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Averting a Lost Covid Generation: Reimagining a Post-Pandemic World for Children in India

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ABSTRACT

Although the pandemic has a smaller effect on children than on adults, they are particularly exposed to its non-health consequences. A generation of children in India are struggling to recover from the adverse effects of the pandemic containment measures, particularly those from low-income households. The consequences of the pandemic on child protection are similar to those seen in previous pandemics, such as Ebola and SARS: higher rates of abuse, neglect, and family separation, as well as lower educational attainment. Families struggling to put food on the table may be forced to send their children out to work. Children who depended on school lunches were deprived of nutrition during school closures. There have been several reports in India regarding the lack of access to education for students, with many schools shutting down and teachers facing challenges in conducting online classes. Numerous young girls have been compelled to enter into marriage due to the impact of this global health crisis. Numerous children have been denied access to education and acquiring knowledge. This holds especially true for children residing in rural areas and those belonging to low-income households. The decrease in learning outcomes is expected to have a significant and lasting effect on the younger population of India. As a result of increasing poverty levels in rural regions, parents frequently face challenges in supporting their daughters, leading to early marriages. There has been a rise in the risk of abuse attributed to food scarcity and a surge in incidents of domestic violence amid the lockdown. This article will centre on the effects of the pandemic on the lives of children. The implications of the pandemic also give rise to worries regarding child protection. Ensuring the well-being and safety of children is paramount both during and in the aftermath of the pandemic. Considering that children are frequently the most susceptible individuals within a population affected by disease outbreaks, it is crucial for governments to play a proactive role in safeguarding them during pandemics. In this article, the author proposes a seven-point plan for addressing, rebuilding, and reimagining a future for every child in India in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Keywords: Covid-19, Child Rights, Pandemic, Health, Lockdown.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children, various aspects need to be taken into account, including mental, physical, social, and cultural dimensions.² This pandemic and post-pandemic must not overlook India's young people, who make up 40% of the country's population. The health and well-being of children are elements of their existence that are impacted by these outcomes.³ However, contrary to the widely held belief, children as young as 12 years old have been infected by the new coronavirus in India, although the number of cases is much lower than in other age groups.⁴ Children's advocacy groups have voiced worry that increased stress and anxiety in families owing to COVID-19 might lead to an escalation of children's mental health difficulties.⁵

Some organisations and experts in various nations have responded to these concerns by providing counselling and psychological assistance for children and adolescents. These services are often disjointed and unfocused on children's individual needs.⁶ Even though India's mental health care system is understaffed and underfunded, the country nonetheless offers services including a toll-free hotline.

There are numerous kids who have had no physical contact with their classmates, schoolmates, and family members for over two months because of the lockdown. Children may become quickly bored, angry, and upset if they have little or no opportunities for outside play and interaction. There is a growing trend of individuals utilising their mobile devices for purposes beyond traditional voice calls and text messaging. The smartphone has become an all-in-one device that allows users to stay connected and entertained at all times.

Recent research has demonstrated that individuals are consistently engaged with social media platforms, even while utilising the internet or other mobile apps. Indian media have widely reported on the negative effect that overuse of mobile phones can have on productivity.⁷

² Louise Dalton, et al., *Protecting the psychological health of children through effective communication about COVID-19*, 4 THE LANC. CH. & ADOL. HEAL. 346, 346-347 (2020).

³ UNICEF (2020a). Geneva Palais briefing note on the impact of COVID-19 on children. Available from: <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/geneva-palais-briefing-note-impact-covid-19-children> (last visited 18th April, 2022.)

⁴ The New Indian Express. (2020). COVID-19: Over 100 children below 12 years of age have contracted coronavirus in India so far. Available from <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2020/apr/19/covid-19-over-100-children-below-12-years-of-age-have-contracted-coronavirus-in-india-so-far-2132143.html> (last visited 18th April, 2022.)

⁵ Connecting with Children and adolescents via telehealth during COVID-19 American Psychological Association, <https://www.apa.org/topics/covid-19/telehealth-children> (last visited Apr 20, 2022)

⁶ Lu Dong & Jennifer Bouey, *Public mental health crisis during COVID-19 pandemic, China*, 26 EMER. INFEC. DISEA., 1616 (2020).

