

Research Article

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON CHILDREN IN VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

The pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus has had significant impacts on all aspects of social life and all people. However, children are vulnerable objects, so during the pandemic, they are always the hardest-hit ones. The impacts on health, learning, entertainment, affection in family, and the growing-up process are present in the present and extend to the future. Therefore, it is necessary to have effective and specific solutions that aim to reduce the impacts of the pandemic on children and help children overcome the pandemic with the slightest vulnerability.

Keywords: children, impacts of the pandemic, SARS-CoV-2 virus.

INTRODUCTION

The pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus (from now on referred to as Covid-19) first appeared at the end of 2019. As of November 01, 2021, there were 247,460,467 people infected with the Covid-19 globally, including 5,014,940 deaths.¹ Since the outbreak in early 2020, Vietnam has recorded 921,069 infections, 820,334 recovered, 78,708 patients treated, and 22,083 deaths.² To cope with the pandemic, the Government has used many measures. They are blocking infected areas, implementing many levels of social distancing, testing on a large scale, restricting some business activities, changing the form of education from face-to-face teaching mainly to online teaching, combining with vaccination against the disease, etc. All of these measures contribute to actively restraining the spread of the pandemic in every period. However, the downside of these measures is enormous and profoundly affects many fields and objects. In other words, the Covid-19 pandemic has a profound impact on people's expected lives. Children - a vulnerable group in society have to bear many serious consequences, both at present and in the future.

IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON CHILDREN

In terms of health

As of August 19, 2021, according to the Ho Chi Minh City Center for Disease Control (HCDC), there are 1,937 children under 16 years old (5.8%) infected with Covid-19.³ Meanwhile, according to local reports, as of August 31, 2021, there were 11,822 children identified as F0 and 27,334 children known as F1.⁴ Although the number of children

infected with Covid-19 compared to adults is lower, the sequelae after recovery are very large. After recovering from the disease, children still have sequelae such as respiratory symptoms, heart problems, including a type of heart inflammation called myocarditis; neurological problems such as "brain fog", headaches, fatigue, and mental health problems.⁵ Because children are in the process of developing and perfecting mentally and physically, contracting Covid-19 and suffering subsequent sequelae inevitably interferes with this process. For children identified as F1 must be isolated in concentrated isolation. Even though their parents are allowed to go into seclusion with the children, the care in terms of nutrition, living, and hygiene is also minimal compared to children living conditions at home. At the same time, they have a higher risk of cross-contamination in the isolation ward and becoming F0 than children living at home. In localities where social distancing has been implemented to prevent the pandemic, children's travel, activities, recreation, and learning are restricted to different degrees depending on the level of distancing. When localities were still applying Directives No. 15 and No. 16 of the Prime Minister, all people were restricted from moving or staying in one place, and children were no exception. Indeed, parents will protect their children by keeping them at home. While children are very active subjects, they are always in motion, and they need space to run, jump, live, play, and explore the world around them. Restricting movement or being forced to stay at home for a long time will significantly affect children's mobility later on and negatively affect motor development and the need to explore. To deal with travel restrictions and too much free time, parents allow their children to indulge in electronic devices such as smart phones, pads, televisions, etc. However, allowing children to use these devices and the internet without strict control will lead to many negative consequences. According to some experts, children using smart devices such as phones and pads for more than 2 hours a day can lead to the following ten harmful effects:⁶

- The risk of brain cancer will be about 4-5 times higher than children who do not use it.
- Poor eyesight or eye diseases.
- Retardation, low intelligence, limited communication ability.

¹ Portal of the Ministry of Information and Communications about the statistics on the Covid-19 pandemic: vnexpress.net/covid-19/covid-19-the-gioi accessed on November 01, 2021

² Portal of the Ministry of Information and Communications about the statistics on the Covid-19 pandemic: vnexpress.net/covid-19/covid-19-the-gioi accessed on November 01, 2021

³ Portal of the Ministry of Health about the acute respiratory disease- Covid-19: "How are children with Covid-19 cared for?"

⁴ Portal of the Ministry of Public Security "tre-em-chiu-hang-loat-anh-huong-tieu-cuc-do-covid-19" accessed on November 01, 2021.

