



“What we have done is baking together”: Asian Immigrant Parents’ Perspectives and Experiences Regarding Children’s Mental Health Related to Online Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Aijuan Cun¹ · Shixi Zhao²

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Abstract

This study reports Asian immigrant parents’ perspectives on the challenges linked to the mental health their families, particularly their children, experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Literature on children’s mental health, the importance of social-emotional health, and theoretical perspectives on literacy were investigated in order to guide this inquiry. The data sources included interviews with Asian immigrant parents and informal conversations. The findings indicated that the challenges regarding the mental health of families included parents’ use of digital technology for school online learning, loneliness in navigating mental health, and limited social activity. Parents indicated how their children’s healthy emotions and feelings were negatively influenced by school closures and limited social and physical interaction with peers during the pandemic. The findings also showed that the parents helped their children navigate their mental health in a positive way through various experiences such as indoor and outdoor activities. The findings informed recommendations for formal U.S. school settings to include parents’ concerns and their perspectives on the use of technology during school closures with online home instruction and the family activities parents can use to help their children manage their mental health and support their social and emotional well-being.

Keywords Asian immigrant families · Mental health · Qualitative research · Early childhood · Online learning

Introduction

During the unprecedented time of the recent global pandemic, millions of children and families worldwide faced the same major health issues, and their lives were significantly disrupted (Rice & Cun, 2023; Feinberg et al., 2022; Imran et al., 2020; Misirli & Ergulec, 2021; Vanderhout et al., 2020). With little preparation and insufficient time, teachers had to

switch their classrooms from face-to-face settings to online learning settings (Kaden, 2020; König et al., 2020; Tomasik et al., 2021). Online learning is defined as a way of “bridging of the space between the teacher and the student through the use of web-based technologies” (Ford et al., 2021, pp. 1–2). The previous literature has demonstrated the complications of using online school learning, such as teachers’ training needs linked to the use of digital technology (Allen et al., 2020; Efriana, 2021; Dayal & Tiko, 2020; Dias et al., 2020), internet access (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2023, Fishbane & Tomer, 2020); insufficient educational resources (Sari & Nayır, 2020; Noor et al., 2020; Zhou, 2022), and challenges engaging children in online learning (Dayal & Tiko, 2020; Szente, 2020; Tarrant & Nagasawa, 2020).

Parents play important roles in their children’s learning and development (Cun, 2020; Lee, 2010; Weinberger, 1996a). Many previous studies have explored parents’ perspectives on their involvement in their children’s learning, such as valuing the importance of early literacy development and providing rich literacy resources and social

✉ Aijuan Cun
aijuancun@unm.edu

Shixi Zhao
shixizhao@salud.unm.edu

¹ Department of Language, Literacy, & Sociocultural Studies, University of New Mexico, 212 Hokona Hall, Albuquerque, NM 87131, USA

² College of Population Health, University of New Mexico, MSC09 5070, 1 University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131, USA

environments for their children (Crawford & Zygouris-Coe, 2006; Trainin et al., 2017; Weinberger, 1996b).

As digital technology has brought more attention to people's daily lives, children have more opportunities to engage in digital literacy practices at home (Rice & Cun, 2021; Davidson, 2012; Neumann & Neumann, 2014). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of digital technology in children's online learning gained increased attention in the educational field (Blažević & Klein, 2022; Ford et al., 2021; Klosky et al., 2022).

In addition to online complications, parents experienced additional challenges and frustrations during the pandemic. Many families turned their homes into classrooms for their children to continue their literacy and other content learning online (Dong et al., 2020; Misirli & Ergulec, 2021). While parents needed to take care of their families and work from home, they also had to determine how to use digital technology to help their children join daily online class sessions (Abuhammad, 2020; Misirli & Ergulec, 2021; Novianti & Garzia, 2020). Parents who grew up without rich digital literacy practices and experiences may have needed more time and support to use digital technology to participate in their children's online school learning (Hao, 2023).

The complications of using online learning have also impacted children's mental health, as has the frustration caused by parents implementing digital technology at home. For example, parents and their children needed to handle stress, depression, and complex feelings tied to mental health while facing many uncertainties (Imran et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2020; Misirli & Ergulec, 2021). As Misirli and Ergulec (2021) state, "Children's homes have become the new educational setting without physical social interactions with their teachers and peers" (p. 6701). Indeed, children could feel stressed, isolated, or emotional without physical social interactions with their friends and teachers.

