

Psychosocial Challenges of School Going Adolescents During Covid-19 Pandemic: Teachers' and Parents' Perspective

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Abstract:- The study Probe into understanding the psychosocial challenges faced by school going adolescents during covid-19 pandemic. The study is descriptive in design and makes use of Purposive sampling to identify respondents from Nongstoin, West Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya. Semi-structured Interview guide is used among Secondary school teachers and parents. Results showed that there is frustration, isolation and loneliness, uncertainty and fear, anxiety, academic stress, unfamiliar online learning for adolescents as well as for the Teachers, internet connectivity problems, poorer control over their everyday life, feeling of helplessness among the adolescents and even the teachers and parents themselves.

Keywords:- Psychosocial Challenges, School Going Adolescents, Teachers and Parents.

I. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc across the world and brought the world to a standstill with unprecedented changes in our society. The impacts of the Pandemic and the lockdown have been disruptive and changed the way in which humans perform their daily activities and go about their routine lives. Such impact has however not been the same across all social groups, with the most vulnerable and marginalized groups being affected differently.

The World Health Organization declared the Covid-19 as a pandemic in March 2020 (WHO, 2020). Since then, several countries including India introduced measures to slow down the transmission of the virus in their community. These included social distancing, identification of cases and their isolation, contact tracing and containment of high transmission zones, and personal and environmental disinfection. Countrywide lockdown is one method to bring about all the above-mentioned measures. India went into a lockdown from March 2020, with restrictions in all areas except for essential commodities and health care. Slow relaxations of the lockdown started again from May 4, 2020, with only minimal activities in the community, again many States in India imposed lock down in the second wave of Covid-19. Schools and other educational institutions, playgrounds, and entertainment centers for children and

adults are shut from the beginning (Lancet, 2020). During the period of lockdown, people suffer psychologically due to the fear of contracting the infection, monetary loss, uncertainty of future, and lack of vent for their stresses. Depression, anxiety, and panic disorders are common psychiatric manifestations in lockdown, as evidenced by a Chinese study (Qiu J et.al 2020).

In the current context of lock down and restriction of movements, young adolescents have constrained access to socialization, play, and even physical contact which is very critical for their psychosocial wellbeing and development. School closures are preventing young adolescents from access to learning and limiting their interactions with peers. Adolescents may feel confused and at loss with the current situation, leading to frustration and anxiety, which will only increase with the overexposure to mass and social media. Given that adolescents seem to be particularly vulnerable to mental health problems (Paus et al., 2008), it is possible that drastic changes to adolescents' everyday lives during COVID-19 may have adverse effects on adolescents' psychosocial functioning.

The purpose of this study is to highlight and understand the psychosocial challenges faced by School going Adolescents during Covid-19 pandemic from the perspective of the teachers and the parents.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The current study is descriptive in design and makes use of Purposive sampling to identify respondents from Nongstoin, West Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya. Semi-structured Interview guide was used among Secondary school teachers and parents to collect the information. Five high School Teachers and Five parents of school going adolescents were interviewed for the study. Informed consent was obtained from the participants prior to starting the interview. Thematic Analysis was used to identify the themes on the Psychosocial Challenges faced by school going adolescents during Covid-19 Pandemic. Data were transcribed by the researcher soon after each interview was conducted, coding of interesting features from the data and identifying patterns of themes.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Demographic profile of the Respondents

High School Teachers	Gender		Age		Qualification	
	Male	Female	35 – 40 years	40 – 45 years	Graduate with B.ED	Master with B.Ed
	2	3	3	2	4	1
	Total =05		Total = 05		Total = 05	
Parents of School going adolescents	Gender		Age		Education	
	Male	Female	35 – 40 Years	40 – 46 Years	Up to Class X	XII
	1	4	2	3	3	2
	Total = 05		Total = 05		Total = 05	

Respondent teachers' demographic details indicate age range of 35-45 years of age and both male (2) and Female (3) teachers were interviewed. All the teachers interviewed completed their Graduation with B.Ed. The parents of school going adolescent ages between 36-44 years and majority of them were mothers. In terms of education, majority (3) studied up to Matriculation and (2) completed their Class XII.

Following are the themes emerged from the data. These themes were identified by all participants; from the perspective of the parents and the teachers of school going adolescents and were central to the psychosocial challenges of School going adolescents during Covid-19 pandemic.

➤ Isolation and loneliness:

Isolation-from friends, other family members and familiar social activities-is one of the most frequently problems mentioned by participants. Isolation leads to loneliness among young adolescents who are never used to being isolated from school and from peers for a long period of time and this can lead to over-eating, involved in unproductive activities such as excessive use of video games, mobile phones, movies etc.

