

Psychological Impact of Covid-19 Spread on the Mental Health Status of Children

Morad Ali Zareipour¹, Ala Monemi², Elham Nozad³ and Mohammad Saeed Jadgal^{4,*}

¹Health System Research Unit, Health Center of Urmia, Urmia University of Medical sciences, Urmia, Iran, ²Department of Psychology, Faculty of Basic Sciences, Urmia Branch, Islamic Azad University, Urmia, Iran, ³Department of Clinical Psychology, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Science, Islamic Azad University, Sanandaj, Iran and ⁴Department of Public Health, School of Nursing and Midwifery, Iranshahr University of Medical Sciences, Iranshahr, Iran

EXPRESSION OF VIEWPOINT

Due to the pandemic condition of covid-19 disease which has affected almost all important aspects of economic, political, social, and even military, affected all countries of the world, in other words, paralyzed all things, discussion of psychological effects of this viral disease on the mental health of people at different levels of society is very important (1). Due to the pathogenicity of this virus, release speed and the percentage of deaths due to disease, status of people's mental health at different levels of the community of patients with covid-19, health care staffs, families, children, students, psychological patients and even staffs of various occupations put them at risk in different ways (2).

Based on a research results, average index of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in quarantined children is fourfold more than non-quarantine children. Therefore, children due to current illness (Covid-19) who are isolated or quarantined, definitely will show signs of psychological symptoms more severe, such as acute stress disorder, compatibility disorder and grief disorder. According to the reports, 30% of these children show symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (3).

According to the Mental Health Foundation, media coverage of covid-19, prominent as one of the unique threats, and this issue has added panic, stress, and potential for mental illness. This disease has a high epidemic, and the result of this widespread epidemic was the filling of hospital beds, the extreme fatigue of medical teams, and the quarantine of people at their homes which has caused negative psychological effects in the community. Fear of disease, fear of death, spreading false news and rumors, interference with daily activities, regulations of prohibiting or restricting travel and transit, decreased social relations, occurrence of job and financial problems and, consequently, psychological burden and pressure on families, and restricting children to play at home, stay away from school and friends, loss of entertainment, stress and tens of other consequences, these conditions threaten the mental health of children and their parents (4-6).

*Address corresponding to this author at the Department of Public Health, School of Nursing and Midwifery, Iranshahr University of Medical Sciences, Iranshahr, Iran; Email: jadgal15@gmail.com

CONSEQUENCES AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS OF COVID-19 IN CHILDREN

1. Anxiety and fear: During the outbreak of Covid-19 disease and the quarantine of children in the home, environment, and related news such as the rapid transmission of the disease and death, children experience fear and anxiety. Fear of losing parents and getting nervous about getting infected is seen in children (7).
2. Increasing behavioral and emotional problems: Closing schools and quarantine at home leads to reduced physical activity and social interactions occurs in children. This can lead to increase behavioral and emotional problems. According to Zhang et al., Problems such as hyperactivity, nightmares, fatigue and boredom, low appetite, anxiety, irritability, and inattention are some of the emotional and behavioral problems seen during COVID- 19 pandemic (8).
3. Problems with self-regulation: The spread of Covid-19 is altering the usual course of adult's and children's lives with difficulties such as self-regulation due to changing bedtime, watching TV for long periods, and constantly using smartphones to do homework. These troubles can cause psychological problems for children (9).
4. Depression and post-traumatic stress disorder: Staying at home is not attractive for many children, and that can reach them to experience loneliness and eventually depression. Children who lose a family member as an outgrowth of the disease show signs of post-traumatic stress or acute stress due to their inability to mourn and suppress grief (10).
5. Problems related to adaptability and coping strategies: Most of the children who go to school show incompatibility problems when schools closed due to Covid-19 disease. In the school environment, children usually communicate a lot with their friends. With the closure of schools and the deterioration of social activities as an outcome of Covid-19 disease, children's interactions, especially with their peers, are decreased. Decreased peer interaction is associated with problems in social adjustment (11).

6. Experience of misbehavior and emotional harassment: The decision of closing the multiple jobs at the height of the Covid-19 outbreaks may cause economic hardships for some families, which can cause increased family conflict. Increasing family conflicts in many situations will follow misbehavior with children. Economic problems and family conflicts affect the pattern of parenting and the parent-child interaction cycle (12).

7. Increasing severity of psychological problems in children: Children with certain psychological disorders, such as attention-deficit / hyperactivity disorder or autism, experience difficulty receiving appropriate treatment and intervention, controlling behavior and self-regulation, relapse-recurrence of improved symptoms during quarantine due to the prevalence of Covid-19 pandemic. These children may not be able to adapt adequately to the condition caused by Covid-19 disease (7).

HOW TO TAKE CARE OF CHILDREN PSYCHOLOGICALLY IN THE SITUATION OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Communicate effectively with your children because parents are the first role models for their children. Learn more about this virus in response to the children's questions, keeping calm, and provide them with honest and age-appropriate information. Teach them how to take care of themselves and prepare them in the face of the crisis with positive aspects training. Remember that children pay close attention to their parents' behaviors, feelings, and reactions to the situation, which can have a lot to do with their anxiety and stress. Therefore, as a model, we have a responsibility to manage our emotional behaviors.

