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IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS - A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

The coronavirus pandemic was one of the most unique challenges faced by humanity, which did not influence only the physical functioning of the world but also its psychological state. Children and adolescents were especially prone to experiencing adverse impacts due to the disruption caused by the pandemic in terms of education, social contacts, daily routine, and availability of mental health resources. The current narrative literature review highlights current findings about the effects of the coronavirus pandemic on the psychological state of children and adolescents with a specific emphasis on risks, protective factors, and outcomes. A comprehensive search of PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar was conducted for peer-reviewed studies, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses published between 2020 and 2025.

Consistent results show there is an observed increase in mental health issues among people during and following the pandemic, in terms of anxiety, depression, loneliness, sleep disorders, emotional regulation problems, and behavioral issues. From a meta-analysis of the available literature, it is evident that the rates of depressive and anxiety symptoms are almost twice compared to before the pandemic. Adolescents, females, those suffering from other psychological issues, and disadvantaged children from economically challenged backgrounds were determined as the most vulnerable populations. Main risk factors include school closure, social isolation, family pressure, financial insecurity, and excessive use of electronic gadgets. On the other hand, there are protective factors that mitigate some of the adverse effects, including parental guidance, consistent routines, mental health treatment, and effective coping mechanisms. It is important for mental health professionals and policymakers to learn from previous experiences as a way to prevent similar impacts in future crises.

KEYWORDS

COVID-19; Children; Adolescents; Mental Health; Anxiety; Depression

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1. Introduction

The arrival of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in late 2019 ushered in one of the biggest public health issues in modern times. Although initial measures were focused mainly on containment of the virus and decreasing deaths, the resulting impacts of the disease on mental health slowly became apparent within all populations, even children and adolescents. In contrast to other outbreaks which were limited geographically, COVID-19 struck all nations at once, leading to increased consequences for mental health systems and society in general (Holmes et al., 2020; Brooks et al., 2020).

One special group that could be considered highly vulnerable is made up of children and teenagers. The reason why this age range of people can be called especially vulnerable lies in the fact that their age demands specific environmental settings which include a stable educational setting, stable peer relationships, and a routine schedule.

In contrast to adults, young people have developing mental skills and can lack the ability to cope with their emotions when faced with long-term uncertainties. The interventions applied throughout the world, such as school closures, lockdowns, isolation at homes, quarantine rules, and social distancing guidelines, significantly affected the lives of children in an unprecedented way and for an unprecedented period of time (Fegert et al., 2020). Such measures were frequently applied repeatedly, which only added complexity to the adaptation process.

While educational institutions offer not only education but also provide social interactions, psychological well-being, and regular routine, there was a fast change towards distance education. These changes revealed inequality in accessing technology, family assistance, and learning environment. Millions of students were affected by the fast transition from usual schooling all over the world, causing several difficulties, such as education-related ones as well as emotional issues like academic pressure, demotivation, and lack of interest in studying (Brooks et al., 2020; Golberstein et al., 2020).

The pandemic context presented a number of overlapping stressors for children and teenagers. These involved concerns about infection, worrying about relatives, exposure to distressing information via media, financial issues at home, parental stress, a reduction in exercise, and a significant decline in social interactions. Together, these formed a psychological burden that influenced regulation and coping skills.

Meta-analysis findings suggested that roughly one out of four young individuals suffered from clinically relevant depression worldwide during the pandemic period. At the same time, around one out of five had clinically relevant levels of anxiety. These figures show a significantly higher incidence rate than that found before the pandemic. This suggests that mental health impacts were substantial worldwide (Racine et al., 2021). It should be noted, however, that the statistics presented clinical conditions but also showed the extent of subclinical manifestations in terms of mental health problems.

However, the effects were not equally felt by all groups. In particular, adolescence showed more vulnerability in terms of psychological state than younger children, perhaps because adolescents rely more on peers for support, develop their identities, and have become sensitive to social evaluation. Additionally, females had higher rates of emotional symptoms than boys, perhaps due to differences in emotion regulation and social stress response (Magson et al., 2021; Samji et al., 2022).

This review attempts to summarize existing literature on the psychological effects of the COVID-19 pandemic among children and adolescents. Specifically, this paper will focus on the mental health problems that occurred due to the coronavirus outbreak, the risk factors, and protection.

