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GOING DIGITAL OVERNIGHT: MOTHERS' AGENCY IN CHILDREN'S REMOTE LEARNING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

This paper examines the processes underlying the rise of educational inequalities among primary-school children in Czechia during the COVID-19 pandemic by analysing the experiences of mothers. Drawing on a secondary analysis of two longitudinal interview sets with mothers of children aged 6–12—middle-class partnered mothers and single mothers with very low-to-moderate incomes—the study compares how mothers with differing resources navigated the transfer of educational responsibility from schools to households. Our findings reveal three interconnected processes driving the widening of inequalities. First, socio-economic disadvantages exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in shortages of both

digital and emotional capital, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of stress and educational setbacks for children. Second, mothers developed varied forms of agency: while some engaged in tacit resistance, others with greater digital capital actively negotiated with schools or introduced innovations that improved learning conditions. Third, emotional capital emerged as crucial, shaping families' ability to utilise digital resources effectively. The paper highlights the dynamics that reproduce educational inequalities as well as the practices through which mothers challenged them. We show that mothers were not passive recipients of educational responsibilities transferred to them by institutions but active agents who sought inventive ways to meet expectations—or resisted them—by finding creative solutions.

Keywords:

Educational Inequalities, COVID-19 Pandemic, Mothers' Agency, Digital Capital, Emotional Capital