Asian immigrant children and their parents experienced additional levels of stress, depression, and other mental health crises while also facing racism and anti-Asian hate linked to the pandemic. Previous studies have shown that Chinese immigrant families, in particular, have an additional degree of stress and emotion, as mass media outlets feature a great deal of information about whether COVID-19 was started or originated in China (Gover et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2022; Zhang & Halpern, 2021). For example, Gover et al. (2020) reported that Chinese immigrants and East Asian Americans have experienced verbal and physical harassment since COVID-19 emerged in China. As another example, by conducting narrative interviews with a Chinese immigrant family, Zhang and Halpern (2021) found that the challenges experienced by Chinese immigrant parents included their children's disengagement with online learning, feeling disconnected from school, and experiencing

stress from the political climate as they read the news linked to anti-Asian hate and discrimination.

These challenges can have long-term negative consequences on Asian immigrant children's mental well-being, which could lead to an increased risk of anxiety, depression, social withdrawal, and suicide over time (Williams, 2018). Although an emerging body of literature has investigated the mental health issues experienced by Chinese immigrant families (Gover et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2022; Zhang & Halpern, 2021), few studies have examined how families handled these issues during the pandemic. Understanding both the challenges and methods that the families used are essential and significant for discussing more about possibilities and recommendations for families, schoolteachers, counselors, and other stakeholders to better support Asian immigrant families in seeking positive mental health practices, learning and literacy resources, and other activities for better managing their own lives and those of their children, in order to support their mental health during difficult times such as the recent pandemic.

This study reports Asian immigrant parents' perspectives on the challenges linked to the mental health that their families experienced and the ways they addressed related challenges during the pandemic. The participants involved were ten Asian immigrant parents who had at least one child attending U.S. early childhood and early elementary schools. In particular, the following central questions guided the analysis:

1. What challenges related to mental health did Asian immigrant parents and their families face during the pandemic?
2. How did parents and their families handle these challenges, and what kinds of mental health activities did Asian immigrant parents and their children engage in during the COVID-19 pandemic?

In the following sections, previous literature and theoretical perspectives on mental health that support this inquiry are reviewed. Then, the participants and the qualitative methods utilized in the study are described. The findings of the participants' narratives related to mental health are presented, and a discussion of the implications of the findings is provided.

Literature Review and Theoretical Perspectives

Literature Review on Mental Health

Even though mental health has become an important topic during the pandemic, related research has been conducted

for several decades. There are different definitions of mental health. Manwell et al. (2015) state that mental health includes “intellectual, emotional and spiritual development, positive self-perception, feelings of self-worth and physical health, and intrapersonal harmony” (p. 2). This broad definition helps one recognize that mental health is a large field that includes many perspectives. On the other hand, Bhugra et al. (2013) provide more specific information by explaining that mental health “involves feeling positive about oneself and others, feeling glad and joyful and loving” (p. 3). This statement enables one to see examples of mental health in daily life.

While many previous studies have documented the importance of managing mental health (Billington et al., 2010; Lewis, 2004; Rizzolo et al., 2009), an emerging body of literature has paid attention to parents’ perspectives on their children’s mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic (Al-Balushi & Essa, 2020; Biradar & Dalvi, 2020; Harrop et al., 2022; Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2021). For example, Fontenelle-Tereshchuk (2021) identified parents’ concerns, including that their children had “very little interaction with teachers or friends” and “overuse of technology” (p.12). Similarly, Al-Balushi and Essa (2020) expressed similar concerns from parents, and they also demonstrated possible factors, such as changes in daily habits and a lack of activities, that affect children’s mental health. All the studies shared the common theme that children experienced additional levels of mental health issues and needed more support from parents, caregivers, and schools.

Like in previous studies, the aim was to explore the perspectives of the participating parents on the challenges their children and families experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Few studies have focused on a similar area in Asian immigrant communities in the U.S. The present study extends the literature by exploring Asian immigrant parents’ perspectives on mental health challenges related to online school learning and the methods they used to navigate these challenges.

