

Covid-19 Pandemic and its Effects on the Orphan and Vulnerable Children of Assam: An Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Covid-19 has affected a large number of children across the country. It affects manifold of our society. It has damages various sectors of society like education, economic, social, cultural etc. Both corona virus and lockdown impact a lot on the life of children. The second wave of Covid-19 in India is leaving devastating impacts on the physical and emotional well being of children. The Covid-19 increases the risk of child protection, exploitation, child marriage, child labor, dropping out from school as well as it impacts on the emotional and psycho social well being of children. In this research paper an attempt has been made to study the effect of Covid-19 on the orphan vulnerable children of Assam.

Key Words: Covid-19, Pandemic, Children, Vulnerable Children, Orphan.

INTRODUCTION

The world is facing an unprecedented challenge in the form of Covid-19. Globally more than 157 million people have so far been infected with Covid-19 with over 3.28 million lives lost. COVID-19 has highlighted inequalities in every area of our social life. Significantly, they have felt along the lines of gender, caste, ethnicity, races, class and disabilities. India witnessed one of the world's severest national lockdown, declared at a four hour notice.(Chaudhuri,2021) In India, children constitute 39 % of the population, out of which over 2, 50,000 lives have been lost to the pandemic until mid May- 2021. As per the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, almost 88 percent of the lives lost are in the age group of 45 or above. It is also found that, many children have to survive without one or both parents. According to UNICEF report over 290 million children out of school due to Covid-19. Due to Covid-19 families resorting to negative coping mechanism including child labor, marriage and institutionalization. Child marriage is cheaper and easier during Covid-19. It is also found that 3,33,000 children reached with psychological support due to Covid-19. Through Childline, 4 million calls of children in distress assisted. As of September 2020, children under 18 years comprised 8.5% of all reported Covid-19 cases in the world. Research across the globe has shown that children and adolescents who are infected with Covid-19 exhibit fewer symptoms are less likely to become severely ill when they do get infected, and have lower chances of transmitting the virus than adults. Globally more than 8 in 10 children felt that they were learning little or nothing at all, and two thirds of parents and caregivers reported their child had received no contact from teachers since their school closed. According to National Commission for protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) in its submission to the Supreme Court, said 9,346 children have lost at least one of the parents to corona virus, including over 1,700 who have lost both their parents.

The PM CARES for children scheme was launched by the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India on 29th May

2021 for the children. It aims to support children who have lost both the parents or legal guardian or adoptive parents or surviving parents to Covid-19. The objective of the scheme is to ensure comprehensive care and protection of children in a sustained manner, and enable their wellbeing through health insurance, empower them through education and equip them for self sufficient existence with financial support on reaching 23 years of age.

ORPHAN AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN IN ASSAM

In Assam children in rural areas are 2.4 times more likely to die before the age of 5 years than urban children. In urban areas the under 5 mortality rate is 27 while in rural areas it averages 65 and goes up to 80 in certain districts. A serious setback in the ability to achieve healthy lives for all children in Assam is low immunization coverage. Nearly 67,000 elementary schools have been set up in Assam. Approximately 90,000 children with different abilities have been mainstreamed into schools, while home-based education has been provided to approximately 10,000 children by experts and resource persons. Despite this progress there are still over 1, 00,000 children are still out of school in Assam. In 2016, the Assam government launched a strategic vision document “Assam 2030 – Our Dream, Our Commitment as a roadmap to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with child development a vital aspect of this vision.

The department of social welfare was established in the year 1965. The Department has mandate to ensure proper care of the uncared, most vulnerable sections of the society. Later on, the integrated child protection scheme is run by state child protection society in Assam. It is a registered society under the aegis of department of social welfare, Assam, at present it is known as Mission Vatsalya.

State Child Protection Society (SCPS), 2015 Assam is a registered society under the department of social welfare, government of Assam. The society was notified by government of Assam on 12th July, 2010. SCPS was registered under the societies act on 15th June, 2015. The scheme aims at providing a holistic child protection mechanism both at the preventive and rehabilitative aspect for children in need of care and protection and children in conflict with law. State Child Protection Society is mandated to implement all the components of the scheme in a manner as prescribed in the scheme and the juvenile justice (Care and Protection of Children) act, 2000, repealed in 2015. State Child Protection Society (SCPS), is the highest state level office to monitor the district level office and other civil society organization of that particular state.

In Assam, there are one twenty two (122) children home or child care institutions. Out of which 10 numbers are Government run Child Care Institution, 62 numbers are NGO run Child Care Institution not receiving Grant-in-aid, 26 numbers are NGO run Child Care Institution receiving Grant-in-Aid, 21 numbers are Specialized Adoption Agencies, 3 numbers are Open Shelters.

Objectives

The objectives of the present study are mention below:

1. To examine, how Covid-19 impact on the education system, mental health of children and how it effect upon the orphan and vulnerable children of the society.
2. To understand the scenario of orphan and vulnerable children in Assam during the time of Covid-19
3. To study the role of Assam Government for the orphan and vulnerable children during the time of Covid-19.

METHODOLOGY

The Information presented for prepare this work are mainly secondary sources which collected from

published articles, reports and websites specially on impact of Covid-19 pandemic on orphan and vulnerable children of society. Journal is also referred relating to Covid-19.

