

The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Children's Lives

**Asma Hamdan Alsaadi, PhD Student, Applied
Sociology, Criminology**

Asma-Alsaadi-99@hotmail.com

Professor Ahmad Falah Alomosh, Criminology

alomosh@sharjah.ac.ae

**University of Sharjah – College of Arts, Humanities,
and Social Sciences, UAE**

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31973/aj.v1i148.3785>

ABSTRACT:

This study suggests remedies for the negative effect of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on the lives of children. It aims to determine the extent to which the children's social lives, behavior, and cultures have been affected by the pandemic, and proposes appropriate plans and solutions to help them return to the lives they were accustomed to before the pandemic. This study's problem is linked to the adverse effects on children resulting from preventive measures applied to stop the spread of the virus, including social distancing, closing schools and other facilities, and introducing quarantines. Despite the reality that these measures were aimed at protecting communities, they have affected children's psychological and social health and educational and cultural lives. On the other hand, violence against children has significantly increased, as studies conducted in various countries have concluded. This study is crucial because it draws attention to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on children's lives, as these children are the future leaders. It concludes that most children worldwide have been affected since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the impact differing based on culture, family, cultural, and economic components. The study's recommendations attempt to encourage the implementation of plans that match the age groups of children to deal with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic before these children return to everyday life so as not to be shocked when they discover that things have changed for good.

Keywords: Novel Coronavirus, Social distancing, and Child protection.

***The authors has signed the consent form and ethical approval**

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the health, psychology, economy, and social lives of all the people worldwide. The effects are both positive and negative, amid the prevailing trend in the multiplicity of its adverse effects and the lack of positivity and diversity from one country to another due to the different capabilities of those countries and their strategies in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the common factor among all the countries is the negative effect of the pandemic on children because of the interruption of their school and social lives. This is in addition to the fact that the pandemic has led to the imposition of lockdown measures and the spread of fear of infection.

Generally, the restrictions imposed because of the pandemic meant reduced access to services, leading to many children dying from preventable causes. Edwards (2020) acknowledges this view and adds that the rise in food and economic insecurity has reduced the chances of many children obtaining a balanced diet, leading to high malnutrition rates. It has become imperative to realize that the pandemic has had psychological risks and adverse effects that may exceed the effects and material damages that society has already encountered.

Perhaps the most dangerous effect is the pandemic's impact on the psyche of future generations. For instance, it could result in children acquiring negative behaviors or changing their perceptions towards other behaviors such as violence. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, the vulnerability of these children who have been at risk and children with a history of abuse may find themselves at greater risk, either home or online. They may experience more frequent and intense violence. Other children may become victims of violence for the first time (UNICEF, 2017. p. 3).

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines violence as the intentional use of physical, threatened, or actual force against another person, group, or community that results in or has a high probability of causing injury or death, psychological harm, mal-development, or disadvantage. According to the same source, child abuse falls under personal violence.

UNICEF (2017. p. 8) indicates that 1.8 billion children living in 104 countries are increasingly exposed to violence during the COVID-19 pandemic as violence prevention services have been disrupted because of the pandemic. The referral of violence against children's cases has also been affected. The same source adds that violence has likely been exacerbated in contexts where child protection systems were already weak before the pandemic.

Moreover, an analysis of these circumstances resulting from the pandemic makes it clear that the pandemic has introduced significant challenges, especially for parents. The most important challenge is helping children adapt to the new lifestyle imposed by the epidemic and the measures taken to prevent and reduce its severity. Children are aware of their normal feelings and significant changes in their lives, but most of them, depending on their age, cannot analyze reality and understand what is happening. Many children living in a family environment have been exposed to various forms of violence. The harm inflicted on them by domestic isolation has escalated, and so has the psychological stress they have been exposed to.

2. Study Problem and Questions

The problem addressed in this study is related to the assumption that the lives of children worldwide are significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This is especially the case for the psychological condition of the child. This can be linked to the wrong behaviors of many persons in dealing with the epidemic in the light of the concern of the entire society due to the coronavirus outbreak. This concern is negatively reflected in children, who express their feelings differently according to their age groups and individual differences among children.

The present study's problem focuses on explaining the role of the COVID-19 pandemic in shaping children's behavior, socially and culturally, by addressing children's attitudes. The family is considered the basic unit for raising children and providing them with the appropriate environment. The main question here is: What is the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on children's lives? Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following sub-questions:

- i) What are the forms of effects on children's lives during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- ii) What factors increase the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on shaping children's lives?
- iii) What are the effects of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic on children's lives?
- iv) What can be done to overcome the effects of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic on children's lives and reduce their risk?