2. Methodology

In this paper, a narrative review method has been used to summarize current literature regarding the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health among children and adolescents. A narrative approach was adopted due to the inconsistency in methodology, population, and measurement used in various studies, making the quantitative method inadequate for this type of research synthesis.

Literature searches were conducted using PubMed, Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar databases. Keywords included combinations of “COVID-19,” “mental health,” “children,” “adolescents,” “psychological impact,” “depression,” “anxiety,” “school closure,” and “social isolation.” Additional manual searches of reference lists from key articles were performed to ensure inclusion of highly relevant studies that may not have been captured through database queries.

The inclusion of studies published from January 2020 to May 2025 guaranteed the incorporation of research that captured psychological impacts experienced during the initial stages of the pandemic and subsequent readjustment periods after the pandemic. The inclusion criteria involved peer-reviewed journal articles, systematic reviews, meta-analysis, longitudinal research, and observational research among people aged below 18 years.

The exclusion criteria included non-English sources, studies targeting only adults, research without psychological impact results, and articles failing to make a distinction between child/adolescent and adult groups.

More weight was placed on high-quality studies, such as systematic reviews and meta-analysis, because of the capacity of such methods of research to combine results from several different populations and settings, thereby minimizing the possibility of researcher bias and enhancing generalization (Panchal et al., 2021; Samji et al., 2022).

The initial database search identified approximately 250 records. After the removal of duplicates and screening of titles and abstracts, studies that did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded. Full-text evaluation was subsequently conducted, and the most relevant studies concerning the psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and adolescents were included in the final narrative synthesis.

3. Psychological Consequences of COVID-19

3.1 Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety symptoms were among those psychological manifestations during the pandemic that appeared in different cultures and settings. Those symptoms comprised generalized anxiety, social anxiety, health anxiety, separation anxiety, and enhanced emotional reactivity. Many individuals' anxiety increased due to various reasons, including the feeling of uncertainty, absence of routines, and lack of coping mechanisms such as peer interactions and institutionalized coping resources like educational institutions (Panchal et al., 2021; Samji et al., 2022).

The result of a systematic review and meta-analysis conducted on the basis of data about nearly 58,000 participants showed that the prevalence rate of anxiety was 26% during the pandemic. This number demonstrates that anxiety became prevalent not among particular patients but among the general population. It also implies that this psychological manifestation increased significantly compared to its prevalence before the pandemic (Racine et al., 2021). Notably, increased symptoms of anxiety were recorded not only among clinical groups but also within communities.

There are several ways that may be responsible for anxiety disorders in children and teenagers. First, children constantly got information from the media about the spread of infection, mortality rates, and economic instability. The constant presence of pandemic information, especially social networks, might intensify the perception of danger and activate the stress reaction. Secondly, the uncertainty about reopening schools, studying, and education in general added extra stress. Lastly, worries about the safety of one's parents, grandparents, and other family members contributed to emotional insecurity, especially when it comes to younger children who cannot tell realistic threats from fictional ones (Brooks et al., 2020; Guessoum et al., 2020).

Children tended to manifest their anxiety in the form of physical symptoms such as headaches, stomachaches, irritability, and sleep issues. This is because younger children have a less developed emotional vocabulary and cannot effectively cognitively evaluate stressors (Jiao et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2020). On the other hand, teens were more prone to experience worries, repetitive negative thoughts, emotional distancing, and avoidance tactics.

Furthermore, closing down of schools took away another important protective environment that was supposed to shield children against anxiety. Schools offer a sense of routine and consistency, emotional support from teachers, and friendships among peers.

3.2 Depression Symptoms

One of the most commonly discussed mental problems related to the impact of COVID-19 on children and teenagers was the development of depressive symptoms. Even though depression in youth had been an issue before the virus outbreak, it became much more prevalent and severe due to the influence of the disease. The increased levels of depression are believed to be caused by social isolation, disturbance of usual activities, and a lack of stimulating environments (Panchal et al., 2021).

An international meta-analysis carried out by Racine et al. (2021) showed that clinically relevant symptoms of depression were experienced by 25% of children and adolescents, which was double than pre-pandemic statistics. Crucially, the rise was not constant but progressive over time, pointing toward the accumulating impact of pandemic-induced stress on children's mental health.

