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## Pandemic, children, media and violence

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### Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic led to a mass school closure in all parts of the world with the school being inaccessible to the students as well as the teachers. During the lockdown, people largely spent time inside the homes, big or small, and they killed their time by watching television or social media news and entertainment programs. With this awareness, sensitivity and a desire to understand the predicaments with their truth, a study was taken in order to document the pandemic-related experiences of children and women living across eight community locations (15 schools) in Mumbai and Thane. The findings reveal that the absence of safe and developmental spaces, interactions with peers, teachers and friends, learning- social, psychological, emotional, and cognitive have not been the same as the 'normal' used to be. There have also been situations that were experienced by children which weren't meant for their age- like the financial worries of the family, unemployment of parents, food hardships, exposure to domestic violence and other adult themes that they may have come across through the increased screen engagement.

**Keywords:** Pandemic, Indian children, media, education, effect of media, impact of the pandemic, violence, and children

### Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic led to a mass school closure in all parts of the world; a 'phenomenon' that one hadn't heard of or imagined except for war-torn areas. Lives have been massively disrupted – many lives have been lost – and yet the effort to continue learning are being made. Learning itself got disrupted and got transformed as schools around the world changed how they had worked, so far. In India, all the institutions have been completely inaccessible to teachers and/or students which served not only the function of education but also as 'spaces' that enabled children's safe childhood, their growth and provided for experiences that their homes lacked. Children spent a home bound life for almost 18 months which impacted their development and characterized this phase in childhood with peculiar experiences. What exactly did the children do? Such questions must be asked and to which answers will have to be found for a long time to come. The studies are already being undertaken to assess the extent of domestic violence and mental health issues experienced by people during the pandemic (Constant A, 2020 and WHO, 2020) [8, 36].

Many stakeholders in education are identifying and re-conceptualizing the priorities. They have recognized the need to identify afresh what should be most important after having gone through a phase of blocked or restricted access of children to school and educational resources. Across societies, the pandemic has led to a narrowing of the sphere of human interaction and a focus on immediate surroundings and a greater mistrust or fear on those who are beyond the immediate. The COVID-19 outbreak has upend critical structures, such as health systems, economic life, socioeconomic class structures, fundamental institutional arrangements, communities and everyday family life. A new canvassing of experts in technology, communications and social change by Pew Research Center and Elon University's Imagining the Internet Center have found that there will be worsening economic inequality and also the spread of misinformation. "They worry about significant damage to social stability and cohesion and the reduced likelihood of rational deliberation and evidence-based policymaking." (PRC, 2021) [27]. The need to research has rarely emerged as urgent and necessary. This is now the time to explore the existential questions in order to make an informed move ahead with children's education, growth and well-being. Kumar (2021) [20] has asserted for a need to recognize that that 17 months without teaching in a physical classroom has made a strange impact on teachers as well as on children. We cannot simply carry on with an approach of 'where we left it'.

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Any efforts to understand the predicaments that people and children have faced, their issues and research on it itself has been restricted as lockdowns restrict access to the full range of people typically encountered in everyday life. In India, children have been away from school for 17 months and most of them are still away must be recognized as a predicament. Several households are focused on home-based education – and survival but only those who could afford it in terms of having access to the digital tools and the required space at home. Locking down people in their homes to control the spread of virus also had other implications. They largely spent time inside the homes, big or small, and they killed their time by watching television or social media news and entertainment programs. With their family members and themselves, children were exposed to suitable as well as unsuitable entertainment programs for a very long duration. For most children, there was no teacher in their reach to ask, talk, voice out their mis-conceptions and express their anxieties to or to even share what all they were experiencing, witnessing and absorbing. For a tiny majority, it remained possible to maintain some kind of dialogue at a distance, but online communication tends to be an echo chamber where you can't address anxieties and debunk misinformation logically; where you can't really systematically engage with children on issues in a progressively planned way (Stern, 2021) <sup>[29]</sup>. There is an urgent need to recognize that we must make all efforts to understand the nuances and implications of what children experienced at home over these 17 months while they suffered the educational disruption in a massive way.

