

Impact of school closure on children's emotional health and behavior

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ABSTRACT

Covid-19 has worsened the situation all over the world. To improve the conditions and stop the spread of pandemic our government has taken many tough steps, one of them is closing the schools. The objective of the study is to assess the emotional health and behavior of children during school closure. In this research sample is collected from parents of Nanded city, Pune using random selection method. A number of 102 parents responded to the online survey consisting of Strength and Difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) developed by the child psychiatrist Robert N. Goodman for the children aged 4-11 years. The questionnaire was created using Google forms and survey was done through WhatsApp and email links, following the social distancing norms. The data collected were converted into excel data sheet and analyzed and interpreted using descriptive statistics Mean and Mean Percentage Differences and compared manually to the scale range. The result shows a significant increase/decrease in emotions and behavior of children.

Keywords: Covid-19, School Closure, Emotional health, Behavior.

Formerly referred as 2019-nCoV, Covid-19 is a virus from the same family of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). It's out broke from Wuhan, China, in Dec 2019, accepted as a pandemic in March 2020 it lead to public health emergency throughout the world. Our country reacted to the need of zero social contact in March 2020 taking decision of lockdown to limit its spread and prepare for the coming medical requirements. Thousands have lost their lives and lacks are affected, restricted to home and lack of resources has caused negative consequences to our society, effecting mental and behavioral health. As per 2020 statistics, the student population contributes to around 28% of total Indian population. School closure as a part of lockdown from last 4 months has effected student's life specially those at very young age. Children below 15 years of age represent approximately one-third of the world population, around 15% of them are showing social behavioral disorders. The 80% of world's children are reared in developing countries where mental health system is negligible. Recent studies show that the mental health problems in children vary from 7% to 43% in Indian context. Children may express anxiousness, fearfulness, aggression and unhappiness; they might not be able to concentrate for longer durations or may have difficulty in controlling emotions. Complaints of headache,

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stomachache, trouble in having friends or dealing and following adult instructions. The stated issues indicate that child needs attention. The most vulnerable population is of children as being at home, Zero peer connection, no outside play time, no social gatherings and being part of family financial and emotional issues they are more troubled. Though government and Non profitable organizations have taken various steps to support mental wellbeing in current situation by providing telecommunication facilities or facilitating material on websites like Manodarpan. Yet studying about their problems is of importance during this period.

Emotional health

One who can control thoughts, feelings and behavior is an emotionally healthy person. They can easily follow problem solving and bounce back from setbacks. Good emotional health is a fundamental aspect of self-awareness, high self-esteem and overall, wellbeing. It represents the ability of a person to accept and manage feelings through challenge and change. Emotional health of children is equally important as their physical health. It allows them to develop resilience to overcome whatever life throws and grow into healthy adults.

Behavior

The way an individual acts in response to any situations reflects behavior. It depends on factors like age, physical and emotional development and family setup. When it comes to children their behavior is affected by many other like family type, parenting style, financial status of family, use of gadgets, friend circle and most important school, as their skills and good and bad habits are encouraged or discouraged in the school. Children learn by visuals, listening, activities, facilities and by following other students or teachers. Social behavior of children is shaped in school as it helps in developing their perception for life and improves critical thinking.

School closure could possibly lead to behavioral problems in children which are of significant concern for teachers and parents and can have both immediate and long term unfavorable conditions.

METHODOLOGY

Population and sample

The current study consists of randomly selected 102 parents of children aged 4 to 11 years who responded out of 150 residents from Nanded city Pune. Either mother or father has filled the questionnaire through Google forms sent to them using WhatsApp group or email links. The children in this study belong to either single or double earning parents from middle income families, who may be following nuclear or joint family culture, the parents might be doing work from home or office.

Instrument used

The data are collected using Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) developed by the child psychiatrist Robert N. Goodman (2005). The questionnaire is widely accepted for children aged 2-17 years. There are three different versions of this questionnaire for different age groups. In this study the questionnaire used is SDQ for 4-11 years to be filled by parents.

The questionnaire contains 25 statements questions intended to measure children's emotional health and behavior across five sub scales: a) Emotional symptoms b) Conduct problems d) Hyperactivity d) Peer problems e) Pro-social behavior.

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The respondents are asked to think about how things have been over the past 4 months and are encouraged to answer all questions. The questionnaire combines positive and negative statements about children's emotional health and behavior. For each statement the parents are asked to mark their choice as not true, somewhat true or certainly true.

The interpretation is done using descriptive method using mean and mean percentage difference which is the average of the percentage differences of two results, i.e. the observed result is compared to the (lower) range of either normal, slightly raised or problematic range depending on the calculated range observed to show the increase or decrease in the range of subscales or total difficulties.

Interpretation

The 25 statements are rated on 3-point scale by scoring between 0 to 2, proper manual scoring is followed. The total score is generated by summing scores from all the scales except pro-social scale as the absence of pro-social behavior is conceptually different from the presence of psychological difficulties. The resultant score ranges from 0 to 40 and is counted missing if any of the four-sub scale score is missing. A lower score is desirable for emotional problems, conduct problems, hyperactivity and peer problem scales whereas a higher score is desirable for the pro-social scale, while a lower scale is desirable for the total difficulties score.

The responses obtained are converted into Excel sheet and based on its chart conversion the percentage of the three category respondents (Not true, somewhat true and certainly true) are obtained. The percentage of respondents is converted into numbers out of 102 and scoring is done, based on the scoring standards of the scale and further mean is calculated to obtain the sub scale results. Excluding Pro-social rest four subscales results are added to obtain the Total difficulties score. To find the highest range of scale the percentage increase method is used and the highest order range for each subscale is obtained.

RESULTS

Among the questionnaire answered by parents its seen that there is 25% increment in children from slightly raised range to problematic range of Emotional problems , 45.73% increment in children from slightly raised range to problematic range of conduct problems, 13.72% increase in children from normal range to slightly raised range of hyperactivity ,22.85% in children from normal range to slightly raised symptoms of peer problems, the total difficulty score contributes 17.27% increment in children from slightly raised to very problematic range, the pro-social score contributes to 27.23% decrease in children from slightly raised range to normal range. The following interpretations are made based on the table below:

Scores	Normal range	Slightly raised	Problematic range	Observed range
Total difficulties	0-13	14-16	17-40	18.765
Emotional problems	0-3	4	5-10	5.019
Conduct problems	0-2	3	4-10	4.372
Hyperactivity	0-5	6	7-10	5.686
Peer Problems	0-2	3	4-10	3.688
Pro-social	6-10	5	0-4	6.362

DISCUSSION

As we can observe that the mean values of respondent scorings differ from the expected ranges of normal, slightly raised and problematic range respectively. The total difficulties observed range falls in its problematic range, Emotional problems observed range falls under its Problematic range, conduct problems observed range falls in its problematic range, Hyperactivity and Peer Problems observed ranges falls under their slightly raised range whereas Pro-social observed range falls in its normal range. The mean differences explain the number of children falling in each range of all the respective subscales. This research focused only on children living in Nanded city of Pune belonging to middle income families. The changes in emotional and mental health could have been effected by number of factors.

CONCLUSION

It is important to have keen observation of children time to time. If the difficulties in emotions or behavior continue for longer duration or child tries to engage self in unsafe behavior immediate help should be sought from a professional. The evaluation done by a health professional could help to clarify the underlying reason for change in child's behavior. Assessment results could demark the reason that the changes are related to home or school early treatments can be planned and prevent further serious problems.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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