

IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH OF SCHOOL GOING CHILDREN IN U.T. CHANDIGARH

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ABSTRACT

Concepts of what constitutes a happy childhood have been upended by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has been both a health and a social crisis for children. The pandemic's long-term impacts on children, their families, and communities are yet unknown. The objective of this paper was to examine the multifaceted impact of lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic on the health and welfare of children. The study not just tried to understand the negative aspect of lockdown but also looked into the positive aspect that these children felt while they got a lot of time to spend with their family members.

Keywords: COVID-19, Lockdown, Positive Impact, Negative Impact

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the world's most valuable resource are children. They welcome enthusiasm, vigor, and inquiry. They learn a lot throughout the course and are always exploring their surroundings. A child's ability to explore and discover new things is vital to their growth. A child's growth is greatly influenced by their family, school, neighborhood, and classmates. A healthy environment must be provided by parents and society for children to grow and develop more effectively. As everyone was forced to stay indoors due to the COVID-19 lockdown it significantly affected children's learning, general wellbeing, and mental and physical health. The COVID-19 pandemic has been a health and social crisis for children, upending notions of what makes for a happy childhood. The pandemic's long-term impacts on children, their families, and communities are yet unknown. Examining the complex effects of lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic on children's physical and mental health as well as the difficulties they faced during the lockdown was the aim of this study.

According to the World Health Organization (1948) Generally speaking, the phrase "health" refers to the lack of illness or other health risks. Good health is actually the body's total well-being, not only the absence of disease. "Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". Additionally, there are two main categories of health: Mental and Physical explained below.

Physical health can be defined as the body's maximum functioning potential free from stress or hardship. It is achievable with consistent practice, appropriate consumption of a well-balanced diet, and rest in accordance with the body's needs. The likelihood of injuries and the majority of physical issues, such as heart attacks and respiratory disorders, are decreased when one is physically well.

Psychology-based variables, social engagement, and emotions are all linked to mental health. According to Nordqvist (2017), mental health is just as important as physical health since it aids in overcoming psychological challenges like stress, anxiety, depression, and hypertension.

According to Park (2007) A person's ability to build harmonious relationships with others and adapt to changes in their social environment is a measure of their mental health. This means that people should adapt to the world and to one another as effectively and happily as possible.

¹On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization proclaimed Covid-19 to be a pandemic. ²On March 24, 2020, the Indian government declared a nationwide lockdown. Covid-19 completely stopped everything. The economy and GDP both were severely impacted. Shopping centers, schools, colleges, offices, etc., were closed for a while during the lockdown, when everyone was confined to their homes. The social groups most immediately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, including the elderly and healthcare professionals, have been the focus of most societal worries. The implications on other collectives, such as children, have, however, received less attention. The various policy restrictions during the pandemic, withdrawing from in-person schooling, limiting peer-to-peer interactions and mobility, and increasing exposure to the digital world among other things, are likely to have had a significant impact on children's physical and mental health, learning, and overall wellbeing. Concepts of what constitutes a happy childhood have been upended by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has been both a health and a social crisis for children. As for children, their families, and communities, the long-term effects of the pandemic are yet unknown. Examining the various effects of lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic on children's health and welfare was the aim of this paper. The United Nations issued a warning shortly after the pandemic broke out, stating that "the harmful effects of this pandemic will not be distributed equally." Children in the poorest nations and neighborhoods are predicted to suffer the most from them (United Nations, 2020). It is difficult to fully understand the spread, development, and potential impacts on children of the health catastrophe brought on by the pandemic and lockdown. Understanding the intricate social variables that can affect children's health and welfare in this ongoing crisis, as well as how these may change by social group, is a significant problem. The objective of this study was to examine the intricate impacts of lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic on the physical and mental health of children, as well as the challenges they encountered throughout the lockdown.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Early on in the pandemic, the official line was that COVID-19 did not discriminate between populations, suggesting that the disease was socially neutral and that its effects were felt equally by all members of society (Milne, 2020). However, According to Barouki et al. (2021), Benach et al. (2019), and Laster Pirtle (2020), the effects of pandemics, pollution, and climate change are frequently unevenly distributed, with the most vulnerable groups in society, that is, those with the lowest social positions as a result of structural determinants and unfair and avoidable social hierarchies, often suffering the most. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought children's vulnerability and marginalization in multiple dimensions back into the public eye. The ramifications have been extensive and profound. The closure of numerous schools was one of the strategies utilized to enforce social distance and stop the virus's spread. As mentioned, this pandemic significantly disrupted schooling (Sibieta, 2021). According to Rajmil et al. (2021) Despite evidence that COVID-19 has little direct effect on children's health, school closure procedures are implemented. ³For an unusually extended amount of time—from several months to years—nearly all educational institutions were physically closed. Extended periods of absence from school have been linked to poorer academic performance, an increase in physical and mental health problems, and even mental health crises in children across all regions.