The signs of depression included feeling sad all the time, being emotionally empty, losing motivation, irritability, problems with cognition, and lack of interest in doing things that once gave joy. Unlike adult patients, children and teenagers do not express their condition using verbal communication but demonstrate behavioral signs of depression instead (Samji et al., 2022).

A number of things led to depressive symptoms. First, schools shut down, which took away the structured environment needed for emotional regulation, socialization, and identity formation. This greatly impacted adolescents as social interaction was vital at their developmental stage of life (Lee, 2020; Viner et al., 2022).

Depressive symptoms do not appear to have been fully alleviated following the easing of restrictions in numerous populations, with a percentage of young people reporting persistently high symptom scores, thus pointing to potentially long-lasting implications for pandemic disruptions (Magson et al., 2021).

Gender differences were found, with adolescent females demonstrating higher scores on measures of depressive symptoms. Factors contributing to such gender differences may be heightened sensitivity to others, involvement in processes of social comparison, and differences in coping mechanisms (Magson et al., 2021).

Family-related risk factors played a major role in determining the incidence of depression. Higher rates of parent stress, unemployment, financial vulnerability, and family arguments were found to increase the likelihood of depression among children. Stable and nurturing families acted as shields against emotional disturbance (Meherali et al., 2021).

Children who had previously been diagnosed with some form of mental illness were especially vulnerable. Children with prior diagnosis of depression, anxiety disorders, ADHD, and ASD had their conditions aggravated because of the break in services and support (Fegert et al., 2020).

3.3 Social Isolation and Loneliness

Interaction with others is an integral developmental necessity in childhood and adolescence. Social interactions are crucial for emotional well-being, identity formation, and social development. Therefore, physical distancing policies due to the pandemic brought about significant mental health repercussions (Loades et al., 2020).

The adoption of strict physical distancing protocols and shutting down schools curtailed face-to-face socialization activities. Although these measures were necessary to control the spread of infection, they adversely affected the important developmental processes that would otherwise occur at critical times (Viner et al., 2022).

There was evidence indicating that loneliness and social isolation significantly contributed to higher risks of depression and anxiety for children and teenagers. It is worth mentioning that the period of time spent being isolated played a crucial role as prolonged isolation led to more pronounced negative psychological results (Loades et al., 2020).

Adolescents suffered from the effects of social isolation because of their strong need to interact with peers for their emotional satisfaction and self-development. The abrupt lack of communication and participation in activities resulted in isolation, exclusion, and other problems (Samji et al., 2022).

These factors were partly countered by digital communications through which students could still communicate with their peers; however, the quality of these interactions was not the same as face-to-face interaction. Additionally, there was an uneven level of digital communication access among children from various socioeconomic groups (Ellis et al., 2020).

Over-reliance on online communication posed several threats to the well-being of young people. The frequent use of social networking sites could be related to cyberbullying, problematic internet usage, and an intensified process of social comparison that would lead to emotional distress (Hawke et al., 2020).

Loneliness in the context of the pandemic becomes especially worrying due to the fact that it might entail future repercussions. According to recent studies, early isolation experiences might affect stress regulation mechanisms and predispose individuals to future psychological disorders (Loades et al., 2020).

3.4 Sleep Disturbances

Sleep is an integral part of cognitive, emotional, immunological, and educational development. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were major disruptions in people's daily lives, leading to many sleep disorders in children and teenagers (Imran et al., 2020; Samji et al., 2022).

Many studies have found that sleep disorders are common during the period of lock downs. These include delayed bedtimes, abnormal sleep patterns, insomnia, increased daytime drowsiness, night terrors, and poor quality of sleep (Singh et al., 2020; Panchal et al., 2021).

Various aspects led to these sleep disturbances. There were no fixed schedules to adhere to with remote learning; thus, teens could have been sleeping in late and maintaining flexible sleeping habits. Inactivity and less time spent outdoors also affected sleep cycle regulations negatively (Lee, 2020).

Exposure to blue lights from electronic screens has been known to disrupt sleep cycles. Since teens had more time engaging with their gadgets for educational purposes, entertainment, and even social interactions, the effects were felt more significantly in such scenarios.

Sleep disorders were similarly strongly associated with emotional symptoms. Anxiety and depression frequently occurred alongside sleep disorders, establishing a cyclical relationship wherein each exacerbated the other (Hawke et al., 2020).

