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RESEARCH ARTICLE

REVIEWING CHILD DEVELOPMENT DURING PANDEMIC

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Abstract

Child development is the foundational and unique aspect, leading to transformations in various abilities. There are several factors, like genetics, nutrition, environment, etc., which put an impact on the process of development. Apart from these, certain extraneous factors like rising terrorist activities, wars, and pandemics also greatly impact the development of a child. Several pandemics or epidemics have had an adverse effect on the development of children, such as "The development of children who were exposed to the Asian influenza pandemic in 1957, while in utero, was hampered with evidence of poor cognitive development". The adversities of such effects can also be observed where "The 1918 Spanish flu has resulted in lower educational attainment for those individuals whose mothers had potential in-utero exposure". Furthermore, research on the effects of past pandemics and health-related crises, such as SARS and H1N1, has shown a link between increased levels of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress in school-aged children, adolescents, and young adults who were directly impacted. The research highlights that the pandemic had lasting adverse effects on multiple generations, particularly influencing children's developmental processes. So, these necessities need to know the impact of another pandemic, which hit the ground in 2020, on child development. Child development is multidimensional as it deals with physical, cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional development. But the focus of this paper is to study the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic on the typical trajectories of child development, especially concerning skills in three domains i.e., Cognitive, Affective (Socio-emotional), and Psychomotor, where the cognitive domain involves intellectual abilities, the affective domain pertains to emotional growth and related skills, while the psychomotor domain covers physical and motor abilities. The study, to know the impact, is done through the review of studies taken from the following databases: Google Scholar, JSTOR, and ResearchGate.

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Introduction:-

Child development refers to the development of various characteristics such as physical, cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional development, which begins from the prenatal stage and continues throughout the postnatal stage. Child development is a fundamental component that includes a special and distinctive process that aids the child's

societal integration. Thus, development is associated with slow and ongoing changes in motor, psychosocial, cognitive, and language capacities, as well as the progressive acquisition of more advanced and complicated activities (Souza & Verissimo, 2015). This definition highlights the multidimensional aspect of development. Development in these areas occurs in diverse contexts, including home, school, and society/community, and these factors further led to other factors like nutrition, childcare, and the role of parents that have an impact on overall growth and development (Manas, 2019). Along with these, some of the extraneous factors, such as rising terrorist activities, war situations, and pandemics around the globe, have greatly influenced individuals' lives. Amid this chaos and ongoing wars, another crisis occurs, disrupting everyone's lives once more, and that is the era of the COVID-19 pandemic. Aside from these, studies reveal that the viral outbreak and measures adopted to limit the threat, such as social restrictions, shutdowns, and school closures, function as a major risk factor in growth and development.

Some studies also suggest that the pandemic may raise the risks in child development because of illness, preventive quarantine, social exclusion, and the heightened stress experienced by the parents and caregivers. These types of conditions not only gave rise to 'adverse childhood experiences' but may also have the ability to generate 'stress', which will increase the potential losses for the development of the brain, individual, and overall collective health. This may eventually result in a long-term decline in cognitive abilities, mental and physical well-being, and workforce productivity (Araujo et al., 2020). In this regard, a different study emphasizes that 'the more unfavorable the experiences, the greater the chance of developmental delays and health issues in adulthood, such as cognitive impairment, substance addiction, depression, and non-communicable diseases' (Natalie Claypool & Arelis Moore, 2021). This led to the conclusion that the COVID-19 pandemic could cause both short-term and long-term developmental delays.

COVID-19 Impact on Child Development

Based on research examining the possible effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on child growth and development "Social and economic reconfigurations, the fear of contagion, illness caused by COVID-19, isolated family life, school closures, the lack of support networks for other adults, the loss of loved ones, the difficulty of combining working from home with full-time childcare, financial challenges, increased exposure to vulnerabilities (such as domestic violence, drug use, and mental illness in family members) can result in toxic stress", (Araujo et al. 2020). These conditions elevate the stress level and lead to adverse childhood experiences, which impact the growth and development of the child in all aspects.

