

# COVID-19 Pandemic And Violation Of Child Rights

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## **Abstract**

*In today's world, COVID-19 pandemic has triggered unprecedented global health, humanitarian, socio-economic, and human rights crises. Across the globe, the pandemic has adversely affected a large number of people including children. It has multifaceted impacts on children including the psychological, mental, physical, social, and cultural. It has posed a serious threat to children's rights to survival and development and the highest attainable standard of health. The pandemic has also exposed children to an increased risk of experiencing physical and psychological violence, including maltreatment and sexual violence. The shutting down of schools and the decision of shifting traditional classroom to a digital platform is not only increasing learning inequality among children but also pushing a large number of children out of schools due to the digital divide. All these factors together have contributed towards the violation of the rights of children. The present paper, therefore, is an attempt to examine the extent of violation of child rights during the COVID-19 pandemic. For the present study, all relevant information is collected from the secondary sources of data.*

**Keywords:** *Pandemic, Crisis, Children, Rights, Violation.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The current COVID-19 pandemic has posed a serious threat to all the nations of the world, may it be developed or developing nations. It has compelled almost every state to shut down their countries. The outbreak of COVID-19 has severely affected the global and national economics, health systems, education systems, and so on. Across the globe, the pandemic has adversely affected a large number of people including children. It has multifaceted impacts on children including the psychological, mental, physical, social, and cultural. India being a developing country is also suffering from this dangerous human crisis. Like many other countries, the pandemic has severely affected the economy of the Indian state too. It has also led to the serious violation of the basic rights of people, particularly those who are vulnerable. Due to this crisis, the Government of India had declared a nationwide lockdown. During the current pandemic situation, the stresses on families such as the increased care burden, financial pressure, etc. are also increasing which have pushed women and children at risk of experiencing a higher level of violence. Specifically speaking, the mandatory stay at home orders and lockdown declared by the governments and confinement measures have severely affected children's rights to physical and mental health, education, play, family environment and freedom from violence, and so on. In light of this, the present paper tries to examine the extent of violation of child rights during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **COVID-19 Pandemic And The Violation Of Child Rights**

Across the globe, the COVID-19 pandemic has provoked unprecedented global health, humanitarian, socio-economic, and human rights crises. To contain the spread of this pandemic the Governments of different countries of the world have undertaken various measures such as the closure of schools, home isolation or quarantine, and community

lockdown. All these measures have harmed children and their families. As per a report, around 1.5 billion children and youth were affected by schools' closure in the first half of April 2020 (Save the Children, 2020).

All children have rights that are specific to them as children, enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Child (UN-CRC), which need to be respected, protected, and fulfilled even during times of crisis (Save the Children, 2020). All over the world, the social and economic disturbances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have adversely affected all sections of people in society, particularly children. The concept of losing zero learning days has been bleak during the time of the pandemic. The various measures undertaken by the governments to contain the pandemic have posed serious challenges before the children and their families as the schools are being shut for months and thus putting children away from schools, probably breaking their learning cycles. Apart from this, children are also exposed to several other risks. For example, the risk of dropping out of schools may inspire children to become child laborers. Again, in the aftermath of the lockdown the incidences of child trafficking, children becoming the victims of cyber-crimes, child marriages, etc. are also increasing. Additionally, the pandemic has unleashed a perfect storm into the lives of the most marginalized children. These children are deprived of their basic rights during the pandemic situation. According to a report, up to 85 million more girls and boys worldwide may be exposed to physical, sexual, and emotional violence over the three months of home quarantine (World Vision, 2020).