Sleep disorders may similarly have a negative impact on academic achievement through interfering with attention, memory, and executive functions. Such cognitive deficits may exacerbate emotional distress and disengagement from schooling activities (Samji et al., 2022).

Especially alarming results were found in adolescents with higher propensity for developing sleep disorders characterized by delayed sleep phases and insufficient sleep.

3.5 Behavioral and Emotional Problems

Not only were the children displaying internal symptoms like anxiety and depression, but the outbreak also led to their development of external behaviors (Jiao et al., 2020).

Children showed signs of behavioral issues such as irritability, tantrums, aggressiveness, clinging, unstable emotions, difficulty concentrating, and increased dependency on their caregivers (Jiao et al., 2020; Xie et al., 2020). This type of behavior could be a sign of other underlying mental issues.

Alteration of one's normal schedule was a critical factor in influencing behavior modification. A scheduled environment, such as in the case of school, helps maintain emotions. The lack thereof caused by lockdowns led to dysregulation (Fegert et al., 2020).

Another factor causing problems psychologically was disruption in one's schedule. A well-structured routine helps maintain emotions and stability. However, switching to e-learning threw all this out of balance.

Parents noted that their children were increasingly having issues with attention and hyperactivity as they were locked down at home. The lack of exercise, socialization, and organized learning may have caused such problems (Xie et al., 2020).

Those who had ADHD were affected especially badly by lockdown since disruption to the established routine and lack of intervention made their symptoms worse. Likewise, those who had autism faced behavioral problems due to the disruption to their established routines (Fegert et al., 2020).

Research conducted on autistic children also revealed considerable difficulties. Modifications in schedules and lack of therapy often resulted in increased behavioral problems (Fegert et al., 2020; Panchal et al., 2021).

3.6 Self-Harm and Suicidal Ideation

One of the psychological impacts of the pandemic that was especially disturbing included the rise in cases of self-inflicted harm as well as thoughts of suicide among adolescents (Guessoum et al., 2020; Samji et al., 2022).

Despite differences between research studies conducted in different countries, some authors have observed an increase in psychiatric emergency patients suffering from self-injury.

There are multiple possible explanations for these trends. Isolation, symptoms of depression, loneliness, family stress, and limited access to mental health care can all be potential contributors to increased psychological stress (Golberstein et al., 2020).

Teenagers with a history of psychological problems were especially vulnerable, particularly those with depression, anxiety, history of exposure to trauma, or previous self-harm (Guessoum et al., 2020).

Scientists noted that school closures may lead to fewer opportunities for early detection of any psychological crisis. School systems are known to be places where teachers and school psychologists detect emotional problems and start intervention procedures (Lee, 2020).

As a result, fewer interactions with such assistance may lead to the delayed detection of serious psychological issues.

Despite the fact that not all investigations showed high levels of suicides, all findings show that students experience increased psychological vulnerability which must be monitored carefully and appropriately (Samji et al., 2022).

4. Factors Affecting Mental Health Outcomes

The psychosocial impacts on children and adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic were extremely heterogeneous. Some people showed resilience while others suffered from mental problems. Such heterogeneity reflects the significance of certain factors that can influence the psychosocial response to the challenges posed by the pandemic environment.

4.1 School Closures

Closing schools was among the largest public health measures implemented globally during the pandemic. Although successful in lowering the spread of the virus, school closures had negative impacts on important developmental, educational, and psychological functions of education (Lee, 2020; Viner et al., 2022).

The school offered routine, peer contact, psychological support, and access to mental health services. The closure of schools, however, eliminated a key source of protection for children and teenagers. Online schooling, while necessary, resulted in inequalities in access to education because of different levels of digital technology availability and study environments at home.

Disruption of school routines led to disruption of peer connections, engagement in extracurricular activities, psychological support mechanisms, and access to mental health facilities (Viner et al., 2022).

The young generation was especially vulnerable because of high academic pressures and increased sensitivity towards social comparison and uncertainties about their future. Academic pressure, lowered motivation, and exhaustion have been reported among students during the prolonged closure of schools (Lee, 2020).

4.2 Family Environment and Parental Stress

Among the most important aspects that impacted the psychological well-being of children and adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic was family functioning. Families faced numerous problems, such as economic insecurity, new working conditions, the necessity to work from home, taking care of children at home, and worries about their health and safety (Meherali et al., 2021).