The United Nations' response, *Education during COVID 19 and Beyond (2020a)* <sup>[32]</sup> emphasized the wider functions of schooling. This document brings into consideration a concern with 'productivity' or 'growth' model and also with 'rights' approach. It emphasizes how the ramifications of the pandemic, especially mass school closures, threaten to exacerbate pre-existing educational inequalities. It reminds us that closing schools has effects that extend beyond the acquisition of skills to provision of children's services, and to the ability of parents, especially mothers, to work. It carries an important reminder that education is not simply a 'fundamental human right', but an 'enabling right with a direct impact on the realization of all other human rights' (3).

Education in a post-COVID world: nine ideas for public action (UNESCO 2020) urges that 'our common humanity necessitates global solidarity' to ensure that disadvantaged communities are not further marginalized (3), warning of the risk to 'decades of progress' in addressing poverty and gender inequality (3-4). Securing funding for education for the poorest societies and communities, and refusing to accept 'current levels of inequality' (let alone their increase) are the urgent necessities for those who work in the education sector. It is well known that school serves functions of education well beyond skills formation. There is significance of schools as 'social spaces' where children get all those social experiences, in the company of their teachers, that they do not get at home.

Vickers (2021) <sup>[35]</sup> argued that most of the responses of international agencies to the educational disruption caused by COVID 19 share a failure as they don't critically reexamine key assumptions concerning education's socio-economic and political functions. They remained focused on viewing education as human capital generation and the

losses incurred from that perspective. These responses fail to envisage what children have endured in the long gap without the company of their teachers, other children and the physical space of school. This had triggered a widespread interest among various stakeholders to remind the society collectively about the learning loss as well as the developmental loss that children have endured. There have been reflective writings in the newspapers and other periodicals and several researches initiated by a variety of agencies.

### **India: School and children during Pandemic**

India is the only country in which schools were not opened in the last 17 months. In several other nations, considerable efforts were made to support the schools to function in an in-person mode on several occasions even if it entailed a clumsy affair of periodic closure and then reopening. (Kumar, 2021 and Chebroly & Raman, 2021) <sup>[20, 7]</sup> As a result, school closures in India have created a serious interruption in children's development and growth.

According to UNICEF's research conducted in India, the Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, school closures in South Asia due to the COVID-19 pandemic have interrupted the learning of 434 million children. Students and parents reported that students learnt significantly less compared to pre-pandemic levels. "In India, 80% of children aged 14-18 years reported lower levels of learning than when physically at school. 42% of children between 6-13 years reported not using any type of remote learning during school closures." The research highlights that even when the devices were available, children's access to them is often limited. The research found that student-teacher engagement, when regular and reciprocal, is a strong predictor of success in children's learning, especially for younger students. However, most students had little or no contact with their teachers during the mass school closures. "School closures in South Asia have compounded a situation which was already precarious." In India, Computer Assisted Telephonic Interviewing was used to survey over 5,800 parents of children aged 5-13 years, and students ages 14-18 years, as well as government school teachers, across six states: Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. To ensure representation of marginalized groups - parents from migrant families, and from tribal and remote locations were included. (UNICEF, 2021) <sup>[33]</sup>.

While the pandemic-led mass school closures were in effect, Government of India's agency UDISE+ released the school-based data for the year 2019-2020. It revealed that in the academic year that ended with school closures due to COVID-19, only 22% of schools in India had Internet facilities. Among government schools, less than 12% had Internet in 2019-20, while less than 30% had functional computer facilities. This is bound to affect the kind of digital education options available to schools during the pandemic, as well as plans for hybrid learning in the days ahead. The availability of digital education — whether via live, apps like Google Meet, or through recorded lectures, emails, WhatsApp or educational apps — has largely been dependent on whether schools, teachers and parents had access to the necessary infrastructure. Even for online teaching, in several places, teachers came to school and taught in their own empty classrooms, while facing a computer screen that communicated to their students at home. However, the UDISE+ data gives a clear picture of

the digital divide. In Maharashtra, (71%), private schools had higher levels of computer availability than in government schools. (UDISE+, 2021) <sup>[31]</sup>. A recent survey of nearly 1,400 schoolchildren (Classes 1 to 8) in underprivileged households (the kind that send their children to government schools) done by the School Children's Online and Offline Learning (SCHOOL) in August 2021 team recently released its report titled 'Locked Out: Emergency Report on School Education'. Lack of access to devices and data, among other factors, has been detrimental. The main findings of the report are:

- In rural areas, only 8 percent and in urban areas, only 24 percent are studying online regularly.
- Over 40 percent of the sample children, in both rural (48) and urban (42) areas, are not able to read more than a few words.
- About 11% children, particularly the younger ones, lack understanding of online study in any case, or find it difficult to concentrate.
- Only 25.5 percent of all children were studying online (occasionally or regularly) at the time of the survey, with an unbalanced advantage to those from urban areas.
- Out of this small percentage, as many as 65 percent students in rural areas and 57 percent students in urban areas faced connectivity problems.
- Over 40 percent students, in both rural (43) and urban (46) areas, found online classes/ videos difficult to follow.

The shortage of digital study materials, the lack of awareness on the part of parents, and the concentration difficulties faced by young children have made things worse. The hardest hit group is of tribal and Dalit children: only 4% and 15% respectively studied online regularly. Some even faced outright discrimination from their teachers.

Those who faced connectivity problems reported poor network and inability to afford data and other technology. The inability of children's families to cope with the demands of online education can be understood well by paying attention to the latest Pew Research Center Analysis report finds that the middle class in India is estimated to have shrunk by 32 million in 2020 as a consequence of the downturn, compared with the number it may have reached absent the pandemic. Meanwhile, the number of people who are poor in India (with incomes of \$2 or less a day) is estimated to have increased by 75 million because of the COVID-19 recession. the number of poor in India is projected to have reached 134 million, more than double the 59 million expected prior to the recession. The poverty rate in India likely rose to 9.7% in 2020, up sharply from the January 2020 forecast of 4.3% (Kochhar, 2021) <sup>[19]</sup>.

The impact of poverty has already started reflecting in the numbers of children who are being withdrawn from private schools all over the country including Maharashtra. According to a Times of India report, the education department found that on account of limited digital access, over 25,000 children remained out of schools in the state of Maharashtra. Of these, the highest share—10,820—is from Mumbai in April 2021, a year after the first-time schools were closed. Among the students who had dropped out of schools in the state, 288 said they were now employed as

child labour and 1,212 couldn't attend due to their special needs. (Borwankar, 2021) <sup>[3]</sup>.

### About the study

With this awareness, sensitivity and a desire to understand the predicaments with their truth, a study was conducted to document the lived experiences of school age children and their mothers in eight community locations (15 schools) in Thane, Mumbai. The reality had already started unfolding through various media reports and research undertaken by different agencies that children had endured a great disadvantage by being away from school and their teachers and friends for a long duration. It arose as a genuine curiosity to find out what did those children do when they were not accessing any kind of learning opportunity. Where did their time and attention go? In the absence of school and any institutional learning, what shape did the childhood take?

In order to capture the lived reality of children and their parents during the lockdown, an effort was made to construct their life narratives in their words in order to document their plight and identify intervention goals for future interventions. The United Nations' response, Education during COVID 19 and Beyond (2020a) <sup>[32]</sup> had highlighted that school closures and parents' especially, mothers' ability to work were intricately linked. A decision was, therefore, taken to include the experiences of children's mothers in the study. For the study, a total of 140 children and 144 women selected through random sampling were interviewed telephonically according to different schedules and then their responses were categorized. The participants belong to the lower socio-economic strata participants live in the slum areas of the mentioned localities of Mumbai and Thane.

### Findings of the Study

The findings suggest that several key issues need to be recognized to be able to offer meaningful support to children when life resumes, the schools re-open and they start coming every day.

