

Stress Management & Coping Strategies for Covid 19 Orphaned Children

¹Dr. J.O. Jeryda Gnanajane Eljo, ²Priya Antony P,

³K .Rahmathnisha

Received: 13-May-2023

Revised: 16-June-2023

Accepted:03-July-2023

¹ Associate Professor & ICSSR Major Project Director,

Department of Social Work, Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu,
jerydaanand@bdu.ac.in

²Research Scholar, Department of Social Work, Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli,
Tamil Nadu, priya.antony029@gmail.com

³ ICSSR Full-time Doctoral Fellow, Department of Social Work, Bharathidasan University,
Kajamalai Campus, Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu, Email ID: krahmathnisha5@gmail.com

Abstract

Covid 19 pandemic has brought very severe impact in the mental health of the children who became orphaned. The Lancet (2021) reported that 119,000 Indian children lost a prime caretaker either a parent or both the parents or grandparents. Even while stress is a normal part of life, each child experiences it differently and finds it difficult. The coping technique is distinctive as well. This discussion paper is based on secondary data. For the purpose of developing this research paper, prior studies and papers gathered from books, Google Scholar, Research Gate, and other online sources are taken into consideration. This secondary research study covered the stress experienced by Covid 19 orphaned children, as well as the physiological impacts of stress, coping mechanisms, stress management, time management, and motivation-boosting techniques. In each of these situations, orphaned children will endure a mental health crisis.

Keywords: Covid 19 orphaned children, stress management, coping strategies, pandemic.

Introduction

Over 20 billion people have contracted the corona virus (Worldometers,2021). People of various ages have contracted the virus and have died. Loved ones in the family have been succumbed. Ultimately children have become orphans. 15 lakh children lost parents during COVID-19, 1.2 lakh in India (India Today, 22.07.2021). A child who has lost either both parents or a single parent is considered an orphan and experiences lack of love, adoration and care. They have either become double, maternal, or paternal orphans. In India early onset of Covid 19 cases was reported in Kerala on January 30th 2020. Then gradually cases increased throughout the country from international travellers. Maharashtra, Gujarat, Delhi, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh are the states in India that have been the most severely affected. (MoHFW, 2020).

It took ten years for 5 million children to become orphans due to AIDS, but it only took two years for 5 million children to become orphans owing to COVID 19, according to the Global Covid -19 orphanhood crisis report. That was the time we realised that covid 19 had laid its impact on the most vulnerable population in the world (Global Covid orphanhood report, 2022). National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights has provided a data stating to the Supreme Court that in the January 2020, 9,346 children aged 17 or younger were orphaned or abandoned. (The Hindu, 2020).

The covid 19 pandemic that started in January 2020, 9,346 children aged 17 or younger were orphaned or abandoned, according to information provided to the Supreme Court by the National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (The Hindu, 2020). The British Medical Journal the Lancet (2021) reported that covid 19 pandemic has left over a million of children to be single or double orphans. It reported that in India 119,000 children have lost a primary caretaker, it can be their parents or grandparents who were raising them. 116,000 children in India have lost either one or both parents. A daily newspaper in India reported that, compared to the previous month there is 8.5-fold rise in the number of new Covid orphans in April 2021. It says 43,139 children became covid orphans in India. "PM- Cares for Children" welfare programme announced that

Covid-19 orphans are eligible for financial aid, scholarships, and a monthly stipend of roughly \$52 for their basic requirements. (Arabnewa,2021). The Tamil Nadu District Child Protection offices has identified about 1400 children in the state as orphans who have lost either one or both parents to the covid-19 pandemic since the first wave. **IANS (2021)**

Meaning of Stress

Even while stress is a part of everyday life, it differs and is challenging for each child. The coping mechanism is also unique. Stress is felt when one does not sufficiently meet mental, emotional, or physical demands, whether they are real or imagined. Stressors are the conditions that lead to stress. Eustress and distress are the two different sorts of stress. Eustress is positive or inspiring stress. It offers healthy stress or stress that motivates. It offers and generates good sentiments. Distress is what happens when stress results in overwhelming feelings and other negative outcomes. The passing of parents as a result of Covid-19 is such a distressing circumstance. Children may experience stress differently from one another.

Effects of Stress on the Body

The human body's reaction to every stressful scenario is essentially the same. For instance, while simulating dog chasing, a surprise exam, or a sudden death, the human body reacts to hot temperatures by sweating, beating quickly, thinking negatively, etc. All stressful conditions result in the same symptoms because the hypothalamus in the brain is activated. It further activates the sympathetic nervous system and makes the central adrenal glands to release epinephrine and norepinephrine. The released hormones are flown into the bloodstream, to operate the on multiple physiological systems to upsurge heart beat and blood pressure, respiration frequency, muscle strain, and other symptoms. Hans Selye, a physician from Canada, explained the General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) has three stages.

