Testimony to the Global Workers' Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic

Herd immunity in education: "I fear for children's lives and what the future legacy will be."

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Daniella Modus-Cutter is a full-time carer, mother and grassroots campaigner, maintaining a list of schools in the UK reporting COVID infections. She is Clinically Extremely Vulnerable and has been shielding since the start of the pandemic. She was interviewed for the Global Workers' Inquest by Julie Hyland.

JH: You opened your Twitter account in March 2020 at the very start of the pandemic in the UK. What made you decide to do this so quickly? What were your concerns and how did you understand the dangers?

I opened my Twitter account as my eldest son said he thought I'd like it and it would help making friends whilst shielding at the start of the pandemic. When I opened my account, I wanted to get information about COVID.

I already had big concerns but almost overnight I was shellshocked realising that I was very vulnerable to COVID. I never really thought of myself before as extremely vulnerable to an illness. I'm physically disabled and yes it affects my daily life and is a struggle day to day, but I can adapt to my surroundings through help from family and a support worker.

I started campaigning with SafeEdForAll [Safe Education for All]. My name is on two open letters for mitigations in schools to the Education Secretary. I moved over to Fighting for Vulnerable Lives because I am Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) and I thought I could support parents better who were in the same place as me, in addition to pushing for mitigations in schools.

JH: You now have 10.7k followers because you have taken responsibility for compiling the rate of incidences in schools and amongst children especially. What have you uncovered?

I decided I would start to do weekly list of cases in schools as it was an ever-changing situation where at first schools told parents if there was a case in schools and which class etc. This soon changed and parents were worried as it went from whole school notifications to just class notifications.

So, I decided to put a daily message on Facebook and Twitter asking parents to contact me with cases in their schools as this will help vulnerable families to be aware when cases were in their child's school and act if they wanted to take their children out of school.

My school data compiling has been 10 percent of help from parents sending me letters; the other 90 percent has been through open research through school newsletters/ websites and Facebook and Twitter posts from school pages. Term time I could spend four to eight hours a day researching and supporting parents.

At times it has been really hard with uploading my data onto Twitter. At times people have trolled me and have been intimidating towards me for the data I have shared.

What the data clearly shows, and that is thanks to SafeEdForAll for putting the data on an animated map, is: you can see the delta wave start to spread across the country all through the summer term of 2021. The government and the authorities would have known this.

You can also find my work on Fighting for Vulnerable Lives and on my own Twitter page.

JH: Throughout the pandemic, the line has been that deaths are mainly due to pre-existing "vulnerabilities", that "People didn't die from COVID but with it." How do you see this claim?

The last few years have been an uphill struggle. Shielding has been very hard—especially in the winter when you can't access outdoors. My husband is Clinically Vulnerable. My son hasn't been to school since March 2020 because it is just not safe for him to attend. There are no mitigations, no masks, no testing, no HEPA filtration to stop transmission. He could bring COVID home to me. It could make him very ill, and it would make me extremely ill. Most probably I would lose my life.

It has been portrayed that it is "just" CEV people whose lives are at risk. This is not true. Four in ten people who have died have not been disabled or had any chronic illnesses. We are part of a capitalist system. If you don't contribute in monetary terms of labour the government doesn't think your life is worth saving.

The policies towards the pandemic have caused a horrendous loss of life. This is eugenics that the government are playing. Capitalism over life.

Disabled people have taken the heaviest toll. Through the pandemic they make up six in 10 COVID deaths. Many people would have lived to old age. They may have had asthma or diabetes which is treatable with medication, but the government decided to do away with mitigations that slow the spread of COVID.

I feel the government have washed their hands of protecting CV people who have been left with no health care through the fear of catching COVID.

The government have gone ahead and lifted mitigations in medical settings. I speak with many people like myself who are CEV. We do not feel safe to go to our medical appointments or even for the vaccine due to

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this for the chance of being infected prior to the vaccine having time to work, so we feel it's safer just to stay home.

It shouldn't be this way as we have the right to healthcare without the prospect of getting infected and losing our lives. Many of us have sacrificed so much just to stay well and free from infection by basically effectively being prisoners in our homes. Our children have suffered the most through foregoing their education to keep them COVID free as they are vulnerable themselves or there's the danger of bringing COVID back home to a loved one.

We have to 'choose' to suffer in silence and not have any health care for the fear of getting COVID and dying. And we don't have to die because many conditions are treatable, and you can live a long life.

CEV have a right to life just like anybody else. The right to treatment, the right to healthcare. And the right to be able to go out and not be prisoners in their own homes. All this could be remedied if the government put health first and their short sightedness is going to cause continuous health problems for people for decades to come, maybe for generations to come.

JH: Your work on schools has been unique and exemplary. You are the only person in the country to have compiled these records which has exposed the claims that schools are safe and that children are not affected. What have you learned doing this work?

The government made many mitigations political. Their political ideology against mask wearing, social distancing, HEPA filtration, or any preventative measures has caused irreparable harm across communities. The failure to mitigate against a novel airborne virus in schools has led to children's deaths and irreparable harm to children's health. It has left thousands of children orphans. No one talks about this and the mental anguish it is causing children.

