

COVID-19 outbreak: impact on child mental health and parental role to cope

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Abstract

COVID-19 outbreak is a global pandemic that kill around 0.278 million people out of 4.01 million infected rolling the date. The rapid transmission rate this disease promotes the rapid changing the strategy by the government. WHO recommended guide line and hygiene measures but foreseeing the worse days. The mental health problem is now secondary wave of the pandemic. At present it difficult to guess how long this situation will persist and how extend its after effect will run. Social distancing, isolation and home quarantine leads mental health problem including depression, anxiety, traumatic stress etc. in monotonous lifestyle of common people. Mental health of children including adolescent are severely disturbed. This study has discussed how the mental health of children has affected by the consequences of COVID-19 and discussed the role of parents to cope the adverse situation.

Keywords: Child mental health, conduct disorder, adolescent, parental support, COVID-19

1. Introduction

Outbreak of COVID-19 is likely to be inception and spreading from Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market, Wuhan, Hubei Province, China and it the biggest pandemic in world (Lu et al., 2020). Till date 4013728 people have infected by the disease, from which 278993 have died. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has declared as global public health emergency. 215 countries are struggling as their best against the transmission of the disease, recovery and motility; till now no specific vaccine developed. Well over 100 countries worldwide had implemented either full or partial lockdown by the end of the March 2020 affecting billions of people. Social distancing, isolation, home quarantine are the preventing measures in addition to the clinical arrangements but the challenging there in. Many people have to stay in relatively small residential place; in the other hand a good number of people unable to keep family alive, as stuck at home and begging for food. Few people with extroversion, feeling mood drained due to lack of friends' interaction and disrupted daily life style. However long time home quarantine sometimes makes to be nightmare, which consequently lead to tress, anxiety, frustration, boredom and depression.

The closure the educational institutions is the important step taken by the government to prevent the rapid spread of current epidemic. According to UNESCO, over 290 million enrolled learners including 1.5 billion young learners worldwide are now out of school due to COVID-19 (UNESCO 2020). Nearly all of the 55 million students in kindergarten through 12th grade in the US are affected, substantially disrupt the lives of students and their families and may have consequences for child health (Golberstein E. et al., 2020).

The unpredictable consequences of public health and misinformation about COVID-19 often impacts individuals' mental health including depression, anxiety, traumatic stress etc. The sadness, fear, anger, worry, annoyance, frustration, helplessness, loneliness and nervousness etc. are the common features of psychological problems suffering by major portion of people experienced during this pandemic situation. Economic fallout and joblessness triggered the mental health crisis that even lead to self harm and suicidal behaviour (Ahorsu et al., 2020; Banerjee, 2020)

2. Child psychology and COVID-19

2.1. Early childhood (2-6 years)

Though the difference between normal and abnormal behaviour in early childhood is not always clear; usually it is a matter of expectation that depends upon the child's level of development. Doing homework, being polite, and doing chores are expected normal child behaviour. Sometimes they may be aggressive or regressive, excessively self-centred or destructive. Children are not only growing physically during early childhood, but they are also growing mentally. Freedom to play indoors and outdoors; taking part in cultural activities, day out in park and picnic etc. help to keep children mentally well (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2020).

In this COVID-19 pandemic the early childhood is confined in four walls. No outdoor activities including schooling, moving in park, even interaction with neighbouring kids; makes the children angry, annoyed, bored, stubborn and sometimes conduct disorder. According to Piaget, children in the Preoperational stage, young children's play becomes increasingly imaginary and filled with

fantasies; playing isn't just fun; it is an important part of brain development (Piaget, J. 1945). The limited social activities of children are lagging behind his intellectual growth.

Children of this age continue to advance their skills in observing and interacting with the world around them. Corona news, discussion on the pandemic among family members, using mask and washing hands frequently affect the mental health of childhood.

2.2 Late childhood (6-11 years)

During this stage, as children develop cognitively, their play will move from simple make-believe to plots involving more characters and scenarios, games with proper rules, etc. Leaving the toddlerhood behind, they also begin to interact others socially. When interacting with other children their age, such as peers at preschool, sensorimotor children engage in parallel play, group play cooperatively. Friend and family togetherness- birthday party; feeling loved, trusted, understood, valued and safe; accepting recognising what they are good from family members and friends; having a sense of belonging in their family, school and community being the important factors of their mental health (Mental health Foundation, 2020).

