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THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON CHILDREN: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract: The covid 19 outbreak of pandemic victimize humans unexpectedly and immensely. It is a pandemic that is still infecting the masses with corona virus around the world for four years continuously. It is a pandemic that breaks and disrupts the life of humans in all respect i.e., economic, social, psychological, and educationally. In all kinds of crisis situation, the marginal group mainly children are vulnerable to be affected a most. Therefore, this paper will analyze the condition of children before, during, and after effects of pandemic that impacts Indian children educationally, economically, socially, with their physical and mental health in relation with the world. Consequently, this paper also reflects upon the lacking and lacunas of Indian systems with certain suggestive measures that may help in prior preparedness of all systems that necessitates the survival and sustenance of masses in all respect.

Index Terms - Covid -19, Pandemic, Children, Education, Economic, Rights.

I.INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic impacts humans predicatively in the entire world. The world is now facing an unprecedented crisis due to the novel Coronavirus, first detected in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. WHO declared Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) as a global pandemic on 11 March 2020. The disease has spread across 210 countries and territories around the world, with a total of more than two million confirmed cases. The first three infection cases occurred on 30th January and 3rd February in Kerala as they returned from Wuhan, China. With adults, the children are the most vulnerable beings in the world who had been impacted immensely in various ways during the Covid-19 pandemic. In view of this, the present article explores the different perspectives in which the children suffered during the COVID-19 pandemic. This article also illustrates how children's future impacts adversely. The change occurred in lives of children are bad to worse. If children are regarded as the future of nation and society builder then on the basis of this premise, needs to look upon the fact whether children fundamental needs are getting fulfilled or not. Children's basic requirements are considered as food, education, and security for their physical and psychological development and well-being. Thus, the article presents a holistic analysis of Covid-19 impacts on children from all the aspects of human life.

World Health Organization. "Novel Corona virus(nCoV) situation report-1https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200121-sitrep-1-2019-ncov.pdf, 21January 2020

² Rapid Risk Assessment. "Novel corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic: increased transmission in the EU/EEA and the UK – sixth update, *European Centre for disease prevention and control*, 12 March 2020 https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/RRA-sixth-update-Outbreak-of-novel-coronavirus-disease 2019-

COVID-19.pdf ³ Coronavirus latest: pandemic could have killed 40 million without any action. https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-

⁰⁰¹⁵⁴⁻w, 27 March 2020.

⁴ Worldometer. "Countries where Coronavirus has spread." 27 March 2020

https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/countries-where-coronavirus-has-spread/.March.

⁵ Patrikar S., Poojary D., Basannar D.R., Kunte R. Projections for novel corona virus (COVID-19) and evaluation of epidemic response strategies for India. *Med. J. Armed Forces* India. 2020:1–8. doi: 10.1016/j.mjafi.2020.05.001.

II. STATUS OF CHILDREN

Before analyzing the impact of covid-19 on children we need to reflect on the status of children.

India has the largest adolescent population in the world, 253 million, and every fifth person is between 10 to 19 years⁶.

It is the responsibility of parents and then the State to fulfill the primary needs of a child. Child's status or survival becomes crucial; when parents are incapable of fulfilling the necessary requirements. The chances becomes that these vulnerable children fall prey to abuse, physical, mental exploitation, and forced into child labor. These circumstances will adversely affect the child's growth as an average person in deprivation of proper nutritious food, adequate shelter, safety, and security. In India, due to lack of adequate protection, they become the victim of pedophiles, sex rackets, human trafficking, smuggling, begging, and child labor. According to Government data, every 11th child is working in India (5-18 years). The Ministry of labor and unemployment census data 2011, the total population of child labor in Indian states was 4353247.7 The CRY (Child Rights &You) analysis of census data regarding Child labor in India portrays the trend of child labor in urban areas of our country has increased by 53% over 2001-2011. Over a crore, children continue to be a part of the country's workforce. "This is of utmost concern, especially since enforcement machinery is primarily based in urban regions and the implementation of child protection structures is stronger in urban India. This increase in urban child labour could be attributed to increased migration including seasonal migration for employment as well as trafficking of unaccompanied minors." Says Komal Ganotra, Director, Policy & Research, CRY. This data depicts children in India are deprived of basic necessities in the guise of poverty, lack of education, and unemployment.