⁷ Gadget addiction among children during lockdown a cause of concern Deccan Herald, <https://www.deccanherald.com/specials/insight/gadget-addiction-among-children-during-lockdown-a-cause-of->

Increased digital connections may also lead to 'emotional contagion,' when one person's anguish and terror spreads to another individual.⁸

As a result of the pandemic, children who have experienced the loss of one or both parents are evidently vulnerable. The passing of a family member can be particularly challenging for children, particularly if they were not given the opportunity to visit their ailing relative before their passing. Concerns regarding the physical and financial welfare of family members can adversely affect children. Consequently, individuals may experience anxiety, depressive symptoms, insomnia, and reduced appetite. Post-traumatic stress disorder may develop as a consequence of various traumatic life experiences such as experiencing quarantine, isolation, or mourning the loss of a loved one.⁹

In order to comprehend the difficulties faced by children, it is beneficial to examine three categories of children: those whose parents underwent isolation as a result of a quarantine; those whose parents have passed away without being quarantined; and those whose parents were either in quarantine or have been discharged from isolation.

Mental health professionals, parents, and other caregivers all have a role to play in providing assistance to children in need in such a situation. Creating a feeling of normality in the house is crucial for parents, and this can be done by putting up a package that includes activities like play, academics, time spent with family, creative writing, and communication with friends and family by phone or video call. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, so do the mental health struggles of parents and children, who have spent months enduring social isolation, financial hardship, and the fear of catching a deadly disease. The Indian Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health (IACAM), recommends that parents and caregivers remain calm and reassuring, letting children know their emotions are normal, checking in on them, and monitoring their own behaviour as well as that of their children to reassure them that the situation will be resolved.¹⁰

The current pandemic or natural calamities may cause severe and long-lasting psychopathology in certain youngsters, according to research. From mood issues to drug misuse, anxiety

concern-827087.html (last visited Apr 20, 2022)

⁸ Junling Gao, et al., *Mental health problems and social media exposure during COVID-19 outbreak*, 15 PLO. ONE., e0231924 (2020).

⁹ P Jacob, et al., *COVID-19 pandemic and mental health issues in children and adolescents*, MENTAL HEALTH IN THE TIMES OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC GUIDANCE FOR GEN. MED. AND SPEC. ME. HEA. CA. SET. NIMHANS, 33-36 (2020).

¹⁰ By UNICEF, *ways parents can support their kids through the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak*, JOURNAL Start Page.

disorders, and suicidal inclinations could be found in these youngsters.¹¹

There has been a noticeable trend among children towards a more sedentary lifestyle, opting to engage in screen-based activities such as playing video games rather than partaking in physical outdoor play. This situation has led to various health issues in numerous children, such as obesity.

Extended use of screens has resulted in mental health issues for certain children, leading them to become antisocial and unhappy, avoiding interactions with peers and family. Lack of exercise and increased access to unhealthy food, coupled with the risks associated with rapidly developing technologies, have contributed to weight problems among children. These issues have increasingly affected the mental health of today's children.

School-aged children have had a long time to get used to having no school, and it is likely that for many of them, going back to a structured environment will be difficult. It is important for parents and teachers to ensure that children are given sufficient time to readjust once the pandemic is over, without pressuring them to quickly return to their usual routines. Everyone will need some time to readjust and learn to function in the post-COVID-19 era.

Covid-19 can cause severe trauma, especially among children. The death of close family members by COVID-19 may trigger anxiety in surviving children. There are already instances of increased anxiety in children who, fearing infection, believe that anyone they're close to will die from the virus.

Amid efforts to bring the COVID-19 pandemic to a close, there is a lack of consensus among experts regarding the next steps for vaccination. The majority of adults are expected to receive a vaccine, while opinions within the scientific community are split regarding the vaccination of children. Given that children are more susceptible to contracting and transmitting COVID-19, it is essential to base the decision on vaccinating them on the evidence currently available. Currently, there is insufficient research to demonstrate the efficacy of COVID-19 vaccinations in younger age groups and their potential interactions with other vaccines given to children. The vaccination campaign for children is currently in its early stages.

II. IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON CHILDREN

a. Impact of COVID-19 on Children with Disabilities

As we face the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, it's important that we protect everyone

¹¹ Andrea Danese, et al., *Child and adolescent mental health amidst emergencies and disasters*, 216 THE BRIT. JOUR. OF PSY., 159-162 (2020).

in our community. Individuals with disabilities or conditions that increase their susceptibility to severe outcomes from COVID-19 are particularly affected. The Ministry of Social Justice and Welfare's Department for the Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD) has recently released comprehensive guidance for ensuring the health and safety of disabled people during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹² There is a lack of reference to support provided for educational services delivered via distance learning, open enrollment, or in a student's residence.

