

## The Impact of a Pandemic on Children's Mental Health

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### ABSTRACT

The newly identified human infection caused by the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) is spreading rapidly around the world, posing a threat to population health and creating challenges to health systems. This disease, whose prognosis is unknown and uncertain with the scarcity of medical and personal protective equipment, has led to the implementation of measures limiting individual freedom. In addition to these factors, increased financial losses will contribute to widespread emotional distress and an increased risk of psychiatric disorders. This study aims to describe the psychological impact on children during the COVID-19 pandemic and identify solutions that can be provided for the data collection technique using the documentation method in the form of scientific journals published in national and international publishers on the internet. While the study of data analysis applied is the content analysis technique. The results of this study are 1) the psychological impact felt by elementary school-age children, which is most often mentioned, namely stress, then boredom and emotional instability, gadget addiction to depression, 2) the solution that can be given is that parents can involve children in household activities, Teachers can be expected to make the learning atmosphere enjoyable.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The world has changed since the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) emerged. The virus that causes the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) encourages a drastic change in self-regulation as a social being. In March 2020, WHO stated that COVID-19 reached a pandemic status, leaving the world on maximum alert and growing and expanding to dimensions that still cannot be measured to date (World Health Organization (WHO), 2020) positive with any symptoms. The examination material can be a throat swab, sputum, and *bronchoalveolar lavage* (BAL). [1]

The newly identified human infection caused by the coronavirus (SARS- CoV-2) is spreading rapidly around the world, posing a threat to the population's health and creating challenges for the health system. COVID-19 affects almost all countries. This disease, whose prognosis is unknown and uncertain, can lead to the application of actions or behaviors that limit the freedom to move where medical equipment and self-protection are inadequate. In addition to these factors, increased financial losses will contribute to widespread emotional distress and an increased risk of psychiatric disorders. [2]

The disease is transmitted by contact with infected droplets, with their incubation period ranging from 2 to 14 days. [3] Symptoms are usually fever, cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, and fatigue.

The disease is mild in most people, and in some people (usually the elderly and people with a history of certain diseases), it can develop to be more severe. [4] WHO and ECDC advise avoiding public places and close contact with infected people, who also designated COVID-19 as a global pandemic based on the rapid and widespread spread in several countries and affecting many people's lives. [5]

The pandemic caused by COVID-19 requires several countries to implement *lockdowns* and quarantines as a form of prevention. Restriction and separation of the movement of people potentially affected by infectious diseases. Quarantine's main purpose is to prevent the transmission of infectious agents from those who have the potential to incubate. [6] Furthermore, the quarantine period is 14 days and can be more, and quarantine can be carried out at home or community-based facilities. [3] The existence of restrictions and separation over a long period certainly impacts various aspects of life. [7]

Covid-19 quarantines have challenged economic, medical, and health infrastructure and education. [4] Some of the impacts caused by the quarantine include restrictions on public facilities, shopping centers, tourist attractions and places to eat, and school closures. [3] The existence of restrictions and the necessity to stay in a place for a certain period also creates a new psychological problem. [8] Psychological problems that arise can be felt from different circles and ages. School closures globally are one of the impacts that look quite significant compared to some other sectors, in the sense that schools are completely closed where some other facilities are still allowed to operate. Of course, this impacts the psychological age of students, especially children[6].

Although fewer children are infected with COVID-19 among all other life forms in the global population, the psychological impact on this group is largely severe. [9] Children's lifestyles and routines have been severely affected due to COVID-19 safety measures. [7] This psychological impact varies from one child to another. But the most common reasons for school closures and some other restrictions include the lack of activities outside the street, activity groups, and direct interaction with peers, teachers, or even parents. This greatly affects the child's psychology and mental health[9].

Children's psychological development and well-being depend on the achievement of development tasks[6]. The developmental stage of children of primary school age is when they are preparing themselves for the continuation of their future development[10]. Most developmental tasks are socially indifferent, such as interaction with peers, choosing friends, interacting with the outside world, as well as ways of behaving[10]. However, children's interaction with social media has been hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic until an undetermined time limit[6].

The significant mental illness burden of young and productive adult life is deeply rooted from the early years (early school age and primary), and careful attention to the mental health of quarantined children is necessary to avoid long-term consequences[8]. Therefore, the psychological impact on children due to COVID-19 needs to be identified[6]. This study aims to 1) describe and explore the impact of COVID-19 on the psychological health of primary school-aged children and 2) identify solutions that can be provided due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Children affected by this pandemic experience the most vulnerable effects, as they are forced to stay home for long periods due to isolation. School closures result in reduced peer interaction and opportunities for exploration and physical activity[11]. This adversely affects children's mental health and well-being, leading to various mental health problems, such as anxiety, stress, depression, and difficulty sleeping[12].