Supporting Mental Health Through Social Activities (i.e., Loneliness)

The research has shown that a lack of social activities can lead to loneliness (Asher & Paquette, 2003; Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2021; Matthews et al., 2015; Page et al., 1992). For example, Page and Colleagues (1992) examined the relationships between children’s loneliness and social skills. By asking 600 children to complete tests related to loneliness and activities, they found that the children who experienced loneliness might not have enough social and physical activities, which were connected closely. Similarly, Matthews et al. (2015) conducted a research study on social

isolation and mental health issues experienced by children. Based on the data collected from parents and teachers, they found that social isolation led to the children’s mental health difficulties, such as loneliness.

During the pandemic, children had to stay home for online learning, had limited social interaction with their peers and teachers, and experienced additional mental health issues (e.g., loneliness) (Cooper et al., 2021; Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2021; Loades et al., 2020). Engaging in social activities is important and essential. The research has documented supporting children’s mental health through social activities (Hendryx et al., 2009; Horghagen et al., 2014) Rothon et al., 2012). For example, by conducting a systematic review, Bauer et al. (2021) found that parents use social support and activities to support their children’s mental health. In another study on a similar topic, Rothon et al. (2012) found that social support from families and communities helped children navigate their mental health. The social support included parental involvement in various social activities with their children.

Literature on Outdoor and Indoor Activities

The research has also shown that outdoor and indoor activities support people’s mental health (Coventry et al., 2021; Dzhambov et al., 2021; Evans et al., 2020; Peacock et al., 2007). By conducting a systematic review, Coventry et al. (2021) explored the relationships between outdoor activities and mental health, and they found that outdoor activities, such as walking and jogging, helped improve the participants’ mental health and well-being. In their study, Peacock et al. (2007) provided examples of outdoor activities, such as gardening and walking, and they found that these activities enabled the study participants to feel relaxed and healthier. In other words, outdoor activities socially benefit people’s mental health. Evans et al. (2020) explored the impact of the pandemic on families by interviewing parents. Their findings showed that even though the families experienced various challenges, they shared positive perspectives on home activities, such as playing games and other indoor activities, which benefited their mental health and strengthened their family relationships. Other indoor activities were linked to literacy. In the next section, we describe supporting mental health with literacy activities in home contexts.

Supporting Mental Health with Literacy Activities

The literature has documented the use of literacy activities as ways to support individuals’ mental health (Arslan et al., 2022; Billington et al., 2013; Sevinç). For example, by conducting a study of story-reading interventions, Arslan et al. (2022) found that story-reading has a positive impact

on high school students' emotions and mental health well-being (e.g., happiness, optimism). In their work, even though they did not particularly focus on mental health in early childhood, Billington et al. (2013) identified the positive impact of a reading program on people's mental health. Similarly, a review written by Sevinç (2019) highlights the use of books and reading as a therapy to improve individuals' mental health. While these previous studies indicate the impact of the use of literacy on individuals' mental health, the majority of the related literature has focused on mental health needs and challenges experienced by adults and youth, but limited research has investigated the use of literacy activities for supporting children's mental health. To help bridge the literature gap, it is important to explore how to support young children's mental health by using theoretical perspectives on literacy.

Theoretical Perspectives on Literacy

The theoretical perspective on New Literacy Studies (Street, 1984) supports this inquiry. This perspective views and defines literacy through the sociocultural lens. In particular, Street (2003) states,

What has come to be termed New Literacy Studies (Gee, 1991; Street, 1996) represents a new tradition in considering the nature of literacy, focusing not so much on the acquisition of skills, as in dominant approaches, but rather on what it means to think of literacy as a social practice (Street, 1984). This entails the recognition of multiple literacies. (p. 7)

Literacy viewed through the New Literacy Studies lens, supports the participants' use of literacy for various social purposes in their everyday lives, specifically in home contexts (Street, 1984, 1993; 1995, 1997; Perry, 2012). There are multiple literacy practices associated with heritage, culture, and languages in immigrant families that are bilingual or multilingual (Cun, 2022; Li, 2000, 2006; Orellana et al., 2003; Purcell-Gates, 2020; Zhao & Flewitt, 2020). It is essential to note that families have established and have been engaging in various literacy practices at home instead of learning them from formal schooling settings (Cun & Kfour, 2022).