¹ "WHO declared Covid-19 as a pandemic". Available at: <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19/news/news/2020/3/who-announces-covid-19-outbreak-a-pandemic>

² "Government of India on March 24, 2020 announced a nationwide lockdown". Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19_pandemic_lockdown_in_India.

³ Schools still closed for nearly 77 million students 18 months into pandemic. Retrieved on 22 February 2022 from: <https://www.unicef.org/chad/press-releases/schools-still-closed-nearly-77-million-students-18-months-pandemic-unicef>

2.1. OBJECTIVES

- 1) To examine the intricate impacts of lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic on the physical and mental health of children.
- 2) To study and explore the challenges faced by children throughout the lockdown.

3. LOCALE OF THE STUDY

In view of the objectives mentioned above, the proposed study, has been conducted in two government schools of Union Territory of Chandigarh.

3.1. SAMPLING AND TECHNIQUES FOR DATA COLLECTION

In Union Territory of Chandigarh, children studying currently in class 12th were included in the current study. Sixty respondents provided data for the collection. In order to investigate the issues faced by children, both male and female, thirty male students and thirty female students were selected for each category. This gave the researcher a thorough understanding of the impacts of lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic on the physical and mental health children and also helps to explore the challenges faced by children throughout the lockdown. The data was gathered using purposive sampling, quota sampling methods. Interviews with schoolchildren who left the building after school were conducted to discover more about their experiences and issues during the lockdown. Interview schedule was used as the method of data collection.

3.2. PROBLEMS FACED BY THE RESPONDENTS

The respondents were directly interviewed using an interview guide and were asked about their experiences and problems they faced during the lockdown. Both male students and female students were asked few questions on what problems they faced during the time of lockdown? What challenges they faced? The respondents were also asked about anything new they felt at that time or they discovered something new in their life which was missing earlier. Table 1 shows some problems that the respondents faced. The study not just tried to understand the negative aspect of lockdown but also looked into the positive aspect that these children felt while they got lot of time to spend with their family members. The students were also asked to share their experiences openly without restricting them to the interview schedule.

Table 1 Showing problems faced by the respondents during lockdown

Problems faced	Male students	Female students	Total
Felt Depressed	12(40)	21(70)	33(55)
Felt Lonely	14(46.7)	23(76.7)	37(61.7)
More pressure of studies	9(30)	20(66.7)	29(48.3)
Fear of exams	6(20)	20(66.7)	26(43.3)
No fear of exams	24(80)	10(33.3)	34(56.7)
Boredom	21(70)	23(76.7)	44(73.3)
Addiction to social media	24(80)	27(90)	51(85)
Addiction to pornography	18(60)	14(46.7)	32(53.3)
Change in food habits	15(50)	24(80)	39(65)
Became Health conscious	18(60)	26(86.7)	44(73.3)
Got to know about health immunity	23(76.7)	25(83.3)	48(80)
Changes in daily schedule	30(100)	30(100)	60(100)

Spent a lot of quality time with family members	23(76.7)	25(83.3)	48(80)
Significance of family was felt	25(83.3)	28(93.3)	53(88.3)
Death of loved ones	10(33.3)	11(36.7)	21(35)
Lack of concentration	24(80)	23(76.7)	47(78.3)
Felt like imprisoned	12(40)	14(46.7)	26(43.3)
Total	30(100)	30(100)	60(100)

Figures in parentheses column wise indicate percentages

***The respondents have given multiple answers. Total percentage was calculated from the total number of both male and female respondents separately (i.e., 30 each).**