### Missing school for two years: loss of enabling physical and psychological space

The loss of two years active engagement with teachers in an institutional ethos means educational disruption. It also means that school's larger function of serving as an enabling physical and psychological space got disrupted. Children were deprived of the experience of a larger, open space, physical as well as emotional, in which they were not confined by the unresourceful and poverty-ridden home. The pandemic led restricted life meant that children's precious two years were spent in a resourceless ethos at home where habits of learning, thinking, paying attention etc were not encouraged. Their familial disadvantage took over their lives. The school closures have exacerbated the pre-existing educational inequalities between the children of poor and well-off families. Children have endured learning loss and also learning lags especially, those who were already lagging behind and struggling at school. Being out of touch with school and related processes and the practice means that several children may have forgotten a lot of foundational knowledge. They have developed physical development lag on account of lack of play, physical



activity and expansive activity in open grounds and clean spaces.

The importance of schools has one more dimension for they serve as 'social spaces' in which they central role is of teachers. In a highly divisive society of India, school functions as an equalizer. It brings children of different linguistic, religious, regional and caste backgrounds together. By eating, playing and learning together, they become more tolerant of differences between various groups. conscious and aware of several social evils. The 17-months long disruption created a disruption in the school's ability to play the role of a socializing agent as well.

### **Food Hardships: disruption in the midday meal provision**

In India, school has served as a compensatory mechanism for a lot of resources that are not adequately available in the homes of a large number of children. One aspect is nutrition. The school closures also meant deprivation of cooked, warm mid-day meal on a regular basis. While the schools were closed so were the employment avenues for children's parents. The economic crisis resulted in high rates of unemployment. As families lost income, more and more families required assistance who had already been coping with bare minimal survival. This led to what can be termed as 'food hardship'. While food hardship has started to decline now in 2021, as more relief has reached low-income families, the number of children in households where children aren't getting enough to eat appears to be many times higher than pre-pandemic levels. And, more importantly, the food hardship of 2020 needs to be addressed in medicinal terms. The physical lag in development doesn't go away with time. It remains intact until it is addressed by compensatory mechanisms.

### **Impact of Parental Unemployment**

Parental unemployment inflicts strong detrimental effects on their children's educational attainment. Younger children show more adverse effects of adverse family economic conditions. The employment and stable income of parents is an essential determinant of children's educational success. unemployment limits families' ability to invest in the lives and learning environments of their children, which in turn hampers their educational development and outcomes. The effects may be stronger when parents, and in particular mothers, become discouraged and detached which happened with great intensity during the pandemic as the mothers were locked down and coped with heightened insecurities and worries for the future.

### **Gendered Experiences During the Lockdown**

The house-bound life was a heavily gendered life for young children. The world of the girls remained small during the pandemic. They got into the customary role of supplementary house wife by sharing their mother's load. It has come out in the study very clearly that girls shared the drudgery of household chores much more than the boys as a result of which their engagement with activities that lead to growth has been limited. The opportunities for reading, thinking and accessing new ideas was limited to the girls because significant time was devoted to cooking, cleaning and washing. Additionally, witnessing domestic violence at home and seeing their mothers closely being hit by their

fathers would have reinforced gendered hierarchies and roles.

The acceptance of domestic violence on various grounds by the participant women has far reaching consequences for girls as well as boys in terms of being a socializing force. Children get socialized into several models of social conduct that are steeped in gender and caste hierarchies. The act of beating one's wife is one such practice which keeps the men-women asymmetry alive. Its impact and consequences on children have been studied and documented extensively. A beating father becomes a role model for the sons and a beaten mother becomes a role model for the daughters. The school has to intervene and create a dent in this model by addressing its impact and by engaging boys and girls on this issue through various means. Gender-based interventions must be planned for boys as well as girls once the children are back to school. The experience of violence on television and the experience of violence at home especially, seeing your mother being beaten has serious consequences for their educational attainment. The decision of people being locked down in their homes to control the spread of virus has exacerbated some of the social evils which have inter-generational consequences. Domestic violence is one of them and children becoming witness to it from close quarters has to be analyzed in a new frame.

