
How COVID-19 has affected the “Mental Health” of the Children?

*Akanksha Malavia
Vichar Samiti*

*Vanshikha Mahana
Vichar Samiti*

Abstract:

COVID-19 is the unforgettable experience of everyone’s life. This pandemic has affected people’s lives and their health (both physical and mental) but now it has become a part of our daily life. In this research paper we mainly focused on how COVID-19 has affected the mental health of children. We also focused on to analyse social, behavioural and emotional implications of COVID-19 on children and adolescents. In this study we also understand various community-based policies and identify immediate private as well as public investment for mental health support of children and young people in low-income families. There are many more things on which we focus, like how the situation and problems of children and adolescents in various age groups in urban metro cities differ from those in slums and rural areas involving working parents and homemakers. Also analyse the present situation, requirements and the immediate actions needed to be undertaken. In this paper we also like to mention the adverse effects as well as the positive impacts on children’s lifestyle and how they face this COVID in their life.

Keywords: COVID-19, CHILDREN, LIVES, ADOLESCENTS, MENTAL HEALTH

How COVID-19 has affected people?

The coronavirus outbreak (COVID-19) has adversely affected the lives of people all over the globe. Apart from the major and serious health problems, COVID-19 has immensely affected the food system, global economy and other utilities. This pandemic has worsened the daily life of the people by affecting:

- **Healthcare**

People are facing challenges in diagnosing and providing treatment to the people infected with the COVID-19. Many people have lost their lives all over the globe. Apart from COVID cases, people who were suffering from any other disease were unable to consult a doctor as the lockdown has posed many restrictions. The existing medical system stopped functioning and focuses only on the treatment of COVID-19 affected people. The doctors and the other healthcare professionals were overburdened during this pandemic due to the thousands of cases and were at a high risk of getting infected from the virus. There was also a disruption of the medical supply chain which severely affected the health of a lot of people.

- **Economic**

This pandemic has slowed down and somewhere stopped the manufacturing of the essential goods, which disrupted the supply chain of products. Huge losses were incurred in the national and international businesses. There is a significant steep down in the graph of revenue growth.

- **Social**

The social life of people has been adversely affected due to the lockdowns imposed. People are unable to meet their friends, social group and even neighbours. The service sector is unable to provide their services. Various examinations, matches, sport tournaments, either national or international, got annulled and postponed due to the lockdowns. There was a restriction to celebrate any festivities or any kind of gathering was not allowed even for the wedding functions. Religious places, restaurants, coffee-shops, hotels, gymnasiums, schools & colleges, offices, and all the other utilities were closed.

All the above-mentioned factors have affected the life of human beings, due to which people, especially children, were facing mental-health issues like hypertension, depression, over thinking, stress, schizophrenia, dementia, etc.

The coronavirus spread is affecting all sections of the society, but it is more devastating for those individuals who are a part of the most vulnerable groups. Those who are poverty-stricken, old-aged people, people with various disabilities, adolescents, and autochthonous peoples. According to various researches, the heinous physical and mental health or financial consequences of the virus are suffered primarily by the people who are below the poverty line.¹

For instance, vagrants who wander from place to place and live by begging are particularly vulnerable to the virus because they are helpless and may not be able to find a safe place or shelter to live.

COVID-19 and the adverse effects it had on the mental health of children and adolescents across nations

“Good mental health is absolutely fundamental to overall health and well being”, said Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director General of the World Health Organisation.²

“ADHD, anxiety, autism, bipolar disorder, conduct disorder, depression, eating disorders, intellectual handicap, and schizophrenia are all mental diseases that can negatively impact the health, schooling and higher education, life satisfaction, and earning capability of

¹ Patel JA; Nielsen FBH; Badiani AA; Assi S; Unadkat VA; Patel B; Ravindrane R; Wardle H; *Poverty, inequality and covid-19: The forgotten vulnerable, Public health*, U.S. NATIONAL LIBRARY OF MEDICINE. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32502699/> (Accessed: January 19, 2023).

² Covid-19 disrupting mental health services in most countries, who survey, World Health Organization, <https://www.who.int/news/item/05-10-2020-covid-19-disrupting-mental-health-services-in-most-countries-who-survey> (last visited Jan 19, 2023).

children and youngsters. While the influence on children's lives is immeasurable, a new analysis in the report by the "London School of Economics" estimates that "decrease in the financial contribution owing to psychiatric conditions that lead to impairment or death amongst teenage people is worth about \$390 billion per year."

Long-term confinement, fear of viruses, boredom, and insufficient knowledge, family's financial instability, inability to connect with friends and many other close relatives, can have more profound and long-term consequences on children and adolescents. Children have spent unforgettable years away from family, friends, classrooms, and play which are in itself precious components of childhood, due to national shutdowns and pandemic-related restrictions. There was a lack of privacy at home and other living standards, which can have a substantial influence on the psychological health of all the members of the family including children and parents. A lower standard of living, such as small flats with confined viewpoints and interior facilities, were linked to the symptoms of depression and poor housing environment put an impact on the mental health during the lockdowns imposed in lieu of the COVID-19 outbreak. In addition to this, the

"Furthermore, the detrimental effects of house confinement on a child's physical and mental health may be exacerbated by psychosocial stress and lifestyle changes, potentially creating a vicious spiral. Children are a crucial group to examine the harmful psychological consequences of COVID-19 isolation because of their vulnerability to trauma, unpleasant events, and environmental dangers."