In the lockdown situation, schools have been closed and classes shifted to home-based distance-learning models. Children are looking to their parents or caregivers about COVID-19 and when restriction will remove; bombarded information by parents hard to digest and children being isolated in an already abusive environment. Social distancing and isolation for weeks will affect the mental health of the children. Uncertainty provokes depression, anxiety, fear of the unknown, stress, conduct disorder, and are often a direct response to what is happening in their lives.

2.3 Adolescence (11 -20 years)

The adolescents are generally healthy with strong immunity power and matured enough to understand and cope the situation. With closed schools and no playtime, the mental health of adolescence is screaming for help and they might be affected emotionally, educationally and socially.

According a study by a clinical psychologist, observed change in daily routine of some school students; who lock themselves up inside their rooms for weeks, refusing to take showers, eat or leave their beds. Some children with depression having considerable difficulties adjusting back to the normal school life (Lee J., 2020) The young children might also be affected by exposure to more screen time, more cyber time, substance misuse, gambling and domestic violence. Due to hostel closure, accommodation in home and overcrowding and absence of free school meals leads the child maltreatment and child and adolescence depressed and feeling guilty.

A study to assess the youth mental health after the coronavirus disease 19 (COVID-19) occurred in China two weeks later, where total of 584 youth enrolled in this study and completed the question about cognitive status of COVID-19; The results of this cross-sectional study suggest that nearly 40.4% the sampled youth were found to be prone to psychological problems and 14.4% the sampled youth with Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms (Liang L., 2020). The long term mental health effects on children and adolescents are not well known, but mental health support needed immediately.

3. Effect of school closure

Indian education system, largest in world with more than 1.5 million schools, 9.4 million teacher and 2.5 billion students from

varied socio economic backgrounds are affected in the school closure measure in this pandemic. School children and adolescents are lacking the access to the resources, exchanged studies and mind fresh ceremonies through schools. During the school closure, they are unable to access mental wellness support; where face to face meet, peer group interaction stopped; phone calls and online attachments are only ways which may be challenging for many young students.

The Good Childhood Report 2016, explore the relationship between the different domains of subjecting well being and different sub scales of the strength and difficulties questionnaires (SDQ) and found that the happiness with appearance was most strongly related to mental health problems including emotional symptoms, peer problem, conduct problem hyperactive and other difficulties shown in Fig. 1, which also found that happiness with schoolwork was more strongly associated with mental health. The 'Understanding Society' analysis found unhappiness with schoolwork to be significantly related to subsequent mental health problems for children aged 10-15 years. Additional analysis considering conduct problem and hyperactivity for the children aged 10-15 suggest that unhappiness with schoolwork made a child 2.6-2.9 times more likely to have conduct problem than a child who was happy with their schoolwork and at least 3 times more likely to have hyperactive problems (The Children's Society, 2018).

There will be huge impact on the educational therapy of children with special needs. The daily therapeutic routine has disrupted for those with disability such as autism spectrum disorder, down syndrome, cerebral palsy, learning disability etc. and they might miss their essential skills. Various online educational services including vocational, recreational and academic through video conferencing mediums are coming in help by understanding the convenient mode of learning and applied pedagogy.

Countries across globe postpone or cancel state exams. In the US, college entry exams scheduled for early May have been cancelled; Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Pakistan and Malaysia have all postponed or cancelled state exams. Government of India postponed various national and state-level entrance exams including JEE, UGC, CSIR NET, NEET, UPSC, IIT JAM have been postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic; CBSE, ICSE, WBCHSE and other board cancelled their examination and advises students to stay at home. The examinations are always stressful; delayed examination could be further stressful. In the crowding in venue, staying mentally and physically fit to appear again is challenging.

