

Impact of Pandemic on Children's Mental Health

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly distressed the existence and health of people all over the world with lots of confirmed cases and hundreds of deaths. Other than physical consequences, the mental illness repercussion of COVID-19 pandemic have accumulated the interest of mental health researchers all over the world (Arslan et al., 2020; Tanhan et al., 2020). Pandemics are well known to trigger/spawn mental health issues, regardless of their nature and type.¹

Not only the employed persons but children's mental health is also affected due to COVID-19. Due to the closure of schools, children extracurricular & outdoor activities has been cut off, that leads mild-severe impact on child mental health like changes in behavior, Changes in sleeping & eating pattern, irritation, anxiety and many more symptoms can easily be seen.

Keywords: COVID-19; Mental Health; Children.

Introduction

Corona is an infectious disease that is caused by corona virus (COVID-19). People who were infected with COVID-19 displayed mild to severerespiratory symptoms and retrieve without the need of any particular treatment. Old age persons and people who were having illnesses are more likely to develop serious complications.² A pandemic is not just a medical situation; it influences individuals and society and causes disruption, anxiety, stress, stigma, and xenophobia.³

In a report WHO estimates that in India number of persons who are suffering from a mental disorders is about 7.5 percent and it will be increased till 20 percent by end of 2020. Furthermore report

state that the number of persons suffering from depression and anxiety disorders in India were 56 million and 38 million respectively.⁴ The primitive phase of COVID-19 and the lockdown were difficult for everyone, in many ways. Quarantine, unemployment, childcare, and many more difficulties grievously affected the mental health of a large population around the world.⁵

A news report published in Hindustan times says that India lost almost USD 400 billion due to unanticipated termination of the schools, as a report of UNICEF estimates that above 15 lakh schools were shut down in India due to pandemic, which lead to one of the reason for country's huge economic loss.⁶

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COVID 19 and Impact on children's mental health

The COVID-19 pandemic led a wide range of complicated challenges which had mental health reverberation (repercussions) for all living being. More than 330 million young persons have been dwell at home, till March 2021, for at least nine months, since the virus spread uncontrollably this time last year. Grief, fear, uncertainty, social isolation, increased screen time, and parental fatigue have negative impact on child's mental health. Defective mental health during childhood can grievously impact the way children learn, behave, or handle their emotions. Friendships and family support are strong stabilizing forces for children, but the COVID-19 pandemic has also disrupted them. It is not unusual for children to experience negative emotions such as fear, disappointment, sadness, anxiety, anger, loss etc.⁷

In March, 2020, schools all over India were closed to limit the transmission of COVID-19. Children have been at home for prolonged time than ever before in recent memory. Closure of schools, absence of extracurricular and outdoor activities, changes in eating and sleeping patterns, lack of peer-time have raised monotony, distress, irritation, and various neuro-psychiatric symptoms. Although home should be the safest place for a child, sexual, psychological and physical abuse have shown a significant rise.⁸

Research conducted by Selim Benjamin Guessoum et.al 2020 suggests that students have committed suicide in many states because of not having smartphones, proper internet connections, pressure of online classes etc. The experience of pandemic has further escalate the mental health problems among students which include anxiety, depression, suicide, conflicts, dropouts, and behavioral problems. Although the government mandates all schools to have counsellors, but the policy has not been implemented strongly. Critiques therefore argue that India must hire 1.5 million professional counsellors at the earliest to maintain the globally acceptable level of student-to-counselor ratio in schools.⁹

Study done by Liu JJ, Bao Y et. al. Suggests kids can experience anxiety, distress, social isolation, and an abusive environment that can have short or long term effects on their mental health. They mention some common changes that have been seen in children's behaviour like.¹⁰

- Excessive crying and annoying behavior
- Increased sadness, depression, or worry

- Difficulties with concentration and attention.
- Changes in, or avoiding, activities that they enjoyed in the past.
- Unexpected headaches and pain throughout their bodies.
- Changes in eating habits.

Some ways to help counterbalance negative behaviours, requires parents to remain calm, deal with the situation wisely, and use their best abilities to clear the doubts of the child. Parents can take some time to talk to their children about the COVID 19 outbreak and share some positive facts, figures, and information. Parents can help to reassure them that they are safe at home and motivate them to involve themselves in some healthy activities including indoor sports and some physical and mental exercises. Parents can also develop a home schedule that can help their children to keep up with their studies. Parents should show less stress or anxiety at their home as children perceive and feel negative energy from their parents. The involvement of parents in healthy activities with their children can help to reduce stress and anxiety and bring relief to the overall situation.¹¹

Conclusion

Covid-19 pandemic has affected everyone in one and different ways, people suffer from various physical problems which ultimately lead to impact their mental health also, not leaving children's also whether closure of schools, stuck in home, increased screen timing, increase load of work and many more things has happened with the child which affected their mental health. According to studies conducted on the issue it was clear that child is suffering from fear, stress, anxiety & other mental health related issues due to pandemic. Researches not only assessed the condition of the child but also suggested the ways to overcome it like to make schedule for the child, share positive thoughts with them and a lot more suggestions researchers have given to have control over the situation. During childhood, good mental health is very important as physical health for achieving developmental milestones. It helps the child with their emotional wellbeing and social skills.

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