3. Explanatory Theory of the Effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Children's Lives

3.1. Theory of Frustration and Aggressive Behavior

The theory of frustration and aggressive behavior assumes that violent behavior is always a result of frustration and that frustration always leads to a form of violence, meaning that aggression is a natural and inevitable result of frustration. Among the most famous scholars of this theory, Miller and Dollard describe frustration as a

subjective feeling experienced by an individual when encountering an obstacle that prevents them from achieving a desired goal or result. Frustration leads to anger, and anger makes a person predisposed to violence.

Dollard, the pioneer of this theory, affirms that violence is a natural result of frustration. Miller shows that humans respond to frustration differently, including through violence. However, violence is not always caused by frustration, depending on the circumstances in which it occurs. Violence often occurs without prior frustration, so frustration may not necessarily lead to aggression, depending on the nature of frustration. It may lead to the suppression of aggressive behavior, especially if the child sees frustration as a punishment for abuse and violence. This theory also confirms that violence is an internal, instinctive motive. However, it is not triggered by instinct, as shown by the theory of instincts, but rather due to the influence of external factors. This theory identifies four factors that control the relationship between frustration and violence.

4. The Method

This study relies on the descriptive-analytical approach. This is considered the appropriate approach.

5. Analysis

By exploring the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on children's lives, we will find that it varies depending on psychological, health, social, and cultural effects.

5.1. Psychological Effects

The psychological effects of COVID-19 on children are a significant risk, as there are many mental illnesses among children, especially obsessive-compulsive disorder and depression. And the reason is that the child is a mirror that reflects the parents' behaviors, thoughts, and psychological state. Therefore, the state of psychological turmoil and anxiety has dominated parents since the outbreak of COVID-19 and reached their children. It has turned into obsessive-compulsive disorder and severe psychological disorder in some cases.

Other psychological disorders, which doctors have seen in abundance among children after the outbreak of the pandemic, have also been observed, such as general anxiety and fear of the unknown or nothing, as well as depression, psychological pressure, and suppression as a result of the intense care imposed by parents on them after the emergence of COVID-19. Added to this are the limitations of the traditional ways of playing and their autism with electronic games.

Studies indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to have many adverse effects on children's mental health due to children being exposed to many psychological stresses due to staying at home for too

long during the pandemic and not interacting on a personal level with peers or friends. This could leave them with many negative feelings, fear, and anxiety. At times, it may even become a phobia. This could exacerbate their chances of being exposed to many emotional problems due to these disorders at the psychological level.

According to a global survey conducted by UNICEF and Gallup (2021) on children during the COVID-19 pandemic (The State of the World's Children 2021; On My Mind: Promotion, Protection, and Care of Children's Mental Health), one out of five children usually feel depressed and lacks interest in activities. One out of seven children suffer at the psychological level directly due to public closures and home quarantine. The survey finds that nearly a billion and a half children suffer from specific educational loss. The disruption of daily routines, education and leisure, and preoccupation with family income and mental and physical health have left many children fearful, angry, and worried about their future. For example, a Chinese survey at the beginning of 2020 focused on the state of the world's children and indicated that about a third of the sample feel anxious or afraid (www.unicef.org).

At the same time, there are persistently wide gaps between funding and needs in mental health. UNICEF and Gallup (2021) find that only 2% of government health budgets worldwide are devoted to community mental health.

According to a UNICEF and Gallup (2021) report, which is considered the most extensive study made by UNICEF on children's mental health in the twenty-first century, children have borne significant burdens related to mental health in the absence of any significant investments to address it, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Accordingly, it can be posited that the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the extent of the seriousness of the mental health crisis for children in particular, as we must integrate mental health and psychological support interventions in the sectors of public health, social protection, and education to meet the growing, complex and diverse mental health needs of children and adolescents in various countries of the world.

The psychological disorders that have affected children under the pandemic may cause significant damage to children's health, education, their ability to earn income, and the results they achieve in life in general; among these psychological damages are hyperactivity, attention deficit and anxiety, bipolar disorder, and autism spectrum, conduct disorders, eating disorders, depression, intellectual disabilities, and schizophrenia.

While it is difficult to estimate the direct impact of the pandemic on children accurately, a report by the London School of

Economics and Political Science finds that the lost contribution to the global economy due to mental disorders among children and adolescents is estimated at \$390 billion annually (www.unicef.org).

Gerschlauer says, “There has been a shift towards psychological issues, ranging from anxiety disorders to focus disorders on sleeping disorders, and in recent months, mental health problems have increased alarmingly, along with behavior disorders, speech development problems, and excessive consumption of the Internet and social networking sites by children.”