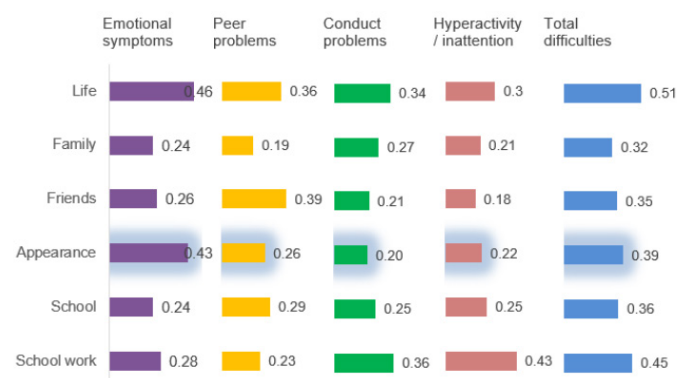
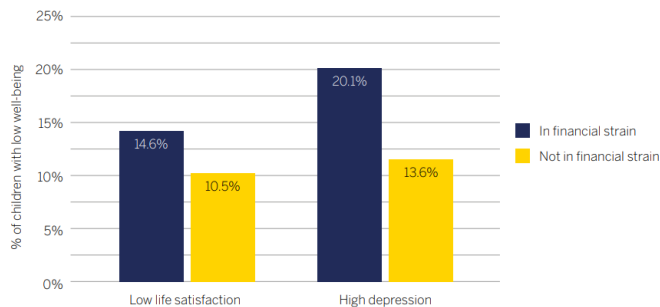


Fig 1. Correlation between subjective well being and mental health problem of Children (Source: The Good Childhood Report 2016, reproduced in The Children's Society, 2018 Access 10th May 2020)

4. Effect of economic downturn

Job aperiens, final year college students are more vulnerable; due to uncertainty in job market in this pandemic. Some lost their part-time jobs as local business closed and anxious about the downturn of global economic situation. The COVID-19 pandemic may lead to mental health problem to adolescents as combined effects of the public health crisis, social isolation and economic recession. Mental health problems for youth that may be associated with parent's unemployment, job loss, adult mental health and child maltreatment (Golberstein E, 2019). An analysis exploits that around 11% of parents being in financial strain in last year. Fig. 2 shows the percentage of children with low well-being on each measure based



on this measure of financial strain; indicating financial strain may be a more direct and relevant measure of how children experience household economic circumstances. (Good Childhood Report 2019).

Fig 2. Correlation of financial strain and low wellbeing of children in terms of low life satisfaction and high depression. (Source: The Good Childhood Report 2019, Accessed 10th May 2020)

5. Role of parent for wellness of their children

There's no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic is having a huge impact on child mental health. Whilst there may be challenges – around routines, missing social contact, staying in, and behaviour; there may also be huge opportunities to get to know our children better, to learn new things together, and to be together as a family.

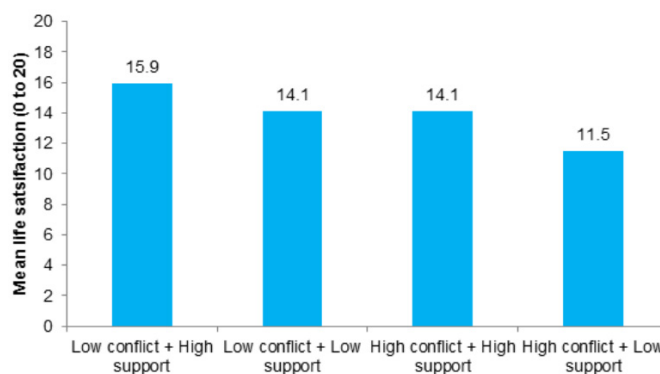


Fig 3. Correlation between family conflict & support and children's subjective wellbeing (Source: The Good Childhood Report 2015, reproduced in The Children's Society, 2018, Accessed 10th May 2020).

Fig. 3 shows the comparative study of parental family conflict and support with the mean life satisfaction of children; that revealed low

conflict and high support gives the most mental wellness. In this pandemic situation parent have the key role in physiological supports to their children, points are highlighted here ((The Children's Society, 2018).

- Quality time for children

Parents to have quality time for family and children, finding a balance of different types of activity like reading together, painting, reciting, drama, playing games, making a meal together or doing something creative and nap times may be important. Keeping the children active very important for their mental health.

- Helping your children stay in touch with friends

Phone or video calls and games with friends and relatives can be good way to keep refresh the children's mind.

