Children in Covid Crisis: What is the Sustainable Way Forward?

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Humans are obsessed with building skills in the current times that will make way for them in the future. There is much discussion regarding the different kinds of skills that future generations will need. They want to teach skills to the upcoming generations to help them spearhead missions in the future, which one cannot even imagine today. One of the many 21st-century skills identified by various international and national organisations is the skill of problem-solving. It is essential to survive the demands of the changing times. The Covid-19 pandemic's arrival has led to a drastic change in every individual's lifestyle. From lockdowns to fighting for limited resources, from facing isolation to experiencing loss, the pandemic has pushed us to deal with situations one could never imagine.

The pandemic is a global crisis as it has affected thousands of people in each country. There have been months-long countrywide lockdowns that have led to economic, physical, social and mental crises. Thus, calling for urgent action. The crisis has hit everyone despite the variations in access to resources. It has affected all generations of people. However, children have been affected the most.

How has Covid Affected Children?

Given that children are in the developing stage, they have suffered the most. The pandemic has forced them to stay inside their houses and limited their socialisation to their immediate environment. They are unable to play outside, which has limited their peer interaction; their education has been limited to the digital medium. Many have experienced loss of loved ones and loss of both parents. Some were forced to leave school.These times have brought grave traumatic experiences for the children that cannot be ignored; the impact can be observed in their physical and mental health. With severe cases affecting adults, many children have lost their

parents. Consequently, leading to an increase in the orphan rate. On the other hand, as the education mode shifted online, many students have lost access to education due to a lack of necessary devices and the internet. Thereby widening the gap of the digital divide. *In a way, the pandemic has exposed the existing gaps in the systemic structures.*

Need for Collective Responsibility

While many negative scenarios were emerging with each day, people stepped up to support each other. There were volunteers to locate help for ambulances, hospital beds, meals, sharing digital devices for children's education, fundraisers, and publicity for help. Thus, collective responsibility could be observed. Dr. Bhargava, a member of the Adoption Recommendation Committee, Central Adoption Resource Agency (CARA), shared her concerns related to her experiences during the pandemic. *She highlighted a need for increased safeguarding for children (especially girls) because the misinformation on social media has increased illegal adoption and the possibility of human trafficking.* She emphasised the urgent need for grief and trauma counselling for children. *While another panellist, Professor Johri, CPCRasserted that there is a misconception that children will forget the loss of loved ones and traumatic issues because they are small.* She further argued that children have struggled with the restrictive middle-class mindset that restricts children's activities such as play and peer group interactions. Furthermore, Mr Anurag Kundu, Chair DCPCR, suggested that policies need to be inclusive for all children irrespective of their backgrounds. The loopholes in the system can be addressed if policies are designed to reach each member of society, which will further legally support the vulnerable in society.

What is the Way Forward?

Although people have come forward to address issues concerning children, there is a need for effective solutions. For example, the messages circulating about adoption through illegal means could have been prevented if the citizens had been more informed about the basic protocols of

adoption. This, nevertheless, highlights people's ability to problem-solve by coming forward to help each other. However, the question arises are these solutions helpful?

Check Source's Credibility

According to Dr. Bhargava, the media does play an essential role in informing the public. Thus, whenever one receives a message seeking help or providing help, it becomes an individual responsibility to check the credibility of the sources. On the other hand, authorities can step up and raise awareness for issues that may raise concern, such as educating on protocols for adoption.

Let Children Engage in Play

Concerning children's physical and mental health, parents need to remember to avoid restricting children from play. Play is an essential space for children to express as well as helps in their development. Moreover, there need to be spaces where dialogues for one's emotions can be expressed. Prof.Johri suggests that there is a need for spaces where grief can be articulated in cases of children dealing with trauma. Hence, having dialogues within families and with counsellors that encourage the expression of emotions can ease the burden.

Use Existing Data for Effective Solutions

Since the government sources have been collecting regular data on children's basic needs (health, safety, education etc.), such data can be used effectively to brainstorm effective solutions. Mr.Kundu suggested school attendance as one of the most important predictors of adversity. For example, if a child has been absent from school for longer than expected. In that case, the teachers may follow up to identify possible factors for the child's absence. *Thus, using attendance as indicators can help recognise children who may need support in various domains.*

As a student of Early Childhood Care and Education, I could draw connections across the courses that I am taking. In a course called Play Learning and Creativity, it highlighted how children's play spaces can be an important aspect for children to display some important skills

such as creativity and negotiation in claiming their space. *In play, they reflect on what they observe in society and are motivated to maximize their play experiences through inventions and reimaginations. Play can be an essential part of practising their agency and expressing themselves.* Second, I could draw connections to the family systems theory by Turnbull, Turnbull, Soodak, and Shogren (2011) which suggests an outline of how family systems function. The authors argue that families which are well functioning are often able to balance between the extremes of low and high adaptability. This theory helps us to understand the stress that families experienced during the pandemic due to the demand to adjust quickly to an unpredictable fast changing environment and how some families may have lost their equilibrium.

In conclusion, it can be suggested that there is an urgent need for collective action to support the children in crisis, given that all disciplines are interconnected. Therefore, no advances in sustainable solutions can occur in the coming years without the multi-sectional community contributing to societal improvement.

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