

## MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS AMONG CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS DURING COVID-19

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### Abstract:

*The COVID-19 pandemic brought a complex array of challenges which had mental health repercussions for everyone, including children and adolescents. Grief, fear, uncertainty, social isolation, increased screen time, and parental fatigue have negatively affected the mental health of children. It has become difficult for parents to calm their children's anxieties because of the uncertainty and stress in their own lives. During the pandemic, adolescents at high risk of psychological problems might fall through the safety net provided by a protective family life, peer support, and psychological support from teachers. Any pre-existing mental health problem, past traumatic experiences or abuse, family instability, or losing a loved one can make children highly vulnerable to developing severe mental health conditions. Mental health problems among this special population were widely ignored, unsolved and given less importance due to lack of understanding. Mental health of Children and adolescent shall be promoted through a series of Psychosocial Management strategies and activities.*

**Key words:** *COVID-19, Mental Health, Children, Adolescents etc.*

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### Introduction:

The mental health of millions of children and adolescent worldwide has been put at risk, with at least one in seven forced to remain at home under nationwide public health orders during the COVID-19 pandemic. More than 330 million youngsters have been stuck at home. It has become difficult for parents to calm their children's anxieties because of the uncertainty and stress in their own lives. The occupational or emotional challenges parents face is interfering with their usual ability to address their children needs and worries. When will the school reopen? When can they go out and play? When can they visit their favorite places? These are some common questions that children may be worrying about.

It is not unusual for children to experience negative emotions such as fear, disappointment, sadness, anxiety, anger, loss etc. But it is the prolonged, restrictive, and widespread nature of the COVID-19 pandemic that has exacerbated the situation. Increased screen time, strained family relations or sedentary lifestyle at home pose additional challenges. Being a parent is a daily challenge and faced with the realities of COVID 19, social distancing and self-quarantine, it may be a struggle. For parents, the best way to help their children is to firstly take care of them-selves.

This situation provided children and adolescents with the perfect conditions for solitude and increased internet use. Parents are concerned about the effect of school closure, social distancing, and increased internet use on their

children mental health.

Increased opportunity for internet use makes it more difficult for parents to control this access, and frequent and unsupervised internet use is associated with self-harm and suicidal behaviour in adolescents with psychological risk factors.

COVID-19 might not be as lethal in children and adolescents as it is in adults, but it does cause a lot of psychological distress in this age group. Adolescents are experiencing acute and chronic stress because of parental anxiety, disruption of daily routines, increased family violence, and home confinement with little or no access to peers, teachers, or physical activity.

However, in a socioeconomically disadvantaged country like India, the school environment might be more enriching than the home—nutritionally, emotionally, and developmentally. School closure has seriously disrupted adolescent lives in India, with many young people entering the workplace as a result, possibly never to return to education again.

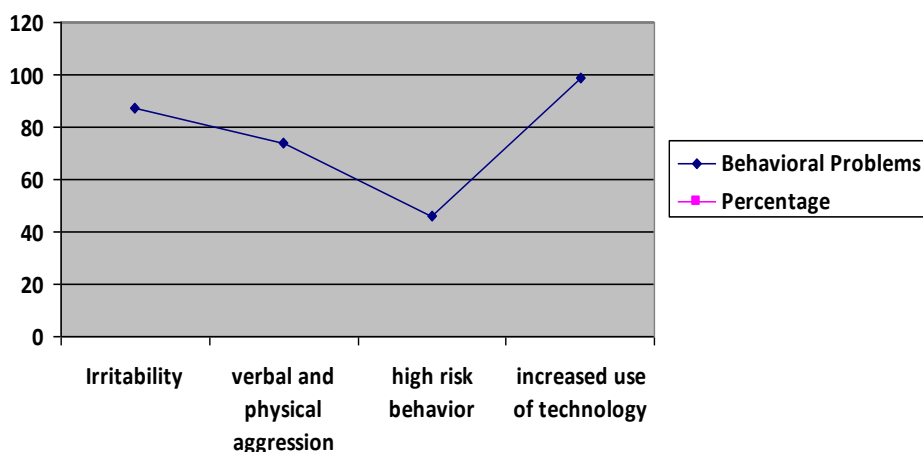
**Aim and Objectives:** The main aim of the study is to explore mental health problems faced by the parents of children and adolescent during Covid-19. The specific objectives of the study are to understand problems related to Behavioural, Emotional, Cognitive, Physical and developmental dimensions.

