

## **Psychosocial Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Children in India**

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**C**oronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has unfolded a tsunami of challenges for mankind over the past 10 months. Despite this, it has triggered a global collaboration to control the pandemic, and transformed every individual by influencing family dynamics.

Many families are experiencing an ongoing, pervasive sense of loss *e.g.*, loss of social networks, jobs, financial security and threatened loss of loved ones. This has impacted the quality of relationships among parents, children and siblings. It poses a significant risk for the adjustment of more than 37 crore children (0-14 years) in India, given their dependence on positive family processes for a host of developmental outcomes.

### **IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON FAMILY DYNAMICS**

Social disruptions from the pandemic and changes in gender norms (moving closer to equal roles in the home) that defines, our new 'normal' have generated heightened levels of psychological distress, impacting the quality of relationships among parents and children.

In March, 2020, schools across India were shut down to curb the transmission of COVID-19. Children have been at home for longer periods of time than ever before in recent memory. Closure of schools, lack of extracurricular and outdoor activities, altered eating and sleeping habits, lack of peer-time have fostered monotony, anguish, irritation, and diverse neuro-psychiatric symptoms. Although home should be the safest place for a child, sexual, psychological and physical abuse have shown a significant rise.

This has unfolded an unparalleled global mental health problem and it presents a unique challenge to psychological resilience across the world. This may soon lead to an outbreak of a 'second pandemic' of mental health crises.

Children of single parents, including medical professionals taking care of COVID-19 patients, are likely to suffer from adjustment difficulties if their parent gets quarantined. In addition, transient or prolonged parent-child separation may lead to significant psychosocial impact.

### **PSYCHOSOCIAL ISSUES OF COVID-19**

It has been reported that the most common psychosocial and behavioral problems among children and adolescents in the pandemic were inattention, clinginess, distraction and fear of asking questions about the pandemic. This risk is greatly increased in those with pre-existing mental health conditions.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, helpline numbers for mental health counselling are seeing a huge surge in calls, with anxiety and adjustment issues topping the list. In addition, domestic violence incidence in India is at a 10-year high during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Thus, the COVID-19 disease itself, and its ripple effects of quarantine and nationwide lockdowns have and will induce acute panic, anxiety, obsessive behaviors, paranoia, and depression, and may also lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the long run.

### **BOUNCING FORWARD FOR A NEW NORMAL**

Identification of children and adolescents at risk by health care providers is especially important during clinical visits/teleconsultation. It is important to screen for psychiatric and psychosocial effects of social distancing and quarantine on families. Asking direct questions on wellbeing and safety at home will be a critical approach to screen children at risk of or experiencing domestic abuse. Other vital interventions for families include suggesting mental health resources, contact or emergency numbers and counseling.

The current pandemic is a lingering stressor that may damage our mind and body, resulting in long-term health consequences. The impact of stress and adversity on physical and psychological wellbeing should be increasingly focused on in a pediatric clinic as the need of the hour. Proactively preventing psychosocial crisis, fostering psychosocial wellness and developing cost optimal widely accessible intervention models should be the topmost priority for the government, health care personnel and other stakeholders.