The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), specifically its Department of School Literacy and Education, is dedicated to guaranteeing children's access to educational resources on the internet. The three primary initiatives of the Ministry of Human Resource Development of India include the National Repository of Open Educational Resources (NROER), Digital Infrastructure For School Education (DIKSHA), providing students with access to over 200 million pages of content, and Study Webs of Active–Learning for Young Aspiring Minds (SWAYAM), the nation's inaugural "MOOCs platform" offering over 250 courses developed by academic institutions, including DTH channels. The text does not address the potential impact of these programmes on exceptional children or their effectiveness in meeting their unique needs.¹³ Parents of children with disabilities are encountering fresh obstacles due to a pandemic that is necessitating their separation from their social circle. These youngsters, who have grown used to a scheduled school day and learning environment, must adapt to these changing environments.

b. Impact of COVID-19 on Child Sexual Abuse Victims

As per a study conducted by the Aarambh India Initiative, a non-governmental organisation based in Mumbai, and the ADM Capital Foundation, children who have survived sexual assault in Mumbai are experiencing increased isolation and social exclusion in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. This situation has resulted in notable challenges for the families of child abuse survivors.¹⁴ The study's findings are based on interviews with over 127 families in Mumbai who have at least one member who is a survivor of child sexual abuse. The researchers found that

¹² Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment. Comprehensive Disability Inclusive Guidelines. DEPwD issues comprehensive disability inclusive guidelines to States/UTs for protection and safety of persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan) in light of COVID-19. <https://pib.gov.in/Press-Release-Page.aspx?PRID=1608495>. 2020; Mar 27 (last visited 18th April, 2022).

¹³ Pooja Pandey & Sumyesh Srivastava, *Excluding the excluded: India's response to the education of children with disabilities during COVID-19*, THE TIM. OF IND. (2020). (last visited 18th April, 2022).

¹⁴ Coronavirus outbreak: For families of child sexual abuse survivors, lockdown makes dealing with trauma much more difficult-india news, Firstpost, <https://www.firstpost.com/india/coronavirus-outbreak-for-families-of-child-sexual-abuse-survivors-lockdown-makes-dealing-with-trauma-much-more-difficult-8277121.html> (last visited Apr 19, 2022)

many of these families have been struggling to pay their rent and other household bills since the lockdown began. Amidst the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous individuals have faced unemployment, leading to financial constraints that hinder their ability to access essential utilities such as electricity and clean water.

Furthermore, the study revealed that the implementation of lockdown measures has posed challenges for survivors in terms of accessing support services to manage their trauma. Many families who were relying on emergency shelter services were unable to continue receiving them during lockdown due to infection risks from sharing space with others (including other survivors). Consequently, certain individuals found themselves with no alternative but to return home, where they encountered increased stress due to being confined in close proximity to family members who had previously committed sexual assault against them.

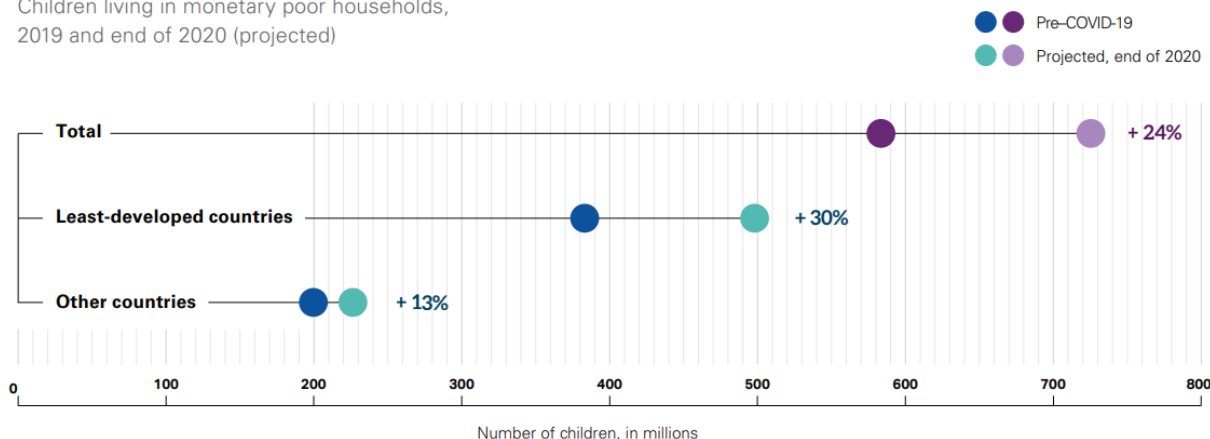
Child sexual abuse has been rampant in India for years, but the lockdown has only made it worse. In a press release by the Childline India Foundation on 31st March 2020 about their helpline, they reported a 50% increase in calls to the helpline during the first 11 days of lockdown. The report also indicated that there was an average of 1,000 incoming calls per day. It is unsurprising that children are currently spending increased amounts of time at home with their abusers, while social distancing measures hinder their ability to seek assistance from other adults.¹⁵ We find it more than coincidental that, during the lockdown of 2020 and 2021, we have seen a sharp rise in cases of sexual abuse in domestic settings. It is well known that a substantial percentage of sexually abusive behaviour toward children has been situational in nature - that is, the abuser may not have had a sexual preference for children or even people of his or her own gender, but due to circumstances - especially circumstances in which the abuser is isolated from his or her regular social group - they engage in this kind of behaviour. This is especially true when it comes to incestuous situations. Self-quarantining at home also implies that the victim must remain in constant and close contact with the abuser, which may be exceedingly draining on the victim's emotions.¹⁶