Another facet of child torture based on gender bias also plays a vital role in children's purview. The girl child suffers more than the boy because socio-cultural norms are based on a patriarchal system. Families' patriarchal mindset leads to gender biases in food and education. As in the Patriarchal family system, a girl has to leave the parental house after marriage to stay with boy's family; hence they are regarded as inferior to boys in the family and were given second class treatment in providing food and good education. "India is the only large country where more girls die than boys, with the inverse sex ratio at birth being 900 girls born for every 1000 boys. Globally 7 per cent more boys die under the age of 5 compared to girls but in India. 11 per cent more girls die under the age of 5".

In Hindu tradition, a girl (daughter) is a temporary member, so subject to child marriage also, and it is a practice prevalent in some parts of rural north India. Child marriage was abolished in India legally and punishable under the Indian penal code¹⁰, but still, confidentially, fewer child marriages in certain regions are prevalent. "India is home to the largest number of child brides in the world. India ranks fourth (after Bangladesh, Nepal and Afghanistan) among the eight South Asian countries in terms of child marriage prevalence"11.

These kinds of customary codes of conduct deprive girl child to suffer physically, emotionally, and educationally. The lack of education itself makes them financially dependent on their father, brother, or husband. Sometimes, economic dependence becomes a cause of domestic violence. "India has one of the highest rates of violence against women and between 60-90 per cent of girls face sexual harassment/violence in public spaces". ¹²In such a socio-cultural scenario, when parents and families fail to fulfill their primary needs, the state has to play a crucial role in meeting children's primary needs. For these kinds of vulnerable children, it should be the state's responsibility to provide safety nets to children and the primary requirement of food and education. During covid -19 "In the study, 11% children in the programme participants group reported that violence has been occurring in their homes during the pandemic (rural -14%, urban - 8%). Significantly, a greater proportion of girls reported violence occurring in homes (12.8%) as compared to boys (8.6%) (p < 0.05). Reports of violence occurring in homes were slightly higher in households that are not relatively poor (12%) as compared to relatively poor households (10%)". 13

III.GLOBAL IMPACT

The global trend showed that children's status in developing nations is quite pathetic compared to developed countries in terms of basic requirements. According to UNICEF, the areas that suffered the highest wasting prevalence in southern Asia are 10-<15%, that is highest, and Africa 5-<10%, which is of a medium impact compared to other areas of the world. ¹⁴ Most of the children in the Asia and Africa peninsula struggle for their survival due to lack of nutritious food and suffering from malnutrition that affects the growth of child physically and mentally. 15 In comparison with the world in India malnutrition is a common problem as indicated, "High levels of malnutrition (38.4 per cent children are stunted), poor learning outcomes (only 42.5 per cent of children in grade

⁶ https://www.unicef.org/india/children-in-india, 24 June 2022

⁷Ministry of labour and Child, Government of India. "Census data on Child and Labour" 15 January 2021, https://labour.gov.in/childlabour/census-data-child-labour

⁸CRY Media. "Child Labour in India.", CRY, 15 January 2021, https://www.cry.org/media/child-labour-in-india-decreasing-at-asnails-pace

⁹ https://www.unicef.org/india/children-in-india, 24 June 2022

¹⁰ Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929), Section 2(a) (India).

¹¹ https://www.unicef.org/india/children-in-india, 24 June 2022

¹³ Shah, Farukh. "A generation at stake." Save the Children, page 35, 2020

¹⁴ Whiting, Kate. "These 5 charts show the impact COVID-19 is having on children around the world." World Economic Forum, 1 september 2020

https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/09/charts-covid19-malnutrition-educaion-mental-health-children-world/retrived

¹⁵Reay, Nicholas and Waterfield, Tim. "Ch- 03. Impacts of 1.5°C global warming on natural and human systems." Special Report-Global Warming of 1.5°C, Intragovernmental Panel of Climate Change, 15 May 2018 https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/chapter/chapter-3/3.7.2.5

three can read a grade one text), vaccine preventable diseases and child labour persist". 16 The reason behind such conditions of children is grave poverty due to unemployment and the failure of reigning governments to raise their citizens' economic state.