- 1) The Alarm Stage
- 2) The Resistance Stage
- 3) The Exhaustion Stage

1)The Alarm Stage

In the first stage, the human body recognises the stress and mobilises all resources to deal with the stressor. The human body starts secreting certain hormones like adrenaline and prepares itself to fight the situation. Heart and respiratory rates increase, muscles are tensed, digestion slows down and the body, on the whole, gets ready for action. If the situation comes under control, the problem is solved and the human body gets back to normal state. If the problem remains unsolved and that stress persists, then the human body forges into the second stage.

2)The Resistance Stage

This resistance stage also called as adaptation stage. When a person faces a stressor for a long time then human body tries to resist or adapt to the stressor. In most of the cases, the body learns to adopt to the stressors. If human body does not adapt to the stressor and the stress lingers, it enters the third stage.

3)The Exhaustion Stage

In the final stage, extended stress results in General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) where the mind and body just cannot cope with stress. The human body is depleted of energy and other vital resources. The person may become vulnerable to experience more distress.

Signs of Stress

Generally, signs of stress can be divided into four. They are physical, emotional, behavioural and cognitive. Physical signs include head ache, fatigue, breath issues, racing heart, butterflies in stomach, cold hand and feet. Cognitive signs include negative thinking, worry about minor matters and indecisiveness. Emotional signs cover low self-confidence, anxiety, depression, irritation on minor issues, sadness. Behavioural signs include restlessness, loss of appetite, loss of sleep, accident prone, drinking alcohol and smoking.

Long term stress can have an impact on immune system and can contribute to developing various physical and psychological illness such as psoriasis, hypertension, insomnia, headache, asthma, irritable bowel syndrome etc...

Symptoms of Covid 19 orphan child's Stress

Each child may show variety of signs and symptoms in dealing with the terrific orphanhood life. It may be short term or long term. To identify the stress issues of covid 19 orphaned child, the custodians or care takers can be taken in consider the following signs

- Finding hard to sleep and eat
- Night mares
- Feeling remote/ destructive
- Unreasonable pain in stomach/ headache
- Fear of being alone
- School absenteeism
- Poor interest in routine
- Poor interest in academics
- Clinging behaviour
- Nyctophobia (Fear of dark)
- Poor interest in recreation activities
- Being sad and crying more than usual
- Bed wetting
- Nail biting
- Oppositional behaviour
- Suicidal ideation
- Ran away attempts from home/institution

Methodology

This is a secondary data-based discussion paper. Previous studies and articles collected from google scholar, research gate, other internet sources and books are counted in for evolving this research paper.

Review of literature

Chiro Islam Mallik & Rifat Binte Radwan (2021) studied about Impact of COVID-19 pandemic and incidence of projecting psychiatric disorders among children and adolescents in Bangladesh. This research found that around the globe shows children and adolescents are suffering from an increased number of depressive symptoms, clinginess, inattention, irritability and worry. Prevalence of any predictive psychiatric disorder before lockdown was 20.5 % and within lockdown was 39.7 % and the difference was highly significant ($P < 0.001$). Prevalence of emotional, conduct disorder and hyperactivity were also increased significantly during the lockdown period than before. Conduct disorder and hyperactivity were more prevalent among boys both before and within lockdown. In contrast, prevalence of emotional disorder was higher among girls before lockdown but within the lockdown period, the boy-girl prevalence was almost the same. **Zhongren Ma et.al (2021) Conducted a study on mental health of Chinese children during pandemic.** This study noted that developing of emotional problems triggered by COVID-19 in children are commonly highlighted. As per this report 7.2% children are undergoing through post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depressive symptoms.

Anuja S Panicker & Chandana Nedungotttil (2021) analysed a paper on the unseen suffers of the COVID – 19 pandemics and mental health belongings on children and adolescents. This study narrates on the context of psychosocial development, adolescents which is crucial stage of development of a personality. This study described that adolescent age as a interim period, between 12-19 years of age, of the resolution of ambivalence in role confusion and identity formation, paves the way for future self-acceptance and social adjustment in adulthood. A lack of opening for these internal urges due to the current pandemic-related boundaries in such activities, as well as the burdens of social distancing and home isolation, outcome in a sagacity of frustration, which adolescents can present as recurrent anger outbursts, nervousness, disconnected, boredom. and impulsive decision making. **Vyjayanthi & Debanjan Banerjee et.al (2020)**, in their study on the Silent victims of the Pandemic: Children and adolescents during the COVID-19 Crisis, the children from the disadvantaged or marginalized sector of the society like migrants, slum-dwellers, homeless children, orphans, children diagnosed with mental illness, disabilities, children living in institutional or residential care are at a greater risk of succumbing to mental health consequences.