It is to be mentioned here that an entire generation's education has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The governments of different countries of the world have undertaken various measures to contain the spread of the pandemic such as the closure of schools, home isolation, etc. which have deeply affected the rights of children. Some children are moving to distance learning as their schools remain closed and others receiving no formal education at all. School closures have been a key part of governments' reaction to control the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic which has resulted in 1.6 billion learners worldwide being out of school at the peak of school closures—approximately 90 percent of the entire student population (Caritas India, 2020). It is a matter of grave concern for all that the closing of schools caused by the pandemic will aggravate existing inequalities and set progress back even future also, particularly for those who are considered to be the marginalized and deprived children. Studies show that around 1.5 billion children were affected by schools' closures in the first half of April 2020. Of these almost 84 percent reside in rural areas while 70 percent attend government schools (Caritas India, 2020). The discourse on education during the pandemic period has focused mainly on online or televised teaching-learning methods. The initiatives undertaken for online classes preclude the rural and urban poor with limited or no connection to electricity and network resources. Save the Children (2020) predicts that almost 10 million children will not return to school following the pandemic, due to the increasing number of children and families that are pushed into poverty because of COVID-19 (Save the Children, 2020). The current COVID-19 pandemic has impacted many economies around the world, with lockdowns and restrictions on the movement of people. Due to this situation, many people are losing their source of income. To be specific, the pandemic has had a remarkable impact on the global economy. Estimates suggest that "by the end of 2020, world trade will drop by up to 32 percent" (Jeesson, 2020, p. 102).

Effective social protection systems are important for safeguarding the most deprived and marginalized people, not just when crises hit, but also to help strengthen their resilience against future shocks. However, in many countries, social protection systems are limited in coverage and are not prepared for large-scale economic shocks such as COVID-19 (Save the Children, 2020).

It may be noted that violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation of children increases exponentially in any crisis. During the present crisis, the closure of schools and lockdowns have disturbed children's access to protective systems and at the same time, the outcomes of the pandemic have dramatically increased stresses on families (Save the Children, 2020). As per an estimate of the UN Population Fund, the COVID-19 pandemic will result in an

additional 13 million child marriages and 2 million cases of female genital mutilation (FGM) between 2020-2030(Save the Children, 2020).

It is due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become very tough for a large section of people to sustain their lives and one such section is children. Studies have revealed that a large section of children throughout the globe has not enjoyed their rights fully. Huge number of children have been facing difficulties in accessing food or medicine. Again, due to the economic breakdown of countries, the prices of all commodities are also growing high day by day which has created lots of problems in availing them. Save the Children (2020) stated that due to food and economic insecurity children face problems in accessing good and sufficient nutrition which ultimately contribute towards malnourishment among young children (Save the children, 2020).

COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated the condition of the most vulnerable groups who are facing more barriers to accessing healthcare and support systems than their peers. The governments of different countries have been implementing various measures to fight against the pandemic which has resulted in a negative impact on people including children. Mandatory schools' closure and stay-at-home orders have put children at risk of being exploited even at their homes. This has increased the risk of psychological distress, violence, neglect, and social exclusion of many children.

Again, due to the problems created by the COVID-19 pandemic, children are facing problems in accessing an outside space for playing. In the lockdown period, children have had no physical access to friends, peers, schoolmates, and relatives. Limited or no opportunity for outdoor play and socialization has negatively affected the children and thus making them easily bored, angry, and frustrated (Kumar, A.et. al, 2020).Consequently, many children are suffering from mental health problems at a very early stage of their life. Today, all over the world due to the adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, many children are not enjoying their right to an adequate standard of living. The restrictions imposed by the governments due to the pandemic have deprived several groups of children and families of their rights to a dignified life. Studies have revealed that many children and families are living in overcrowded houses with more than five people in one single room.

The COVID-19 pandemic has excessively affected those people who are living under the poverty line and in the poorest nations of the world, including children. The lockdowns and confinement measures of the governments have exposed children to the increased risk of witnessing physical, mental, and psychological violence, including maltreatment and sexual violence. Girls are particularly at risk of suffering from sexual violence, exploitation, discrimination, and abuse. According to a report (2020), millions of children will face extreme poverty shortly as their families are facing financial hardships due to the loss of employment or income opportunities. Again, in addition to the estimated 386 million children living in extreme poverty, an estimated 42-66 million children could face extreme poverty due to the COVID-19 pandemic (UN, 2020).

### **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

From the discussion above it is clear that the current COVID-19 pandemic has posed a serious threat to the safety and wellbeing of children all over the world. The pandemic has hit people from all countries and all communities around the world. The governments of various countries, civil society organizations, as well as the general people today, are worried about the immediate impact of the pandemic. But, to be particular, it is children who are at risk of experiencing negative outcomes of the pandemic even in the future too. The rights of children as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN-CRC) should, therefore, be respected, protected, and fulfilled even during times of crisis as children are considered to be one of the most weaker sections of the society who are always dependent on others for their all-round development.

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