**Research design & Sample design:** The present study follows a descriptive research design. The researcher used the sampling method lottery method for this study. The sample size of 100 respondents was taken for the study from Kolhapur Municipal Corporation. The parents of children and adolescent were selected as a respondent to find mental health problems.

**Discussion and Result:** During the pandemic, adolescents at high risk of psychological problems might fall through the safety net provided by a protective family life, peer support, and psychological support from teachers. It is time to address adolescent mental health systematically, to monitor the incidence of various psychiatric disorders (e.g.: depression, anxiety, and self-harm behaviours), and to identify factors for both risk and resilience. Unattended mental health problems can disrupt children functioning at home, school and in the community. Parents and teachers should get equipped to detect and deal with early signs of mental health problems among children as they are the first to notice changes in child's emotions or behaviour.

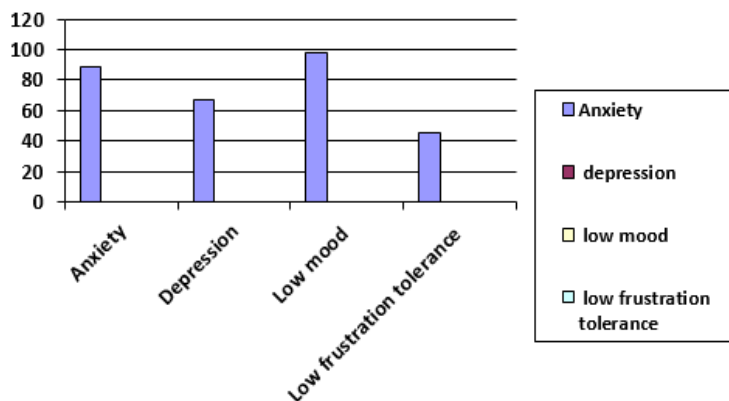
Following are the results of study:

**Figure No.1: Behavioral problems in children and adolescent**



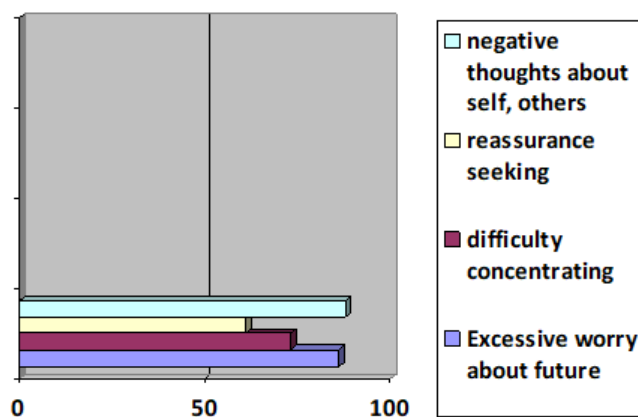
It is evident from the figure that majority of children and adolescent i.e., 87% experienced Irritability, 74% experienced verbal and physical aggression, and 46% experienced high-risk behaviour. Which is due to result of high use of technology up to 99%.