Shweta Singh et.al (2020) reviewed the effect of COVID-19 and lockdown on mental health of children and adolescents. The study exposed that there exist a persistent need for scheduling longitudinal and developmental studies, and implementing evidence based elaborative plan of action to cater to the psycho social and mental health needs of the vulnerable children and adolescents during pandemic as well as post pandemic. **Anbarasu & Bhuvaneswari (2020)** in the study found that children and adolescents of rural and urban community struggle with different psychosocial problems such as fear, stress, anxiety, depression, emotional, conduct problems and hyperactivity during this outbreak of COVID-19 Pandemic.

Discussion

The adolescent period is the footing age of emotional elasticity of any person. The adolescent orphan may undergo a lot of traumas of coping. The emotional loss due to parent's death creates constant worry about their future which may lead them to be emotionally silent. Those pain in mind will affects educational opportunities. They may experience lack of adult love, guidance and protection. Sometimes they may negatively affect by isolation, neglect and abuse. In future this kind of emotional impact may develop fatalism, behaviour problems and low self-esteem. Initially the stress seems to be quite normal to the orphans and is often ignored as many other problems surrounds them. Those stress can evoke feeling of frustration, fear, conflict, pressure, hurt, anger, sadness, inadequacy, guilt and loneliness. It may further make them to perform less effectively and efficiently. Another important feeling of orphanhood in adolescent period is insecurity feeling. The symptoms of insecurity feelings are chronic anxiety, scrupulosity, excessive timidity, social inadequacy and perfectionistic idealism. Insecurity feeling among adolescent orphans may cause shyness and social withdrawal.

Covid – 19 Orphaned Children Stress Management Self Support Framework

Covid - Stress Management for 19 Orphaned Children Learning coping mechanisms will be the first step in the self-support framework. With this knowledge, Covid's 19 orphaned children may create a schedule and learn time management techniques. They will develop a productive and inventive routine through that approach. For the appropriate rhythm to continue, there must be enough internal motivation. Motivation from the immediate environment, including the school and care home, will be an additional assistance.

Coping Strategies

Coping refers to the approaches used by individuals to deal with stress. Coping strategies categorized into 1) Problem Focused Coping and 2) Emotion Focused Coping

1) Problem Focused Coping

The first step in the problem-solving process is to define the issue. Covid 19 orphaned children have to select one or more attainable goals after gaining clarity on the affected situation. The next step in problem-focused coping is coming up with alternatives, choosing the best one, and then putting the solution into practise. After that, you set a deadline for doing so and track your progress. Below are some problem-focused coping strategies.

- **Acceptance:** The first step in any problem solving is accepting that there is a problem. Once the affected child accepts the truth of the death situation of parent or care taker, it develops easier to focus on the situation and think about practical solutions.
- **Active Coping:** Active coping involves active efforts at addressing the problem. It can be involve making a time table, prioritising and avoiding distractions.
- **Planning:** It give ideas about how best to grip the problem and expedient the plan of action . This involves planning the time, resources, events work as well as the blocks or hurdles one may face during the process of solving the problem.
- **Positive Reframing:** Stress is a matter of perception. That means how you think about a problem condition. If you consider a situation as a hurdle in your path it will produce stress, if you think of it as a learning opportunity, then it will nor create that much stress.
- **Social Support:** Social support is very essential on each one's life It helps in reducing the stress and solving the problem. The two forms social support are Instrumental support and emotional support. Instrumental supports are receiving advice and help from other people about to do. Emotional support are receiving comfort and support from others in difficult situations.

2)Emotion Focused Coping

Emotion focused coping are directed toward changing one's own emotional reaction to the stressor and thereby reducing their negative impact. It allows the affected person to think more clarity, better decision making frame work and handling feelings as well as come up with workable solutions. Emotion focused strategies which can help in reducing stress are discussed below