### **Heightened Engagement with Violence on Television and Entertainment Apps on Mobile**

A general trend is that children in homes with television spend very considerable amounts of time watching TV. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when they people were forced to stay at home, children and parents spent a lot of time watching television programs on TV and on internet enabled mobile sets. It was found through their choices that at all age levels children seemed to do a majority of their TV-watching through programs which are not exclusively children's programs, so that their exposure to a variety of adult programs has been considerable as was reported by 73% women that they watched TV programs during the lockdown. In order to develop a full picture of TV exposure of children, we need to reflect on the mothers' as well as children's responses together. It is well known that children are likely to spend more time watching TV if their parents are devoted TV fans.

The study revealed that watching Tiktok videos emerged as the most preferred activity of children when it comes to screen based entertainment reported by 55% children followed by cartoons liked by 43.5% children. There were additional 23.5% children who reported frequently watching videos on You Tube. It can be inferred that a large majority of participant children engaged in unregulated screen entertainment. A large amount of time spent with the screen, largely for entertainment must have replaced their physical activity which was anyhow not feasible during the lockdown and on account of limited open spaces in informal settlements to play and run around.

There have been several studies that study the effect of screen time on children's psychological well-being. Twenge and Campbell (2018) examined a large ( $n = 40,337$ ) random sample of 2- to 17-year-old children and adolescents in the U.S. in 2016 that included comprehensive measures of screen time and an array of psychological well-being measures. In their findings, more hours of daily screen time

were associated with lower psychological well-being, including less curiosity, lower self-control, more distractibility, more difficulty making friends, less emotional stability, being more difficult to care for, and inability to finish tasks. Among 14- to 17-year-olds, even moderate use of screens was associated with lower psychological well-being. Screen addiction has been diagnosed as a growing health issue, generally being referred to as screen dependency disorder (SDD). SDDs have become a new challenge for child neurology. The World Health Organization's (WHO) recent classification of 'gaming disorder' as a mental health condition has again brought the issue into focus.

Their mothers also reported a generous engagement with television programs on TV or through mobile screen. They gave a few specific replies and also gave clubbed responses such as 'Marathi serials' or 'All kinds of things on mobile'. None of them said that they have to exercise restraint over their screen engagement because their kids remain in their close company. Mothers emerged as screen fans in our data who didn't regulate their behavior on the basis of what is appropriate or inappropriate for children.

Watching television programs emerged as one of the significant activities in women's routine during the lockdown. The choice of their programs give us an idea about how did they keep themselves occupied when they didn't step out of their homes. Most preferred programs were television serials including soap operas on Sab TV and Star Plus channels. Parallel to the names of two channels, women mentioned Crime Patrol distinctly. It is a program bring the real stories of crime happening all around the country which were resolved by the police. A distinct mention of this program by 41.5% women reveals that it is very popular among them and they watch it without any consciousness that it's content may not be appropriate for children. A sizeable proportion of women at 27.5% reported that they watch all kinds of television programs on their mobile. A functional mobile with internet connectivity was reportedly available in the house of 27.5% women but it was being used for their purpose including entertainment and not for classes. This is consistent with the findings of other studies such as *Locked Out ...* that smartphones are often used by working adults, and may or may not be available to school children.

Maccoby (1951) <sup>[9]</sup> had done a path breaking study on television and its addiction among children. While discussing the findings of his empirical work, he argued that if a child becomes accustomed to a heightened level of excitement and organizes much of his learned activity at that particular level of excitement, his behavior will be disrupted if the level of excitement declines, and he will be restless, bored, ill-at-ease until he does something to restore the particular level of excitement. If television does increase the level of excitement significantly, a mild form of "addiction" might take place in this way, and parents and teachers could get the child's interest only by making the things they want to present to him as exciting as the stories he is accustomed to seeing over television. Children also develop vicarious habits formation. Continually living through experience of violence and aggression, romantic and sexual excitement, vicariously should have two effects: it may momentarily reduce a child's need to be aggressive in real life, but if at some future time the need to be aggressive is aroused, it should increase the probability that the child will actually

perform an aggressive act. Aggression of different kinds is a very common theme in all the stories children choose from the mass media, and insofar as this or any other action system is practiced conceptually through the mass media, the probability of the act's being performed in real life should of course be increased.