The children of marginal class families in the wake of poverty and unemployment have no access of basic needs, which affects their growth and advancement. It first hinders physical and mental growth due to insufficient nutrient food, resulting from compromised economic conditions. This low financial condition impacts children's development due to lack of food, education, safety, or security. In the wake of the pandemic, UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore said, "It is increasingly clear that the repercussions of the pandemic are causing more harm to children than the disease itself." It may construe that any disaster or pandemic can harm children hugely, but primary needs deprivation creates more life-long impacts on children. 'With 472 million children, India has the largest child population globally, and campaigners say the lockdown has impacted around 40 million children from poor families.' 18 The vulnerability of marginal class and their children become a direct victim of any disaster, whether it is a natural disaster, war, or any pandemic. It is assumed that the primary victims are mainly females, children, diseased, and physically challenged people in any disaster condition. According to the UNICEF data of India, "more than half (54 per cent) of adolescent girls have anaemia compared to 30 per cent of boys, and the issue of low Body Mass Index in adolescent girls coupled with challenges of child marriage and adolescent pregnancies have an intergenerational impact."19

A recent UNICEF report on food insecurity and nutrition worldwide, the recent pandemic is adding 83-132 million people undernourished in 2020.²⁰ It illustrates that the Covid-19 pandemic adversely contributes towards the challenge of food nutrition and nourishment globally.

IV. ECONOMIC IMPACT

The Covid-19 is one of the pandemics that directly affects all the sections of society as an immediate effect and to affluent people psychologically due to fear ingrained in mind to get infected, consequent isolation (quarantine), and the possibility of death due to deadly coronavirus. However, the immediate effect is an economic bankruptcy that people lost the job overnight in the private sector or devastated with the situation 'No work, No pay.' On 4th June 2020, the Supreme Court ordered that no coercive action could be taken against employers concerning the MHA notification compelling payment of wages to employees amid COVID-19 lockdown.²¹ This judgment gave liberty to employers to decide regarding the payments of employees. It severely affected the employees economically, marginal class laborers, and their families adversely in the absence of work during the nation-wide lockdown. The judgement did not ensure salaries in the absence of work from the employer through the lockdown was ruled, and inevitable but not by choice. Consequently, parents' poor economic condition deprives children of basic necessities: food, education, and shelter.

The people of the marginal class suddenly fall into a situation to worry about food and shelter. In the absence of daily wages, for the labor class it became challenge for them to survive without food and shelter. Consequently, the labor class emigrates to their hometown during nation-wide lockdown conditions. 'Most migrant workers who reached out from Delhi and Haryana (35%) and Tamil Nadu (33%) were unsure of what to do post-lockdown. Most from Maharashtra (31%), Karnataka (49%), and Punjab (48%) said they would continue in the same line of work with the same employer. A relatively smaller % of workers said they would find work in their hometown.'22

In such a condition, neither one can stay back with their families nor any arrangements made by the government to help people in displacement by providing food and means of transport. It took the lives of so many people in such a struggling journey in adverse conditions. Millions of people, particularly vulnerable children, migrant labor, the poor, those affected by violence and exploitation, are exposed to even higher risk levels during the pandemic. "From the study it emerged that, four out of five (78%) households reported loss of income since the onset of the pandemic. A significantly greater proportion of women (83%) reported loss of income as compared to men (70%) (p < 0.05). A significantly greater proportion of households that are relatively poor (84%) reported loss of income as compared to households that are not relatively poor (70%) (p < 0.05). Among migrants, nine out of every ten households (91%) reported an income loss since the beginning of the pandemic". 23

'For 2020, the IMF estimates GDP growth of just 1.9% for the country, the lowest rate since the 1991 balance-of-payments crisis.'²⁴ In a study program a 17 year old boy says, "Since (the outbreak of) COVID-19, our parents are not able to buy many things for us as they say that they do not have money with them. It would be good if work can be provided or if government can give some money to families who have lost income." 25