Regarding the protective factors, the UNICEF report states that a combination of factors related to genes, experiences, and the environment work from the earliest days in life to shape children’s mental health and affect it throughout their lives. These factors include upbringing, schooling, quality of relationships, exposure to violence or abuse, discrimination, poverty, humanitarian crises, and health emergencies such as COVID-19. The report calls on governments and public and private partners to commit, communicate and act on the mental health of all children, adolescents, and caregivers, protect those in need and care for the most vulnerable among them, including urgently investing in the mental health of children and adolescents in all sectors, not just in the health sector, to support a whole community-based approach to prevention, promotion, and care.

Despite the seriousness of the aforementioned psychological damage that affects many children negatively, the issue of violence against children, from the researcher’s point of view, is the most dangerous to children’s psyche. Violence against children reached catastrophic levels before the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, one billion children from two to 17 years have suffered physical violence worldwide or other abuse related to sexual, emotional, or neglect. This number increases every year, raising concern and fears that this number will increase with the pandemic, especially since the application of domestic isolation has generated new violence cases due to psychological pressure on the spouses.

5.2. Health Effects

The health of many people has been affected by the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The effect on young children is even more pronounced as they are more sensitive to sensory, psychological, and physical changes, resulting in more complex problems. Children at this age also go through a stage of development and growth in which they need to be in school to develop their sensory, cognitive, and social abilities. The child needs to develop mental awareness through direct sensory interaction with peers and teachers as part of life at school.

Many health problems have affected children due to their exposure to the COVID-19 pandemic. These problems could result from the infection or nutritional and therapeutic practices and habits followed in light of this pandemic. These health effects include:

- i) Obesity is due to lack of exercise, sedentary lifestyle, and binge eating, as the incidence of obesity-related diseases and abnormal eating patterns among children increases.
- ii) Vision impairment and other visual problems are caused by playing computer games and distance education, and back, neck, and hands pains result from spending much time on digital devices.
- iii) Language delay in young children and many behavioral problems, such as tantrums and hyperactivity or lack of interest in food, especially in under five years.
- iv) Severe vitamin D deficiency is one of the physical problems among young children due to staying at home and limited exposure to the sun. The child needs 800 to 1000 units of it per day in general.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had many adverse effects regarding children's mental health. The pandemic has disrupted or stopped mental health services in more than 90% of countries worldwide, as the demand for mental health services has increased. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has increased children's mental health disorders worldwide, with nearly half of the mental health disorders occurring in children before the age of 14.

Add to this the sharp decrease in the coverage of services related to good nutrition for children, reaching more than 40%. This is especially the case for those services provided by the government, such as school meals, which were in most cases absent at the beginning of the pandemic. Nearly 300 million children miss the nutrition provided in school meals, resulting in wasting and malnutrition because of the lack of vitamin supplement programs that protect their health. And the situation is likely to worsen and increase to nearly 350 million children suffering from malnutrition and wasting globally. (www.unicef.org)

5.3. Social and Cultural Effects

In light of the prevention of family visits and gatherings in many countries as preventive measures against the spread of COVID-19, many specialists have noted adverse effects at the social level. These social effects appear directly on children, and their elimination may require a long-term treatment program to address the damage they cause.

Chaiban notes that home quarantine, excessive movement restrictions, and the closure of educational institutions and schools have significantly impacted children's daily practices and social interactions; the longer the pandemic continues, the greater its

negative effect on children. Therefore, there is a need to continue to find innovative solutions to overcome these effects on children by supporting them with health and psychosocial care and following social protection measures, including attempts at social integration. (<https://www.unicef.org/mena>)

The social effect is the most dangerous among the other effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. It may take several years to be able to treat this effect in addition to the high financial cost. Suddenly, children find themselves in a state of involuntary introversion away from many forms of cultural exchange and simulation, which leads to decreased communication with others, loss of self-confidence, and increased fears of dealing with the outside world. Therefore, it is posited that the effect must be dealt with as soon as possible and be at the top of the list of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, as the affected children are the future leaders.