It is well known that heightened engagement with screen leads to other problems in children such as mean later average bedtimes for children, conflict with parents over meal time and children who remain withdrawn from the household activities (Bulck, 2010) <sup>[5]</sup>. Mothers commonly regard quiet children as virtuous children, so a withdrawn child doesn't appear problematic to them but the tendency to be quiet and the perpetual withdrawal interferes with educational attainment and social interaction. We found ample evidence of this in our study.

Children and their mothers spent a lot of time watching programs on television and on the internet-enabled mobile instruments. Their engagement was absolutely unregulated in terms of the number of hours spent and the kind of programs watched and preferred. Overindulgence in television led to the late retirement to bed as well as unregulated content exposure to children. Less informed adults and TV addicts themselves could not discriminate between what is appropriate or inappropriate content for children. When children were further asked prodded to tell the kind of programs they enjoyed most. Their responses revealed top most choice of the surveyed children emerged as horror films and crime-based programs and films that involve plots around, murder, bloodshed, ghosts and so on. Children didn't spend time only with programs exclusively for their age group. The inappropriateness of such programs for children is well known and has been a major concern for those who work in the field of education and children's mental health. The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry released a statement in 2014 stating the following:

Unfortunately, much of today's television programming is violent. Hundreds of studies of the effects of TV violence on children and teenagers have found that children may:

- become "immune" or numb to the horror of violence
- begin to accept violence as a way to solve problems
- imitate the violence they observe on television; and
- identify with certain characters, victims and/or victimizers

Extensive viewing of television violence by children causes greater aggressiveness. Sometimes, watching a single violent program can increase aggressiveness. Children who view shows in which violence is very realistic, frequently repeated or unpunished, are more likely to imitate what they see. Children with emotional, behavioral, learning or impulse control problems may be more easily influenced by TV violence. The impact of TV violence may show immediately in the child's behavior or may surface years later. Young people can be affected even when their home life shows no tendency toward violence." TV Violence and Children (aacap.org)

Huesmann (2007) <sup>[12]</sup> critically assessed the research evidence since 1960s that suggests that exposure to violence in television, movies, video games, cell phones, and on the internet increases the risk of violent behavior on the viewer's part just as growing up in an environment filled

with real violence increases the risk of them behaving violently. His conclusions are:

This review marshals evidence that compelling points to the conclusion that media violence increases the risk significantly that a viewer or game player will behave more violently in the short run and in the long run. Randomized experiments demonstrate conclusively that exposure to media violence immediately increases the likelihood of aggressive behavior for children and adults in the short run. The most important underlying process for this effect is probably priming though mimicry and increased arousal also play important roles. The evidence from longitudinal field studies is also compelling that children's exposure to violent electronic media including violent games leads to long-term increases in their risk for behaving aggressively and violently. These long-term effects are a consequence of the powerful observational learning and desensitization processes that neuroscientists and psychologists now understand occur automatically in the human child. Children automatically acquire scripts for the behaviors they observe around them in real life or in the media along with emotional reactions and social cognitions that support those behaviors. Social comparison processes also lead children to seek out others who behave similarly aggressively in the media or in real life leading to a downward spiral process that increases risk for violent behavior. (Huesmann, 2007, p: 10) <sup>[12]</sup>.

The ubiquity and pervasiveness of television and electronic media with its overarching aim of entertainment do not discriminate against its audience in terms of accessibility, content and mental stimulation. In other words, various forms of violence with varying degrees are presented in television news shows that are easily accessible to both children and adults alike (Postman, 1982) <sup>[26]</sup>. The study highlights this very pertinent issue that the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the precarity of childhood.