Young people's behaviours and emotions are critical for appropriately addressing their needs and developing contextually relevant information and preventive activities for children and adolescents that can assist in protecting their mental health during quarantine. Quarantine can have a long-term psychological effect, stressing the importance of developing appropriate mitigation strategies as part of the quarantine strategic planning. As a result, parents and governments have an universal and urgent responsibility to ensure that youngsters are protected from the psychological and physical effects of COVID-19 lockdown.

In comparison to the period before quarantine, more than half of the youngsters are bored, 40% are irritable, and roughly one-third are lonely, restless, apprehensive, disturbed, anxious, and uneasy, according to parents' observations. During home confinement, parents also stated that their children argue much more with the rest of the family. Quarantine has been shown to have negative psychological consequences on adults' mental health, producing despair, stress, rage, and boredom, as well as increasing tensions between homes.

Given that COVID-19 isolated parents may be particularly upset, these observations could indicate a decrease in parental emotional availability to support children, as well as an increase in ineffective parenting methods such as antagonism or inconsistent discipline. As a result, symptomatology in children and teenagers may grow, as well as the likelihood of disputes with family members. These findings appear to support international health groups'

concerns about the impact of COVID-19 quarantine on children's mental health and family connections.

Children all over the globe have regularly changed their habits while confined at home, which could explain why their psychological and behavioural problems have increased. Prior to quarantine, most youngsters spent 1 hour in front of screens (e.g., iPads, TVs, mobile phones, computers). Children use screens for more than 3 hours during home confinement, well beyond the levels suggested by international health organisations. For children under the age of six, the WHO recommends limiting screen time to one hour, and other research has linked screen time to lower psychological well-being in children and adolescents. Furthermore, children's physical activity has decreased, with more than half now exercising for less than 30 minutes. Prior to quarantine, however, youngsters practised for 30 to 60 minutes.

“Moreover, children who are already suffering from any mental health disorder are even more vulnerable. Because each disease is unique, each child has unique demands that must be met. Children with autism have a hard time adapting to changes in their surroundings. When something is changed or shifted from its original position, they become angry and frustrated. They may exhibit an upsurge in behavioural issues and self-harming behaviours. Lockdown makes it difficult for parents to deal with autistic children. Because it is difficult for children to learn through online sessions, the interruption of speech therapy and occupational therapy sessions could have a detrimental influence on their skill development and attainment of the next milestone.”

Pre-lockdown learning for children and adolescents was mostly one-on-one engagement with mentors and peer groups around the world. “Over 91 percent of the world's student population has been significantly impacted by countrywide school and institution closures.” Children and adolescents who are confined to their homes experience uncertainty and anxiety as a result of disruptions in their education, physical activity, and socialisation chances.³

One factor is that during shut downs and confinement techniques, children are more inclined to see or experience violence and abuse. Children living in combat zones, as well as those in congested, unclean places like refugee and IDP camps, are especially vulnerable. The risk of children being exposed to hazardous information and online predators has increased due to their reliance on e-learning.⁴ Home is a source of security and protection for most youngsters.

However, for a small percentage, the opposite is tragically true. The most frequent form of violence faced by children is violence perpetrated by caregivers. Children are frequently witnesses to domestic violence against women, which is estimated to have grown in many

³ Singh S; Roy D; Sinha K; Parveen S; Sharma G; Joshi G; *Impact of covid-19 and Lockdown on Mental Health of Children and Adolescents: A Narrative Review with recommendations Psychiatry research*, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32882598/> (last visited Jan 19, 2023).

⁴ 27 million children out of school in Conflict Zones, UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/27-million-children-out-school-conflict-zones> (last visited Jan 19, 2023).

countries. When families are trapped at home and feeling high levels of stress and anxiety, such acts of violence are more prone to occur.

In high-risk countries, the cumulative impact of school closures and economic turmoil is likely to cause some children to quit school, and the same combination is likely to force kids into child labour, child soldiers, and child marriage.⁵

Children's safety and rights are jeopardised when confinement and mitigating measures are poorly designed or implemented, especially when measures to protect the most sensitive are not implemented as well. Forced shutdown, curfews, and movement restrictions have resulted in the dispersal of slum dwellers, including children, and the closure of refugee camps and residential institutions.

"Surveillance methods used to enforce containment and social distancing, as well as contact tracing, has proven to be effective in reducing the spread of the virus in some nations, but they have occasionally infringed children's private rights. This includes the public disclosure of sick children's personal information or sufficient information to identify them. These techniques run the risk of reversing legal safeguards and rights that will be difficult to reclaim."