- Relaxing rules on screen time during these times

It may need to temporarily relax rules on screen time so that we can all get quality time with ourselves. Though there's a huge amount of free, exciting content including virtual museum tours, theatre shows, platforms and new games being developed at the moment for TV, and online that can be good for our mental health; but parents good to know what your kids are watching and doing online, and to keep talking about it.

- Framing healthy routines and structure

Though there is no time target but we can schedule to be active and certainly passes the time. Trying to keep mealtime and bedtime routines consistent. Sleeping well may help them to cope with the challenges they face, as long as they are not staying up all night worrying – or gaming.

- Inspiring indoor game and yoga

Physical activities have important role for good mental health of child and adult also. Parents should keep interest in indoor gaming that involved physical exercise; Free hand exercise, Yoga and meditation may be helpful.

- Helping children with school work at home

'Schooling from home' starts in different countries but there has a lot of trial and error. From 20th April there will be a range of lesson and content available through BBC Bitesize which connect to the curriculum and stages in all four nations of the UK. In India TV channels like Star Ananda, 24 Ghanta etc provides a special time slot for secondary students. Parents sharing some topics and sometimes can encourage a longer session of study.

The parents of children with special needs, have to more concern to their children at this period. They should create a schedule for their children to reduce anxiety arises from uncertainty. They may continue their speech and social skill therapy through online based training programmes.

- Helping children build their own spaces

Chores with sibling and togetherness are good for children, but each child needs their personal space too.

- Talking about COVID-19

Parents should talk to their children about Corona Virus, symptoms, transmission and pandemic situation also as they try to understand the unlike environment and produced specific advice about having conversations about coronavirus with children of all ages. Parents have to be honest to answer questions as and when children arise. Popular children's illustrator Axel Scheffler also collaborated with public health specialists to produce a downloadable book on coronavirus for primary-aged children (Scheffler A., 2020).

- Recognising and managing stress

It's important to recognise and address stress of children, both in relation to parenting and in relation to work, family and other challenges. Children show stress in different ways so it may be that fewer vegetables are eaten and bedtimes might take longer. Parents may try as follows.

- o Try not to judge or compare ourselves and others
- o Celebrating success and staying positive
- o Praise your children when they do well
- o Talk about what you have been grateful for
- Managing difficult behaviour and conflict

As some tension at pandemic moment, parents are often less able than normal to keep their responses proportional. They should allow more meltdowns, they are dealing with an extraordinary set of circumstances.

The World Health Organisation promoting a three-stage model for dealing with acting (World Health Organization, 2004)

i) Redirect

At the first sign of misbehaviour try and divert onto something else – suggesting a game, a call with a relative etc.

ii) Pause

If redirecting doesn't work and you can feel your temper fraying try to take a 10 second pause. Take a few deep breaths and come back to the situation in a calmer frame of mind. Acknowledge the emotion and understand how they're feeling.

iii) Consequence

Give your child the opportunity to do what you are asking of them. If they don't let them know that there will be a consequence action that you will take. If they don't do what you ask, you need to give them the consequence and when it is over, go back to normal. Sometimes apologies may be important when you've lost your temper but they need to be meaningful. For adolescence, you can accept apologies with a thank you and remind them that they hurt your feelings but you can move on.

6. Online mental health support

Global wise there are many online support system offered by Governments as well as NGOs for supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing like

World Health Organization:

<http://www.emro.who.int/mnh/publications/mental-health-support>

Mental Health America: <https://mhanational.org/covid19>

Mental Health Europe: <https://www.mhe-sme.org/library/helplines/>

Govt. of India: <https://www.mohfw.gov.in/>

University of Mumbai, India: <https://mu.ac.in/online-counseling-for-covid-19-english>

Australian Govt.: <https://headtohealth.gov.au/covid-19-support/covid-19>

CDC, America: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/>

7. Conclusion

Mental health problem of children in this COVID-19 pandemic is forthcoming global issue. Nationwide lockdown, social distancing, school closure, quarantine, confinement in rooms affects mental health of children. This article has discussed how the mental health of each stage of childhood has affected by COVID-19 and its consequences and also discussed the role of parents to cope the adverse situation. Togetherness, provide quality time for children is most important that parents should do; co activity in indoor game and yoga, helping creative activities, praising, routine for screen time, help to touch with friends make some extend of wellness. Understanding the mind of children and managing stress will be the duty of parents.

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