For families, literacy is more than reading a book or decoding vocabulary words. Examples of immigrant families' social literacy practices include using literacy to help children learn their heritage languages (Cun, 2022; Li & Lin, 2023; Song, 2023), connect to their cultural roots (Cun & Kfour, 2022; Lam & Rosario-Ramos, 2009; Li, 2000), and navigate social contexts (e.g., health care and educational systems) in their daily lives (Cun, 2022; Merry

et al., 2017; Straiton & Myhre, 2017). These theoretical perspectives allow us to explore how participants navigated mental health issues through literacy activities and resources through an asset-based lens in addition to studying challenges.

Methodology

Research Context and Participants

The data presented in this study were obtained from a research project exploring Asian immigrant families' mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research project was conducted in a large city, High Desert Garden City (pseudonym), in the southwestern United States. A total of ten Asian immigrant families were recruited through a community center in the city. The community center provides educational, legal, counseling, translation, and other services for immigrant families from Asian countries and regions who live in the local community of the High Desert Garden City. The families who obtained resources from the center were originally from different countries of origin in Asia, such as Vietnam, China, the Philippines, and Afghanistan. The research team had established partnerships with the community center for a few years. According to the community staff members' descriptions, they have served many immigrant families. In addition to the families, there were also visitors or friends involved in events and workshops that were organized by the center.

Participants

A total of ten parents participated in the study and share their perspectives on their families' mental health during the pandemic. The participants were recruited via flyers distributed through a community center. University approval was received from the university's institutional review board, and consent was obtained from all participants before the project was conducted. The parents were originally from Mainland China, Taiwan, Afghanistan, the Philippines, and Vietnam (see Table 1).

All the parents were bilingual, as they spoke a language other than English as their first language. All the parents had at least one child who was an early childhood or early elementary student during the period of data collection. Zhen and Lilly had only one child in their family, and the other parents all had more than one child in their family. All the families had been living in the U.S. for more than three years. Most of the children in the families were born in the host country.

Table 1 Parents' background information (all the names are pseudonyms)

Participants	Parental role	Homeland	Children ages
Zhen	Mother	Mainland China	7
Ming	Father	Mainland China	2,7,10
Yayi	Mother	Mainland China	6, 10
Hua	Mother	Mainland China	5, 9, 11
Lily	Mother	Taiwan	9
Linh	Mother	Vietnam	6, 10, 12
Maria	Mother	The Philippines	5, 9
Samira	Mother	Afghanistan	4,6,10
Mina	Mother	Afghanistan	4,7,10
Lala	Mother	Afghanistan	2,10

Data Collection

The focus of this study was on the parents' perspectives on their families' mental health activities. The data sources included a total of two interviews with each parent. All the interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom, and all the data were audio recorded. Narrative interviews were used as a qualitative research approach to "characterize the phenomena of human experience" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p.2) through participants' stories. This approach allowed us to understand the participants' experiences during the pandemic. Examples of interview questions included: "How would you describe your family activities related to mental health (e.g., stress, anxiety, emotion) in your everyday life during the COVID-19 pandemic?", "What were your activities during the COVID-19 pandemic?", and "What do you think about your family's activities in relation to mental health?" Research funds were obtained in order to offer bilingual translation services when the participants needed them. All the participants were able to speak fluent English, and not every family requested a translation service. In addition to the interviews, informal conversations were conducted with the participants to clarify or map potential misinterpretations to help us ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the study (Glesne, 2011).

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in four steps. First, the interviews were transcribed, and each transcript was then coded by adopting the initial coding method (Saldaña, 2016). In particular, each transcript was reviewed, and words and phrases were highlighted and then linked to the participants' mental health challenges and activities. Second, the codes were grouped by mapping the relationships among the codes. This step generated categories, such as challenges, literacy activities, and indoor/outdoor activities.

Third, all the datasets were reviewed and organized by categories into common themes: challenges related to

mental health during the pandemic and navigating mental health through family activities. Fourth, each major theme was revisited, and the data was coded again. This step enabled the identification of subcategories under each major theme. Under the first theme, three kinds of challenges were identified: school online learning stress, loneliness in navigating mental health, and limited social activity. Under the second major theme, two subgroups were defined: family literacy activities and indoor/outdoor activities.

Findings

The participants' narratives included different stories, but also included similar themes: challenges related to mental health during the pandemic (e.g., stress, loneliness, limited social activities) and navigating mental health through their family literacy and indoor/outdoor activities. The following section is organized based on the major themes. Representative examples are presented to illustrate each theme.