On the other hand, the findings revealed a beneficial shift in children's patterns during quarantine, showing an increase in workday sleep. *"Children are sleeping 9.51 hours per night on average (0.40 hours more than before the lockdown), which is in line with WHO and American Academy of Sleep Medicine recommendations (10-13 hours of good quality sleep for kids under 5 years; 9-12 hours for children 5-12 years; 8-10 hours for adolescents). However, if this rise in sleeping time is accompanied by bedtime delays (often linked to the use of screen-based activities) it may be detrimental."*

Situation in India

In India, many families have lost their near and dear ones in the prevailing pandemic which has caused a situation of distress and psychological changes in the behaviour of such families. Mental health specialists must anticipate increasing mental health difficulties as the pandemic progresses. There may be psychological discomfort as a result of the diagnosis, as well as guilt, concerns about family and others, and concerns about recovery. Separating families from patients admitted with COVID-19 symptoms can be brutally traumatic from a psychosocial standpoint, causing fear, powerlessness, and open sadness. There will be times

⁵ What is child labour (IPEC), International Labour Organization, <https://www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/lang--en/index.htm> (last visited Jan 19, 2023).

when people must deal with the sudden death of a family member or prepare for unfavourable consequences.⁶

Children and the adolescents who are the innocent victims of this pandemic are the most affected, be it by losing their loved ones or coping with the stress of their career at the time when all the opportunities are closed in a developing country like India.

Mental Impact from the past viral diseases

“Previous research on severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS), and Ebola epidemics has found that the disease causes considerable mental anguish. Unfortunately, research on children and teenagers during previous epidemics to assess the influence on their mental health were not undertaken adequately, but numerous parallels can be observed. The predicament of COVID-19 outbreak is identical to MERS and SARS, in that similar statements about the seriousness of MERS created public dread, worry, and distress. According to a study of SARS survivors with psychiatric illnesses, nearly 25% of them displayed symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and 15.6 percent had increasing depression.” This finding corresponds to an increase in the number of suicide fatalities among SARS survivors in various countries like Hong-Kong and many more. A worse quality of life was also seen among MERS survivors. Based on earlier outbreaks, a neuropsychiatric connection has been established.

Recommendations

Emotional, psychological, and social well-being are all aspects of mental health. Mental health has an impact on how we think, feel, and act, according to the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).⁷ *It also influences how we respond to stress, how we interact with others, and how we make decisions. Mental health is important at all stages of life, from infancy to youth and maturity. Chronic illnesses can raise the likelihood of mental illness. Striking a sustainable equilibrium between students’ physiological and mental well-being is important.*

Dwelling in a low-income or poor-income family has been related to poor healthcare and an elevated risk of mental health disorders in both children and adults, which can last a lifetime, especially in the prevailing condition of lockdowns imposed due to COVID-19 pandemic. Various mental healthcare institutions should take inputs from the mental health care experts to provide assistance and guidelines to cope-up with the emergency situations of psychological imbalance under the coordination of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India.

⁶ Coronavirus WN. Situation report–22. World Health Organization; 2019. <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200211-sitrep-22-ncov.pdf>.

⁷ What is mental health? What Is Mental Health? , MENTALHEALTH.GOV, <https://www.mentalhealth.gov/basics/what-is-mental-health> (last visited Jan 19, 2023).

Psychological crisis management should be incorporated into the entire pandemic prevention and management strategy, with the goal of minimising possible psychological harm and supporting social cohesion. Psychological crisis treatments for high-risk individuals as well as mental wellbeing awareness for the general public must be designed and implemented. In such instances, help-lines are lifelines. Running such help-lines requires a good control centre with ready answers to frequently asked questions. Treatment services for substance use disorders must be maintained indefinitely, and public outreach initiatives must be established so that the mental health team can provide prompt interventions.

Only a strong educational and medical system can protect and preserve the psychological health of the next generation of adults. To overcome this situation, substantial resources are required. To ease the load on the system for helping adolescents during this pandemic, more school employees, therapists, and mental health counsellors are needed.

Furthermore, children with insufficient information regarding the reasons for the quarantine have been observed to be more anxious. As a result, it is critical to provide kids with further knowledge and understanding about COVID-19 through a variety of mediums, such as the news every night. Children will have a better understanding of not only why quarantine measures were implemented, but also what COVID-19 is. Parents and guardians are urged to talk with their children about what they've learnt, since this may assist to reduce the negative feelings about COVID-19 and isolation. Furthermore, talking with kids about how they're processing information will provide them the emotional tools they need to do well in lockdown.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 outbreak has long-reaching consequences that go far beyond physical health. The pandemic is having a significant impact on children's mental health, social progress, safety, privacy, financial stability, and other factors. Strict confinement appears to have a negative impact on the mental health of children and teens aged 8 to 18. And, at least in the early stages of confinement, it appears that the impact of isolation differs between children and young adults. *"Youngsters with and without underlying medical or mental health disorders are affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, and they have feelings and emotions similar to adults."* This highlights the importance of striking a careful balance between harsh confinement and efforts to prevent the spread of dangerous diseases. It is important that parents, educators, and health officials continually preserve and guard their children's mental health through open conversation and the facilitation of competent counselling to manage stressors. Children who are more vulnerable to mental health crises should be provided special attention through a multidisciplinary approach involving their parents, educators, school officials, counsellors, therapists, psychologists, and psychiatrists.