¹⁵ D Buckshee, *Child abuse, pornography on the rise in India's COVID-19 lockdown*, QUIN. FIT (2020). (last visited 18th April, 2022).

¹⁶ Peter Green, *Risks to children and young people during covid-19 pandemic*, 369 JOURNAL Start Page(2020).

c. Impact of Covid-19 on Indian Slum Children and Street Children

Children living in monetary poor households,
2019 and end of 2020 (projected)



Source: Joint UNICEF-Save the Children analysis.

Figure 1: Children living in monetary poor households, Pre-COVID-19 and after 2020 (projected): *The least-developed countries have had a significantly higher rise in child poverty during COVID-19.*

Over 100,000 people call helplines every day, and thousands have been going to sleep hungry even as the nation shuts down in an effort to fight the pandemic. Rag-pickers, traffic-light vendors, and other street children populate the streets of India, where they live in cramped quarters in narrow lanes and under flyovers. Everyone has been ordered to stay at home during the lockdown. It is still uncertain what the future holds for the children residing on the streets. What is the outcome when they depart? As a result of the economic challenges brought about by the lockdown measures implemented due to the coronavirus pandemic, numerous children have been left without homes. The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights ¹⁷ (NCPCR) has identified some measures that could be taken by the government in order to keep children off the streets when life resumes its normal flow. The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has recommended that the Union government roll out a database to track street children and link them to social welfare measures. The establishment of the database was deemed essential by the commission due to the absence of official statistics regarding the population of street children in India.

It also noted that the lack of official data meant that these children were being excluded from key social programmes, including welfare schemes and education initiatives. The NCPCR proposed that children be registered as “street children” as soon as they are found living on the

¹⁷ Hereinafter “NCPCR”.

streets, and linked to appropriate relief measures until they can be rehabilitated.¹⁸

d. Impact of Covid-19 on Migrant Worker's Children

The exodus of migrants from urban areas has caused significant concern. Children in the following categories may be those whose parents are currently undergoing migration. Initially, there are children whose parents have departed for work, leaving them in the villages. They depend on remittances sent back to their home country for their sustenance. Due to the lockdown measures, the dietary habits and health status of these young individuals are likely to be promptly affected. Another group consists of children who move to new areas with their parents, often employed in industries such as construction, brick kilns, or agriculture. According to a survey conducted at casual employment locations in seven Indian towns, 80 per cent of migrant children did not have access to Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), with 30 per cent of them never having been enrolled in school.¹⁹ Overwhelmingly, the youngsters were discovered to be living in unsafe and unsanitary circumstances.

As the present pandemic worsens, the predicament of migrant workers' children will only become worse. As many as tens of thousands of these households returned to their home countries with newborns as well as toddlers in tow, exposing their youngsters to the dangers of famine and sickness. Children who relocate in search of work make up the last segment. Observers advocating for the rights of children have identified a range of challenges, such as the financial impact and physical mistreatment experienced by children. Aside from quarantine facilities, state borders, relief, and transit camps should provide families with safe and child-friendly shelters, along with nutritious food, clean water, and sanitary facilities.