### **Pandemic: Experience ridden with Fear, Ignorance and Denial**

An impression got created in the minds of common people that despite problems involving life and death, learning had continued for most children. The idea was the only difference was that teaching and learning moved to various online media but it continued for everybody. However, several studies have already brought out that a large number of children not only remained outside the reach of online forums, but more alarmingly several of them completely dropped out of the school (UNICEF, 2021 and School, 2021) <sup>[33]</sup>. Therefore, the present study collected the data about children's experiences with school, teachers and learning during the pandemic

It was found in the study that a significant proportion of children clearly denied any understanding about the virus and the pandemic and a sizeable proportion had no curiosity to know about it. Children expressed fear in clear terms of catching the infection and suffering on account of it but lacked any relevant information and knowledge. It is not strange and has been known in psychology as denial of a painful reality. It also reflects a usual problem of Indian education system that real life doesn't become a matter of intellectual engagement at school so children do not go to school with specific curiosities. They internalize this idea very early in life that school is not about what they want to learn rather about what the teacher has to teach.

A lot of conflicts and miseries can be better coped in the world by knowing their causes and by understanding them. The target set in SDG 4.7 is to achieve the following by 2030: ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development. The children's ignorance as well as the desire to know about COVID-19 gives us an intervention direction. What are the ideas and mental maps that children have made about the virus and human misery that it created? Teaching children in a concerted way through modules, videos and activities will contribute in the direction of developing knowledge through education to promote sustainable development through education for sustainable lifestyles and others.

The NCERT's supplementary reader *Vimla in the Virus Land* has been written for the children of 10-14 year old children with a clear assumption that they can understand virus, its propagation and its interaction with human body. However, through any medium, schools or the other educational material publishers did not consider it viable to enhance children's learning about the COVID-19 virus. NCERT itself did not bring any notice of the education departments on its publication.

### **A monumental challenge to assess the consequences of the massive interruptions**

With the experience of persistent fear, witnessing violence in close quarters and the long-drawn food hardship, it was expected that family's stress and struggle will lead to a complete break for children continued engagement at school. It reflected in the anxieties expressed by a sizeable proportion of women that continuing school may not be feasible for their children. UNICEF warned us about two salient possibilities namely, child marriage and child labour by releasing following statements: The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly affected the everyday lives of girls: their physical and mental health, their education, and the economic circumstances of their families and communities. Over the next decade, up to 10 million more girls will be at risk of becoming child brides as a result of the pandemic.

The risk of child marriage increases when families endure serious economic setbacks, school closures and disruption in other services. Economic insecurity has emerged as a strong factor that enhances the possibility of child marriage as a means to relieve financial pressure on a family. Mass school closures during the pandemic is likely to have pushed girls towards marriage since school is no longer an engaging option. The disruption of reproductive health services will have a direct impact on early pregnancy and reproductive health of girls.

The pandemic has increased economic insecurity, dramatically restricted supply chains and brought production to a colossal halt. The resulting losses in household income will in turn push children to contribute to family's income to ensure survival in the times to come. More and more children could be forced into exploitative and hazardous jobs. Those already working may do so for longer hours or under worsening conditions. Such a long



school closure will exacerbate these tendencies, as families will struggle to survive.

### Conclusion

The Pandemic has changed the ways of lives in many ways, in the study we focused on the changed lives of children and their mothers. The absence of safe and developmental spaces, interactions with peers, teachers and friends, learning- social, psychological, emotional and cognitive have not been the same as the 'normal' used to be. There have also been situations that were experienced by children which weren't meant for their age- like the financial worries of the family, unemployment of parents, food hardships, exposure to domestic violence and other adult themes that they may have come across through the increased screen engagement.

The routines and the habits have considerably changed, and this should be kept in mind while 'resuming' back. The issues and implications highlighted by the study give a strong basis and reasoning to how the thing are, and why they are so. Rigorous work and will to work is the need of the hour and many hours to come because this cannot be simply 'handled', it will have to be worked upon, diligently, by everyone involved in any role in the live of children.

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