

COVID-19 lockdown: children from online classes became stubborn, moody, and careless and over weighted

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ABSTRACT

Crisp shirt and trousers? Check. Polished shoes? Check. But instead of the distant sound of the school bus, it's the phone that rings. Over the last four months, the nationwide lockdown imposed following the Coronavirus scare has made schools take the online route to help students continue with their education. Children, as young as four years, have now gotten into the groove of interacting with their teachers and classmates via video conference – a change that arose out of necessity. And parents are concerned it's affecting their eyesight, became stubborn, moody, careless and over weighted. The aim of this study is to explore and describe the concerns of parents towards at risk of harm as their children lives more increasingly online during lockdown in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19, Lockdown, Internet, Children's behavior, Stubborn, Moody, Careless, Obese

As COVID-19 pandemic continues to expand in India and in the world, only one thing is certain: the current outbreak will have profound impact not only in the health and economic situation, but also on the psychosocial well-being of societies across nations. The impacts will be felt differently among different population groups. Among these, one group will face additional challenges to understand, absorb, and deal with the changes that COVID-19 is bringing to our world: the children. In the current context of lock down and restriction of movements, children have constrained access to socialization, play, and even physical contact, critical for their psychosocial wellbeing and development. School closures are preventing children from access to learning and limiting their interactions with peers. Children may feel confused and at loss with the current situation, leading to frustration and anxiety, which will only increase with the overexposure to mass and social media, especially among adolescents.

The COVID-19 outbreak has disrupted the academic year, cancelled classes and examinations across the country.

“Out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls; the most massive characters are seared with scars,” wrote Lebanese-American poet Kahlil Gibran. Childhood is celebrated as most

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COVID-19 lockdown: children from online classes became stubborn, moody, and careless and overweight

influential time for sprout of human mind. This phase of life is distinctly cherished for learning the prevailing social decorum, values, morals, principles, exemplary social archetype and positive broad outlook. Momentarily, the universe has become restricted to home and courtyard for house-restraint childhood. But in this confined milieu, their minds roam free. The COVID-19 “holocaust” has snatched their school-plays, kindergartens, amusement parks, and friendly touch. To ensure that students do not miss out on their studies, schools moved classes online, forcing students to attend lectures via their gadgets.

Online classes are the only way a child can continue the learning process,” says Ranjini Chalam, a Delhi-based PR professional, who also feels parents must, on their part, monitor screen time beyond these classes.

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), which is engaged in humanitarian aid for young ones around the world, said “millions of children are at increased risk of harm as their lives move increasingly online during lockdown in the Covid-19 pandemic”.

The National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS) has been studying the increased dependency on gadgets among adults and children amid the lockdown and monitoring its impact on mental health.

The schools have been closed for almost three months. Children are taking an average of five hours of online classes. Now its side effects have also come to light. They have undergone many changes due to being constantly on screen. 71% of children have become irritable, stubborn, moody, obese, tantrums and careless about work. More than 65% of children have undergone physical changes – Ashok Gupta Superintendent, JK Lone Hospital. “Children were found to be flying into a fit of rage, uncontrollable crying, disobedience to their parents, and also displayed irritable behavioural pattern, if they were told to lay off their electronic devices,” said Dr. Ashok Gupta.

In 2007 study by von Hippel et al. reported the effects of school versus nonschool environments on overweight in childhood. The authors posed the question of whether nonschool environments experienced during summer vacations contribute more to BMI gain in childhood than when school is in session. Von Hippel et al. found that BMI gain was more rapid during summer vacation than during the in-session school year.

Dr Navanil Barua, a neurosurgeon based in Guwahati said, “Children need to indulge in a lot of physical activities in order to stay healthy. The recent trend of online education and online gaming has been paving way for many diseases like obesity and heart diseases. If things continue this way for long, we can expect to see a spurt in occurrence of such diseases at an early age.”

“Increased screen time can cause increased sedentary behaviour in children and teens, decreased metabolism, disturbance in sleep cycle, more distractibility and perhaps lower well-being,” said Dr Kanika Ahuja, who teaches psychology at Delhi’s Lady Shri Ram College.

