

The Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on children

"The growing buds, despite the storm."

“Since the earliest period of our life was preverbal, everything depended on emotional interaction. Without someone to reflect our emotions, we had no way of knowing who we were.”

— John Bradshaw, *Healing the Shame that Binds You*

The ramifications of the Covid-19 on children have not escaped our attention. We have rightfully acknowledged the wide range of hindrances that have propped up for children and how it may continue to showcase its effects on their lives diversely. The researches have shown that children have been affected by anxiety, sleep disorders, loneliness, digital toxicity, and even abuse. (Gupta & Jawanda 2020). It has undoubtedly influenced their mental, physical, social, and emotional health while seriously challenging their developmental stages. It's not the negative effects per se that are deleterious, but this particular age that makes it so. Children have not yet developed the necessary coping skills to outdo these ramifications. This is why it becomes all the more crucial to focus on the troublesome issues and develop ways for them to ease into the situation.

Amongst these challenges, something that eclipsed our attention is the impact of the pandemic on children's subjective mindset like beliefs, perceptions, thoughts, expectations, etc., and their brain development. It's perceived that the brain waves oscillates between theta to alpha from birth up to seven years. That is almost a meditative state where we easily grasp things that get stored deep within. The things that we observe, listen to, experience, and feel become the seed for our beliefs, behavior, thoughts, and actions, which govern our adult life as well. When we introspect, we realize that our strongest beliefs, insecurities, habits, etc., were formed as kids. This is why it's imperative to realize that our mindsets affect our well-being. This idea gains significance as we notice the children whose childhoods are being shaped by the events of uncertainty, anxiety, negativity, and restlessness.

I imagine a child who is growing up in a time when they have seen people locked up in their homes, when they have grown in an environment of fear and constant negativity, where the only form of human contact was staring at inanimate screens. They are growing up believing that there is no surety to anything, they have to fight for their resources, that online mediums and technologies can very well replace and even overtake social needs, and there is no need to compete for self-growth. The tainted perspectives that the world is an unhealthy place and you can never be safe enough are just a few harmful ideas that have been instilled in these young minds. It is quite possible that it will continue to drive their behavior for a long period. It has

been all the more harmful for children belonging to disrupted families. They have witnessed unhealthy and extreme forms of relationships, marriage, and parenting like verbal and physical abuse, taunting, stonewalling, neglect, etc. These might not seem a huge problem right now but will later form their ideal ideas of how relationships work, based on which they might lead their relations. For children with working parents, they have grasped the idea that they are not cared for, they are lonely, work is exhausting and makes you tired, you cannot enjoy your work along with your life. These ideas, too, are unhealthy and make the child think distortedly about themselves, their families, and the concept of work. It significantly impacts their well-being for the time being and their later lives. It hinders and alters the child's emotional development, self-concept, coping mechanism, etc., which is something that is honed during childhood.

Another major issue for which we will continue to feel its effects has been in terms of educational and intellectual development. Since children possess a great potential to grasp things easily, education during these growing years matters greatly. Due to the pandemic, children have lost out on quality education. I think it's safe to say that online medium has not specifically been too helpful or easy for children. It requires immense motivation, attention, and resources to carry out the lessons successfully. And a lack of any of these might create difficulties for the child to understand the concepts. This has been one of the major losses, that is, having to lag behind in your course, which will ultimately result in the child not scoring good enough grades. Secondly, there has been a decrease in attention span, curiosity, motivation to do well, maintain a healthy competition with your peers, and the ability to solve problems. The lack of stimulation does not help in cognitive development and thereby further decreases the ability to intake information and elicit effective outcomes. Schools also ensure discipline, routine, and the formation of healthy habits. The time is appropriately divided for playing, studying, eating, socializing, and extracurriculars. The children are bound to these routines, which instill good habits. In the lack of such an environment and guided directions, the children were left to do things independently, which severely disrupted their routines. This led to disrupted sleep and eating patterns, not enough focus on studies, not enough physical play, sedentary lifestyles, and not to mention the intense strain on their eyes. Within this as well, the most disadvantaged group has been children from low-socioeconomic status. Not having the resources to continue education, eat healthy meals, and have a safe place to reside have immensely affected the child's overall development. They were also more susceptible to child trafficking, child marriage, sexual exploitation, etc. (Ghosh, et al., 2020)