⁵ Portal of Tien Giang Provincial General Hospital "canh-bao-tre-em-mac-covid-19-ang-gia-tang-va-bien-chung-nang"

⁶ <https://medayroi.com/tac-hai-cua-viec-su-dung-dien-thoai-doi-voi-tre-em/>

- Neck dislocation, cervical spondylosis.
- The increasing likelihood of mental illness.
- Get rid of family affection.
- Decreasing learning ability.
- Insomnia.
- Obesity.
- Memory loss, difficulty concentrating.

The Covid-19 pandemic has and will continue to cause significant impacts on the health of children, both those who contract Covid-19 and those who do not. However, only physical health is addressed, while mental health is more affected but less considered prevention and treatment.

In terms of learning

From the end of 2019 to the beginning of 2020, through 4 pandemics and the 4th one, which is not known when it will end, educational activities have been severely affected, especially ones from preschool to high school. They have had to pause their studies at school for a long time and then have to switch from face-to-face learning mainly to fully online learning. Online learning is a solution to help children avoid being infected in a crowded school environment, to implement social distancing measures in localities, and at the same time to help educational activities be carried out on schedule. However, the effectiveness of online learning and teaching activities is much lower than that of face-to-face teaching and learning. Accordingly, most children prefer to play rather than sit still and study, so it is necessary to supervise teachers and parents throughout their learning process. Meanwhile, regulations on online teaching and learning have not been issued and implemented synchronously and uniformly. Each locality, school, and teacher has a different way of implementing and supervising students. Therefore, learning effectiveness depends significantly on the children's sense of initiative in learning and the parent's interest in their children's education. Children who lack studying facilities have to look with friends or choose to leave school because they do not have the conditions and their parents cannot monitor, supervise, and help their children to participate in online learning because parents themselves do not know anything about information technology. On the other hand, the internet system in many places is not stable, so their understanding is also interrupted. The fact that localities have a policy that when students return to face-to-face learning, they will allow the results of online teaching to be checked before continuing to teach the program. That method takes additional measures for students who lack knowledge in the online learning process shows that the government and education industry also clearly see that online learning is ineffective.

In terms of entertainment

Not being able to go to school, they lose space and opportunities to play and communicate with friends and teachers. With limited movement, children lose time to participate in outdoor activities. This is a considerable loss for children. Many of them are sad and disappointed when they cannot go to school and learn online. Instead, they will come to electronic games or online games on phones, pads, and computers. The harmful effects of indulging in these games are sometimes their health and their personality formation in the future.

Being bereaved of close relatives, then becoming orphans

According to a brief report of the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, by the end of October 14, 2021, the whole country has had more than 2,184 orphaned and helpless children due to the

impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. There are 2,084 single orphans and more than 41 total orphans due to the pandemic.⁷ Being bereaved of the father or mother is a massive shock to children because they have lost their parents' care, both physically and emotionally. Many children fall into an unbalanced state in life, bewildered and worried because they have lost their everyday life. This can be the cause that can lead to mental illnesses such as depression, autism, and even thoughts of death.

SUGGESTIONS

From the above negative impacts, it is necessary to take measures to minimize the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on children, not only with material support but also with emotional and spiritual support. Over the past time, the Government has had policies to support children to overcome the pandemic more safely. Specifically, on July 07, 2021, the Prime Minister issued Decision No. 23/2021/QĐ-TTg stipulating the implementation of many policies to support employees and employers who face difficulties due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Accordingly, Article 25 of the Decision stipulates that children (people under 16 years of age under the provisions of the Law on Children) and people who are treated for Covid-19 infection (as known as F0) or who perform medical isolation for the prevention of Covid-19 (as known as F1) according to the decision of the competent authority is one of the beneficiaries of support. A meal allowance is at the rate of VND 80,000/person/day for the cases of people being treated for Covid-19 (F0), from April 27, 2021, to December 31, 2021, support time according to actual treatment time but no more than a maximum of 45 days. According to the competent authority's decision, a meal allowance is at the rate of VND 80,000/person/day for cases of people performing medical isolation (F1), from April 27, 2021 to December 31, 2021, the maximum support period of 21 days. During treatment due to Covid-19 infection or medical isolation, children will receive one-time additional support of 1,000,000 VND/child. Thus, for children infected with Covid-19 or subject to concentrated isolation due to direct contact with people with Covid-19, they will be supported with a daily meal allowance of VND 80,000 during the period of treatment and isolation, but no more than a maximum of 45 days. At the same time, one-time money support with the level of VND 1,000,000/child. However, this is financial support, only contributing a tiny part to solving children and their families' difficulties. Meanwhile, the mental damage is too significant, and the Government is confused, even there is no solution in solving this problem. Here are some suggestions to help limit the negative impacts children will have to suffer due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Establishing a fund to protect children affected by the Covid-19 pandemic