**Figure No.2: Emotional problems in children and adolescent**



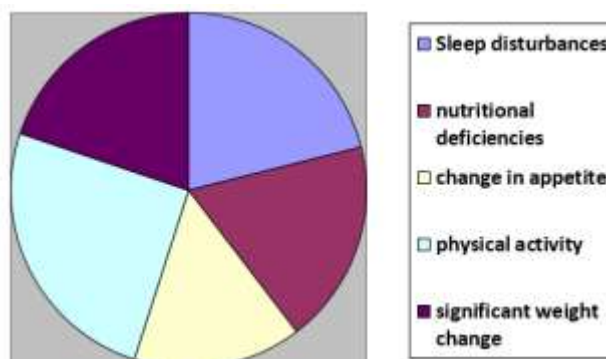
It is observed that 98% have low mood, 89% have anxiety, 67% have depression and 45% have low frustration tolerance.

**Figure No.3: Cognitive problems in children and adolescent**



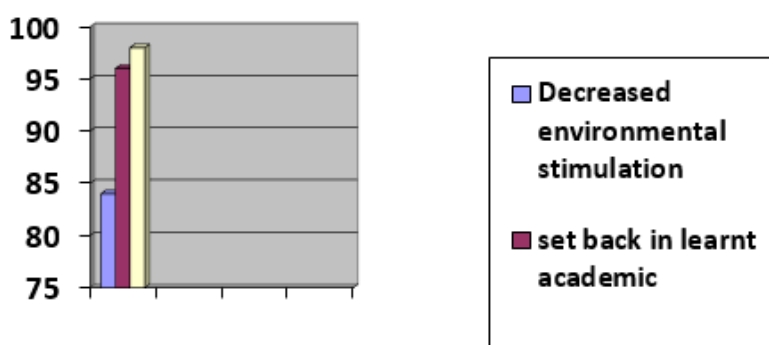
Cognitive problems among children and adolescent constitutes 88% Excessive worry about future, family, health and safety; 86% negative thoughts about self, others and future; 73% difficulty concentrating, 61% reassurance seeking.

**Figure No.4: Physical problems in children and adolescent**



The Physical problems found in Children and adolescent such as Sleep disturbances 66%, nutritional deficiencies 58%, change in appetite 48%, lack of physical activity 79%, significant weight change 62%.

**Figure No.5: Developmental problems in children and adolescent**



Developmental problems are noticed like 98% Decreased environmental stimulation and 96% had set back in learnt academic skills, nearly 84% lack of skills practice.

In these challenging times, some children are at greater risk of developing intense reactions, including severe anxiety, depression, and suicidal tendencies. Any pre-existing mental health problem, past traumatic experiences or abuse, family instability, or losing a loved one can make children highly vulnerable to developing severe mental health conditions. Children and adolescents should also be encouraged to talk about their feelings and reach out to a trusted friend or family member. There is urgent need to aware parents, teachers and peer group for seeking help from professional social worker, counselor, therapist, Motivational speaker, life trainers. Early intervention can prevent long term mental health consequences from this COVID-19 pandemic.

**Psychosocial Management strategies by Professional Social Worker:** A professional social worker can effectively engage not only children and adolescent but also may be extended to parents, teachers and peer group for creating holistic Environment.

Fostering Well-Being achieved through

1. Developing Positive Emotions
2. Engagement in life skills Activities
3. Building trustful Relationships
4. Giving meaning to Life
5. Physical Activity & Sport
6. Maintain Sleep Hygiene and Balanced Nutrition.
7. Removing Stigma & Discrimination
8. Self-Care Management

### Conclusion:

In current situation of COVID-19, Children and adolescent mental health issues are observed by the three important elements of Socialization such as parents, teachers and peer group. Mental health problems among this special population were widely ignored, unsolved and given less importance due to lack of understanding, knowledge, attitude and poor coping strategies. There was a heavy burden on health professional to treat and cure Covid-19 positive patients.

Hence mental health of Children and adolescent was ignored by all levels of social environment during pandemic as well as post pandemic. To carter the need of Mental health of Children and adolescent shall promoted through a series of Psychosocial Management strategies and activities in online and offline by professional social worker, counsellor, therapist and life trainers deemed necessary.

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