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Child Abuse & Neglect

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/chiabuneg

Letter to the Editor

Psycho-social impact of COVID-19 pandemic on children in India: The reality



ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Child- abuse
 Lock-down in India
 Psycho-social impact of lock-down
 Physical abuse
 Sexual abuse

Dear Editor,

Since the emergence of COVID-19 pandemic, the world is facing very unprecedented situation. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced to close down the educational institutions, thus enforcing a lockdown to prevent it's further spread of the virus. While most adults can understand the implications, it is the children that have become the most vulnerable population. In a country like India, where most of the child abuse cases go unreported has seen increase in the number of calls on the CHILDLINE number. The Government of India called for an draconian lockdown measures to curb the spread of the virus on March 25th, 2020 ([The Lancet, 2020](#)). With the most adult population at home along with the children in closed approximation making them the most vulnerable in the household. In addition, financial implications and uncertain situations have put the families on additional strain. This has led to increased number of abuse cases reported on the helpline number. To provide some context in the situation prevailing before the lockdown, National Crime Record Bureau in India estimated that around 40,810 children fell victim to sexual offences and in 95 % cases the perpetrator were known to the victim under regular circumstances prior to pandemic ("[COVID19-XIX: Child Abuse in India amidst the Pandemic – Law School Policy Review](#), " n.d.). However during the lockdown approximately 300,000 calls were received between March 20th – March 31st, showing almost around 50 % increase in calls in just 10 days to CHILDLINE India. Around 30 % of the calls were just to report child abuse and intervention was made in almost around 4857 calls ("[Child Sexual Abuse During Coronavirus Pandemic: Is Child Abuse on the Rise in India's COVID-19 Lockdown?](#), " n.d.). The CHILDLINE India, reported that 11 % calls were related to physical health, 8 % calls were on child labour and additional 8% were on missing children ("[CHILDLINE India helpline: Govt helpline platform explodes with SOS calls, 92, 000 seek help on CHILDLINE in 11 days, Government News, ET Government](#), " n.d.). The impact can be analysed just by the sheer number of help calls received on various helplines.

There have been multiple arrays of reasons in the increase in child abuse cases during the lockdown period. Some of the reasons that have been hypothesized were poor mental health of parents, unemployment and frustration of not stepping out of the house ("[Countering child abuse during lockdown | | Citizen Matters, Bengaluru](#), " n.d.). During the normal circumstances, child abuse can be noticed by school teachers, school counsellors or friends. Owing to the lockdown measures schools have been shut so this line of defence has been majorly affected. With school system not running effectively and not able to be in the environment has made children very vulnerable psychologically. Thus this pandemic period has posed many questions along with the opportunity to re-evaluate on how we raise our children and effectiveness of the school system of kid's mental health, which can be implemented throughout the globe. To strengthen the first line of defence in observing signs of abuse, teacher and school staff should be trained properly on how to deal with the abuse kids. We cannot emphasize enough on having school counsellor appointed in each school, especially in India. As they can be really helpful in dealing with complicated issues of abuse as well as forming a bridge for effective communications with children as well as with the parents ("[Role of the School Counsellor - Children](#), " n.d.).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2020.104663>

Received 26 June 2020

Available online 10 August 2020

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Funding source

No external funding for this manuscript.

Financial disclosure

No author's have any financial relationships for this article to disclose.

Clinical trial registration

None required

Table of content summary

In this pandemic era many countries have enforced lockdown, thus making children the most vulnerable population for abuse in India.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors report no declaration of interest.

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Hitanshu Dave*

Bharati Vidyapeeth Medical College and Hospital, Pune, India
E-mail address: davhitansh@gmail.com.

Priyank Yagnik

KU School of Pediatrics, Wichita, United States

* Corresponding author at: Department of Pediatrics, Bharati Vidyapeeth Medical College and Hospital, A 53 Westend Park, Ahmedabad, 380059, India.