The discussion suggests the economic interdependence of family members on a sole bread earner that mainly hinder the progress of growing children badly. The main victim of this kind of crisis were poor marginal class families and their children.

https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/SOFI2020_EN_web.pdf

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¹⁶ https://www.unicef.org/india/children-in-india, 24 June 2022

¹⁸ Pandey, Geeta. "Corona virus: the children struggling to survive india's lockdown." *BBC news*, delhi, 11 april 2020

¹⁹ https://www.unicef.org/india/children-in-india, 24 June 2022

²⁰ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. "The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World: Transforming food systems affordable healthy diets." 2020

²¹Talwar, SC Sanya. "No Coercive Action Against Employers On MHA Order For Full Payment Of Wages." Live law.in ,4 Jun 2020 1:37 PM

https://www.livelaw.in/top-stories/no-coercive-action-against-employers-on-mha-order-for-full-payment-of-wages-sc-157802

²² DATA TEAM. "MIGRANT WORKERS' DISTRESS CONTINUES AS NATIONWIDE LOCKDOWN EXTENDED FOR THE SECOND TIME." THE HINDU, 4 MAY 2020 HTTPS://WWW.THEHINDU.COM/DATA/DATA-MIGRANT-WORKERS-DISTRESS-CONTINUES-AS-NATIONWIDE-LOCKDOWN-EXTENDED-FOR-THE-SECONDTIME/ARTICLE31497300.ECE

²³ Shah, Farukh. "A generation at stake." Save the Children, page 31, 2020

²⁴Walter, Dagmar. "Implications of Covid-19 for Labour and Employment in India." The Indian Journal of Labour Economics, volume 63, pages47-51, 3 September 2020

²⁵ Ibid. Shah, Farukh. Page 33

V. EDUCATIONAL IMPACT

The Covid-19 lockdown affects children's education badly. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to many hardships for teachers, and students especially those in rural areas, "With schools closed, administrations are now relying on virtual platforms to conduct classes. According to a survey by the National Council of 10 Educational Research and Training, one of the factors which hindered learning was that teachers were not well-versed with online teaching methodologies". ²⁶

The children who anyhow manage to attend the government schools regularly could not join almost for a year. As many as 1.5 billion children have lost precious weeks and months of educational progress in the world ²⁷. In such a scenario, poor children lost the study of their one year and more due to lack of cyber-equity and the digital divide. According to the research report published, one out of ten children were not sure whether they will return to school on reopening of it. With reference to the same study claimed that 3 out 4 children were not able to use internet learning due to its limited access. ²⁸ The children of the marginal class could not arrange or afford smartphones and laptops to continue their studies, unlike affluent-middle class children. The unequal distribution and non-affordability of supportive communication means and gadgets expose the issue of lack of cyber-equity and digital-divide in the nation. The fewer measures were taken in this regard by govt, to maintain cyber-equity in the country, while developed nations provided cyber facilities to majority of children to maintain cyber-equity and to overcome digital-divide. The nations distributed free data card and computer tablets to students.²⁹ However, the children of the affluent middle class able to cope up with their studies due to the affordability of Smartphone and laptops required for online classes though that is also not a perfect way of education but certainly it is the only way things can be worked out during the pandemic with the help of technology. Nevertheless, education does not mean passing the exam for promotion only to the next class. As the overall development of a child's personality gets evolved with peer group interaction, playfulness, and practical experience. The deprivation of these outdoor activities made children fall in isolation and homesickness.

Moreover, children developed mental depression, vision disorders, and various other behavioral changes due to lack of physical activities, virtual presence, and increased screen timing. These are the side-effects of dependence on virtual presence and prolong engagement with the screen. Safeguarding the interest of children during pandemic or crisis requires following the given pattern below:

Child protection > Socio-economic norms > Education > children's online classes > children well-being

Child protection becomes inevitable in terms of physical security and medical protection. When there is an increase in drastic fall of jobs leads to mass unemployment. These socio-economic conditions violated the norms and made people vulnerable to fulfill their basic needs. These socio-economic situations are challenging to manage, protect, and safeguard children's interests. Apart from protection, the education of children also gets massively disrupts. Therefore, online classes are the only solution to save the educational well being of children to an extent.

