

Research Article

**STRESS AND COPING STRATEGIES OF CHILDREN DURING
COVID-19 LOCKDOWN AT VYPIN ISLAND**

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Abstract

COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown have brought about a sense of fear and anxiety around the globe. This phenomenon has led to short-term as well as long-term psychosocial and mental health implications for children and adolescents. (Singh S et al 2020) Although the rate of COVID-19 infection among young children is low in Kerala, the stress confronted by them poses their condition as highly vulnerable. So, the present study will look into the stress and coping strategies adopted by the children from the coastal area of Ernakulam district. The prime objective of the study is to understand the stress faced by children during Covid - 19 lockdown. It also studied the coping strategies adopted by the students. The study suggests suitable social work implications. The researchers adopted the case study method in which three cases were examined.

In-depth interviews were directly conducted by the researchers with the use of a semi-structured interview schedule. The cases identified by the researchers are one student, one teacher, and a parent. The teachers' parents and children clearly state that the children are having too much pressure in online classes because of the long-time classes, fear of exams, data and range issues, financial instability to recharge their data monthly, pressure from the parents, and teachers, etc. Some of the coping strategies said by the participants are; to make

the time useful by studying new things or getting involved in gardening, singing, dancing, writing poetry, etc. Parents and teachers were stated that they try their best to support their children in coping with this situation. The current study proposes some possible social work implications too.

Key words: stress, coping strategies, covid 19

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Introduction

The quality and magnitude of the impact of covid -19 on children and adolescents are determined by many vulnerability factors like developmental age, educational status, pre-existing mental health conditions, being economically underprivileged. During the time of lockdown, an increasing number of poor families in coastal areas have no source of daily wages which leads to frustration and feelings of helplessness. This can make the child more vulnerable to stress, depression, anxiety, and suicide. The world has recognized that the traditional pre-COVID-19 models and policies for children's mental health are no longer applicable during COVID 19 era. Hence, the need is felt for the transformation of policies that can take into account not only lock down duration.

Vypin Island is one of the highly populated islands in the world. most of the people live their livelihood by fishing and small jobs and poverty is quite common .so pandemic situation

affects their daily life of children as well as an adult but the children are affected the more because of their studies will be disturbed and most of them will not be in a situation to buy a new phone or the availability of internet will be less. Although the rate of COVID-19 infection among young children is low in Kerala, the stress confronted by them poses their condition as highly vulnerable. So, the present study will look into the stress and coping strategies adopted by the children from the coastal area of Ernakulam district.

Review of literature

Fenn et al (2021) conducted a study among 1073 adults using sociodemographic information, perceived stress scale, sources of stress checklist, and COVID-19 coping strategies scale. And reported that 65.7% of respondents scored high on the stress scale with 8.3% experiencing severe stress. Stress was negatively correlated with age, education level, and income. Anxiety about the impact of the pandemic on the world and their future was the main source of stress. This was followed by financial worries, stress due to frustration of limited movement, and fear about contracting COVID. The five most common coping strategies used were increased hygiene, social distancing, increasing awareness about the disease, increased communication with family, and distraction through movies and books.

Kumar v et al (2020) observed that children face anxiety, depressive disorder, argument tendency and show adverse mental problem symptoms, behavioral health symptoms, and COVID-19 related trauma and stressor-related disorders.

Shah et al. 2020) also reported that COVID-19 can lead to higher rates of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. This causes fear in children because the virus threatens not just them but also their families and surroundings, especially as they see their parents working from home, leading to fear

Methodology

The prime objective of the study is to understand the stress faced by children during Covid - 19 lockdown. It also studied the coping strategies adopted by the students. The study suggests suitable social work implications.

The researchers adopted the case study method in which three cases were examined. In-depth interviews were directly conducted by the researcher with the use of a semi-structured interview schedule. The cases identified by the researchers are one student, one teacher, and a parent.

The 'Explanatory Case Study Method' was adopted. It is a method that can be used to investigate certain phenomena in very complex and multivariate cases (Yin, 1984; Zaidah Zainal, 2007). The case study format described by Budgell (2008); Boeije (2010) was followed for this case study presentation.

Result presentation

Case study 1

Introduction

Participant X is studying 5th standard in an aided school. He is 10 years old. His mother is working at the post office and his father is a fisherman. He is having a joint family with a brother and three elder sisters.

Case Presentation

Case explained that he feels difficulty in the newly adopted method of study. He feels stressed while staying at home for long hours. This lockdown made participant X get addicted to smartphones. *“This corona time has made all people suffer a lot. It had made my studies difficult. It would be better to learn if we can go to school and study. It is so sad that I can't see my friends. We miss the times that we learned, played, and walked together. For me, the mental happiness getting from the class is not getting from the online classes. Watching the phone for a long time creates headaches and hand pain for us. Parents and all others are always forcing us to stay at home and making us afraid. I tried to engage in indoor games so that it will make me happy and healthy.*

Outcome

It is clear from the experience of participant X that, the lockdown has affected the studies of children and made them miss their schooling, friends, play, and other entertainments. He also finds difficulty in coping with online classes.

Discussion

Fear of exams and stress is caused along with it because of the forcing of parents. The case used to play along at their own house is the coping strategy to relieve the stress. The stress created while staying home for a long time is the reason for depending on smartphone. The working parents find time to spend with their children to speak with them to avoid their silence is a coping strategy the case has put forward.