Significance of the Study

The current study compiled a questionnaire to investigate the epidemic affecting children’s behaviors and their health status. Based on the characteristics of epidemic peaks, the study

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conducted preliminary psychological and behavioral health assessment and provided a basis for timely psychological intervention and reduction of Children behavioural problems.

Aim & Objective

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on children's behavior and changes due to being constantly on screen.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

A total of 50 children under the age of 18 and their parents were selected for this research to complete the self-made General situation Questionnaire and Child behavior Questionnaire. The subjects were selected randomly and gender was not a parameter. All respondents provided informed consent and volunteered to participate in this study.

Measures

According to the purpose of the study, the "child behavior questionnaire" for children and their parents in the epidemic period of COVID-19 was compiled. It consists of two parts:

General Situation Questionnaire The questionnaire includes the parent section and the child section. There are 15 items each in the parent and the children section, including attitude towards COVID-19 and the impact of the epidemic on the children.

Child Behavior Questionnaire The questionnaire is mainly composed of children's recent behaviors such as time spent on electronic gazettes, sleep condition, change in behavior, how much activity, health status, change in concentration and temper. It consists of 20 items for parents.

Procedure

I used to collect the information from a sample of 50 parent selected using stratified random sampling technique through Google Classroom, Social media (Facebook and WhatsApp). The survey was conducted to assess the Child behavior of students during the COVID-19 outbreak by using structured questionnaires and designed the items that meet the research goals. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study and always observed the privacy rights of human subjects.

RESULTS

The results showed that there were significant differences in children's behavior after taking online classes during lockdown. The findings suggest that 90% of parents were concerned about the amount of time their children spent in front of screens and monitors. 85 % of the parents perceived changes (irritable, stubborn, moody, obese, tantrums and careless about work) in their children's behaviors during the quarantine. The most frequent symptoms after taking online classes were careless about work (75%), boredom (52%), irritability (60%), restlessness (80%), nervousness (88%), moody (59%), more likely to argue with the rest of the family (78%) and obesity (90%). As expected, children spent less time doing physical activity. Furthermore, the situation was more serious, and parents tended to report behavioural problems in their children.

DISCUSSION

Under the shadow of COVID-19, the lives of millions of children have temporarily shrunk to just their homes and their screens. In the analysis of data, parents mentioned that 85% of the children have been summoned to the extent of intoxication of mobile or laptop computer. Children aren't in a position to get away from the gadget even for half an hour. Due to lockdown, parents might start noticing behavioral changes in their children such as excessive arguments, refusals, opposition, defiance, or withdrawal, and it is not unusual for some kids to fall further behind.

PM Narendra Modi warned students against addiction to electronic gadgets earlier this year. In his *Pareeksha pe Charcha* (discussion on examinations) interaction with students in January, Modi said, "I'm all for using technology to advance our lives but let's not allow ourselves to be enslaved by technology," the PM said.

Medical literature shows that children are minimally susceptible to 2019-Corona virus disease (COVID-19), they are hit the hardest by psychosocial impact of this pandemic. Being quarantined in homes and institutions may impose greater psychological burden than the physical sufferings caused by the virus. School closure, lack of outdoor activity, aberrant dietary and sleeping habits are likely to disrupt children's usual lifestyle and can potentially promote monotony, distress, impatience, irritability, stubborn, moody, obese, tantrums and varied neuropsychiatric manifestations.

CONCLUSION

COVID-19 pandemic has caused a lot of uncertainty in the lives of Indian public, just like their global counterparts. Exposing children to screens from a young age is not right. It can hamper their overall development. The light emitted from the screen can strain children's eyes and could lead to vision problems throughout their lives. Watching a screen is also a passive activity that can make children lethargic and affect their thinking skills. Education is not just about information or content delivered to students via screens. It is about a lot more. And most of it takes place through the social interactions in a school, with peers, with the teachers. Since online classes have begun, all that has been cut out. And I think that would have other kinds of developmental and cognitive impact on the child and their development.

During epidemic of the COVID-19, Government, education, prevention and control work played an important role. People of the whole country can actively cooperate and speed up the control of the epidemic. There were significant differences in children's behavior and their mental health status. These differences can be mitigated by epidemic control, psychological intervention, and self-direction.

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COVID-19 lockdown: children from online classes became stubborn, moody, and careless and over weighted

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Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest. The subjects were asked to sign a consent form and after their approval their data was used.

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