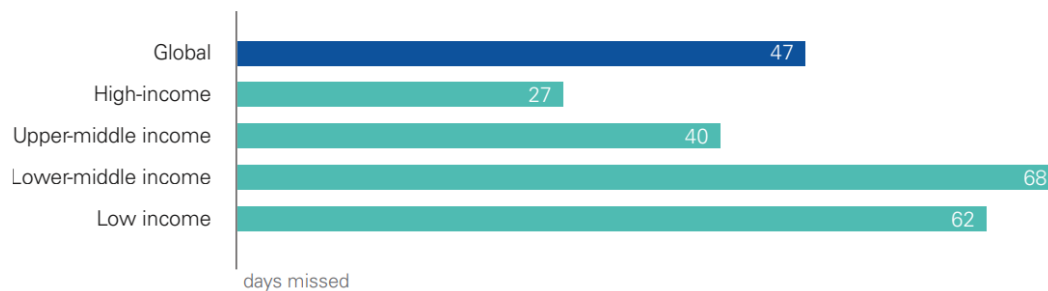
III. IMPACT OF LOCKDOWN ON CHILDREN AND THEIR LIVES IN INDIA

a. Impact of Lockdown on Education of Children

Owing to the Covid-19 pandemic, educational institutions such as schools and colleges were shut down nationwide. The most significant impact was observed in juvenile individuals. In numerous locations, children were unable to attend school for nearly two years, leading to their discontinuation of education as a consequence of financial constraints and household circumstances.

¹⁸ Covid-19 lockdown: NCPCR to focus on creating database of street children Republic World, <https://www.republicworld.com/india-news/general-news/covid-19-lockdown-ncpcr-to-focus-on-creating-database-of-street-children.html> (last visited Apr 20, 2022)

¹⁹ Behera, Ratikanta & Daniel, Umi & Minz, Roshan, *Young Lives at Worksite* (2014).



Source: UNESCO-UNICEF-World Bank joint survey round 2, 2020.

Figure 2: Average days of school missed, by income level: *Students in lower-income countries have missed more days of school than students in higher-income countries.*

According to a report of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), only 16 states and union territories across the country are providing private admission facilities to eligible student groups and economically weaker sections without any fee in unaided schools. The NCPCR has prepared a report on the implementation of Section 12(1)(c) of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, popularly known as the Right to Education Act²⁰(RTE Act). Under this section, private unaided schools should provide free education to children from weaker groups and 25% of seats are to be reserved for children from weaker sections.²¹ According to the Right to Education Act, children between the ages of 6 and 14 in India are entitled to free and mandatory education. The report indicated that the enrollment rate of students from disadvantaged backgrounds is significantly low. The report states that the enrollment of children under the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) category is just 5.4% of the total enrollment, which as per the RTE Act, 2009 should be at least 25%. Parents facing financial problems due to COVID-19 are sending their children from private schools to government schools. The main reason for this is the exorbitant fees charged by private schools.²²

According to the state education department, 2.82 lakh students in Gujarat have been transferred from private schools to government schools in the academic year 2021-22. Similarly, in Delhi, 1.58 lakh students, 1.25 in Telangana, 2 lakh students in Haryana, and 1,85,480 students in Punjab went to government schools. The percentage of students enrolled in government schools increased from 65.8 per cent in 2020 to 70.3 per cent in 2021, while the percentage of students

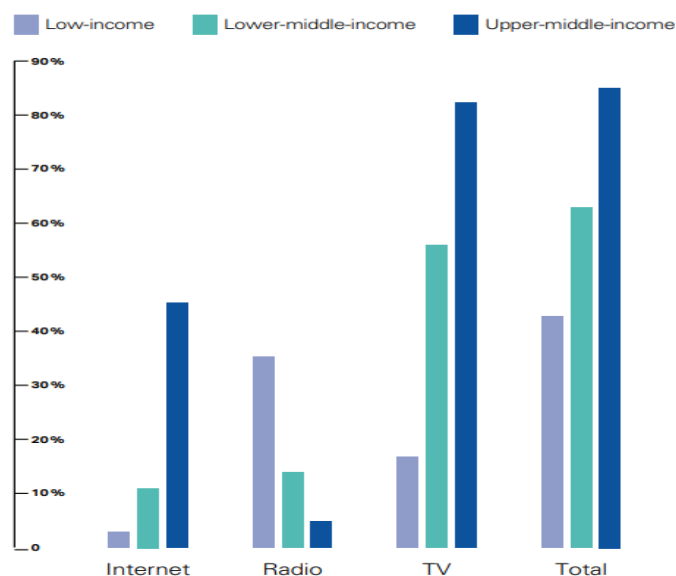
²⁰ Hereinafter "RTE".