VI. DEPRIVATION OF BASIC RIGHTS

During the Covid-19, children's fundamental rights were compromised right to food, right to security, and right to education. The right to food is the long-cherished goal of the government to fulfill. The Covid-19 pandemic postpones this aim or goal to get cherished. It impacts immensely the availability, accessibility, and utilization of food. In the article titled, "Opinion: Impact of Covid-19 pandemic on food security of India, by Suresh Kumar, Chief Principal Secretary to Chief Minister of Punjab, wrote, "The availability of food grains does not seem to have been adversely impacted so far. As of March 1, 2020, the country had sufficient buffers of food grains: 58.4 million tons and pulses 3 million tons. However, it is not so for other commodities such as fruits and vegetables, eggs, meat, milk, and sugar that constitutes 78 percent of the total food consumption."³⁰It depicts that the availability of food during the initial phase of Covid-19 was not a problem, but disruption in the supply chain occurred due to lockdown. However, food supply was beyond restriction but declined in demand adversely affect production, traders, and consumers, which in turn impacts the lowest GDP of the nation in the last 40 years. However, the government provides mid-day meals in almost all their school, which is one of the sources of nutritious food for children of the marginal class. This was also lost during lockdown period when all the school was closed for almost nine months. During the lockdown period, the accessibility of food was not assured. It is said that young children are the ones who are facing the worst consequences of COVID-19, especially in low-and-middleincome countries.³¹ According to 2018, educational statistics of India total number of children enrolled for the mid-day meal scheme are 9.83 crores for the year 2017-18.32 The children were deprived of mid-day meals throughout the year that hampers the growth of children and the aim of the government. However, the Government of India has issued orders, requested states and other union territories to continue with the provision of the mid-day meal program. A circular was generated on July 31st, 2020, allowing the

²⁶ Ibid. Shah, Farukh. page 28

²⁷https://www.unicef-irc.org/covid19/retrived on 10 January 2021

²⁸ Shah, Farukh. "A generation at stake." Save the Children, page 8, 2020

²⁹ https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/edutech/brief/how-countries-are-using-edtech-to-support-remote-learning-during-the-Covid-19-pandemic, March 2020-June2020

³⁰kumar, suresh. "opinion: impact of covid-19 pandemic on food security of india." *Et government news*, 19 july 2020, 14:22 ist HTTPS://GOVERNMENT.ECONOMICTIMES.INDIATIMES.COM/NEWS/POLICY/OPINON-IMPACT-OF-THE-COVID-19-PANDEMIC-ON-FOOD-SECURITY-OF-INDIA/77048453 RETRIEVED ON 11-01-2021

³¹ Fore Henrietta H, Dongyu Qu, Beasley David M., Ghebreyesus Tedros A. "Child malnutrition and COVID-19: the time to act is now." The Lancet. Volume 396. 2020 ,Page 517-518. https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S0140-6736% 2820% 2931648-2

³² Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, "Educational Statistics at a Glance," Department of School Education and Literacy, Statistics Division, 2018, New Delhi. https://www.mhrd.g ov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/statistics-new/ESAG-2018.pdf

food security allowances to children. Subsidies comprising food grains, pulses, oil, etc., are allowed for primary and upper primary students.33

VII. THE INITIATIVE OF THE GOVERNMENTS

The Indian states took various initiatives to bring the Covid-19 pandemic into control by taking reasonable and timely measures for their people's holistic welfare. It includes the economic, educational, psychological, and medical welfare of all citizens of the state. During the pandemic, thousands of people and laborer lost their jobs, and opportunities become skewed. The labours get devastated by losing jobs and getting migrated to their native places with severe transportation problems during the lockdown. To remove the hardship of people for the economic well-being of people, "the government has come up with Rozgar Bazar, which is an online government portal where job seekers and employers can reach out to each other. Till today, nearly 1,00,000 job vacancies have been registered, and around 8 lakh vacancies are still pending. This has been an important step to reach out to the employers who are suffering from a lack of people, and also to the job seekers who are looking for job opportunities."³⁴ This kind of online portal can help people find job opportunities to attain economic independence and meet the basic needs of life. In this way, they have met their basic requirements, which helped their families, specifically, children, get proper food and education. So, this kind of job portal is a visionary decision of the government during the pandemic.