Another crucial aspect of children's life that has been affected by the pandemic is their social development. Psychologists like Erick Erikson and Urie Bronfenbrenner have strongly emphasized the role of social factors in one's development. It's through socializing that we learn concepts and practices like sharing, perspective taking, helping, communication, empathy, trust and friendship. We learn how to channelize our energy through constructive ways by engaging socially with others. When I remember my childhood days, the fondest memories are playing with my friends. And I can only imagine the repercussion of growing up in times when even going out was not possible, let alone playing with your friends. Not only do children learn how to play different sports and stay active, but they also learn how to play with others (teamwork), how to maintain friendships, how to manage and cope with defeat. In a way, it contributes strongly to framing their personalities, emotions, and perspectives. Children learn various social etiquettes, verbal and non-verbal communication, interactional patterns, and time management. The children affected by the pandemic have missed these opportunities, which might reflect on their personalities in the years to come. They have been confined in spaces with little healthy means of outlet to their energies. This must have led to feelings of frustration, anger, boredom, restlessness, and even stagnancy. It's not only disruptive to social-emotional learning but also to cognitive development. After all, play is considered a tool for enhancing creativity, flexibility, multi-perspective stance, and intelligence. Deprivation of these opportunities becomes a host of problems for children.

But like every coin has two sides, this situation too has positive sides, and it would be unfair not to bring them to light.

The pandemic was a unique opportunity for children to spend some quality time with their parents, who are otherwise always rushing for their work. They even got to observe them in various roles like that of a husband/wife, sibling, chef, artist, etc. It was also a time for parents to bond with their children and pass some lessons and learnings onto them. Since social support is necessary for overcoming difficult times, these relationships have been effective for children to deal with uncertainties and negativity by connecting deeply to their families. They learned various coping styles to overcome such problems.

It was also an opportunity to diversify their skills in terms of taking care of household responsibilities and chores. By engaging with it, they got to earn experiences that are different from school responsibilities. Moreover, through these times, it would have been beneficial for children to learn about empathy, community, service, etc. These are the skills that they are

developing from an early stage, and it will strongly add to their personalities as an individual and a citizen. In a way, these have been valuable life experiences, which have made them only stronger. They have learned how to deal with uncertainty, have framed flexible outlook, are aware of various means to extend their help towards others, and most importantly, they have understood the importance of taking care of one's physical and mental health, something that even we as adults tend to ignore at times.

It is true that children faced enormous difficulties because of the pandemic which has affected various areas of their lives, but it is also true that years later, we will realize that this was the generation that stood through everything, faced each difficulty with courage and only came out stronger, braver and more resilient.

Reference

Gupta, S., & Jawanda, M. K. (2020). The impacts of COVID-19 on children. *Acta Paediatr*, 109(11), 2181-2183.

Ghosh, R., Dubey, M. J., Chatterjee, S., & Dubey, S. (2020). Impact of COVID-19 on children: special focus on the psychosocial aspect. *Minerva Pediatrica*, 72(3), 226-235.

Happiness in COVID times. (n.d.). Welcome to Ambedkar University Delhi. <https://aud.ac.in/happiness-in-covid-times>

The impact of COVID-19 on children's mental health. (n.d.).

UNICEF. <https://www.unicef.org/india/impact-covid-19-childrens-mental-health>

Writer's name- Arushi Srivastava

College name- Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai

Registration number- m2020apccp026

Course name and year- M.A. Applied Psychology (With Specialisation in Clinical and Counselling Practice), 2020-2022

Department name- School of Human Ecology

HOD name- Dr. Sujata Sriram

Contact- tissche@gmail.com/sujatas@tiss.edu