Emergencies declared by the government in April and May called on citizens to stay home and maintain social distancing, which limits contact with peers and playgrounds for children and teenagers. This can hinder a child's growth and development, deprive the child of the opportunity to manage stress, and cause the child to socially isolate[13].

## **2. METHOD**

### **a. Types of Research**

This study uses a type of literature study research. Literature studies study various reference sources, such as the results of previous relevant research, books, articles, and journals, both nationally and internationally, that are useful in obtaining a theoretical basis regarding the problem under study[14].

**b. Research Procedure**

This literature research procedure is used to compile concepts and descriptions of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the psychology of elementary school children. The steps of the literature study, according to Zed, are as follows: 1) Have a general idea of the research topic, 2) Search for information that supports the topic, 3) Emphasize the research focus, 4) Search and find reading materials 5) Read and make research notes, 6) Review and enrich reading materials, 7) Classify reading materials and start writing[15].

**c. Data Sources**

Systematic literature review through journal reviews of the impact of the covid 19 pandemic on the mental health of children and adolescents. The literature search was conducted through *Science direct* and *Pubmed* with the same keywords, namely *The Covid-19 Pandemic, Mental Health, Children and Adolescents*, published in 2019-2020. The search results obtained five articles that met the inclusion and exclusion criteria. In the process of searching for articles that meet the inclusion criteria, they are systematically collected and checked.

**d. Analysis Techniques data**

The data analysis technique used in this study uses the *content analysis* method. In this analysis, the process of selecting, comparing, combining, and sorting out various understandings to find relevant ones is carried out. To maintain the conservation of the assessment process and prevent and overcome *miss information*, checks are carried out between libraries and re-reading[14].

**3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Based on the results of research conducted by Meutia on the psychological impact on children, one of them is stress. Some of the symptoms that indicate the child is experiencing stress can be seen from changes in behavior, some of which are: being more demanding, looking like they are starting to withdraw, having difficulty concentrating, showing restless behaviors such as frequent nail biting, hands cannot stand still[16].

Research conducted by Suhandi shows that children are becoming grumpy than before the pandemic. This is because children feel bored with no activities and cannot interact with peers. In addition, the child feels more emotional, feels sad and achieves distance learning that requires staring at a cellphone or laptop screen for several hours non-stop[17].

Likewise, the results of research by Ismaniar and Utoyo show that any quarantine due to the occurrence of cases of the COVID-19 pandemic has caused various impacts on children. One of the psychological impacts felt by children is feeling bored, irritable, or emotionally instability. The study's results showed that the stress level of large-grade elementary school students was higher than the average stress level of small-grade elementary school students. One of the causes of stress in students during the pandemic is the demand for assignments, so the symptoms that appear are divided into two, namely emotional reactions that arise in the form of feelings of tension, distress, worry, and difficulty concentrating while the physical reactions shown are crying, nervousness and complaining [18].

Raven-Sieberer and colleagues also showed that one-third of children feel burdened by the COVID-19 pandemic, where they experience mental health problems such as anxiety and depression[19]. Research conducted by O'Sullivan also showed that a child experienced adverse mental health effects during the COVID-19 pandemic, including feelings of social isolation, depression, anxiety, and increased maladaptive behavior[7].

Mental health doesn't just apply to certain age groups. In principle, the entire life span requires mental health. Even with cutting-edge thinking, mental health efforts not only begin human children are born but are carried out long in advance. The first year for the child is a very important period for the child's subsequent mental development[20]

Being mentally healthy for children is important because it will determine their mentality in the future. The existence of a virus that hits the world until it is determined to be a pandemic has a great influence and impact on children. Restrictions on outdoor space until school closures that ended in

school-to-home learning transfers affected children. This change is unprecedented, and parents have little to no protracted learning-from-home experience[7]. School routines are the most important coping, especially for children with mental health issues. Prolonged quarantine psychologically impacts children in the form of stress, loneliness and boredom, emotional instability and irritability, anxiety, sadness, and depression.

### **The Psychic Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic Causes Stress and Trauma**

The Covid pandemic is considered a major event that occurs or is experienced in a person's life. This condition generates uncomfortable feelings and will change the individual's life due to what he experiences. These changes can be stressful. The stress experienced can generate pressure or demands that the individual experiences for him to adapt or adjust. Stress has far-reaching implications for both physical and psychological problems[21].

