



Hidden Pediatric Effects of Covid-19 Pandemic

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As of August 2021 The World Health Organization (WHO) has reported 210 million Covid 19 cases and 4.5 million deaths. Thankfully global data to date shows that children appear to be largely spared from the direct effects of the Covid 19 infection. Most children experience clinically mild disease or remain asymptotically infected [1,2].

The authorities have concentrated their efforts on delivering services to the adult population which accounts for the majority of patients in this COVID-19 outbreak. This pandemic, as well as the present efforts to reduce and manage it has resulted in job losses and financial hardships for families. They have caused havoc in the lives of youngsters. Many peer reviewed and non-peer reviewed research have revealed further unintended consequences for children and adolescents' well being. This includes health-care service disruptions, the twin double burdens of undernutrition and obesity, lack of socialization and educational deprivation. The potential loss of educational possibilities accrued in learning for today's youthful population poses a significant challenge to their human capital development. This might be even more serious with inequitable educational opportunities coming from distance learning platforms being out of reach for the majority of children [3].

Aside from their education, the school is a microcosm of society, where children can access a variety of services such as extra-curricular activities, psychosocial assistance and nourishment. It has provided a secure environment for all children and additionally access to health monitoring through the school health programme in many countries. Schools are finally reopening, allowing students to once again use these services, learn, connect

and play with their peers. However careful planning is required to provide a healthy learning and socialising atmosphere in the classroom.

How have children and adolescents been affected by the protracted disruption? Many peer reviewed research have found that the Covid-19 pandemic as well as the restrictions that have resulted, has triggered an epidemic of mental health problems in children and teenagers [4,5]. Many newborns and toddlers with developmental difficulties have had their screening and developmental diagnosis postponed. The benefits of their interventional developmental therapy programmes and treatment are often diluted. The Covid-19 pandemic has wrecked havoc on pediatric oncology services around the world, causing significant delays in cancer diagnosis and treatment, particularly in low income and middle income nations [6].

Children who have skipped school may have been bored, understimulated, or spent too much time watching television or using iPADS, and may have become victims of domestic violence and abuse, child labour or other forms of child labour. During the epidemic, many peer reviewed and non-peer reviewed studies have observed fluctuating mental health concerns and suicide risk. Many recent reports of severe depression and an upsurge in suicides among young people under the age of 18 should be cause of alarm [7-9].

Finally, it must be emphasised that this unique global pandemic has had severe impacts on children's health and education from infancy to adolescence. In primary health and pediatric clinics, healthcare providers will need to provide much needed

growth and developmental surveillance, as well as anticipatory guidance. Developmental and behavioral aberrations, in particular must be identified and addressed effectively. The statistics on suicides among people aged 15-18 years are alarming. A national strategy with an integrated, intersectoral (health, education, social, economic judiciary and NGOs) approach will be required to respond appropriately, to be framed to attenuate these impact, led by the highest level of political leadership. In the current economic crisis, there must be a political will to provide the required services with a holistic approach to secure the health and wellbeing of the children who are the country's future human capital.

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