For children's educational and cultural aspects, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, Hassan produced a report showing that distance education has caused many problems for young children. Some of the challenges are related to the Internet and connectivity. The diversity of children in different places has significantly decreased young children's educational attainment levels. In addition to that, the Internet cannot perform the same sensory educational functions available in face-to-face education (<https://www.mediclinic.ae>)

A study conducted by the World Bank (2021) confirms that hundreds of millions of children have lost at least an entire school year due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic has caused the largest loss of human capital in living memory and the worst education crisis in a century. World Bank (2021) data shows a 17% increase in lack of education in many countries, a more severe rate than estimates of the deterioration released earlier in 2021, which was 10%. Before the pandemic, the lack of education had already reached 53%, and preliminary estimates indicate that it would rise to 63%. However, the data collected by the World Bank (2021) study shows an actual increase of up to 70% in the lack of education. This rise results from the long school closure period and poor learning outcomes, despite government efforts to provide distance education. In many countries, schools have been closed for between 200 and 250 days in 2021 (World Bank, 2021).

The pandemic also severely affects children's acquisition of the necessary and basic social skills for proper growth. This is because the procedures followed during the pandemic have increased the loss of care for children in their early years. The child needs special care, emotional stimulation, and stimulation to develop social skills properly.

6. Discussion of Findings

This study has identified the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on children's lives and concludes with the following significant findings.

6.1. Psychological Effects

The psychological findings indicate the seriousness of mental illnesses in children through psychological disorders and anxiety that have dominated since the COVID-19 pandemic. Many parents have been worried about transmitting the virus to their children (Tomoda & Hiraoka, 2020).

Studies find that 72% of children experienced closure-related changes in behavior and attitude, while 57% had new mental symptoms. They also show that 36% of children suffered from hyperactivity, 36% experienced loneliness and isolation, and 18% suffered from lack of attention and concentration. More than 75% of children experienced frequent loneliness and nostalgia for friends and school.

6.2. Health Effects

The health effect findings show the effects of the pandemic on children's health with an increase in disease cases, obesity, and visual problems due to spending time at home playing computer games and attending distance education, leading to language delay in children, and hyperactivity (Ravichandran, Shah, & Ravichandran, 2020).

The studies show that 50% of the children have suffered from diet problems such as eating a lot of fast food and sweets or even refusing to eat, all of which had not been presented before.

The studies also show that domestic violence has always appeared and increased during crises and disasters. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought many problems and pressures, such as lack of income and unemployment, lack of support and resources, and excessive alcohol use. According to these studies, all of these factors are among the risk factors that increase the phenomenon of domestic violence (Campbell, 2020).

6.3. Cultural and Social Effects

The cultural and social effect findings indicate that children's involuntary introvert away from forms of exchange and imitation with others leads to a decrease in the children's communication skills and an increase in the fears of dealing with others (Save the Generations Association, 2020).

References

- Manzoor, B, Bin Mukrram, J.A.D: Lisan Al-Arab, Vol. 9, Dar Sader, Beirut, Lebanon (1968)
- Asaad, A ., Latif A: Family Marriage Counseling. Dar Al-Shorouk, Amman (2008).
- Abbas, A.B: Domestic Violence, Research Presented in the Conference of Crime Prevention in the Age of Globalization, Naif Arab Academy for Security Sciences, Riyadh (2001).
- Batoul, A.: Protection of Children in Bahrain from Abuse, Bahrain Center for Studies and Research, Kingdom of Bahrain (2004).
- Al-Hasaniya, Salim, A. et al.: Family Planning Thought, Reality, and Ambition, Publications of the Ministry of Culture, Damascus (1998).
- Dhaidan, A.M.: Self-esteem and its Relationship to Aggressive Behavior, Naif Arab Academy for Security Sciences, Riyadh (1424 AH).
- Ibrahim, A.B.: Children's Perception of Physical and Psychological Abuse in Kuwait, Journal of Human Sciences, University of Bahrain (2005).
- Falah, A.A.: Childhood and Violence, Children's Lives of Violence in the Emirates Society, a field study, the Journal of Social Studies (2007).
- Zaki, B.A.: Dictionary of Social Sciences Terms, Library of Lebanon, Beirut (1986).
- Hebert, J.L.: Childhood Abuse and Revictimization in Adolescent Girls' Relationships, International Review, vol. 29, issue 10 (2005).
- Jamil, H.: The Philosophical Dictionary, vol. 2, pp. 112 Lebanese Book House, Beirut (1982).
- Shahi and Kathryn: Domestic Violence in the Arab World, The Arab Journal of Psychiatry, vol. 26, issue 1, Part 11 (2015).
- Amir, F.: Contemporary Rulers in Domestic Violence, Modern Arab Office, Azarita, Alexandria, Egypt (2011).
- Meek and Komen: Physical Child Abuse and Social Change, Judicial Intervention in the Lower Lands, vol. 27 (2003).
- United Nations Children's Fund: Protecting Children from Violence during COVID-19 Pandemic, Disruptions in prevention and response services.
- SAMHSA: Intimate Partner Violence and Child Abuse Considerations during COVID-19 Pandemic (2019).
- Campbell, A. M.: An Increasing Risk of Family Violence during the Covid-19 Pandemic, pp. 1-8, FSI (2020).
- Chung, G.: Mediating Effects of Parental Stress on Harsh Parenting and Parent-child, pp. 1-35, Gerard Chung (2020).
- Đapić, M. R.: Children behind Closed Doors Due to COVID-19 Isolation: Abuse, Neglect, and Domestic Violence, pp. 181-187, Archives of Psychiatry Research (2020).
- Hiraoka, D., & Tomoda, A.: The Relationship between Parenting Stress and School, pp. 1-8, Research Center for Child Mental Development (2020).