"Loneliness due to being isolated from school." (Teacher) *"They get upset and mood off. They feel trapped because they can't go to school, or go to play or catch up with friends..."* (Parent)

➤ Uncertainty and fear:

Uncertainty about the future in terms of their health and especially in terms of school reopening, studies and examination is widespread and has created fear in young Adolescents. Young adolescents who have to appear for their Board examination are uncertain of what will happen, how they will give their examination, unsure about what to prepare which has created a lot of fears about their future studies among young adolescents.

"Uncertainty of the future and no clear outcome of what the future hold for them." (Teacher)

➤ Anxiety:

Anxiety is another mentioned challenge, attributed to schools and examination concerns and to the total disruption of daily routines.

"They were not anxious at the start of the lockdown; in fact they were happy in the first week of lock down but gradually they look and express wariness over their studies". (Parent)

This is an anxiety-provoking and stressful time for everyone and while anxiety is a normal and expected reaction to this pandemic situation, too much anxiety can start to cause harm. Feeling stressed and fearful every day takes a toll on health and well-being of school going adolescents very quickly.

➤ Academic stress:

Usually school going adolescents are known to face a varied range of ongoing normative stressors associated with their ongoing academic demands. And in the present scenario where there is social restrictions imposed due to covid-19 pandemic, it have led to increase to severe levels of academic stress among school going adolescents. Severe and long-standing academic-related stress has an adverse effect on their academic performance and their psychosocial well being. The online learning system that has changed during the Covid-19 pandemic requires students to get more assignments and with the other challenges such as problems in using of technology, online platform, internet connection problem it has increase to the stress level of the students in terms of their studies.

"Whenever I contact the students, I could sense that they are so worried over their studies and examinations, they expressed their difficulty in adjusting to this new whole thing of online learning" (Teacher)

“They are easily irritable and show anger whenever they find difficult to do their assignments and studies, the concentration level during online learning is very less, frequently complain of headache and start neglecting their responsibilities” (Parent)

➤ *Unfamiliar online Learning:*

With schools teaching changed to online delivery of classes to avoid the disruption of educational services, the online platform still remains unfamiliar for majority of people especially those from the rural areas. In rural areas both teachers and students are unprepared in terms of technology handling or accessibility issues for online learning where in other urban areas they are more advance in terms of technology use.

The sudden switch to online classes has been challenging for students, teachers and even the parents. Instead of teaching or learning in a classroom, students and teachers found themselves working and learning from home. Concerns related to private space, quiet room for learning becomes a challenge for many students coming from poor family where they have no privacy at home. Besides there was also an emotional toll for many teachers and students. Teachers and students feel isolated and demotivated with this unfamiliar learning online learning and teaching.

“Despite having the best intentions to help students learns during this pandemic we as teachers feel apprehensive and not suitably equipped to teach via online particularly as we ourselves are still learning and try to figure out to use some of the online teaching platforms.” (Teacher)

“We try our best to use whatever we could through sending notes through whatsapp, record a video and send it to the students through mobile phones to help students” (Teacher)

Since the time the closure of schools, parents find themselves primarily responsible for the teaching and helping of their children in terms of their studies. This also becomes an added burden, while they are already tackling issues such as poverty, unemployment leading to financial crisis, management of household chores. Many parents especially in rural areas do not have adequate educational qualifications to assist their children with their assignments and studies that were usually taken care of by their teachers. This also leads to frustration and burnout amongst caregivers and disruption in the academic activities of the children, leading to stress in both parents and children.

“I know that my children are having difficulties in their online learning, it shows in their face and expression but I myself do not know even how to operate a smart phone, we parents become helpless how to help our children in these difficult situation” (Parent)

➤ *Internet connection problem:*

The internet connection in rural setting is very poor. Though many people of rural area are using mobile phones

but the utilization of digital resources for learning remained unexplored as of now. Secondly dissemination of learning through online would require access to a device such as laptop/computer or smart phones for the students, which given the disparity amongst the socio-economic strata, remains unattainable for students belonging to low socio-economic status.

“I have five children studying in school, all require smart phones for online classes and we could afford only one smart phone...it becomes very difficult to manage one phone for all the five children” (Parent)

The network is a big problem even for those who could afford devices for online learning....when there availability of smart phones there is no network....when it rains, electricity goes off for days and there is no battery in the phone, the use of online learning requires internet data and battery and with these kind of situation we become so helpless as to how to help the students” (Teacher)

➤ *Poorer control over their everyday life:*

The lock down due to corona Virus has disrupted the daily routine of school going adolescents. Distraction, inability to concentrate and time management has become a big challenge for school going adolescents. The changing routines from the normal routine previously make it difficult for youngsters to stay motivated and be positive.