The psychological health of parents exhibited significant connections to the emotions of the children. A number of research studies discovered that parental stress, anxiety, and depression symptoms were associated with emotional distress among children. Parents who struggle emotionally have less ability to offer their children psychological support and stability within the family (Magson et al., 2021).

Lockdowns meant that families had to spend a lot of time together in close domestic environments. Although having more interactions among families could lead to stronger bonds in some situations, lockdowns were bound to cause more conflicts.

Finances were yet another critical issue to consider. Unemployment and financial insecurity contributed to increased parental stress, which indirectly affected their children due to family conflicts and an insecure future outlook. Empirical research indicated that low socioeconomic status correlated positively with psychological strain during the pandemic (Golberstein et al., 2020).

In addition, an increase in cases of domestic violence and family disputes was observed amongst certain communities during lockdowns. Exposure to difficult family environments led to the emotional vulnerability of children and teenagers.

Children who grew up in a favorable family environment, marked by emotional supportiveness, consistent communication, and coping techniques, were likely to exhibit superior psychological well-being (Samji et al., 2022).

The level of parental involvement had an impact on educational experiences amid distance learning arrangements. Parents who had more access to resources and flexible work hours could oversee their children's educational efforts effectively.

Therefore, family environment served as both a risk and protective factor in varying environmental settings.

4.3 Socioeconomic Inequalities

Inequities based on socioeconomics were a crucial factor in the mental well-being of people during the COVID-19 crisis. The most vulnerable group was children from families with low socioeconomic status because of the existence of several adverse factors at once (UNICEF, 2021).

The socio-economic status greatly impacted availability to educational technology, medical help, residential settings, and psychological assistance. Poorer households faced more difficulties regarding distance learning and adaptation emotionally.

They included limited availability of digital technology, crowded housing environments, food scarcity, and lack of access to medical care and education (Meherali et al., 2021). This resulted in persistent stressors that adversely affected psychological wellbeing. This led to accumulated stressors affecting the psychological wellbeing of individuals.

Educational inequalities were another aspect highlighted by school closures. Access to technological devices needed for remote learning was uneven among different groups. Thus, students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds faced higher educational interruptions and higher academic pressure (Viner et al., 2022).

It was revealed that children living in urban areas with cramped spaces faced higher stress levels due to limited access to outdoor recreational activities.

International studies also revealed discrepancies depending on differences in healthcare and social welfare provisions of various nations. Areas where effective social security systems operated reported slightly lower levels of psychological distress among children and their families.

Thus, socioeconomic status played a critical role in determining pandemic experiences and psychological outcomes.

4.4 Increased Screen Time and Social Media Use

Pandemic led to increased use of digital technology by children and adolescents (Hawke et al., 2020). While digital technology aided in education and social interaction, screen-time became a cause for concern in regard to psychological wellbeing.

Though digital technology helped maintain continuity in education and communication, increasing exposure to screens caused a great deal of concern in relation to psychological well-being.

Numerous studies reported substantial increases in daily screen time among children During lock down periods.

In most populations, the average time spent was higher than before the pandemic by several hours (Ellis et al., 2020).

The increase in screen time could be attributed to various reasons:

- Online learning;
- Social media;
- On-demand content streaming;
- Games;
- Less access to outdoor recreation;
- Minimal physical interactions.

The results of research about screen use revealed a variety of outcomes. The positive outcomes were:

- conservation of peer-to-peer communication;
- conservation of access to education;
- emotional support through online communities;
- less loneliness (Ellis et al., 2020).

Yet there were also negative repercussions. Overexposure to screens was linked with:

- disturbed sleep;
- low physical activity levels;
- emotional regulation issues;
- internet problems;
- anxiety;
- depression (Panchal et al., 2021; Hawke et al., 2020).

Exposure to screens led to an alteration in sleeping patterns, lower physical activities, and emotional regulation issues. Young people mainly depended on social media platforms to keep up with peer connections; however, through such interactions, they were vulnerable to cyberbullying, misleading information, and social comparisons (Guessoum et al., 2020).

It was recommended that perhaps the content and usage style were more crucial than the time spent using screens. The problems that seemed more troublesome included passive use of social media and addiction to the Internet.

More studies need to explore the potential implications of altering one's digital practices during the pandemic.