Intimate Partner Violence and Child Abuse Considerations during COVID-19 Pandemic, pp. 1-4, SAMHSA (2020).

Brown, M., Doom, S., Lechuga-Peña, J., Watamura, S., E. S., Koppels, T.: Stress and Parenting during the Global COVID-19 Pandemic: Child Abuse & Neglect, pp. 1-42 (2020).

Ravichandran, P., Shah, A. K., Ravichandran, P.: Shadow pandemic: domestic violence and child abuse during the COVID-19 lockdown in India, pp. 3118-3121, International Journal of Research in Medical Sciences (2020).

World Health Organization, Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19): Question and Answer, <https://www.who.int/ar/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/q-a-coronaviruses> , last accessed 2020/09/06.

National Institute for Human Rights, Definition of child Protection, http://www.nihriq.org/Arabic/?page_id=245 , last accessed 2020/09/06.

Moawad, Musa Najib Musa, Childhood Definitions and Characteristics, <http://www.alukah.net/social/0/44786> , last accessed 2020/09/05.

UNICEF, The State of the World's Children 2021, On My Mind: Promotion, Protection, and Care of Children's Mental Health, <https://www.unicef.org/reports/state-worlds-children-2021>, last accessed 2020/09/05.

أثر أزمة جائحة كورونا على حياة الأطفال

الملخص

تسعى هذه الدراسة لتدراك أثر أزمة جائحة كورونا على حياة الأطفال كأحد أهم المشاكل التي خلفتها جائحة كورونا (كوفيد-19) بهدف معرفة مدى تأثر حياة الأطفال اجتماعيًا وسلوكيًا وثقافيًا، ليتسنى لنا وضع الخطط والحلول المناسبة من أجل استعادة الأطفال لحياتهم الطبيعية مرةً أخرى.

وقد تمثلت مشكلة هذا البحث في ضرورة تسليط الضوء على الآثار السلبية على الأطفال الناجمة جراء تطبيق الإجراءات الاحترازية والتباعد الاجتماعي وإغلاق المدارس وكافة المنشآت الحيوية والبقاء في المنزل.

وتكمن أهمية الدراسة في أنه وعلى الرغم من قرارات الالتزام بالمنزل وإغلاق المدارس والحدائق والعديد من المؤسسات التي اتخذتها كافة الدول والتي تهدف للحفاظ على صحة الأفراد وعدم انتشار الفيروس إلا أنها جنت على صحة الأطفال النفسية والاجتماعية فضلاً عن تأثر مستواهم الدراسي والثقافي، ومن ناحية أخرى ظهر بشكلٍ ملموسٍ العنف ضد الأطفال والذي أثبتته نتائج الدراسات والاستبانات التي أجريت في مختلف الدول، ومن هذا المنطلق ترى الباحثة حتمية الاهتمام بموضوع الدراسة حيث أن هؤلاء الأطفال هم قادة المستقبل.

وقد أظهرت نتائج هذه الدراسة أن غالبية الأطفال على مستوى العالم قد تأثرت حياتهم منذ بداية جائحة كورونا (كوفيد-19) مع تفاوت هذا التأثير معتمداً على ثقافة المجتمع والأسرة ومقوماتهم الثقافية والاقتصادية.

ونوهت المقترحات والتوصيات بمحاولة تطبيق خططٍ علاجيةٍ تتناسب مع الفئات العمرية للأطفال بهدف التداوي من آثار أزمة جائحة كورونا (كوفيد-19) قبل الرجوع مرةً أخرى للحياة الطبيعية بهدف عدم الاصطدام الذي قد يحدث للأطفال عند عودتهم مرةً أخرى لحياتهم الطبيعية وأثناء تعاملهم مع الأشخاص مرةً أخرى.

المفردات الأساسية: جائحة كورونا، حياة الأطفال، التباعد الاجتماعي.