From Table 1 it could be summarized that 40 percent of male respondents and 70 percent of female respondents felt depressed during the lockdown. While, 46.7 percent of male respondents and 76.7 percent of female respondents felt lonely. Female respondents felt more pressure of studies and fear of exams (66.7 percent) while there were only 30 percent of male respondents felt pressure of studies and only 20 percent felt fear of exams. There were a greater number of respondents who felt bored during the lockdown i.e., 70 percent of male respondents and 76.7 percent of female respondents. During the lockdown there were a majority people who got addicted to social media. There were 80 percent of male respondents and 90 percent of female respondents who felt bored and had nothing much to do during the lockdown and got addicted to social media. It was found that 60 percent of male respondents and 46.7 percent of female respondents got addicted to pornography during the lockdown period. 50 percent of male respondents and 80 percent of female respondents changed their food habits. There were 60 percent of male respondents and 86.7 percent of female respondents started eating healthy and nutritious food as they found that health is the most important thing in life. All the respondents i.e., both 100 percent of male and female respondents faced changes in their daily schedule. 76.7 percent of male respondents and 83.3 percent of female respondents spent a lot of quality time with family members. It was found that 83.3 percent of male respondents and 93.3 percent of female respondents felt the significance of family, earlier they use to take their family members for granted. It was found that 33.3 percent of male respondents and 36.7 percent of female respondents mentioned about death of their loved ones. In the present study it was found that 80 percent of male respondents and 76.7 percent of female respondents lacked concentration. There were 40 percent of male respondents and 46.7 percent of female respondents who felt like imprisoned.

Based on the responses, this study tried to analyze what could have been the circumstances when these children were locked inside their households at that stage of their life where they want to be free. Students admitted that they did not prepare as much for their final exams as they had done before the pandemic. Indirect student-teacher interaction is possible in online classes via Zoom or other programs; however, all students are muted for prolonged periods of time in order to give the teacher the opportunity to be heard clearly. Many students took advantage of typical internet connection issues and seldom ever switch on their webcams, demonstrating how much less engaged they are with online lectures than with in-person ones. Online courses are therefore rarely interactive. Smartphones and laptops are essential for online learning, but many respondents could not afford them. Surprisingly, education has been neglected for nearly two years. It was clear that after more than two years of not receiving a formal and direct education, some primary and college students displayed a remarkable reluctance to sit for and take exams at school. The longer students continue without fully comprehending their course material, the more they will suffer later in life due to the prolonged learning gap.

The study identified various positive and negative impacts that these children felt because of lockdown during COVID-19 pandemic that are mentioned below.

3.3. POSITIVE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

Due to the enormous loss of employment, lives, and the nation's economy, there are no notable benefits. However, as narrated by the respondents there are certain benefits when it comes to the children as under:

It was found that children were pleased about the school holidays because they could spend more time playing and using screens, as well as learning and pursuing other hobbies.

Since everyone worked from home. Because there is plenty of time, children could spend time with their parents, grandparents, and other family members (if possible, as per government standards).

Because of online classes, travel time gets saved. Additionally, it allowed more time for sleep because there was no need to get ready for school; one just needs to wake up and attend the class.

The study found because students could turn off their screens and microphones, it was simple to fall asleep in between classes and avoid having to listen to the entire lecture, something that was never possible in offline classroom settings.

3.4. NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

Some of the main drawbacks that children felt are as under:

Students' health especially eyesight was impacted by online classes because they spend so much time in front of a blue screen. Small children of primary grades are not able to sit in front of a blue screen for extended periods of time.

Because there was no invigilator to check them there was in an offline exam setting, they also used to cheat in the test.

Students felt bored, lonely, addicted to social media, and started feeling to lack concentrated in doing anything especially while studying.

Many underprivileged children lack access to laptops and computers, leaving them vulnerable because they did not receive a basic education and fall behind. This kind of unequal education shouldn't exist.

4. CONCLUSION

After lasting more than two years without receiving a formal and direct education, it was clear that a number of primary and college students had a noticeable hesitancy to sit for and take tests at school. The longer students continue to struggle to fully comprehend their course material, the more they suffer in later life as a result of the prolonged learning gap. To be ready for a situation like this in the future, the government should make informed decisions regarding education and set clear norms as soon as possible. By doing this, the circumstances that arose during the COVID-19 pandemic will be avoided.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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