- **Distraction:** Distraction refers to the attempts made in order to escape from the emotions produced by a stressful situation. Distraction as a coping method is useful in the short term, if those distractions are frequently used without attempting to address the stressful situation, it becomes unhealthy habit. Some of the distraction strategies that are found to be helpful if used on a short term basis are, watching a feel good movie, listening favourite music, dancing and fun activities with friends etc..can lessen emotional pain and helps them to feel better.
- **Scheduling "Worry Time":** A big advantage to this technique is that it allows the person to think about worries in a limited way, without going overboard and worrying all the time. It enables them to feel relaxed for the rest of the day, knowing that you are not denying or ignoring those problems.
- **Journaling:** journaling allows the stressed person to manage emotions in several ways. Writing about the painful feelings can be cathartic. It can provide a ventilation from the stress feel. Through journaling the orphaned children can identify more positive aspects of life and look at the negative ones more objectively.
- **Meditation & Relaxation:** It helps to relax the body, mind and increase the threshold of experiencing arousal states like anger and stress. It can help to inculcate objectivity, by enabling to stand back and choose a response than reacting out of fear or panic. Abdominal breathing and Progressive Muscular Relaxation are very useful techniques.

Time Management

Time management is an essential skill to be cultivated. It helps us prioritise things and become more organised, save time and enhances the quality of our work and our life. The step involves finding out how much time is available in a week and juxtaposing against the academic calendar. The second step is prioritising, which means setting academic and non-academic goals. The third step is organising, i.e., making a detailed time table to achieve the goals. With regard to time management the covid 19 orphaned children has to try to avoid non-productive activities like worrying, brooding, day dreaming, chitchatting, dilemmas, etc. Weekly and monthly assessment can be entertained.

Enhancing Motivation

It is very easy to lose motivation when life seems like an endless sadness saga of orphanhood. For enhancing motivation covid 19 orphaned children has to set their own goals, then have to make a practical routine with perseverance and consciously deal the procrastination problems also.

Area of Social Work Interventions

The scope of social work practise with children become orphans under COVID 19 is very broad. Social case work and social group work, which are the foundational techniques of social work, can be used to a large extent as an intervention tool to restore and lessen those children's psychological issues. The number of empirical studies on Covid 19 orphans in social work is really few. Therefore, future research findings are necessary and pertinent for formulating policies relating to the Covid 19 orphaned children.

Recommendations

- Offer covid orphans opportunities to express about what they feel.
- Motivate them to share apprehensions and ask questions.
- Distribute children's specific responsibilities.
- Try to help them to accept new reality of life and routine.
- Provide periodical counselling support.
- Implement Indoor and outdoor recreation activities.
- Practice them progressive muscle relaxation technique for reducing tension and stress.

Conclusion

Corona, a pandemic in and of itself, is a variety of situational crisis and a time for enormous bravery, understanding, and teamwork. A whirlwind of consequences, including child displacement, sibling separation, rebuilt families, institutionalisation, child marriage, school dropouts, starvation, etc., will result from Covid 19 orphanhood. Children who are orphans will experience a mental health emergency in all of these circumstances. For dealing with those stress-related problems, long-term solutions are required.

Acknowledgement

Dr.J.O. Dr.J.O.Jeryda Gnanajane Eljo , Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, is the is a recipient of the ICSSR Major Project. Her article is largely an outcome of the Major project funded by ICSSR. However, the responsibility for the facts stated, opinions expressed, and the conclusions drawn is entirely that of the author. A special word of thanks to the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) for the immense support and financial assistance.

References

1. Akaninyene Otu, Egbe Osifo-Dawodu, P. A., & Emmanuel Agogo, B. E. (2021). Since January 2020 Elsevier has created a COVID-19 resource centre with free information in English and Mandarin on the novel coronavirus COVID- research that is available on the COVID-19 resource centre - including this Comment Beyond vaccine hesitancy : *The Lancet*, 2(January), 2020–2022.
2. Anbarasu, A., & Bhuvanawari, M. (2020). COVID-19 pandemic and psychosocial problems in children and adolescents in vellore-district. *European Journal of Molecular and Clinical Medicine*, 7(7), 334–339. https://ejmcm.com/article_2848.html%0Ahttp://ovidsp.ovid.com/ovidweb.cgi?T=JS&PAGE=reference&D=emexa&NEWS=N&AN=2010205562
3. Ant^, A., Gomes De Matos Brasil, O., Virginin, K., Correia Da Silva, C., Gonçalves, J., Neto, R., Alves, P., Lima, N. R., Sampaio, M. L., Janielly De Matos Cassiano, C., Leite, M., & Neto, R. (2022). *Social inequalities and extreme vulnerability of children and adolescents impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j>

