

Children's Reactions to Lockdown: Need of Nurturing Resilience in Children Exposed to COVID-19 Pandemic: A Review

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Abstract

Covid-19 pandemic crisis has created chaos all over the world as isolation, contact restrictions and economic shutdown imposed a complete change to the psychosocial environment in affected countries. Many countries have put lockdown measures to contain the risks associated with the virus. The lockdown due to pandemic has confined the children to their rooms making them vulnerable to develop certain mental health issues because of their particular social and physiological development. This article presents about the various scenarios' children are getting affected and it mentions recommendation for the parents about how to manage the behavioral and emotional issues among the children by nurturing their resilience. Social Workers have essential frontline role while dealing with children and families during the times of COVID-19 crisis by helping them to adapt the conditions and practices that has largely been successful. Social workers have been supporting parents and family members about the child management and how to engage them in response to any adversity at preparedness or during outbreak periods. However, the involvement of parents and family members may depend on a number of factors including the feasibility, acceptability, safety and cost of measures. Children in particular are vulnerable during infectious disease outbreaks for a variety of reasons like health impacts and social and economic disruptions caused by outbreaks which may affect the normal wellbeing of children. These recommendation for nurturing resilience among children provides an opportunity for the parents and adult family members to interact constructively with their children during this time of confinement. This paper has greater implication for the social work practice during the Covid-19 pandemic and educating the families and parents about these concepts which may prove beneficial for children.

Keywords:

COVID-19;
Children;
Resilience;
Isolation;
Vulnerability;
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1. Introduction

In early December 2019, a cluster of pneumonia cases emerged in Wuhan, Hubei province, China with most of the case reported exposure to Seafood market selling live many species of animals including exotic species. China saw rapid spread of this disease in different parts of the country and globally it spread to other countries of the world. The first case of Coronavirus (COVID 19) was reported in China on January 21, 2020. Emergence of 2019-nCoV has attracted global attention, and the WHO (World Health Organization) has declared the COVID-19 a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC). Furthermore, the disease traveled to other countries of the world forcing nations to impose lockdown to contain the spread of this infection. As of May 25, 2020, a total of 5,304,772 confirmed cases including 342,029 death globally were documented by WHO, in 188 countries [1].

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Researchers and scientists have found the pathogen of COVID 19 as a novel beta-coronavirus and named it as Novel Coronavirus (nCoV-2019). This outbreak reminded of SARS-2003 outbreak (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) that occurred 17 years ago. With the increasing number of COVID 19 positive cases several countries like China, Italy, Spain, and Australia took strict measures like nationwide lockdown by the first week of March 2020 to contain the risks of community spread which was later followed by other countries of the world including India from where lockdown was imposed by government on March 22, 2020. In this rapidly changing situation due to lockdown, schools are closed, restrictions were put on outdoor activities and children remained confined to their rooms. Media and social conversations are entirely dominated by the outbreak, and children are exposed to large amounts of information and high levels of stress and anxiety in the adults around them. Simultaneously, children are experiencing substantial changes to their daily routine and social infrastructure, which ordinarily foster resilience to challenging events [2]

Children during the lockdown may display increased negative emotions and behaviors as a result of certain events like school closure, abuse/neglect, isolation, no outdoor play, boredom, family poverty due to lockdown or psychiatric illnesses. COVID-19 pandemic is not the first virus to threaten humanity, and it will not be the last. There is a need to utilize effective strategies to strengthen families to respond, care, and protect a future for the world's children. It is important for the parents to engage with children and address their concerns and nurture the resilience among them. This paper highlights the emotional and behavioral issues of the children the COVID19 pandemic may cause and the nurturing the resilience of the children due to coronavirus and lockdown.

2. Psychosocial issues pertaining to children due to COVID 19

There is mass fear of COVID-19, commonly termed as “coronaphobia”, has generated a plethora of psychiatric manifestations across the different strata of the society. Due to lockdown measures, apart from physical sufferings, the consequences of the self-isolation or quarantine on the mental health and well-being at personal and population-levels are many folds. Children have been familiar icons of the adversity are confined to the home, their normal routines disrupted and feel boredom due to the separation from outdoor activities, interactions with their peers and friends. Imposed mass quarantine applied by nationwide lockdown programs can produce mass hysteria and children may experience emotional problems like anxiety, worry, stress etc. and exhibit certain behavioral issues. Some of scenarios are broadly discussed which are associated with emotional and behavioral problems among children during COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

2.1 Impact due to school closure

Schools play a key part in children's development, from peer relationships and social interactions to academic attainment and cognitive progress, emotional control and behavioral expectations, and physical and moral development. Schools have long served as a de facto mental health system for many children and adolescents and routines at school act as important coping mechanisms for young people with mental health issues [3], [4]. Due to outbreak of COVID 188 countries have imposed countrywide school closures, affecting more than 1.5 billion children and youth, impacting 87.6% of the world's total enrolled learners [5]. School closure lock children inside their houses and many children may become very aggressive, short tempted and manifest significant behavior disturbances which parents could find very difficult to manage. Drop-out rates across the globe are likely to rise as a result of this massive disruption to education access. The ‘pile-on effect’ of the coronavirus is that, during the global COVID-19 pandemic, interruptions to education can have long term implications especially for the most vulnerable. Children with disabilities and special needs are especially hard to serve through distance programmes. Then children may no longer have that sense of structure and stimulation that is provided by that environment, and now they have less opportunity to be with their friends and get that social support that is essential for good mental well-being [6]