The Ministry of Labour, Invalids should establish this fund, and Social Affairs to call for the contributions of the whole society, domestic and foreign benefactors to create a separate fund to support children affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The fund needs to be established and have specific operating regulations to ensure that money is received and given publicly transparent, timely, and suitable.

Creating a spiritual fulcrum for children

The Central Youth Union should call on localities to establish volunteers to help them mentally, especially the children who become orphans due to the pandemic. Support can be provided in many ways, directly or indirectly. This is very important because children

⁷ Portal of the Central Military Commission and the Ministry of National Defense "ca-nuoc-co-hon-2-000-tre-em-mo-coi-do-covid-19-lam-gi-de-co-giai-phap-ho-tro-lau-dai"

are in a state of panic, anxiety, and loneliness. If there is spiritual support, it will help them overcome the crisis better, be more positive, and limit them to fall into social crimes, criminal, etc. Participants in this network need to be selected and have specific standards such as knowledge of child psychology and experiences in handling problems related to children. At the same time, volunteers' activities also need to be monitored by assessing children's progress from home and school. This is to avoid people taking advantage of the support network to approach children and entice them into harmful activities. For children who have been bereaved of parents and have no close relatives, the local authorities can search for infertile families and encourage them to accept the children for adoption. This is a very human activity, creating a refuge for the children.

Parents need to set up a daily schedule for their children

For children under ten years old, parents should have a specific activity schedule for a day - including playtime for children to chat with friends on the phone, playtime without contact with technology tools, and time helping parents with housework. Children will feel more relieved when they have a sense of certainty, know in advance what activities will be in the day, when to study and when to play. For children aged 10-11 years old, parents should let children design their timetable. Please suggest what to include in the schedule and build a daily plan with them. If parents cannot stay at home to accompany their children to implement the schedule, it is necessary to spend time at the end of the day to summarize with their children the program's implementation for that day.

There should be unified regulations on online teaching and learning

The Ministry of Education and Training needs to issue cooperative online teaching and learning guidelines throughout the country. Avoid letting each locality or teacher have their ways, which quickly leads to arbitrary and negligent teaching. These regulations should aim to harmonize the results achieved by protecting children's physical and mental health. There should be additional compulsory activities to help children relax and move between school hours. This is small but has a significant effect on helping children not fall into a state of stress, fatigue, and depression due to having to study online.

Giving children opportunities to suggest how to solve their problems

It is necessary to acknowledge the children's suggestions in solving the problems that children face and will have to suffer in the future. The children themselves understand each other and know what they and their peers need to get through the pandemic safely. We do not fully accommodate all of the children's suggestions, but there will be valuable and workable suggestions to help solve their problems.

CONCLUSION

Children are vulnerable groups in society. Experiencing and living with the pandemic causes them significant impacts, mainly negative ones. Health, learning, and entertainment, which are all core issues in children's lives have been disturbed. The pandemic also put them at various illness threats, loss of knowledge, retardation, grief, etc. Therefore, it is necessary to have effective solutions to minimize the impacts of the pandemic on children in Vietnam. The above resolutions may help partially solve the physical and mental problems for the children. However, for mentioned solutions to be implemented in reality, it is required that all levels of Government and organizations closely coordinate and focus more on caring for and helping children, not only during the pandemic but also after the pandemic is over. In particular, it is necessary to listen to what the children say and what they want to help accordingly.

REFERENCES

Legislation

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