

## Mental Health Distress of children in Covid 19 Pandemic

Visanth V S<sup>1</sup>, Kuruvateppa Halemani<sup>2</sup>

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### Abstract

Children have many worries related to the consequences of COVID-19 such as whether they will see their friends and relatives, go to school or get sick. It is often difficult for parents to calm their children's anxieties because of the uncertainty in their lives. They are encountered with various emotional & Mental health problems. Evidences from various research studies indicated various mental health problems among children. Further research are needed to assess the overall effect of covid 19 Pandemic in children.

**Keywords:** Mental Health Distress; Children.

### Introduction

The index case of COVID 19 in Indian subcontinent was reported in the month of January 2020 among student returnees from Wuhan, China to Kerala. Indian Health care system became alarmed, triggering infection control practices against potential COVID 19 exposure. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare of India had created awareness about covid 19 & its transmission among general Public. The central government in coordination with state had taken several measures and formulated various standard operating protocols to achieve this goal. Indian government had implemented a 55-days lockdown throughout the country which began on March 25th, 2020 till the end of May, to reduce the transmission of the virus.<sup>1</sup> This pandemic has affected lives of both elderly and children. Children were unable to go to school or play or interact freely which had created

violence or abuse. Stress, fear and anxiety were the main mental health problems among children.

### Emotional Needs of children in pandemic

Children were the most vulnerable group who have faced more challenges and care & attention are much needed for them. Some of the children don't have support system and social references which created tension & stress. This resulted in a sense of insecurity and even serious mental health issues if not addressed in timely manner.<sup>2</sup>

### Risk of Violence, Abuse and Exploitation of children

Stress in family due to social isolation, economic hardship and loss of employment had increased risks of domestic violence and child abuse, including beating children, or using harsh language. Closures of schools and restrictions of travel have created various psychological disturbances among children. Children were forced to spend time at home with adults, caregivers and elderly who already stressed. Sexual abuse of children or adolescent also increased in this pandemic. Children were also

**Author Affiliation:** <sup>1</sup>Senior Nursing Officer, Department of Nursing, All India Institute of Medical Sciences Patna, Phulwari Sharif, Bihar 801507, India. <sup>2</sup>Teching Staff, Department of Nursing, Sanjay Gandhi Postgraduate Institute of Medical Sciences, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh 226014, India.

**Corresponding Author:** Visanth V S, Senior Nursing Officer, Department of Nursing, All India Institute of Medical Sciences Patna, Phulwari Sharif, Bihar 801507, India.

**E-mail:** [aiimspatna.leave@gmail.com](mailto:aiimspatna.leave@gmail.com)

exposed to online sexual abuse and grooming for sexual exploitation, cyberbullying and other online threats.<sup>3</sup>

### Recognizing signs and Symptoms of Psychological distress in children

Children may exhibit various signs and symptoms of mental health problems in covid 19 pandemic. Some of the following signs exhibited by children are as follows:

- Difficulties in sleeping and eating
- Nightmares
- Being withdrawn or aggressive
- Complaint of pain in stomach or headache without physical reason
- Having fears, being afraid to be left alone
- Clinging, depending behaviours
- New fears manifest (for instance of the dark)
- Decreased interest in playing and engaging in playful activities
- Being sad, crying more than usual or for no apparent reason

Research Findings related to Psychological wellbeing of children in covid 19 Pandemic

In a systematic review, Loades and colleagues assessed the impact of social isolation and loneliness on mental health among children and adolescents. The review included 63 studies with a total of 51,576 participants. Social isolation and loneliness heightened the risk of depression up to 9 years later. The findings from this literature review on loneliness and social isolation have potential implications for COVID-19 pandemic. The researchers also suggested that loneliness for youth during the disease containment measures for COVID-19 may affect the future mental health

of youth. They recommended preventive support and early intervention to address the mental health needs of children and adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>4</sup>

In another online survey among 8079 junior and senior high school students about depressive and anxiety symptoms during the COVID-19 epidemic period. Depressive and anxiety symptoms were higher in females, and with increasing grade level from junior to senior high.<sup>5</sup>

### Conclusion

Finally the research demonstrates that COVID-19 is affecting the mental health problems such as depression & anxiety are prevalent among children and adolescents. Further research is needed to assess the overall effect of COVID-19 on children & Adolescents.

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