2.2 Mental health issues

The outbreak of COVID 19 has put children confined to their house and many were kept in quarantine. These children are likely to be experiencing worry, anxiety and fear, and this can include the types of fears that are very similar to those experienced by adults, such as a fear of dying, a fear of their relatives dying, or a fear of what it means to receive medical treatment [6]. The COVID-19 pandemic may worsen existing mental health problems and lead to more cases among children and adolescents because of the unique combination of the public health crisis, social isolation, and economic [7]. Children may find that they want to be closer to their parents, make more demands on them, and, in turn, some parents or caregivers may be under undue pressure themselves [6]. For children who are quarantined at home with their parents or relatives, the stress caused by such a sharp change in their environment might be eased to some degree [8]. The children after witnessing the traumatic events going around them due to the pandemic crises may develop intrusive, avoidance and arousal

manifestations, social withdrawal, constriction of play, poor social skills, irrational thoughts, flashbacks, nightmares, sleep disturbances etc. are common among the children.

2.3 Exploitation/abuse/neglect

The global economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 crisis, including massive global job losses, is likely to increase rates of child labor and child marriage. In its report by Human Rights Watch (COVID-19's Devastating Impact on Children) Globally, an estimated 152 million children were already engaged in child labor before the COVID-19 pandemic, with 73 million engaged in hazardous work. Children are spending more time online due to school shutdowns, and may be anxious or lonely because of isolation and confinement, making them more vulnerable to online predators. Based on these data, for the COVID-19 pandemic, a worldwide increase in the risks for children and adolescents is a plausible assumption.

Added family stresses related to the COVID-19 crisis – including job loss, isolation, excessive confinement, and anxieties over health and finances – heighten the risk of violence in the home, including both between partners and by caregivers against children. The United Nations secretary-general has reported a “horrible” global surge in domestic-based violence linked to COVID-19, and calls to helplines in some countries have reportedly doubled. Increased rates of child abuse, neglect, and exploitation have also been reported during previous public health emergencies, such as the Ebola outbreak in west Africa from 2014 to 2016 [4]. Abuse, exploitation and neglect of children can be anticipated during the current pandemic crisis or aftermath which can pose greater physical and mental health problems among them.

2.4 Isolation due to lockdown

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and the lockdown measures that many countries have implemented have caused disruptions to daily routines. In recent pandemics, isolation and quarantine (more extreme forms of social distancing) have precipitated depression and anxiety [9], [10]. During the outbreak of COVID-19, the reduction of outdoor activities and social interaction have been associated with an increase in children's depressive and anxiety symptoms [11]. Perhaps a more important but easily neglected issue is the psychological impact on children and adolescents. Stressors such as prolonged duration, fears of infection, frustration and boredom, inadequate information, lack of in-person contact with classmates, friends, and teachers, lack of personal space at home, and family financial loss can have even more problematic and enduring effects on children and adolescents [12]. Furthermore, the interaction between lifestyle changes and psychosocial stress caused by home confinement could further aggravate the detrimental effects on child physical and mental health, which could cause a vicious circle. Research suggests that when children are out of school (e.g. weekends and summer holidays), they are physically less active, have much longer screen time, irregular sleep patterns, and less favorable diets, resulting in weight gain and a loss of cardiorespiratory fitness [13].

3. Measures to nurture resilience among children

With the aim of better dealing with urgent and unmet psychosocial issues of children during this COVID-19 pandemic, parents and family members can play a proactive role in psychosocial crisis prevention and can develop resilience among children with the application of appropriate behavioral management techniques. The parents may find it very difficult to deal with the children during their confinement and may exhibit challenging behaviors and emotional disturbances during the crisis. Parents need to equip themselves to create opportunities in order to manage their children effectively. Following points discuss about the methods which can keep children busy and nurture their resilience during the lockdown period.

3.1 Making effective communication

Children are experiencing substantial changes to their daily routine and social infrastructure, which ordinarily foster resilience to challenging events [2]. It is essential for the adults and parents to increase the communication with children about the global pandemic with authentic information to address their concerns. Information can include tips for parents on how to talk to children and adolescents about COVID-19, the associated risks and the changes in daily life. Parents should use simple language in spite of technical language with actual facts to help the children to minimize their distress [14]. Normalizing their emotional reactions and reassuring children about how the family will look after each other helps to contain anxiety and provides a shared focus [15]. Sensitive and effective communication about life-threatening illness has major benefits for children and their family's long-term psychological wellbeing [16]. The communication should be age specific. Children who use social media or have online access, including young children with older siblings, are likely to hear a lot of information, some of which may not be accurate.