4. Araújo, L. A. de, Veloso, C. F., Souza, M. de C., Azevedo, J. M. C. de, & Tarro, G. (2021). The potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on child growth and development: a systematic review. In *Journal de Pediatria* (Vol. 97, Issue 4, pp. 369–377). Elsevier Editora Ltda. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpmed.2020.08.008>
5. Govender, K., Cowden, R. G., Nyamaruze, P., Armstrong, R. M., & Hatane, L. (2020). Beyond the Disease: Contextualized Implications of the COVID-19 Pandemic for Children and Young People Living in Eastern and Southern Africa. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 8. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2020.00504>
6. Hillis, S. D., Unwin, H. J. T., Chen, Y., Cluver, L., Sherr, L., Goldman, P. S., Ratmann, O., Donnelly, C. A., Bhatt, S., Villaveces, A., Butchart, A., Bachman, G., Rawlings, L., Green, P., Nelson, C. A., & Flaxman, S. (2021). Global minimum estimates of children affected by COVID-19-associated orphanhood and deaths of caregivers: a modelling study. *The Lancet*, 398(10298), 391–402. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(21\)01253-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(21)01253-8)
7. Journal, I., Radhika, G., Rajendran, R., & Sankar, R. (2020). Systems thinking approach for the promotion of mental health among Adolescents: The role of food, sports, music, yoga and spirituality need for a paradigm shift towards a post-COVID-19 India. *Positive Psychology Review*, 2020(4), 331–337. <https://iahrw.org/our-services/journals/indian-journal-of-positive-psychology/>
9. Kim, A. W., Nyengerai, T., & Mendenhall, E. (2020). Evaluating the mental health impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Perceived risk of COVID-19 infection and childhood trauma predict adult depressive symptoms in Urban South Africa. *Psychological Medicine*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291720003414>
10. Ma, Z., Idris, S., Zhang, Y., Zewen, L., Wali, A., Ji, Y., Pan, Q., & Baloch, Z. (2021). The impact of COVID-19 pandemic outbreak on education and mental health of Chinese children aged 7–15 years: an online survey. *BMC Pediatrics*, 21(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12887-021-02550-1>
11. Mallik, C. I., & Radwan, R. B. (2021). Impact of lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic in changes of prevalence of predictive psychiatric disorders among children and adolescents in Bangladesh. *Asian Journal of Psychiatry*, 56. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajp.2021.102554>
12. Marques de Miranda, D., da Silva Athanasio, B., Sena Oliveira, A. C., & Simoes-e-Silva, A. C. (2020). How is COVID-19 pandemic impacting mental health of children and adolescents? In *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* (Vol. 51). Elsevier Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdrr.2020.101845>
13. Mohler-kuo, M., Dzemaili, S., Foster, S., Werlen, L., & Walitza, S. (2021). Stress and mental health among children/adolescents, their parents, and young adults during the first COVID-19 lockdown in Switzerland. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(9). <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18094668>
14. Panicker, A. S., & Nedungotttil, C. (2021). Review Paper_The invisible sufferers of the COVID-19 pandemic: Mental health impact and intervention for children and adolescents. *Indian Journal of Mental Health*, 8(2), 133. <https://doi.org/10.30877/ijmh.8.2.2021.133-139>
16. RAJU, J., & ASIRVATHAM, R. (2021). A qualitative study to assess the Level of anxiety associated with COVID-19 among high school students. *Black Sea Journal of Health Science*, 1–2. <https://doi.org/10.19127/bshealthscience.765279>
17. Sinha, M., Kumar, M., Zeitz, L., Collins, P. Y., Kumar, S., Fisher, S., Foote, N., Sartorius, N., Herrman, H., & Atwoli, L. (2021). Towards mental health friendly cities during and after COVID-19. *Cities and Health*, 5(sup1), S89–S92. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23748834.2020.1790251>
18. Tang, S., Xiang, M., Cheung, T., & Xiang, Y. (2020). Since January 2020 Elsevier has created a COVID-19 resource centre with free information in English and Mandarin on the novel coronavirus COVID-19. The COVID-19 resource centre is hosted on Elsevier Connect, the company's public news and information. *Psychiatry Research*, 293(January), 337–339.
19. Vyjayanthi, N. V., Banerjee, D., & Sathyanarayana Rao, T. S. (2020). The silent victims of the pandemic: Children and adolescents during the COVID-19 crisis. *Journal of Indian Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 16(3), 17–31.

Websites

1. (<https://mediaindia.eu/politics/covid-19-leaves-trail-of-orphaned-children-helpless-widows/>).
2. www.worldometers.info,2021

3. <https://scroll.in/latest/996376/over-9000-children-orphaned-or-abandoned-during-covid-19-pandemic-child-rights-body-tells-sc>
4. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2092896/world>
5. <https://www.socialserviceworkforce.org/resources/blog/three-ways-care-children-orphaned-covid-19>