Challenges Related to Mental Health During the Pandemic

Stress: School Online Learning

The interview data showed that all the parents expressed difficulties with mental health and online school learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the challenges was using digital devices to support their children's learning. For example, a mother from one of the Afghan families, Mina, shared her perspective on learning about how to use a laptop to help her children attend classes online:

I always had questions. Like, what time did they start school? I didn't know how to use the computer. I didn't know what to do. Sometimes my husband helped me, but he had his job to do. I did not know what to do. In online schooling, every class was changing, and they were during different times. My kids asked me what they needed to do; I said I did not know. Right now, I'm happy, my kids go to school every day.

Mina's utterance, "I did not know what to do," was echoed several times in her statement; indicating the challenges linked to her children's online schooling during the pandemic. She was not sure about how to navigate the computer or the school schedule. Mobilizing digital devices for different purposes was considered a digital literacy practice and was defined as a way for participants to build on what they "acquire and know from their wider cultural participation" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2015, p.18). In other words, it

was about how the participants used digital technology to read, write, or engage in other literacy activities for various social purposes in their daily lives. In this case, digital literacy referred to how the participants navigated digital technology for a specific social purpose—to support their children’s online school learning.

Mina, who grew up in an age in which limited digital technology was available, did not have much digital literacy experience. During the pandemic, she not only needed to learn how to use the computer and internet, but also had to use it to help her children attend online school with little preparation. As reflected in Mina’s statement, other parents’ narratives revealed the same challenges and stress linked to the use of digital technology to support their children’s online school learning.

Loneliness: Navigating Mental Health

Additionally, loneliness, was another mental health challenge experienced by the families. For example, one of parents from the Chinese families, Zhen shared her perspectives on her son’s feelings:

He attended the university’s preschool in that year [2020]. The pandemic started in March. Around March or April, the schools were closed. He [her son] was very disappointed. There were many activities at the preschool in the past. He was very disappointed, as he could not go to school. He also felt lonely. He is our only child. He felt lonely. I did not feel he was stressed, but I noticed he felt lonely during that time.

The words “disappointed” and “lonely” highlighted her son’s feelings related to his mental health at the beginning of the pandemic. The major reason was that he could not continue going to school and did not have physical interaction with his teachers or friends during the pandemic. Additionally, Zhen’s family had only one child, and his son did not have siblings to play with.

Limited Social Activities

In addition to these challenges, parents also described other related examples that caused stress, anxiety, or other feelings linked to the pandemic and which limited social activities. The father from one of the Chinese families, Ming, said, “Our life was interrupted. Like my younger son who usually went to Taekwondo training, but during the pandemic, we could not send him there. We also spent less time going out. Everything was messy during that time.” The statement illustrates Ming’s reflection on the factors, such as his family’s routine being interrupted and social activities his sons

usually participated in were canceled during the pandemic. Samira, the mother from one of the Afghani families, also described factors linked to challenges during the pandemic:

He [her younger son] just started his first grade; it was difficult during that time. For me, it was difficult as well. English is my second language; sometimes I did not totally understand what the teacher asked. I had to sit with him and encourage him to do this, to do that. It was a difficult time.

Samira’s statement indicated that other factors, such as understanding the teacher and her son’s academic transition to his first grade, led her family to experience additional levels of stress and more challenges related to her son’s schooling during the pandemic. In addition, Samira mentioned that her family did not receive enough support and felt disconnected from school due to school closures and limited social activity. In other words, these challenges might not be simply caused by the pandemic. Multiple factors in the participants’ lives also accelerated more stress, loneliness, and limited social activities which complicated their life experiences during this unprecedented period.

Navigating Mental Health Through Family Activities

Indoor Family Literacy Activities

Another major theme was related to continuing established family literacy activities. The parents’ narratives indicate that the families had various family literacy activities that they had engaged in before the pandemic, and they continued these activities during this unprecedented time. All the parents’ narratives indicated that bilingual books and other literacy resources were available to their children, as they spoke their first language at home. The mother, Mina, mentioned her family’s reading practices. When asked what her family usually reads, she states,

We read in Dari. We read something to relax, something good for mind, or something about my country, something good for my kids too. I have some books in Dari in my house. We read when we have free time, sometimes, not always. Sometimes I have to clean the house, cook, feed the kids, I’m very, very, busy. But when I have time, I read, I read about life, what’s going on, in Dari, not in English.

