

Understanding Parent's Stress in Relation to the Psychological Problems Faced by Children Amidst the Global Lockdown Due to COVID-19

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Abstract

The research aims to explore the parent's stress in relationship to psychology problems faced by children due to global lockdown due to the COVID-19. Parents of children aged between three to fifteen years old completed an online survey. They reported their home environment condition, and difficulties experience due to lockdown and the children's emotional and behavior issues.

Results shows that the lockdown undermine both parents and children well-being. It impacts children behavior and emotional problems affecting parents' wellbeing. Parents had reported more difficulties during lockdown and are stressed due to this condition. This results into increase of children's problems. Current research is important to understand where families stand now so that further research can be designed accordingly.

Keywords: COVID-19, Lockdown, family psychology, stress.

On 30th of January 2020, COVID-19 was declared a subject of Public Health Emergency of International Concern post the initial major outbreak of COVID-19 starting raising its ugly head in China (Oyebode et al., 2020). Soon after this declaration, the Indian Government placed a hold on people entering the country by implementing strict screening and social distancing measures at airports and compulsory self-quarantine for a minimum of 14 days to shield its residents from this infection. Soon after this declaration, the Indian Government placed a hold on people entering the country by implementing strict screening and social distancing measures at airports and compulsory self-quarantine for a minimum of 14 days to shield its residents from this infection. However, the number of COVID-19 cases in India starting shooting up from the latter half of February 2020, rendering the entire country of 1.35 billion people into a state of panic. Following this, small scale measures started being implemented like shutting down schools, colleges, offices and public transports to safeguard the citizens of the country against this deadly virus.

On 25th March 2020, the Government of India imposed a strict, complete, national lockdown to contain the rising spread of the virus and buy time to deal with this health emergency in a much more efficient manner. It was initially supposed to last for 3 weeks but was later extended up to August by a couple of more decrees with specific rules and regulations until the situation became manageable. What followed this were families being caught up with each other in their homes. The parents worked from home, the children studied from home, there was no way of going out to meet friends for both parents and children, and families were pretty much left to entertain themselves. Here, online activities went up quite high. Be it online working, freelance jobs, online coaching, online gaming, and online learning. However, families faced a new situation in which they had to spend all their time 24 x 7 together in each other's company with no way out. It led to a shift in the mental health space of parents and

children, and also as a couple, along with a psychological imbalance faced by both parties (Jiao et al., 2020). Having said that, this study only deals with the mental health implications of the global lockdown and does not take into consideration the possibility of the family battling with physical health issues, the COVID-19 viral infection, or being dysfunctional or abusive families. There has been a total of 4.28 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 in India leading to 72, 775 deaths across the country. Of these 155, 622 cases were reported in Mumbai alone, almost 65,000 succumbing to the effect. A large number of these cases are asymptomatic and need to be dealt with accordingly (Biswas, 2020).

Understanding family dynamics

As the name suggests, family psychology is a minute branch of the larger study of psychology that deals with family dynamics. These include the study of family members and the inter-family relationships between members of a collective unit. Family psychology deals with multiple aspects such as the relationships between spouses, siblings, and parent and child. It takes into account the effect of dysfunctional and abusive families on the mental health of both parents and children and derives ways to help them through it.

The safe spaces for women are tight even under regular circumstances for a large number of residential households, the situation deteriorating during the lockdown. Not only that, families faced a rough time keeping their kids busy and indoors, therefore, safe from the virus.

The effects of the global lockdown

Since a complete lockdown was imposed, house helpers couldn't make it to their respective duties, thereby leading the parents to fend for their own. Parents faced a hard time juggling between household chores, cooking, looking after children, and managing their office work alongside this hectic lifestyle altogether.

Other than having a significant impact on family dynamics, the global lockdown even plummeted the economy of the world compelling citizens to

reconsider their financial choices and opt for more promising and reliable careers. All of this created an intense impact on the ground-level which nuclear families were the most affected in terms of lifestyle, health, and inter-personal family relationships.

Objectives

The present study aimed to explore the effects of the global lockdown and the risk factors associated with the COVID-19 outbreak experience on a family’s wellbeing i.e. parents and children.

Hypotheses

Null Hypothesis: There is no significant difference between family dynamics before and after the global lockdown.

Alternate Hypothesis: There is significant difference, positive or negative, in family dynamics before and after the global lockdown.

Method

Sample

An online survey was conducted on the urban parents of Mumbai city, Maharashtra, India to understand the current situation better. Parents of young and pre-teen children were asked to fill out anonymously after consenting to giving out their data for the study. The survey was spread across our social media platforms and emails for a set period of: May 12th to Aug 19th, 2020. The questionnaire consisted of a series of questions for the parents and for the child, both of which were filled out by the parent. Parents were asked to fill out the information of just one child at a time, in case of multiple children. 897 parents took part in the study, out of which 597 were mothers. There was no compensation, monetary or otherwise, given to parents for handing out their information for this study.

Results and Discussion

619 parents were working from home thereby not being able to give complete attention to their children and household chores. 97% of these parents claimed to have difficult children and admitted to facing

extreme hardships in controlling and disciplining their children. 551 parents claimed to be extremely stressed out because of the ongoing health crisis and the imposition of the national lockdown. 87% of these parents agreed that children are stressed out and need mental health intervention to deal with this condition.

