

The Born in Covid Year - Core Lockdown Effects (BICYCLE) project - investigating language and cognition at 4 years of age.

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Abstract

The Born in Covid Year – Core Lockdown Effects (BICYCLE) project (2024-2027) investigates whether being born-in-lockdown affects later language and cognition. Babies born in 2020 experienced unprecedented disruption to their first social and communicative experiences, and there is already some evidence that these children are learning words more slowly and that communication is affected (Byrne et al, 2022; 2023).

The project, which has a large multidisciplinary research team across several universities, will assess 200 children born-in-lockdown as they reach four years of age (both online and in person), along with a group of 200 children the same age but born later, when lockdowns had ended (born-after-lockdown group). Comparisons between these groups (and with data already collected on children who were born-before-lockdown) on their language and cognition skills will deliver new knowledge about how social isolation affects development in these areas, how these two skills relate, and about the long-term effects of the lockdowns.

This poster will present preliminary contextual Patient and Public Involvement and Engagement (PPIE) work establishing the perceptions of becoming a parent in lockdown. Interview data from a group of 17 parent-participants from a variety of backgrounds highlights that the pandemic restrictions had many negative impacts on the experience of pregnancy, birth, and parenting a small child, which were felt by extended families besides couples, many of which lasted beyond the lifting of the restrictions themselves. We will also present a new battery of executive functioning tasks developed for this project, designed for use on tablets with four-year-olds.