Mina’s statement shows that her family has established reading practices in her home language, Dari. Instead of using literacy for schooling, her family read for social purposes, such as for entertainment, obtaining news, and obtaining

information for her children. In other words, her family engaged in literacy as a social practice (Street, 1984). During the interview, Mina also shared other literacy activities in their household. For example, when showing the drawing samples that were drawn by her four-year-old daughter, Mina said, “She likes painting and coloring.” Mina’s daughter usually engaged in drawing and other emergent literacy practices at home.

Linh, a mother in the Vietnamese family, shared similar experiences. Her family read texts in her first language and English. Linh usually read children’s books with her youngest son, who was six-years-old at the time of data collection. When asked to share her perspectives on the reading texts, she said, “He [the youngest son] likes reading in Vietnamese. Most of the time, he likes reading in Vietnamese. He can read in both Vietnamese and English.” This statement highlights Linh’s son’s bilingual identity and his preference for reading Vietnamese children’s books tied to their family’s heritage and culture.

Similarly, the mothers in the Chinese families, Zhen and Lilly, also shared their family literacy practices. Zhen and Lilly had similar family structures in that they had only one child, and they had established child–parent reading practices at home. For example, Zhen stated,

We usually read books at night before going to sleep. Usually, we read books with him [her son] together. We read English books these days as we just returned from China, and he is working on his English these days. We usually spent ten to fifteen minutes reading at night. Most of the time, he reads, and sometimes we read together. Most of the time, he could independently read. If he needed help understanding something, we helped him look up information or explained it to him.

Unlike other families who lived in the United States all the time, Zhen’s family went to mainland China and visited their family members during the pandemic. Zhen’s son had opportunities to speak Chinese and engage in literacy practices in China at that time. After her family returned to the U.S., she wanted her son to read books in English to catch up on acquiring the language.

Reading with her son was a family literacy practice that her family had been engaging in for a long time and continued during the pandemic.

Lilly also read to her son, the only child in her family. In the interview, she provided details:

Every day, we have at least half an hour to read with my son. It’s like a reading time before he goes to sleep. He can have half an hour each day to have the screen

time. After he finishes the screen, he usually reads or plays. When he asks us to read with him, we usually do that. My husband usually reads to him. If my son has questions, he usually answers or gives him ideas. When I read, I usually read and ask him [her son] to see if he recognizes the words. Or I ask him what kinds of problems are in the books.

Child–parent reading was a vital family literacy practice for Lilly’s family, not just during the pandemic. Nevertheless, they have been engaging in this practice since her son was a baby. Her statement also describes how she or her husband read and discussed the books with her son to determine whether he understood the stories illustrated in the books. In other words, they did not simply read stories to their son but also discussed these to ensure his comprehension.

The participants’ narratives also showed that their families initiated new family literacy activities and used them to navigate their mental health during the pandemic.

In one of the Chinese families, Zhen brought children’s books related to mental health to her son when the pandemic started. She elaborated on this literacy resource during the interview:

I bought books for him [her son]. I wanted him to read, like this book; he has read this. Have You Filled a Bucket Today? A Guide to Daily Happiness for Kids. Something like this about managing emotion. Another book, Anger Management, Workbook for Kids. He has not read this one yet. However, I wanted him to read. I wanted him to know how to manage his emotions, specifically when the pandemic started. At that time, he could not continue going to kindergarten; he felt anxious and afraid, so I bought these books for him.

While describing the two books she bought for her son, Zhen also presented the two children’s books. She provided a specific example of mental health emotions – her son experienced based on her observation at the beginning of the pandemic. The words “anxious” and “afraid” clarified the challenge. Zhen strategically utilized books as a literacy resource to help her son understand how to manage his emotions.

Similarly, Ming and his sons also navigated mental health through literacy activities. Unlike Zhen’s family, who provided books related to the topic, Ming viewed attending online reading programs as a way to help his children continue learning literacy and managing mental health. Ming has three sons. Two of them were elementary school-aged children, and one was a baby. When sharing his family’s literacy practices, he discussed his older sons’ literacy learning practices:

During the pandemic, we did not have opportunities to go out for literacy learning. They [his sons] participated in online reading programs. During that time, one program focused on reading Harry Potter. They read with other kids and other friends in that program.