²¹ Report "IMPACT OF EXEMPTION UNDER ARTICLE 15(5) W.R.T. ARTICLE 21A OF THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA ON EDUCATION OF CHILDREN OF MINORITY COMMUNITIES", National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), New Delhi, p. 12. (March 2021)

²² *Id.*

enrolled in private schools decreased from 28.8 per cent to 24.4 per cent over the same period, according to ASER 2021 data.²³

Schools remained closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In the midst of online education, the scope of education has been greatly narrowed. According to a survey, 8% of children in rural areas were able to study online, while 37% of children were not able to study.²⁴



Source: UNICEF joint survey data and household surveys

Figure 3: Share of students reached by remote learning policies globally.

Around 60% of the population resides in rural regions across various states such as Assam, Chandigarh, Delhi, Gujarat, Haryana, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal. Additionally, approximately 60% of the households belong to Dalit or tribal communities, leading to limited access to online education as a result of insufficient smartphone availability.²⁵

As we can see from this data Children's right to education is being violated due to the pandemic and it has become difficult for children to comply with the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act.

b. Impact Of Lockdown on Health of Children

• Impact Of Lockdown on Immunisation of Children

In light of the Ebola epidemic's influence on normal vaccination efforts, we can learn a few things. Immunisation coverage decreased by over 25% during the Ebola outbreak in West

²³ Annual Status of Education Report (Rural) 2021, p. 23 (2021).

²⁴ Bakhla, Nirali, et al. "Locked Out: Emergency Report on School Education." p. 2. (2021).

²⁵ *Id.* at p. 3.

Africa in 2016 as a result of health system disruptions.²⁶ While the Ebola epidemic in the Democratic Republic of the Congo claimed the lives of roughly 2,000 people, measles killed twice as many people in 2019 because vaccination programmes were disrupted, according to a UNICEF study.²⁷ Essential medical services, including vaccination, must be maintained during a lockdown, according to Government of India rules issued on April 15, 2020.²⁸ During the current pandemic even though precise data is not yet available, India's universal vaccination programme seems to be in decline.

- **Impact of Lockdown on Non-Covid Health Emergency Situations Related to Children**

Even before the pandemic, the hospital could be a scary place for kids. The bright lights, the unfamiliar equipment, and the unusual surroundings can be overwhelming. Parents often harbour a widespread apprehension towards hospitals due to the perceived risk associated with pandemics. For numerous parents, this concern is well-founded as they have either been infected with COVID-19 themselves or are acquainted with individuals who have had adverse encounters with the virus. Concerns have been raised regarding the potential for children to become ill due to close contact with symptomatic individuals or from exposure to COVID-19 through possibly asymptomatic staff members. Regrettably, this results in numerous children not receiving essential medical treatment. There was a delay in treating prevalent illnesses such as typhoid fever and dengue fever. RT-PCR testing was conducted on multiple paediatric patients in the medical facility due to the risk of potential spread of infection.

- c. **Impact of Lockdown on The Psychology of Children**

The news about the pandemic's impacts is frequently terrible, and children are being subjected to an information overload.²⁹ Adults in their immediate environment seem to be under a great deal of pressure. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced a new way of life that requires social distancing, self-quarantining, and staying at home. This new way of life has forced changes in child development, especially among children aged 2 to 9 years old.

A growing number of young children are currently grappling with ongoing feelings of anxiety related to the new societal standards implemented in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. This

²⁶ Xiaojin Sun, et al., *Impact of the Ebola outbreak on routine immunization in western area, Sierra Leone-a field survey from an Ebola epidemic area*, 17 BMC PUB. HEAL., 1-6 (2017).

²⁷ Measles claims more than twice as many lives than ebola in DR congo | | UN news United Nations, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/11/1052321> (last visited Apr 19, 2022)

²⁸ Revised Consolidated Guidelines of Ministry of Home Affairs. Ministry of Information & Broadcasting. Available from: <https://pib.gov.in/Press Release Page.aspx?PRID=1614611> (last visited 18th April, 2022).

²⁹ Danese, et al., *THE BRIT. JOUR. OF PSY.*, 159-162 (2020).

anxiety is causing them to be fearful of going places and doing things that they previously enjoyed, such as visiting friends or family members, having playdates, or participating in activities.