327 parents were at ease staying at home with their spouses and children, cherishing a time they seldom gain and enjoy together. 93% of these parents were of the opinion that children are enjoying it better at home with online studies and staying indoors than the life before the lockdown.

The results show that children of both age groups i.e. 3-11 years and 12-15 years showed mental health troubles and behavioral issues only when their parents were subject to the same condition. On the other hand, children belonging to relaxed and easy-going parents were often not as inclined towards stress and troubles as their former counterparts.

This goes on to say that it is not really the lockdown or the sudden, forced need to spend time within families but the effect parents have on their own selves and, consequently, on their children that goes on to influence their behavior as a whole.

Out of 897 parents who took the survey, 551 claimed to be stressed and mentally worked up due to the implications of the global lockdown, while the rest have pretty much adopted to the newly developed circumstances.

The children of the former set of parents show an apparent stressful behavior while the children of the latter are quite easy-going and controllable. Preteens showed a drastic drop in emotional and behavioral difficulties amidst this lockdown when in the company of relaxed and understanding parents.

This shows how important it is to instill a sense of self-love and confidence in children that is seldom common in schools, educational institutes, and the rest of society as well. It is also imperative to understand family dynamics for the wellbeing of

Table 1: Comparison of stressed and unstressed parents with children psychology traits

	Emotional Difficulties	Behavioral difficulties	Restlessness & Attention difficulties
Children (3-11 years) of stressed parents	Increased	Increased	Increased
Children (3-11 years) of untroubled parents	Controlled	Controlled	Decreased
Children (12-15 years) of stressed parents	Increased	Increased	Increased
Children (12-15 years) of untroubled parents	Decreased	Decreased	Decreased
Children with SEN & mental health difficulties	Decreased	No change	No change

children currently and in the future as well (Wang, Zhang, Zhao, Zhang, & Jiang, 2020).

Children are often subject to extreme strain, unhealthy competition, unnecessary stress, and unavoidable mentally torturing circumstances while at school or in a challenging atmosphere.

The lockdown has given them the much-needed hiatus from the fast-paced challenging lifestyle that children are unfairly expected to keep up with, even if it takes a toll on their mental and physical health. Due to the sudden stoppage of schools and colleges, children are no longer expected to cater to unnecessary social demands and give in to peer pressure. This is one of the most promising, long-lasting effects of the COVID-19 lockdown on children which is quite apparent through the results of this study.

Through this study, we find that aspects like COVID-19 infection spreading in the proximity or falling prey to health implications do not considerably affect family psychology and dynamics. In fact, government figures and the increasing numbers of coronavirus cases across the globe also seem to have little to no effect on the children in families at the ground level. However, children's mental health and psychology is largely influenced by how their parents handle stress (Jiao et al., 2020). Children perceive the world largely through their parents' understanding. That is the lens through which they see the distinct reality which goes on to shape their own understanding of it. Parents who claim they find it difficult to manage household duties along with looking after their children, attending to their school needs, and finding time for their own office work are quite stressed usually. And the children of such parents are seen to battle with distress and mental troubles consequently (Brooks & Smith, 1987).

On the other hand, parents who are smoothly handling their household responsibilities with good control over their work and their children have a much more relaxed atmosphere at home, thereby having the same effect on the children as well.

In reality, it is not the lockdown or the global stoppage per se that is causing stress. It is the sudden surge of duties amidst a completely unfamiliar circumstances coupled with the added responsibility of looking after each other's health at all times.

It is this direct correlation between added duties combined with the lack of help and mutual understanding between couples that has led to a serious shift in family paradigms, especially parent-child relationships (Harold & Leve, 2018).

They fail to acknowledge and address their child's needs in a sensitive way. This may compel the children to react in a more offensive and aggressive manner since they tend to feel less understood by their parents (Pinquart, 2017).

Moreover, children now start looking upon parents as a dominant and authoritative personality that controls

every move they make, instead of looking upon them as their loving mum and dad.

It is the strains of the quarantine effect that take a toll on the lives of adults, parents, that then consequently goes on to create a subsequent stress on the children's lives as well, thereby compromising their complete wellbeing (de Lima et al., 2020). Undergoing this stress, parents are often unable to enjoy parent-child relationships because they're now burdened with these unsolicited obligations.

Conclusion

Global lockdown implications are here to stay. This condition is a sudden jerk, a wake-up call for parents to realize, address, and work towards improving inter-personal family relationships in order to raise healthy, emotionally strong kids.

The key lies in keeping our sanity intact, as parents, and not imparting it to our kids unless necessary. An emotionally strong mind with a determined and clear perspective within families can help clear the clouds of doubt and lead a stress less, happy life amidst the lockdown or otherwise.

Suggestions Future research

The global lockdown, as unfortunate as it is, was a historic feat in recent times, a phenomenon that the modern world was never subject to yet. It was an uncommon occurrence that bought the leaders of the world the much-needed time to fend us from the infection.

This gave rise to multiple possibilities of further research and endless scope of delving deeper into the current and the after-effects of the COVID-19 lockdown. These include aspects like mental health, physical health, effect on social life, psychology, family dynamics, financial aspects, work ethics, career opportunities, and reshuffling of priorities as a reality check for most of the global citizens.

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