacKenzie 2019: 507). In the same article, another student with disability, Sarah-Jane, noted, 'I always felt very stressed, anxious and out of place... I felt hurt when excluded by "friends"' (Goodall and MacKenzie 2019: 507). Another student with disability, who was marginalised in a special education programme, states, 'It is a horrible feeling to be labelled and you never quite get rid of it…. The anxiety and the pressure that you're in is just too much' (Winn 2010).

These examples reflect the many psychological effects of exclusion and isolation experienced by thousands or maybe hundreds of thousands of students with disabilities who are denied access to educational and social rights across the world. Murray (2006) argues that excluding students with disabilities may lead to many negative psychological effects such as being stressed, depressed, lacking confidence, and feeling useless. Indeed, exclusion resulting from disability increases psychological disorders among students with disabilities, such as depression, anxiety, loneliness, fear, self-pity, and feelings of alienation (Akram et al. 2018; Wänström et al. 2014).

Social Effects

The findings of this study reflect some social effects of isolation and exclusion for people affected by COVID-19. For instance, all 22 participants in this study confirmed the strong effects

of this pandemic on their social lives. Comparably, students with disabilities around the world experience the social effects of systemic exclusionary practices in most schooling systems. The social effects of exclusion and isolation within schools are transmitted to places even outside schools. 'Schools have an important and proactive role in shaping the community both inside and outside the school gates' (Porter 2014). The following are some experiences that have had a social impact on students with disabilities. Frank, a student with disability, mentioned that his exclusion spreads across from his school to the community, 'I just do nothing, sit at home doing nothing … just watch TV… watching DVDs' (Wilson et al. 2017: 853). Sarah-Jane speaks of how exclusionary practices at school impact her social life: 'I found that I had no close friends and no one to talk to. I felt very lonely and often found myself without anyone to play with' (Goodall and MacKenzie 2019: 507). In Zambrano's (2016) study, Brooklyn, a student with disability, describes his social life in a few words 'Some people see you as, "what a weirdo, just get away from me". I also noticed a few people that wouldn't even talk to me' (p. 62).

Exclusion impacts students with disabilities in many ways. Gere and MacDonald (2010) confirm that social exclusion increases the chances of developing emotional problems such as sadness, anger, shame, and embarrassment. Long-term exclusion may even lead to feelings of lack of belonging to the community (Killen et al. 2013).

Isolation and exclusion of students with disabilities thus contributes to them losing their sense of belonging to society. Violet, a student with disability, narrates her experience:

I had no friends [...] I think a lot of it was because I was ostracised. I was kept outside of the classroom. I mean, how much more can you say, 'You don't fit in', than, 'You're not even allowed to sit in our classroom?' You know? And I'm seven to eight years old, so you're telling a seven to eight-year-old little child that they don't belong (Maconi et al. 2019: 185).

Social exclusion leads to the loss of a sense of belonging that significantly affects the well-being of these students. Scorgie and Forlin (2019) argue that both social inclusion and belonging are fundamental factors responsible for personal well-being. In addition, the sense of belonging is

a fundamental desire of children with disabilities (Hall 2010). Therefore, the struggle of students with disabilities to achieve a sense of belonging in the schooling system reveals the deep structures of exclusion embedded within many educational systems (Slee 2019).

These examples present a picture of the social suffering of students with disabilities in many countries. Learners experience the consequences of exclusion in many ways in schools. This is a small part of the reality they face around the world, where they are kept out of school systems (UNESCO 2019), excluded from general classrooms (Dixon 2018; Madhesh 2019), or placed in inclusive classrooms without provisions of adequate support (Schwab et al. 2018; Slee 2011). What is unfortunate is that even though students with disabilities are physically present in classrooms, they have no social lives due to exclusionary practices. Avramidis et al. (2018) argue that students with disabilities have fewer friends and social interactions inside the schools not only because of a lack of social skills but also from negative attitudes from their ordinary peers or some over-protective stance from teachers.

CONCLUSION

This study described the isolating, psychological and social effects of COVID-19 on healthy people, drawing parallels with the collected experiences of students with disabilities. These students face daily exclusionary practices in many educational systems around the world. Although the causes are different, the principles of exclusion are similar in the case of people affected by COVID-19 and students with disabilities as both are affected by exclusionary situations. However, the COVID-19 pandemic was caused by a natural occurrence. In addition, it is non-discriminatory, whereas excluding students with disabilities from general classrooms is systemic, deliberate, and discriminatory.

Additionally, in the case of COVID-19, the majority of people know it is temporary and will end in a short period while in the case of exclusionary practices against students with disabilities, they may never end These practices may stay forever or for a long time.

Moreover, while people have many alternatives to avoid or reduce the negative consequenc-

es of the COVID-19 pandemic, in many contexts students with disabilities have few or no alternatives to reduce the substantial negative impact of exclusion from the schooling system and society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Although this study is the first of its kind drawing parallels between the two cases of isolation, its main limitation is the variation in terms of time and permanence between the two cases. However, the outcomes of this study could contribute to enhancing the understanding of individuals around the globe who have experienced the effects of isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic towards how students with disabilities consistently feel when facing such exclusionary practices.

This study may encourage many people who are involved in isolating these students to rethink their standpoints. Finally, its outcomes could help to open a new and different way of thinking for future research studies.

NOTE

[1]   A Gatekeeping practice is an approach employed by a powerholder to erect structural barriers or limitations that prevent others from accessing certain rights (Oleinik 2015).

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