Although Ming's family could not participate in physical literacy activities, they found that attending online reading programs enabled his sons to continue literacy learning during the pandemic. When asked if the online reading programs were part of the public school curriculum, Ming explained that they were unrelated to public school activities. Later in that interview, Ming's narrative indicated that attending these programs was more than just reading; it also allowed his sons to talk to other children, continue social interaction, and manage their mental health better.

Indoor Activities: Baking and Games

In an interview, Maria, a mother from the Filipino community, also made connections between her family literacy activity and managing mental health during the pandemic through baking and playing games together. She stated,

What we have done is baking together. They [her children] could read cooking books. They could read something about the measurements and numbers. We also included that, the children could read the instructions. I also ask them to use apps, especially reading, using dual-language apps. We used apps for the children to learn both Tagalog and English through games.

Maria's statement illustrates her family literacy practices and indoor activities, such as baking, playing games, and mobilizing dual-language apps. While engaging in these family literacy practices to address stress during the pandemic, her children could be exposed to numeracy and bilingual environments that potentially facilitated their biliteracy learning. These indoor activities also increased socialization within the family and reduced loneliness.

Outdoor Activities

Outdoor activities were another way of managing mental health that was available in all the families. For example, when asked how to address mental health, the mother of another Chinese family, Yayi, said, "We usually took a walk in the park together to relieve stress during the pandemic." Yayi's family has three children, and taking them to the park was a way for her family to deal with stress and other feelings during the pandemic. Ming also shared similar outdoor activities:

We usually spent more time biking together. We also bought an above-ground swimming pool for them [his sons] to play in the water and learn how to swim. We also played Ping Pong (table tennis) and installed a basketball stand in the yard.

As described previously, Ming's reflection on the pandemic showed that his family's life was disrupted. Here, Ming shared his perspective on the alternative ways his family found to manage their life better and handle stress during the pandemic. For example, Ming's sons could not participate in physical sports activities or training. However, the words "biking," "swimming," and "ping pong" all illustrate the alternative activities Ming's family provided so their sons could continue playing sports and relieve stress during the pandemic.

Maria, the mother from the Filipino community, also commented, "Walking is another stress-free activity we did together."

Like these families, Linh's family engaged in various family activities to manage stress and complex feelings linked to mental health during the pandemic. In the interview, Linh expressed a positive view when sharing her family's activities:

The pandemic brought my family together. My kids stayed at home. We did a lot of creative stuff together. Cooking, or doing other fun things together. We couldn't meet other people but still went hiking or biking together. There was additional time for our family to gather together and do things together.

Linh's statement showed that her family engaged in many activities, such as creating creative arts, cooking, hiking, and biking. In a follow-up conversation, Linh mentioned that before the pandemic, her family did not have opportunities to enjoy these activities, as her older children were always busy attending school and after-school programs, and she spent more time with her youngest son at home. However, during the pandemic, all her children stayed home. Her family had more opportunities to enjoy various family activities, which allowed her family to stay happy during this unusual time.

Discussion and Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the lives and mental health of many children (Rice & Cun, 2023; Feinberg et al., 2022; Misirli & Ergulec, 2021; Vanderhout et al., 2020). Parents also faced additional challenges when participating in their children's education during this unparalleled time.

Additionally, Asian immigrant children and their parents experienced additional levels of mental stress as they had to face anti-Asian hate and racism tied to the pandemic. Chinese immigrants and other Asian immigrants reported that they experienced racism, discrimination, and verbal and physical harassment specifically during the pandemic (Gover et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2022; Zhang & Halpern, 2021). To help extend the literature and find solutions to these unaddressed issues, the present study explored Asian immigrant parents' perspectives on the challenges linked to the mental health issues that their families experienced and the ways that they dealt with these challenges through their family activities.

The previous literature highlighted different complications associated with using online school learning (e.g., teachers' training needs and insufficient education resources) and with the impacts of these complications on children's mental health, as well as with the frustration caused by parents trying to implement digital technology at home (Allen et al., 2020; Dayal & Tiko, 2020; Dong et al., 2020; Ford et al., 2021; Misirli & Ergulec, 2021; Szente, 2020; Tarrant & Nagasawa, 2020). Similarly, the findings showed parents' perspectives on the challenges their families faced in relation to online school learning and mental health during the pandemic. For example, Mina, shared her concerns about understanding school schedules and using digital technology for online learning. This type of experience made it more difficult for many parents who grew up with limited technological access or experience with digital literacy.