5. Differences Across Age Groups

Variations existed concerning psychological reactions to stressors caused by pandemics depending on the developmental level. Cognitive functioning, emotional regulation, social needs, and coping skills of children and adolescents vary a great deal.

Age was therefore an essential variable determining psychological reactions.

5.1 Early Childhood

The children had pandemic-related stress mainly due to disturbances in routine and emotional responses from parents. Children have limited cognitive capacity to understand environmental stress, so they use their parents as indicators of stress (Jiao et al., 2020).

Reactions to the outbreak included separation anxiety, irritability, difficulty sleeping, and regression in terms of development.

Emotional reactions were manifested in somatic complaints because young children cannot explain their feelings in words.

Young children lack awareness about complicated public health problems and often rely on parents' emotional responses to interpret danger.

Restructuring of normal life routines, less time spent playing, and new dynamics within the family may have been important sources of stress.

In addition, preschoolers faced problems with understanding social isolation and disruption of the environment around them.

5.2 School-Age Children

Academic structure and peer connections were affected due to disruptions among school-age children. Closures of schools meant that important settings for learning and emotional regulation were lost (Lee, 2020).

School provides structure, emotional comfort, and a chance for social development. This was hindered by the closure of schools, which often led to isolation and academic pressures.

Many students experienced challenges when adapting to virtual learning environments such as inability to concentrate, lack of motivation and frustrations with technology. Without any extracurricular activities to take part in, there were fewer chances for interaction and skill acquisition. Challenges associated with attention and lack of motivation were among the most common ones mentioned.

The academic pressure along with the change in the environment often led to feelings of irritation, boredom and lack of attention.

5.3 Adolescents

Adolescents represented the group most psychologically impacted during the pandemic period (Magson et al., 2021; Racine et al., 2021; Samji et al., 2022). Adolescents' vulnerability can be justified by their psychological need to develop relationships with peers, autonomy, and identity.

Developmental theories emphasize that adolescence constitutes a period characterized by:

- identity formation;
- emotional independence;

- peer affiliation;
- social belonging.

Consequently, social distancing measures disproportionately affected adolescents due to interruption of critical developmental experiences.

Studies repeatedly demonstrated increased prevalence of:

- depressive symptoms;
- anxiety;
- loneliness;
- emotional dysregulation;
- sleep difficulties;
- self-harm behaviors.

Furthermore, there was increased awareness among the teenagers regarding the uncertainties relating to education, employment, and interactions. Girls were found to have higher rates of emotional disorders than boys. The reason behind this could be attributed to their high sensitivity along with isolation and pressure related to education.

6. Protective Factors and Resilience

Still, regardless of the abundance of studies related to adverse psychological consequences associated with the pandemic brought about by the virus, some children did not experience any significant mental distress. Differences in psychological responses suggest that there exist protective factors associated with resilience (Magson et al., 2021).

In simple terms, resilience may be considered the capacity to maintain psychological well-being despite difficulties encountered. Several protective factors appeared frequently across research papers.

6.1 Parental Support

Parents' support has consistently been considered one of the key protective factors for mental wellness (Meherali et al., 2021). Parental empathy, communication, and scheduling had a positive effect on emotional wellness.

The presence of supportive parents would imply that children had the ability to cope, had minimal anxiety, and were not depressed. Resilience building among children depended on how their parents reacted to stressors.

6.2 Coping Strategies and Psychological Adaptation

The coping skills needed to deal with the effects of stress are quite varied between individuals and can have a major effect on the psychological outcomes. Coping skills needed to deal with the impact of stress became particularly important during the emergence of the coronavirus pandemic to reduce the pain experienced by children and teenagers.

These are mainly classified into two categories: problem-oriented coping and emotion-focused coping skills.

The research conducted during the period of pandemic suggests that instances of adaptive coping exhibited by teenagers include:

- following a set schedule;
- exercising regularly;
- keeping in touch on social media platforms;
- participating in their favorite recreational activities;
- utilizing relaxation techniques;
- support seeking.

Children and young people who stuck to routine schedules experienced fewer instances of emotional stress. Routines can offer stability and security in times when things are uncertain.

Exercise was also found to be important. Exercise has been known to reduce anxiety and improve mood for a while now. But during lockdowns, people could not exercise due to movement restrictions and closures of recreational facilities.

According to various studies, children who continued to engage in physical activities showed higher levels of emotional wellbeing and lesser signs of depression (Panchal et al., 2021).