Moreover, the government has also taken steps to deal with the healthcare need of its citizen by providing free healthcare facilities and diagnostic testing in their government hospitals and Mohalla clinic. These include increasing hospital bed by installing tents and accommodating patients in unoccupied residential spaces of the Delhi government, ICU facilities for critical patients, management of home quarantine patients with teleconsultation and care, distribution of oximeters to patients and families, round the clock availability of ambulance service, and created plasma banks. Dr. Nimmi Rastogi, a health coordinator at the Dialogue and Development Commission of Delhi, said, "Delhi is winning the fight against Covid-19 because of our emphasis on home isolation, increased testing, bed capacity, transparency, and plasma therapy."35 With adequate and sincere efforts, the impact of Covid-19 is getting decreased with the decrease in active cases of coronavirus. These arrangements show that if healthcare facilities for families are good, it will directly impact children's mental and psychological well-being.

Indian government started a 24-hour helpline for children since 24 March 2020, with ChildLine India Foundation number-1098, and received about 300,000 calls against a weekly average of 200,000. The helpline works in 569 of India's 718 districts and 128 railway stations.³⁶

With all the possible efforts done by govt, in the field of medical care for unprecedented and deadly second wave of coronavirus made shortfall medical facilities that could have otherwise saved lives of people. There are around 1lakh children who lost their single parent and around 10,000 children who lost their both parents. This loss of parental care for children will impact the lives of these children adversely that no help from state or people can suffice the gap, consequently will hinder the progress of society. For those who lost their loved one's certain monetary relief was granted to children and the close relative of deceased, which could not suffice the loss totally.

The pandemic, war, and natural disasters happened without prior notice. So, by keeping in view the prevailing problem of pandemic specific strategies to be adopted by the government to minimize the loss of life and difficulties of destitute people, children, women, diseased, and differently able people. A civic system should be evolved across nation in such a manner that might help in mitigating the problems of people to elevate the condition of children as a whole. There are certain suggestive measures that requires its implementation diligently.

- 1. The educational and employment online portals with centers should be established to help illiterate parents and guidance to aspire students. It can help job seekers and job providers in finding opportunities even during crisis.
- The government should develop DRC's (Digital Resource Centers) in every school, college, and institutes, where economically poor students can access cyber facilities inequity with others.
- The free or subsidized medical healthcare facility should be provided to all children whose parents cannot afford expensive treatment in private hospitals. All children's health index should be maintained digitally so that none is deprived of physical and mental growth.
- Medical information about all government and private hospitals regarding facilities and treatment availability should be on the single online portal with the information regarding the free treatment of the diseased poor patients.
- Government Hiring agencies or agencies verified by the government for unskilled and skilled workers in the field of household, medical, etc. Because if the parent has a job, they can take care of their children's fundamental need of education and healthcare.
- Programs and training should be given to children and people for the promotion of hygiene and how to do deal in a crisis that may be epidemic, pandemic, war, or natural disasters.

³⁶ Ibid. Ghosh, Sayatana.

³³ Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of school education & literacy. 31-07-2020. Circular. F. No.1-2/2020Desk(MDM).

http://mdm.nic.in/mdm_website/Files/OrderCirculars/2020/JS_DOLetters/DO_Letter_Food%20Security%20Allowance-31-7-2020.pd

³⁴Ghosh, Sayatana. "How Delhi government bring back economy on track in covid times." *Daily O*, 12 August 2020

https://www.dailyo.in/politics/Covid-19-delhi-government-arvind-kejriwal-economic-policy-rozgar-bazar/story/1/33490.html

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