In certain instances, these concerns have also led children to display aggressive behaviour, along with heightened attachment and difficulties with separation. Children experiencing separation issues may face challenges during specific transitional periods in their daily routine, such as departing for school in the morning or leaving a friend's residence following a playdate.³⁰ It's important to note that separation anxiety is not only a fear of being left alone or of being separated from parents, but goes beyond that to include the fear of being apart from a loved one - a sibling, close relative, or even a pet. Coronavirus is a new thing that no one has seen before. It's scary for everyone, especially kids. But let's think about what makes us feel better when we're scared: talking to someone we love. During this period of uncertainty, it is increasingly crucial to engage in conversations with our children regarding COVID-19 and its potential impact on their daily routines.

IV. SEVEN-POINT PLAN TO RESPOND, RECOVER AND REIMAGINE A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD FOR EVERY CHILD IN INDIA

The primary focus of any strategy aimed at addressing the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic should be the health and well-being of children. It is crucial to guarantee that children have sufficient access to food and proper nutrition, giving aid to and protection for vulnerable children who need it. Children from low-income families, those with special needs, and those in precarious conditions have an increased risk of contracting COVID. The present and future generations' well-being depends on promptly addressing these issues in order to prevent rising inequality and promote prosperity that benefits everyone.

Government, municipal, as well as non-governmental organisations actively working with the communities impacted must be engaged in the response in a coordinated and highly publicised way to be most successful. Authorities play a crucial role in offering food and financial assistance, redeploying workers from government services as well as child protection programs to deal with emergency circumstances, as well as putting up national alert and information systems; local authorities are vital to supplementing national help and customise the support to local requirements. Governments play an important role. Facilitating the connection of measures with individuals in need, along with recognising and engaging in discussions

³⁰ Louise Dalton, et al., *Communication with children and adolescents about the diagnosis of a life-threatening condition in their parent*, 393 THE LANCET, 1164-1176 (2019).

regarding available support and useful guidance, as well as fostering collaboration among family service providers to develop the most efficient response, are essential roles of family service providers.

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a growing demand for support. Recognising community needs promptly and accurately is crucial to reducing social unrest and alleviating pressure on essential health and care services. It is possible to discover gaps in services and finance in a community by using a resource directory or systems mapping. The usage of system mapping in digital platforms provides families with a way to locate services more rapidly.

Partners in the church sector, as well as social enterprises, are essential for establishing channels of communication with the community about available resources and identifying unmet needs within civil society.

a. Increasing Food Aid to Those in Need

Because school lunches are no longer provided to children in COVID-19 and economic losses restrict the ability of impoverished families to acquire food, an urgent boost in food and nutrition assistance is needed. In the context of value chains in developing countries, it is essential to enact laws that recognise the significance of all workers in the informal sector, including those involved in food production, processing, distribution, and sales, as essential service providers to mitigate the risk of food scarcity.

b. Ensuring Children in Urgent Need Of Help And Protection Are Supported

In order to help and safeguard vulnerable children, family support and child protection agencies must be present in their homes. Workers must be educated on safe practices during COVID-19, and case management techniques and supports must be re-evaluated and modified.

Parents' disagreements over child support and custody arrangements may exacerbate the stress on children who have divorced or separated from their parents. Non-payment of child alimony may be addressed via mediation services and organisations, which keep an eye out for non-compliance with child custody and/or alimony agreements.

c. Reduction Of Children's and Teenagers' Mental Health Issues As Well As The Reduction Of The Social Consequences Of Incarceration

Parents and carers across various countries and institutions are being provided guidance on how to effectively communicate with their children regarding the COVID-19 pandemic in a way that is suitable for their age and helps alleviate anxiety.

d. Assisting Parents to Support Their Children's Education By Ensuring That Learning Proceeds In A Continuous Manner

Many educational systems have shifted to online as well as e-learning in the wake of school closures. Whenever possible, countries have made use of already existing online distance education courses, as well as creating their own materials and platforms from scratch. Recent advancements in technology have enabled new companies to provide their tools to the broader population. In regions with restricted internet access, educational content has been disseminated through television and radio broadcasts. To avoid exacerbating the existing achievement gap, further measures are necessary to support children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

For parents who aren't generally quite engaged in their children's school activities, helping them set up quality tutoring as well as teaching sessions is critical. Educators and school officials are encouraged to share relevant information and guidance with parents to support their children's academic success at home. It is also important to maintain communication with parents of students who may be at risk of academic struggles or dropping out of school. As part of this initiative, it is important to prioritise children from economically disadvantaged families who may face challenges accessing online courses, as well as those who are already benefiting from additional educational support. This includes children with attention deficit disorders, disabilities, migrant backgrounds, and other similar circumstances.