The COVID-19 pandemic was an unusual and unexpected event that caused many people to worry and even panic. Children see and hear a lot of scary news on television. The child has a family member or another person they know is sick or may die. Stress can also arise because children cannot carry out social activities as usual. Likewise, school activities require children to stay at home. Schools are closed for too long to saturate children. Children who used to be in school lose the interaction and opportunity to play with their friends. The negative impact is also felt by children when forced to learn from home because face-to-face learning is eliminated to prevent the transmission of covid-19. Even though not all students, students, and college students are used to learning Online. Moreover, teachers and many are still not proficient in teaching using internet technology or social media, especially in various regions.

According to data from the Indonesian Children's Assistance Institute (LBAI), during the COVID-19 pandemic, many children experienced stress due to the pressures at home. Because children's bodies are developing, they are more sensitive to this repetitive stress and bear the heaviest part of the system. Some of the symptoms that indicate a stressed child can be seen from the presence of behavioral changes shown, some of which are:

1. Be more demanding.
2. Feeling anxious.
3. Looks are starting to pull away.
4. Delirious.
5. Fear, such as fear of the dark, fear of oneself, or fear of strangers.
6. It's hard to concentrate.
7. Experiencing mood swings.
8. Shows restless behaviors, such as biting nails and others.

Physically, some of the symptoms include:

1. Decrease or increase in appetite.
2. Complaining pain in the abdomen or head symptoms already affect the body's metabolism.
3. Bedwetting.

Children's reactions to a traumatic event will vary depending on their age, level of development, social support, and problem-coping skills. Some children show signs of traumatic stress in response to stressful events, while others do not[22].

Studies have shown that while some children show signs of stress in reaction to traumatic events, these symptoms are likely to resolve within a few days or weeks, while some may have a more lasting impact. If the child's symptoms do not decrease within two to four weeks after the incident, it is recommended that the child be consulted with a psychiatrist or child psychologist. Other situations that may require special treatment with a mental health specialist include the following:

1. If the family cannot meet the child's needs, including if a parent or other caregiver is struggling due to a traumatic event and wants or needs support.
2. If the child's symptoms are severe or significantly interfere with his daily routine, his ability to socialize or do schoolwork.

3. A child has previously been traumatized, previously diagnosed with a mental health disorder, or struggling with anxiety or other mood problems. These children are more prone to develop ongoing traumatic stress problems.
4. If the child experiences loss or grief, this may require additional support, even if the situation does not seem traumatic.

### **Coping Strategies**

There are three important parts to supporting a child's resilience in stressful circumstances[23]. The first is to ensure physical and emotional safety. This includes ensuring their physical needs are met (food, shelter, health care), providing emotional security by providing accurate information in age-appropriate language, limiting exposure to media coverage, and creating or rebuilding familiar structures and predictable routines.

The second is to build and maintain healthy relationships. It builds and strengthens connections with supportive adults such as caregivers, family members, teachers, coaches, and peers. Children can also be connected to larger communities, such as faith-based groups or schools that are thought to help children build resilience.

Third, it teaches supporting skills to cope and regulate emotions. These include helping children learn to express emotions in words, engage in positive activities, use relaxation strategies such as deep breathing, access social support, and solve problems. Remembering these three main components can help children not only get through this stressful time but also grow and develop.

### **4. CONCLUSION**

The Covid-19 pandemic has become a condition affecting many people's lives. Its widespread spread has resulted in stress, anxiety, and stress. This condition not only affects adults but is also prone to affect the child's psychological condition. Most children will be resilient in the face of stress or severe trauma. However, some children may experience some permanent mental health effects. This becomes more likely if the child has experienced a direct threat to their safety (such as not having enough food or a stable place to live, becoming very sick on his own, or seeing a loved one who is very sick) or experiencing death or loss due to the pandemic. Children with pre-existing mental health problems are also at higher risk for longer mental health problems.

Various efforts can be made to give children a good memory of how they got through the Covid 19 pandemic. In addition, parents should share with the child the optimism that a positive future lies ahead and parents can help make it happen. It not only helps the well-being of children but also becomes part of what children remember. Fun times and special moments will be encoded in long-term memory. Children's memories of the pandemic will also be influenced by what they see, read, and hear. Children will remember and create their narratives, where these events are considered experiences of resilience. So it is hoped that memory will be created in the memory of children where this pandemic was one of the worst events in this century, but they survived it.

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