Case study 2

Introduction

Participant M is a parent of 2 children who is studying on 4th standard and 9th standard. She is a 37 years old housewife., her husband is a fisherman their livelihood was affected during the lockdown.

Case Presentation

According to this parent, the covid-19 pandemic has made the children get addicted to mobile phones. A slight change in behavior of the elder child is observed in that he is not much speaking at home and always showing his interest on smartphones for playing games and watching YouTube channels. According to her *“Online class tests are not completed within the given time. During the revision time teachers ask questions through phone calls, children are not able to study completely hence they have a fear of attending to the questions. Sometimes because of this tension, they cannot answer the question even if they have studied. Sometimes it is observed that the child is entering Google meet and go away by keeping it on. As a parent, I tried to make my children always in touch with their friends through phone so that they won’t feel they are away from their happiness of being with friends.*

Outcome

Case M has a clear understanding of the situation that happened. She explained that children were explaining their difficulty in studies and staying at home. They always ask to go out on weekends for relaxation. They are always writing notes and complaining about a headache. So, sometimes parents have to force children from writing notes, because of the fear of parents that this will affect their health. This fear may make children more confused.

Discussion

As a participant, M was anxious about the exams and results of her child. According to her fear of speaking with teachers is increasing, because the case loses interaction with them. The participant said that children are tense about their studies. They are also affected because of the absence of parents while studying.

Case study 3

Introduction

Participant T is a class teacher of the 6th standard. She is 46 years old working in an aided school with 21 years of experience. She is married and having a college-going daughter.

Case Presentation

As an experienced teacher, she was worried about the inability of online platforms to improve the cognitive, moral, and social development of children. She explained that *“Students are having Stress of about the future exams; this exam tension is also experienced during online class tests.* She also pointed out another major issue, *students have up to 4 siblings, so the parents who have a single smartphone affected in this case as their children are continuously using the phone one after the other. If the parent is working, students will not be able to complete their notes. This creates more stress in children.* Another issue pointed out by case T is phone addiction. *“Many parents convey that when children are given with mobile phone for writing notes, they use it to play games and watch YouTube videos.”* Another issue stated by the respondent is the financial difficulty of charging data continuously. This also may lead to stress for students.

Outcome

As a teacher, she was concerned about the physical, emotional, and social development of her students. According to her many are already affected with eye-related health problems, anxiety, and stress-related issues. *There are some students who do not perform much in theory and perform well in practice. A child who is brilliant in practical works will lose their chance to perform and explore their skills through online classes.* It also affected the students who are talented in extracurricular activities and practices.

Discussion

Case T pointed that the stress faced by the children is because of staying at home without seeing their friends or loved ones. It seriously affects their mental health. As a coping strategy, she introduced class-wise cultural programs and encourage the students to perform virtually. She also suggests that teachers should provide individual attention to students especially those who are suffering from the digital divide.

Result discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed the world and the way we work, rest, and play. Especially, the situation is going to change the lives of children around the world. It is clear from the study that students, teachers, and parents were under stress and anxiety. The students who are continuously attending online classes get distracted from the class. When teachers ask questions personally by calling on the phone creates more anxiety in children. Teachers and parents were concerned more about the moral and social development than cognitive aspects since lockdown. Children are affected while they miss their friends, playgrounds, teachers, and loved ones. This in turn makes them stressed. The digital divide is the term that denotes the gap between demographics and areas that have access to modern information and communications technology, and those that don't or have restricted access. These technologies are a smartphone, television, personal computers, and the internet. Poor internet connection during the online education and lack of accessories has affected the children to a great extent in the coastal areas of vypin.

The home confinement of children is associated with uncertainty and anxiety which is attributable to disruption in their education, physical activities, and opportunities for socialization teachers are worried about this and make the children feel at home in jail. Disruption in routine, boredom, and lack of innovative ideas for engaging in various academic and extracurricular activities due to the absence of structured setting of the school for a long duration was said by participant B who was a young teacher, after her studies she was more excited to work with children but it ended up in online classes. Teachers are trying their best to engage the children in activities through the online platform but all of their capabilities re having limitations. Teachers here are not only focusing on their studies but also their social life.

Through these case studies, the teachers' parents and children clearly state that the children are having too much pressure in online classes because of the long-time classes, fear of exams, data and range issues, financial instability to recharge their data monthly, pressure from the parents and teachers, etc. Some of the coping strategies said by the participants are; to make the time useful by studying new things or getting involved in gardening, singing, dancing, writing, poetry these could be developed by children themselves. Parents said of helping the children to do their regular home works as well as help in studying and spending more time with their children, will help to improve the child-parent relationship. The teachers said about giving information about the virus and the spread of disease how it could be prevented so that children won't panic, as the online platform is a new model of teaching, they are willing to add more fun to make the children engage in the daily classes.

Social work implications

- Social workers can help the Policy makers to formulate various interventions based on the developmental needs of children affected with stress.
- Social case work can be initiated not only with the affected children but also with their family members.

- Group therapy sessions can be initiated by trained social workers through online mode to support the children affected with stress.
- More mental health professionals should be appointed to address the mental health need of the students.
- More qualitative as well as quantitative research studies can be conducted in the area of adolescent stress and coping strategies.

Conclusion

This study gives a detailed outlook of the stress and coping strategies of children during this pandemic. The qualitative research method using case study design helped the researcher to conduct a detailed investigation into the perceptions of students, parents, and teachers. Future studies can also be intended at designing interventions.

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