3.2 Protection from loneliness and isolation

Daily structure is important to everyone, but particularly to children in their psychological and emotional development. The rapid implementation of social distancing is necessary cause what we might call a “social recession”: a collapse in social contact that is particularly hard on the populations most vulnerable to isolation and loneliness. self-isolation may lead to severe psychological consequences [12]. Prolonged school closure and home confinement during a disease outbreak might have negative effects on children's physical and mental health [12], [13]. In the event of home confinement, parents are often the closest and best resource for children to seek help from. Home confinement could offer a good opportunity to enhance the interaction between parents and children, involve children in family activities, and improve their self-sufficiency skills. With the right parenting approaches, family bonds can be strengthened, and child psychological needs met [17]. For example, in addition to innovative courses for a better learning experience, promotional videos can be useful to motivate children to have a healthy lifestyle at home by increasing physical activities, having a balanced diet, regular sleep pattern, and good personal hygiene [18] toys, games informative movies/videos. Tv shows, family time, activities of household chores.

3.3 Promoting physical activities

Physical activity has also been associated with psychological benefits in young people by improving their control over symptoms of anxiety and depression. Similarly, participation in physical activity can assist in the social development of young people by providing opportunities for self-expression, building self-confidence, social interaction and integration [19]. As a result of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, opportunities for children to meet the movement behaviour guidelines issued by WHO have been affected by school closures and physical distancing measures implemented by many governments. Although children seem less susceptible to COVID-19, maintaining or increasing levels of physical activity can reduce their risk of respiratory infections [20]. In addition, resuming regular physical activities may also help students recuperate from the stress and anxiety [21] children experience while in quarantine or during home isolation during the COVID-19 crisis.

3.4 Encouraging creativity among children

In this time of Covid 19 crisis and isolation, the role of art has become more central to our lives, whether we realize it or not. Children are confined to their rooms, schools are closed, no sports activities, decreased fun time children are feeling increased boredom and remain mostly inactive. Parents should encourage the children to participate in creative activities like art work, dancing and music to help them to remain active during the lockdown and school closure period. Parent-child games can be an effective way to strengthen the parent-child bond, relieve stress, and build resilience in children. Art can also help children work out any frustrations in their lives by offering a healthy, expressive medium. Art provides students an outlet for emotional troubles, as well, and helps them to deal with stress and difficult feelings. It was found by one study [22] that participating in arts activities can have a positive effect on self-confidence, self-esteem, relationship building and a sense of belonging, qualities which have been associated with resilience and mental wellbeing.

3.5 Quality time with children

Parents should create an effort to spend quality time with their children. Spending quality time with children by involving them in the activities they like in order compensate for outdoor and school activities absence. the fun time they Even short periods of time playing, reading, going outdoors, and talking can bolster children's sense of safety and security during uncertain or scary times. Parents should stay connected with their children when physical separation is necessary due to safety reasons by using telephone calls, video calling, use of social media, texts and emails to help children feel secure and supported during the lockdown times. In short, quality time is about having a mutually enjoyable time in a ritualistic manner; it could be a shared activity such as cleaning up child's room, or a simple game, or cooking or kitchen work, or even going to park, or watching tv, or storytelling so that the child knows that the parent is available for the child everyday consistently.

3.6 Effective Parenting

Parenting can be challenging especially during a pandemic. Balancing the responsibility of engaging children at home while helping them cope and adapt to this new and uncertain environment is a tightrope walk. Most of the children are confined to their homes and spending huge amount of time with their parents and family members. Children are experience worry, stress and have lot of concerns what is going around. Parents should try to be open and listen to the children, be honest, supportive, spend time with children. Parents should prepare flexible but consistent routines, ensure handwashing and distancing, practice family rituals, storytelling, try to be role model for children. Children need care that promotes positive emotional health and

well-being. Parents can also role-play with their child to help them understand how staying at home can be a powerful way to defeat the virus. Provision of support by parents helps minimize the risk of internalizing behaviors, such as those associated with anxiety and depression [23] which can impair children's adjustment and ability to function well at home, at school, and in the community.

4. Conclusion

Due to the current pandemic crisis children showing emotional and behavioral problems at home are not uncommon and parents may find it difficult to manage the children due to inadequate information and awareness. It is known fact that due to impact of adversities children become vulnerable to develop psychological and behavioral issues due to their social and physiological development. Parents and adult family members need to create efforts to promote, encourage and practice resilience building measures among children in this time of crisis. Due care needs to be taken to prepare the children for the uncertainties associated with this disease by regular discussions and addressing their concerns without creating communication gaps. Therefore, it becomes essential for the parents and adult family members to respond to mental health needs of children particularly who have been quarantined due to COVID-19 by nurturing their resilience by creating positive environment for them at home. The COVID-19 pandemic can have tremendous mental health effects on children and adolescents, future research studies can focus on those factors and develop intervention plans for prepare the children by focusing coping mechanisms, resilience and their well-being.

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