Cognitive Development

The term 'Cognition' relates to 'mental functions including memory, thought processes, reasoning, spatial understanding, problem-solving, language, and perception' (Richland et al., 2016). Development is the process of gradual, sequential, foreseeable changes starting from conception and lasting throughout life. Thus, cognitive development signifies the gradual transformations in the aforementioned capabilities. Studies also highlight those cognitive abilities and skills, such as academic achievement in math, science, reading, and other subjects that are part of the school curriculum, have been affected due to the onset of the pandemic (Werner & Woessmann, 2021). In addition, a study examining the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on early child cognitive growth observed a decrease in cognitive performance due to the onset of the pandemic, particularly among infants who were born after mid-2020 (Deoni, 2022). The following is the effect of COVID-19 on cognitive development:

1. The prospective influence of the pandemic on growth and development highlights that the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in "differential brain structural and functional" development among children, which subsequently leads to a variety of cognitive impairments (Araujo et al., 2020).
2. Social distancing and school closures have heightened mental health issues among children and adolescents, who are more vulnerable to such problems compared to adults (Jessica Deighton et al., 2019).
3. The pandemic has also resulted in lower academic growth in math (Thompson, 2020) and language and arts (Darmiyanti et al., 2021).
4. This has also increased the risk of developmental disorders. This is evident in cases where a child under the age of 13 is responsible for taking care of minor siblings (without adult supervision) has resulted in adversities such as "selective mutism, and speech delay" (Araujo et al., 2020; Cauchemez et al., 2009).
5. Because of limited social interaction during the COVID-19 pandemic, young children have been deprived of experiential learning, peer interactions, and the development of essential cognitive abilities (Amit Bansal, 2021).
6. The discomfort caused by the pandemic not only increases stress but also caused problems with attention and cognitive functioning in adolescents, compounding the possibility of academic difficulties (Frolli et al., 2021).

7. As highlighted in an additional study regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on language and social development, “the school from the home policy implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic has affected young children’s receptive skills and reading aspects” (Darmiyanti et al., 2021).
8. The pandemic has caused pre-schoolers to struggle with attention and concentration (Yildirim, 2021).
9. Furthermore, according to a study concerning the educational aftermath of COVID-19, children are “missing development of basic skills such as reading, writing, and counting skills” (Werner & Woessmann, 2021).

According to the studies, the pandemic has caused not only developmental delays and impairments but also a delay in basic skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic. Aside from this, lower academic performance in math, languages, and arts can also be observed.

Socio-Emotional Development

Growth in social and emotional aspects is referred to as socio-emotional development (Thompson, 2012). Social development is defined by the “Center on the Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning” (CSEFEL, 2008) defines as “the developing capacity of the child from birth to 5 years of age, to form close and secure adult and peer relationships; experience, regulate, and express emotions in social and culturally appropriate ways; and explore and learn”. It can also be defined as the developmental process through which children start initiating activities, maintain and trust relationship-building with both adults and peers; to recognize and communicate emotions suitably; and to develop independence, actively explore their surroundings, and make responsible choices (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012). To summarize, socio-emotional development demonstrates how a child adjusts, understands, acts, makes adjustments, and maintains healthy relationships in life.

According to Julia Dillmann et al. (2022), Parents’ stress during the pandemic brought major changes to “Early Social-Emotional Child Development”. As a result of financial, social, and emotional constraints, parents suffer, resulting in long-term stress that causes not only cognitive but also emotional burdens. Furthermore, “disconnection from loved ones, the loss of freedom, uncertainty about disease status, and boredom can, on occasion, produce dramatic effects” (Brookset al., 2019). In another case, it is observed that many toddlers and children in early childhood in Chile experienced a certain change in emotions and behavior. Compared to the period before the pandemic, the majority of caregivers noted that 78.9% of children were ‘more affectionate’, 65.1% were ‘more restless’, and 54.1% were ‘more frustrated’ (Aguila-Fairas et al., 2021). And according to another study conducted in Italy and Spain, by Orgiles et al. (2020), 85.7% of the Parents perceived shifts in their emotions and behaviour, and most of these changes were observed during the quarantine (a measure adopted to curb the flow of COVID-19). The most commonly noticed symptoms were struggle in concentration (76.6%), increased boredom (52%), irritability (39%), enhanced restlessness (38.8%), the feeling of nervousness (38%), and feelings of loneliness (31.3%), apart from these, uneasiness (30.4%), and worries (30.1%) also got enhanced. According to the studies, parental well-being and child development are strongly connected to each other, and COVID-19 has created an environment in which negative consequences can be seen not only in parent-child relationships but also in child development (Dillmann et al., 2022). Apart from this, “reduced freedom of movement may also disrupt emotional and psychological well-being among children” (Werner & Woessmann, 2021). Furthermore, the school from the home method adopted during Covid-19 lacked a feasible learning atmosphere and resulted in a lack of social interactions; in addition to this, students also failed to connect with their friends, which ultimately resulted in “poor learning outcomes” (Darmiyanti et al., 2021). The following is the effect of COVID-19 on socio-emotional development:

1. Adolescents experienced increased stress as a result of restrictive measures due to fear of infection, frustration, and boredom. Fear and boredom were heightened during this phase as a result of the lack of face-to-face contact with classmates and friends, as well as the loss of relatives (Bozzola et al., 2022).
2. In addition to the effects mentioned above, another study found that the pandemic also results in increased clinginess, under-stimulation, sadness, and anxiousness (Dillmann et al., 2022).
3. An analysis of the immediate psychological effect of the COVID-19 pandemic pointed out that Children and young adults are particularly vulnerable to developing anxiety symptoms (Orgiles et al., 2020).
4. Another factor influencing socio-emotional development, particularly among adolescents, is a low mood or signs of depression (Aguila-Fairas et al., 2021).
5. Apart from this, social isolation adopted as a measure in many homes has amplified the harmful experiences, resulting in psychological aggression and increasing toxic stress among children (Huang et al., 2021).

6. Risky behavioral problems among children and adolescents, such as “substance abuse, suicide, relationship problems, academic issues, and absenteeism from work,” have been observed in the study conducted by Meharali et al. (2021).
7. Lack of motivation and social skills emerged as another effect of COVID-19 on socio-emotional development, because of insufficient peer-to-peer interaction while delivering instructions through online mode (Chaturvedi et al., 2021).

This leads to the conclusion that the pandemic results in prolonged effects on socio-emotional development, such as reduced social interaction, emotional instability (feelings of irritability, fearfulness, clinginess, mood swings, etc.), reduced motivation, and social skills.

Psycho-Motor Development

According to Riga (2006), motor skills encompass certain functions such as the living organism's self-generated movements. ‘These include not only voluntarily performed motor actions, but also the coordination of physical, cognitive, and affective factors, which continues to improve throughout lifetime’ (Sáez-Sánchez et al., 2021). Thus, psychomotor development is an important and complex process in which social as well as cognitive development leads to physical changes (Sáez-Sánchez et al., 2021). In addition, psychomotor activities include gross and fine motor activities (Yudanto et al., 2022). Based on the findings of Getchell et al. (2022), “the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on motor development have a profound impact on infants and children of all ages, and this may have a lasting impact on many distinct aspects of development in the years to come”. The pandemic's impact on psychomotor development is as follows:

1. COVID-19 has contributed to decreased engagement in physical activities due to school closures and stay-at-home restrictions.
2. According to a study focusing on the physical activity of children and adolescents during the pandemic, “the pandemic caused adolescents to be more inactive due to the cancellation and replacements of organized team sports and activities” (Rossi et al., 2021).
3. According to research, the phenomenon of reduced interaction and social isolation amid the pandemic might result in fine motor and communication delays, particularly in children under the age of 1 year old. (Huang et al., 2021).
4. For 12-24 months or more, opportunities for physical activity via PE classes, sports, and unstructured play decreased, further hampering the motor development (Getchell et al., 2022).
5. Students who studied face-to-face developed better psychomotor skills than those who were exposed to a digital learning format (Eroğlu et al., 2022).
6. According to a comprehensive analysis of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the inability to launch practices associated with the subject of physical education has resulted in reduced motor development (Cachon-Zagalaz, 2020).

This implies that the pandemic has resulted in a reduction in psycho-motor development due to the reduced availability of physical activities as a result of the online system of education in the majority of countries, furthering the delays in psychomotor skills.

Conclusion:-

According to the studies, pandemics or endemics have enduring and multi-generational effects. Similarly, a review of the studies on the outcomes resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the undeniable impact on social and emotional, cognitive, and psychomotor aspects of neurodevelopment during the course of child development. The consequences include cognitive impairment, mental health issues, and a reduction in math and language abilities. Furthermore, studies show that the precautionary steps designed to mitigate the transmission of the pandemic have increased psychological distress (stress, being scared, and an increase in irritability, feeling depression, sadness, and anger). Aside from that, a significant setback to socio-emotional aspects is seen due to the deprived opportunities for peer interaction and collaborative learning and the lack of socialization opportunities (Watts & Pattnaik, 2022). Furthermore, teachers and parents have reported difficulties in the acquisition of physical, motor, and practical skills due to the lack of practice facilities for physical activities and fine motor skills as a result of school closures (Meyer et al., 2022).

These studies further necessities the need for psychologists, counsellors, educationists, and policymakers to develop such strategies which can mitigate the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis, including increased dropout and low attendance (Mthlane et al, 2021).

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