e. Top Priority Recommendations for Schools

- School facilities must be cleaned and classrooms must be adequately ventilated on a regular basis to guarantee the safety of students.
- In order to plan and organise student learning, diagnostic formative assessments of all pupils will be necessary for tracking progress and limiting the effect of learning losses. In order to help the most vulnerable students, special education services will be required. For example, large-scale grade repetition should not be used as a strategy to help the underprivileged.
- Safety: The pandemic might cause a wide range of mental problems for pupils, ranging from mild anxiety to more severe symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). While in isolation, certain students may have lacked opportunities for physical activity. The return to "regular life" will need specific care for students' emotional and physical well-being.

f. Keeping Children Safe in The Digital World

All stakeholders engaged in protecting children from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic should collaborate to guarantee that children can access the advantages of the digital realm while also safeguarding them from potential risks. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, children are increasingly utilising online platforms. Therefore, it is essential to establish a safe online space and equip them with the necessary digital competencies and resources to navigate potential risks.

Educators and carers are crucial in safeguarding children from harm, but tailored support is necessary for them to fulfil their roles effectively during this challenging period. To this aim, it is critical that learning settings include digital literacy, skills, and competence. Furthermore, in light of the current COVID-19 situation and the ensuing flood of misinformation, it is crucial that students have the digital literacy necessary to evaluate the material they are exposed to critically.

Given the increasing risks faced by children in the digital realm, such as sexting, cyberbullying, and sexual exploitation, it is imperative for authorities and internet service providers to implement measures to protect children from harm. Since the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to lead to an upsurge in child sexual exploitation in the digital environment, hotlines, informational centres and proper legislative safeguards for children at risk are going to be even more critical.

g. Working To Alleviate the Plight Of Child Poverty

We may predict a substantial increase in poverty that will particularly affect children.

Telecommuting can provide assistance to numerous working parents who are restricted, but it may not be sustainable for extended durations. Parents of young children and single parents who need to dedicate a substantial amount of time to looking after their children encounter considerable challenges when working remotely.

The vulnerabilities of children who were previously unaffected by the pandemic have been brought to light by the COVID-19 crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted a preexisting understanding that our children and families are susceptible to various challenges. An essential requirement is a resilient infrastructure that can withstand crises and provide necessary services and assistance. The crisis has also brought to light the deficiencies in this infrastructure. The legacy of COVID-19 includes a need to improve protection for previously unaffected populations and to adapt data systems and service infrastructures to meet future challenges. What we can take from this crisis is a determination to not let it happen again.

This infrastructure needs to be built around two key elements: data and policies. These elements need to work together in order to build the type of infrastructure that children and families need, regardless of the type of crisis they face.

Information plays a crucial role in shaping policies, and by implementing effective policies, the process of gathering data can be optimised, leading to a deeper comprehension of the requirements of children and families in times of emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

V. CONCLUSION

India's current problems are manifold. There will be many more as this pandemic progresses. The insufficiency of our current infrastructure to effectively address a global pandemic has been highlighted by the emergence of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases. There is a need for increased health funding and enhanced health system efficiency to enhance response times, deliver improved care to diverse populations, and accommodate a higher volume of patients simultaneously. Telemedicine should play a larger role in providing non-emergency services. It is essential to conduct crisis management exercises nationwide regularly to enhance preparedness for various emergencies, such as pandemics. Finally, we must all make significant lifestyle changes - especially when it comes to travel - to ensure that we don't spread the disease beyond our borders or introduce new ailments into our homes.

The expansion of digitalization is contributing to the evolving situation surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. According to data from the OECD, the majority of children dedicate a significant portion of their time to activities on the Internet. Hence, digital technologies could potentially mitigate some of the adverse impacts of the crisis: Children, parents, educators, and caregivers may all benefit from the convenience and affordability of digital gadgets and internet connections. In addition to providing physical and mental stimulation, digital gadgets may also serve as a source of external psychological and social support. They make it easier for kids to communicate socially online and help them become more tech-savvy in general. Digital technologies have their drawbacks, such as a reduced quality of home-schooling and social connections, as compared to traditional methods. If internet usage is increasingly unsupervised, the hazards of sexual exploitation as well as cyberbullying may be magnified. Moreover, a significant number of underprivileged children lack a conducive environment at home for academic pursuits and may also lack the necessary technology for remote learning. This is likely to expand the gap between children. This education divide may have long-term consequences. If COVID-19's legacy is not addressed, the divide between privileged and underprivileged children will widen even more.