The participants also described their concerns related to their children's limited social activities, which caused more stress, anxiety, loneliness, and other feelings related to mental health. For example, Zhen indicated that her son's feelings and emotions were impacted by school closure and limited social activities. In addition to these challenges, the present study extends the literature by revealing how participants and their families navigate these challenges at home. The data analysis revealed three specific sub-findings: families' literacy activities and indoor and outdoor activities, which were valued through an asset-based view. Like previous studies on immigrant students' bilingual family literacy activities as valuable educational assets (Cun, 2022; Li, 2000, 2006), the study findings also showed that Asian immigrant families navigated their stress, emotion, and other feelings associated with mental health through their family literacy and indoor and outdoor activities.

The findings showed that four mothers' narratives highlighted their established family literacy activities (e.g., reading in Vietnamese and English), and they continued these activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. More importantly, the participants' families engaged in these literacy and indoor and outdoor activities to help their children

navigate issues with their mental health. For example, Ming, who said his sons attended online reading programs to help them continue their literacy learning and maintain social interaction with their friends to benefit their mental health.

Maria, shared her family literacy and indoor experience, such as baking together as a family to help her children engage in literacy and numeracy learning and relieve stress. The participants' narratives also highlighted their use of outdoor activities, such as walking, biking and hiking, to navigate their mental health during the pandemic.

Implications and Recommendations

The findings informed recommendations for including parents' perspectives on the use of technology in formal U.S. educational settings. In the present study, the parents' narratives indicated the challenges of using digital technology to support their children's online school learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was even more difficult for Mina and other parents with a limited digital literacy background to participate. Teachers and schools should consider providing parents with digital literacy resources to help them better understand how to use digital technology to support their children's online school learning. Suggestions include sending ongoing digital literacy and online school learning resources to parents in various ways, such as letters, emails, or other established teacher–parent communication methods. As Hao (2023) states, “Teachers could also invite parents to express their concerns and share their thoughts” (p.36). Echoing this statement, the present study also suggests that teachers and schools need to involve parents' voices in multiple ways, such as sending surveys or conducting interviews with parents to know their needs and concerns, asking them to share their perspectives during regular teacher-parent conference sessions, and inviting parents to participate in school activities related to digital technology.

The findings of this study suggest valuing immigrant families' literacy and the indoor and outdoor activities they establish and engage in at home. In formal U.S. schooling settings, immigrant children who speak multiple languages are usually taught in English as a second language (ESL) class, and identified as ESL students (Cun, 2022; Lee, 2010). In this study, both the challenges experienced by parents and the ways in which their families handled those challenges were explored. Immigrant families' literacy experiences, along with the indoor and outdoor activities were used to address challenges, were explored through an asset-based lens. This contrasts with a focus on the challenges, which constitute only part of their lived experiences. The findings not only highlighted the immigrant families'

bilingual identities but also provide insights into how the families continued to use and draw upon their family literacy activities, as well as social indoor and outdoor activities, to help their children navigate issues, such as stress and loneliness, in order to support their children's mental health. While examining the challenges faced by immigrant families, educators could better support them by acknowledging and valuing literacy activities linked to their culture and heritage language.

The findings also suggest that more attention needs to be paid to children's mental health by classroom teachers and other school personnel. The study's findings showed that parents noticed that their children's feelings and emotions were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic due to school closures, limited social activities, and other factors. While recently published articles have focused on this topic (Imran et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2020; Misirli & Ergulec, 2021), it is essential to note that children's mental health continues to need attention in the post-pandemic world. Promoting and maintaining effective teacher-parent communication can help classroom teachers and schools understand the challenges linked to their students' mental health and the established family activities in their households. The study findings highlight that the participants' family literacy and indoor and outdoor activities enabled their children to relieve stress, loneliness, and manage their emotions during the COVID-19 outbreak.

These findings illustrate that parents and their families were "resourceful, persistent, and creative in their approaches" to strategically use stress-free activities to "survive and then thrive" (Li & Lin, 2023, p. 6). Inviting parents to share their stress-free activities in school settings could help classroom teachers implement similar activities and help other parents know how to help their children manage their mental health challenges.

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