



¹ Coventry University (SC),
Scarborough YO11 2JW, UK

² Whittington Health NHS Trust and
University College London, London,
UK

ac7768@coventry.ac.uk

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2021;372:n157

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n157>

Published: 19 January 2021

TO EACH CHILD THEIR OWN CORONAVIRUS

The elephant and the blind men: the children of long covid

Frances K Simpson,¹ Amali U Lokugamage²

In response to Martinerie and colleagues' article¹ we note the concerns about the sociological effects of the pandemic on children. We feel, however, that the article's view that SARS-CoV-2 infection is less severe in children is unsubstantiated and, as outlined in our *BMJ* Opinion piece,² there has been insufficient epidemiological study of long covid in children.

We appreciate art as a therapeutic outlet and means of communication for adults to understand what coronavirus has meant to children. We also appreciate the use of the parable of the blind men and the elephant³ in describing the subjective experiences of coronavirus for children. This important allegory can be extended to include children whose lived experience of the pandemic has been one of chronic illness.

The parable of the elephant and the blind men may also be adopted to offer a useful account of long covid itself—each patient experiencing their own version which has required excellent communication to conceptualise the condition. The recent long covid NICE guideline⁴ is a testament to this process, a demonstration that when all the blind men share their experiences, they do not need to come to blows.

Children's experience of the virus relies on the beneficence and advocacy of adults to be heard. The children from the Long Covid Kids organisation⁵ have made use of film⁶ to express their experiences. Let's ensure that it gets heard and that responses to the pandemic for children are co-produced by children, their carers, and the official organisations that seek to offer assistance.

Competing interests: None declared.

Full response at: www.bmj.com/content/371/bmj.m4578/rr.

- 1 Martinerie L, Bernoux D, Giovannini-Chami L, Fabre A. To each child their own coronavirus. *BMJ* 2020;371:m4578. doi: 10.1136/bmj.m4578 pmid: 33328207
- 2 Simpson F, Lokugamage AU. Counting long covid in children. *BMJ* Opinion 2020. <https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2020/10/16/counting-long-covid-in-children>.
- 3 Goldstein E. *Encyclopedia of perception*. SAGE Publications, 2009.
- 4 NICE. Covid-19 rapid guideline: managing the long-term effects of covid-19. www.nice.org.uk/guidance/NG188.
- 5 Long Covid Kids. Long lasting covid symptoms. www.longcovidkids.org.
- 6 Long Covid Kids. Long lasting covid symptoms in children. YouTube. 29 October 2020. www.youtube.com/watch?v=RilambG8vs0.