For school students, school is not only an education but also a home outside the home with plentiful free space. It offers a scope of interaction with peers, psychological comfort besides providing education. Schools play an enriching role in promoting importance of personal hygiene, physical activity and body habits. Even a short-term shutdown of educational institutions and home confinement for children is indeed troublesome and expected to have unfavorable effects on children's physical and mental health and break the sense of normalcy that schools used to provide. The lock down has result to long-term physical inactivity, irregular sleep patterns, eating problems, longer smart-phone/television screen time that are being practiced during lockdown. The changes in diet sleep and physical activities are associated with poorer control over their daily activities due to the pandemic.

“The normal daily routine has changed upside down....sleeping patterns; eating time has completely changed during the lock down, there is no sense of time anymore” (Parent)

“Students find it difficult to manage their daily routine in compare to the time when they have to attend school” (Teacher)

➤ *Feeling of Helplessness:*

With all the other problems and challenges during Covid-19 pandemic it has created a feeling of helplessness among the parents, the teachers and the young adolescents. Feeling helpless can have a very negative effect on the

psychosocial well being of the young adolescents, the parents and teachers as well.

"We don't know how long this is going to last...There's so much about this that we can't control." (Teacher)

"We are so helpless and frustrated about the situation, how to help our children and our children are feeling helpless too with this situation" (Parent)

IV. DISCUSSION

The lockdown has affected the psychosocial well being of adolescents to a greater extent. The Complex interplay between psychosocial challenges and pandemic induced forced home-stay and lifestyle modifications will further worsen the malefic effects on adolescents overall health in a vicious cycle fashion (Lancet, 2020). This is a pandemic of fear, stress, anxiety, uncertainty that is going hand in hand with COVID-19 infection. Adolescents are already extra-sensitive to emotional stress even during a normal situation. In near future, a pandemic of childhood mental illness is upcoming which will include the whole disease spectrum from childhood depression, anxiety disorders, childhood obsession, pervasive developmental disorder, eating disorders to name a few (Dubey et al., 2020).

Academic-related stress is significantly associated with reduced student academic motivation (Liu, 2015) and academic disengagement (Liu & Lu, 2011). This in turn makes them vulnerable to dropping out, future unemployment, and increased incidence of psychiatric disorders such as depression, anxiety and substance use disorders (Pascoe et al., 2020). Long-standing stress exposure in children and adolescents may also lead to the development of physical health problems such as metabolic syndrome, obesity and reduced insulin sensitivity as well as reduction of life expectancy (Pervanidou & Chrousos, 2012).

This prolonged lockdown hits the notion of right to education hard and there is educational inequalities stem from it. Learning gap will be widened between children from lower and higher-income families during this institution closure. Facilities for online learning which need audio-visual systems and good internet connection are not available for many students from low-income families. A large number of students do not have a suitable place for online learning, computers, smart phones, internet access and access to outdoor leisure activities even in developed countries. (Van Lancker W, Parolin Z. 2020). The accessibility of electronic gazettes, learning equipment, home conditions for studies among adolescents of developing or under-developed countries are even more inadequate and thus, they are likely to be worst affected (The print, 2020). This disparity of access to online learning becomes an indication of academic stress in students who would find themselves unable to avail online classes or submit their assignments, thus falling behind their peers in their studies. This has led to reports of symptoms of depression, anxiety, and in severe cases suicidal attempts in children and adolescents triggered by academic stress and apprehensions regarding future (Fegert et al., 2020). Recently

a 15-year old girl died by suicide after being unable to access online classes from her village (Naha, 2020). In a similar incident, a 50-year old farmer, died by suicide after being unable to buy a smart phone for his daughter's online classes (Deb Barman, 2020). Such incidents highlight the severity of the psychological consequences of inability to access basic education because of socio-economic and geographic barriers. In the absence of adequate social welfare and policy measures at governmental and institutional levels, this could lead to a severe mental health crisis amongst the young adolescents, further weakening their academic prospects leading to a vicious cycle of mental health problem, academic problems and poor functioning. On the other hand, for those who have access to online learning, problematic use of technology, increased gaming, spending more time on social media are also issues of concern that may emerge requiring intervention.

V. CONCLUSION

This study has identified many themes which could pave the way for future crisis planning to promote psychosocial wellbeing and ensure access to services among School going adolescents. It is important on all of us to prepare for the future and identify protective factors that will help the general population cope in the face of future pandemics. Health care policy maker and school authority should create awareness program on psychosocial problems among adolescents, develop strategies for health promotion of adolescents, and plan for prevention of psychosocial problems among adolescents. With the increasing psychosocial problems among young people and the parents' and teacher's observations in this study that children are struggling to cope, it is crucial to ensure these support services are made available. Young people need support to develop healthy coping mechanisms as they cope with the adverse effects of COVID-19.

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