Explain to your child how important it is to follow the health tips about this virus and why you should not leave the house. Be sure not to increase their fear by explaining and repeating. Speak as much as they understand. Try to play with a child like a playmate and increase your patience in this regard. Do not expose children to news related to corona virus. Spend at least half an hour a day with your child and play with them if it is possible. If your child talks to you about their fears and worries, do not blame their feelings at all. If you have homework for student children, stay with them to help with homework and give them security with your presence. Give your child peace and security by improving your relationships with other family members. Increase fun activities with family members at home and embrace and encourage your child to participate in these activities. Design group activities at home and give your child the opportunity to participate in these group activities. You can distract and reduce their mental engagement about corona virus by playing the kill the giant game and the game of bursting balloons and prevent annoying thoughts from appearing in their thoughts. Part of the concern for children can be the

anxiety of losing their parents. Parents should provide an opportunity for the child to express their concerns, and while the child is expressing feelings, parents should be good listeners, eager to listen to the child, and empathize with his or her feelings. If you feel it is difficult for you and your children to control negative emotions, be sure to contact a skilled psychologist or counselor by phone or virtual.

Considering the social and psychological consequences of the post-corona age and the psychological difficulties that occur in this period, by identifying and predicting these issues, strategies should be considered for optimal intervention and reduction of injuries in the post-crisis period, and take effective measures to prevent and control the fear and anxiety caused by the Covid-19 crisis in children.

References

- [1] Deng S-Q, Peng H-J. Characteristics of and public health responses to the coronavirus disease 2019 outbreak in China. *Journal of clinical medicine*. 2020;9(2):575. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jcm9020575>
- [2] Dalton L, Rapa E, Stein A. Protecting the psychological health of children through effective communication about COVID-19. *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*. 2020;4(5):346-7. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s2352-4642\(20\)30097-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/s2352-4642(20)30097-3)
- [3] Sprang G, Silman M. Posttraumatic stress disorder in parents and youth after health-related disasters. *Disaster medicine and public health preparedness*. 2013;7(1):105-10. <https://doi.org/10.1017/dmp.2013.22>
- [4] Wu Z, McGoogan JM. Characteristics of and important lessons from the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak in China: summary of a report of 72 314 cases from the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention. *Jama*. 2020;323(13):1239-42. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2020.2648>
- [5] Valero-Moreno S, Lacomba-Trejo L, Casaña-Granell S, Prado-Gascó VJ, Montoya-Castilla I, Pérez-Marín M. Psychometric properties of the questionnaire on threat perception of chronic illnesses in pediatric patients. *Revista latinoamericana de enfermagem*. 2020;28. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1518-8345.3144.3242>
- [6] Dong X-Y, Wang L, Tao Y-X, Suo X-I, Li Y-C, Liu F, et al. Psychometric properties of the Anxiety Inventory for Respiratory Disease in patients with COPD in China. *International journal of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease*. 2017;12:49. <https://doi.org/10.2147/copd.s117626>
- [7] Liu JJ, Bao Y, Huang X, Shi J, Lu L. Mental health considerations for children quarantined because of COVID-19. *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*. 2020;4(5):347-9. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s2352-4642\(20\)30096-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/s2352-4642(20)30096-1)

- [8] Zhang J, Shuai L, Yu H, Wang Z, Qiu M, Lu L, et al. Acute stress, behavioural symptoms and mood states among school-age children with attention-deficit/hyperactive disorder during the COVID-19 outbreak. *Asian journal of psychiatry*. 2020;51:102077. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajp.2020.102077>
- [9] Wang G, Zhang Y, Zhao J, Zhang J, Jiang F. Mitigate the effects of home confinement on children during the COVID-19 outbreak. *The Lancet*. 2020;395(10228):945-7. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736\(20\)30547-x](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736(20)30547-x)
- [10] Roccella M. Children and coronavirus infection (Covid-19): what to tell children to avoid post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). *The Open Pediatric Medicine Journal*. 2020;10(1). <https://doi.org/10.2174/18743099902010010001>
- [11] Park I, Oh SM, Lee KH, Kim S, Jeon JE, Lee HY, et al. The moderating effect of sleep disturbance on the association of stress with impulsivity and depressed mood. *Psychiatry investigation*. 2020;17(3):243. <https://doi.org/10.30773/pi.2019.0181>
- [12] Viner RM, Russell SJ, Croker H, Packer J, Ward J, Stansfield C, et al. School closure and management practices during coronavirus outbreaks including COVID-19: a rapid systematic review. *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*. 2020;4(5):397-404. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s2352-4642\(20\)30095-x](https://doi.org/10.1016/s2352-4642(20)30095-x)

Received on 09-09-2021

Accepted on 24-09-2021

Published on 06-10-2021

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.12974/2313-0946.2021.06.01.2>

© 2021 Jadgal *et al.*; Licensee Savvy Science Publisher.

This is an open access article licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/>) which permits unrestricted, non-commercial use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the work is properly cited.