COVID-19 AND ITS EFFECT ON THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN

The Covid-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected marginalized sections globally, with school closure and online education emerging largely as the substitute; children from underprivileged backgrounds have been the worst hit. In India numerous girls at the intersections of gender, class and other structural hierarchies like caste, have little or no access to the internet or digital education, the economic crisis brought about by the pandemic is going to push them towards child labor. According to the National Sample Survey (NSS) around 75th, only 10.7 percent of Indian households have a computer and only 23.8 percent have Internet access. The Reserve Bank of India saw the Covid-19 outbreak, and subsequently, prolonged lockdown is likely to have a devastating impact on the overall economy of the country (Rahman, 2021)

In India school closures have affected 320 million students (UNESCO, 2020). Only 37.6 million children across 16 states are continuing education through various education initiatives such as online classrooms and radio programmes, etc. (UNICEF, 2020a). Different study of Survey by save the children during the pandemic reports the discontinuation of children's education in 62 percent of the surveyed household with 67 percent in rural and 55 per cent in urban areas, respectively. Assam has been even more vulnerable to the pandemic. Online courses were taken during Covid-19 although it could not be effective due to the irregularities in the network and electricity. Similarly the majority of the people of Assam are in the lower middle class. Due to the unavailability of facilities some students had to stay away from this system.

Some of the positive impacts of the pandemic on children are learning new educational skills, developing greater inner strength, developing relationships and empathy while some of the negative impacts are feelings of deprivation in terms of education, anxiety about the future, health issues, and addiction to the internet. (Anand, 2021)

COVID-19 AND ITS EFFECT ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF CHILDREN

Due to lockdown, many children have had no physical access to friends, peers, schoolmates and relatives for over several months. Limited or no opportunity for outdoor play and socialization may also impact children adversely, making them easily bored, angry and frustrated. Children may experience a range of psychological issues such as anxiety, low mood, insomnia and loss of appetite. Quarantine, isolation and traumatic bereavement may also lead to post traumatic stress disorder. According to UNICEF reports, the Indian association for child and adolescent mental health also suggest that children need reassurance that this time will pass, it is important for parents and caregivers to be calm and proactive, letting the child feel their emotions, check in with them about what they are hearing and doing, and by monitoring their own and their children's behavior.

COVID-19 AND ORPHAN AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN OF ASSAM

The pandemic strike of covid-19 infection has caused substantial changes in the lives of people, Children being another vulnerable group and biggest victims of this attack may have changes in their lives in profound ways especially in those of lower socio economic group. More significantly this pandemic attack is impacting the overall development of children including nutrition, physical health, mental health, family economic growth, cognitive learning, safety at home, social development, protection and creativity of these little kids. (Sennyappan, et.al. 2021) Over 34,000 children under 18 infected with Covid-19 since April in this year when the second wave of the pandemic began in the state .According to National Health Mission,

Assam, the state has recorded 280,504 cases of Covid-19 since April 1. While 5755 of those cases were of children under 5 years, 28,851 cases belonged to those between 6 to 18 years. From April 1 to June 26 this year, total number of Covid infected persons in the state was 2, 80,504. This included 34,606 children up to the age of 18 years. Further analysis showed that 5,755 of these children were less than five and 28,851 between 6-18 years. The number of infected persons from April 1, 2021 to June 26 2021 was 2, 80,504. An analysis of the 34,606 children and teenagers showed 5,755 were less than five years old and 28,851 were between six and less than 18. The state government has promoted TV based educational programmes and mobile app based learning as the main substitutes to the classrooms. National Commission for Protection of child Rights (NCPCR) in an affidavit filed before the supreme court of India has shared six point schemes, to ensure care and protection to children, who have lost one or both their parents to the pandemic. Data of 9346 affected children have been uploaded on the newly created Bal Swaraj portal, which includes data 1,742 children who lost both parents, 7,464 now in a single parent household, 140 have been abandoned from March 2020 to May 29, 2021.

Assam Government Scheme for Orphan and Vulnerable Children during Covid-19

The chief minister of Assam Himanta Biswa Sarma had announced the Shishu Seva Scheme on May 29 on the occasion of the completion 7 years of Modi Government. Under the scheme, the state will give Rs 3500 per month per child including central government support of Rs 2000. Considering the marriage component of the scheme, state government will extend one time financial package as marriage assistance. Government will give one tola of gold under Arundhati Scheme and an amount of Rs 50,000 to each girl. Further for skill development and training, laptops or tablets will be provided to school or college going orphan for undergoing vocational training. The Assam Government through the Chief Minister's Shishu Seva Scheme providing Rs.3500 per month to the guardian of every child orphaned due to Covid-19 in the state, for their education and skill development. As per this scheme those children who have lost both their parents and are being looked after by their extended family members will be entitled to Rs. 3,500 financial aid per month. Children below the age of 10 years without any family support will be provided shelter at Child Care Institutions. Under this scheme, children will receive a fixed deposit of 7,81,000 Rs. with a monthly interest of Rs. 3,500 till they attain the age of 24. The principal amount of Rs. 781,000 will be credited to the account of the beneficiary. Apart from this, children will also receive a laptop and a skill-based education. Adolescent girls who have been orphaned will be accommodated at reputed institutions like Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya to ensure that they are cared for sensitively and provided proper protection.

CONCLUSION

Covid-19 has impacted every sphere of our society. The pandemic effects a lot of children among which vulnerable sections are highly influenced through it. Though it has created many challenges in our society and become a hindrance in the path of development of every country of the world but at the same time, it creates many new ideas and opportunities in society. Though government has taken various steps to give support to the orphan and vulnerable children of our society but it should develop more creative strategies to support the vulnerable section of our society.

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