The vaccine only strategy has failed. There's nearly two million people with Long COVID. This will really affect the workforce for a very long time. The only solution is contact tracing, testing, putting ventilation systems into public spaces, isolation of contacts. Unless this happens, we will forever be in a vicious circle.

This is already affecting the labour market. Less people are working—possibly due to Long COVID. The pandemic is raging on. Kids are going to schools with cold symptoms. CEV families have only got one option—to keep children home and forgo education until such a time that the government wakes up to the problem that it is creating. And this is the only way we can be protected.

Everyone screams human rights, but where are our human rights or our right to life? I see no human rights agency campaigning on our behalf about this, our right to healthcare and access to safe education for children who are themselves vulnerable or a family member. We just get threatened with prosecution or social services just because we want to keep our families safe from the Petri dish of the education system.

I have had no involvement from the trade unions. Absolutely none. They could have done this work on the situation in schools very easily by taking information from their members and they have the resources to do so. The teaching unions have worked hand in hand with the government all the way through. I do not know why members are still paying their fees as they've done nothing to protect staff. As of December 2020, over 500 staff have died from COVID and 10s of thousands of education staff have Long COVID.

My attitude to the Labour Party is it's not a party for workers anymore. It's now a Tory lite establishment. If this was a true workers' party, there would be no way they would turn their back on teaching staff. The government and the Labour 'opposition' had a perfect opportunity in the summer of May-September 2020, when a more effective lockdown was in place. They could have made sure proper ventilation was installed in schools as per Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) recommendation. Cases were low in September 2020 and test and trace was still in place along with mask wearing in schools. It would have stopped the need for lockdowns.

We have effectively been thrown under the bus by the government, the opposition parties and any organisation that's supposed to help disabled/CEV families.

JH: The pandemic has been declared officially over. But your own work shows that the situation in schools is as bad as ever. Infections are going up and so are hospitalisations.

The school data I have logged is just the tip of the iceberg. Yet it shows that not having mitigations in schools caused disruption, more disruption than if the schools were properly mitigated for an airborne virus. Children are getting Long COVID, hepatitis. I fear for children's lives and what the future legacy will be.

The reason I've taken a pause from my data work is because it is extremely hard to find any information due to the stopping of free testing in schools.

I feel this is deliberate—to enable the virus to run rampant through schools. Vulnerable families have been forgotten about. Out of sight, out of mind. People are getting on with their lives but frequently getting infected which is no life really because it's doing untold damage to bodily organs.

And it doesn't work out like this as there is constant distribution to education through staff and children becoming sick. Some schools have had to close classes / year groups and even whole schools at times throughout the pandemic.

Children are not being protected in schools. No HEPA filtration, no masks, no testing, no contact tracing. Just because you wish something over, it doesn't mean it is. It's just hiding from the reality of what is really happening. Schools must be kept open at all costs because children are just an extension, just a cog in the capitalist wheel so parents can go to work.

I have been supporting parents and trying to get the information they need to deal with issues with schools and non-attendance. If I didn't know the information, I directed them to a campaign that could help in their situations.

I've campaigned for safety mitigations in schools; masks, HEPA filtration units in classrooms, free testing and 10 days isolation for positive cases and remote learning for children with vulnerable families until it's safe for them to be able attend.

Pretending COVID isn't a problem will cause a worse variant that completely evades the vaccine, which has started to happen. We will continue to see wave after wave of infection, disruption to education, children/staff/parents being hospitalised or worse losing their lives. Until COVID is taken seriously, we will see constant disruption to businesses, through staff illness and staff unable to work due to Long COVID. For a healthy economy you need a healthy workforce.

JH: What conclusions have you drawn and how do you see the solution?

The pandemic is part of a bigger problem. Having recklessly endangered so many lives through the policy of 'herd immunity', governments everywhere are deliberately trying to provoke a war with Russia.

I really don't understand people's reasoning when it comes to the war with Ukraine. There are many people I know through my work on COVID that are aware of the harm the government's caused as regards the pandemic but seem to believe everything they are told about war.

They should understand that COVID and this war are connected. They are part of the problem which is capitalism. Ukraine isn't the democracy that the government is selling them: Ukraine banned the Russian language, opposition parties and media. A high percentage of Ukrainians are ethnic Russians. This war didn't start in February this year, it started eight years ago when the republics of the Donbas broke away from Ukraine to become independent as they didn't want to be governed by a

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US-backed right-wing government in 2014.

The sanctions in place do not hurt the ‘leaders’: it’s always the people of said country that suffer. And in this case the sanctions are also hurting the citizens in the countries that are imposing them.

The working class everywhere are suffering at the hands of their own governments in western countries, through inflation, higher energy and food prices.

What is needed is for the working class across the globe to come together and strike and protest for better pay and conditions, to stop the pandemic and end war. That is why I joined the Educators Rank-and-File Committee.

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