Expression of emotions was another crucial factor. The adolescents who could share their problems with family members and friends showed better psychological adjustment.

However, maladaptive coping mechanisms such as avoidance, over-use of Internet, suppression of emotions, and social isolation proved to have negative impacts on emotions.

6.3 School and Community Support Systems

Schools have other roles besides teaching and learning. The learning environment helps students psychologically, socially interacts with others, and identifies any early emotional problems that may exist.

The school closure during the pandemic has been detrimental to young people in terms of losing some of these aspects.

School psychologists, teachers, counselors, and other staff often notice changes in behavior that indicate some type of emotional problem. With limited physical interaction, psychological problems may not have been recognized on time. In order to keep the system running smoothly, certain countries tried to use telehealth solutions and online teaching (Viner et al., 2022).

There is emerging evidence that shows such programs may help overcome some of the challenges of emotions.

In a similar vein, community-based organizations have helped provide some of the following valuable contributions:

- mental health awareness;
- family services;
- online forums;
- services for youth;
- intervention in crisis situations.

There have been findings to show that those societies that were well-supported were able to withstand public health emergencies better.

The development of mental health resources in schools could thus be seen as one way of ensuring that future emergencies do not become disasters.

7. Discussion

The results of this study suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic brought about a significant multidimensional effect on the psychological well-being of children and adolescents. All reviewed studies identified higher incidences of anxiety, depression, loneliness, sleep disorders, and behavioral issues among their participants (Samji et al., 2022; Panchal et al., 2021).

In almost all research, anxiety and depression were found to be the two commonest forms of emotional impact experienced by people. It has been found that prevalence rates significantly exceeded pre-COVID estimates, implying wide-ranging psychological impacts across all sorts of people.

Social isolation emerged as an especially relevant variable in terms of affecting mental health impacts. According to the developmental theories, interactions within peer groups and society play a critical role in emotional development (Loades et al., 2020).

It seemed that adolescents were particularly prone to psychological repercussions. Unlike younger children, adolescents depend on social bonding and self-exploration, which is why any disruption in these processes might account for the emotional issues witnessed in this age group (Magson et al., 2021).

Moreover, research findings revealed that there were significant inequalities relating to experiences during the pandemic. The disadvantaged children bore a large burden psychologically because of the disruption of education and other stresses faced by their families (UNICEF, 2021).

Family functioning proved another crucial factor. Healthy family backgrounds would often act as a buffer against stress, while parental psychological issues and family conflicts served to increase the risks (Meherali et al., 2021).

A number of other results also hint that there may be some lasting effects following these psychological impacts, even after the period of crises ends. For example, research indicates that many young people still exhibited emotional problems even as restrictions were eased (Magson et al., 2021).

Such results pose serious doubts about the possible long-term developmental effects on young people.

However, some factors that need to be taken into account are evident. First of all, many of the existing researches use cross-sectional design which prevents making causal conclusions. The latter means that psychological effects can be measured only once and long-term development cannot be traced. Second, a significant heterogeneity can be observed in regard to the age groups, methods used for data collection, and methodologies applied. Finally, many researches were conducted by means of using self-reports, which may be considered as an additional limitation. (Holmes et al., 2020).

On the whole, the global pandemic can be seen to be an important example showing how societal disruptions on a massive scale can greatly impact the mental well-being of young people.

8. Recommendations for Public Health and Education

The findings drawn from the literature suggest that there were significant and diverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental wellbeing of children and adolescents. It can be noted that such results have revealed the pressing need to develop public health approaches to prevent youth mental health problems.

Early Identification Programs

Early recognition of psychological issues is critical to avoid further development of such mental illnesses. Schools are ideal environments to carry out psychological screening because they are accessible and constantly interact with minors.

Schools' mental health screening programs may help detect anxiety, depression, and behavior issues early on so that individuals can be referred for appropriate treatment in a timely manner. Research indicates that early intervention positively impacts the effectiveness of mental health treatments and makes mental illnesses less severe (Lee, 2020; Viner et al., 2022).

Another possible method of enhancing mental well-being in schools is including mental health lessons in the curriculum. This approach will help enhance emotional awareness among schoolchildren.

Expansion of Child Mental Health Services

The pandemic has only served to shed light on the already existing inadequacies in child and adolescent psychological services. Several healthcare providers had difficulties catering to the additional psychological demands that arose due to the pandemic (Golberstein et al., 2020).

Thus, the need for extending the scope of psychological services for children must be prioritized. This will involve increasing the availability of child psychologists, ensuring better access to psychiatry services, and creating holistic models of service provision.

The rapid growth in telehealth service delivery that occurred during the pandemic should be preserved for use as an additional method of therapy. Evidence suggests that online therapeutic approaches may prove to be efficacious methods for reducing anxiety and depressive disorders in young people (Samji et al., 2022).

Family Support Initiatives

Considering the impact of family environment on children's mental well-being, it becomes necessary to conduct interventions for parents or caregivers. Programs for parents that focus on improving emotional regulation, managing stress, and communication could have an indirect effect on children. Parents' mental well-being needs to be prioritized since their stress levels correlated highly with children's psychological distress during the pandemic (Meherali et al., 2021).

Moreover, social policies focused on easing financial stress on the family unit could lead to better mental health outcomes for children, especially from economically underprivileged communities (UNICEF, 2021).

Educational Support

Schools occupy an important part in psychological recovery after major disruptions. Post-pandemic education plans need to cover two main areas - learning recovery and psychosocial recovery. The methods that can be implemented in order to make up for learning losses caused by long-term school closure include tutoring sessions, catch-up programs, and a flexible curriculum. However, social, emotional, and peer reintegration programs are required to facilitate psychosocial recovery (Viner et al., 2022).

Training of teachers on mental health issues is also critical since teachers can be the first observers of problems associated with psychological well-being among kids and teenagers.

Future Crisis Preparedness

The coronavirus disease has clearly shown that mental well-being needs to be considered when preparing for future emergencies. The policies in place when dealing with health emergencies need to include risk evaluations that address both the physical and mental well-being of individuals.

Education and mental well-being support should be assured when an emergency occurs. These include learning programs, counseling, and interventions to high-risk groups during such times (Holmes et al., 2020).

Investment in the infrastructure for children and adolescents' mental well-being is critical.

9. Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic stands among one of the most crucial global phenomena in terms of its impact on child and adolescent mental health in the modern world. Numerous international studies have found increased symptoms of various psychological issues ranging from anxiety, depression, loneliness, sleep-related disorders, behavioral problems, to emotional disturbance (Samji et al., 2022; Panchal et al., 2021).

These findings have been influenced by a series of interconnected determinants such as the closure of schools, social isolation, family pressures, economic disparity, and the increasing use of media. However, social disruptions seem to be one of the most impactful ways that impact psychological well-being among all these factors (Loades et al., 2020; Lee, 2020).

Significantly, however, the effects of the pandemic were not felt evenly across society. Adolescents, girls, children who suffered from mental disorders prior to the onset of the crisis, and people from marginalized economic backgrounds experienced greater negative consequences than other members of the population (Racine et al., 2021; UNICEF, 2021).

However, many other kids showed resilience, owing to several protective factors like good family relations, adaptive coping skills, and education, among others (Meherali et al., 2021). These results have made it evident that there is an urgent need to create protective environments for young people.

Though some progress has been seen post-restrictions, it appears that certain young people continue to suffer from mental health issues, which may pose serious implications for their development in the future (Magson et al., 2021).

Limitations of method in current research, such as dependence on cross-sectional methodology and use of self-report measures, emphasize the necessity for longitudinal research in order to gain knowledge about mental well-being dynamics and recovery (Holmes et al., 2020).

All things considered, the results show that mental well-being is crucial for health planning. Improving early intervention strategies, increasing accessibility of mental well-being resources, and providing psychological support through education and communities are key actions in reducing the negative effects of this pandemic in the future.

Table 1. Summary of Selected Studies Examining COVID-19 and Child Mental Health

Authors	Study type	Population	Main findings
Racine et al. (2021)	Meta-analysis	80,000+ participants	Increased depression and anxiety prevalence
Loades et al. (2020)	Systematic review	International	Isolation strongly associated with anxiety and depression
Samji et al. (2022)	Review	Children and youth	Significant worsening of mental health indicators
Panchal et al. (2021)	Systematic review	Multiple countries	Increased emotional symptoms and behavioral problems
Viner et al. (2022)	Review	School-aged populations	School closures negatively influenced well-being

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