



# COMMUNITY HEALTH AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

(PERSPECTIVES, CHALLENGES AND POLICIES)



UGC National Seminar Proceedings

Editor

**Prof. M. Trimurthi Rao**

Department of Sociology and Social Work  
ACHARYA NAGARJUNA UNIVERSITY

Nagarjuna Nagar - 522 510, Guntur  
Andhra Pradesh, India

**Community Health and Sustainable  
Development Goals  
(Perspectives, Challenges and Policies)**

**Dedicated to**  
**Late (Shri) Prof. Y. C. Simhadri**  
**Sociologist and Former Vice-Chancellor &**  
**Founder, Dept. of Sociology, Social Work & IRPM, ANU**  
**&**  
**Late (Shri) Prof. M. Lakshmipathi Raju**  
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(PERSPECTIVES, CHALLENGES AND POLICIES)

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The Department of Sociology and Social Work, Acharya Nagarjuna University is planned to conduct the ANU & UGC Sponsored Two Day National Seminar on “**Community Health and Sustainable Development Goals (Perspectives, Challenges and Policies)**” on 20<sup>th</sup>& 21<sup>st</sup>March 2023.

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# Impact of COVID-19 on Mental Health of Children with Disabilities and their Families

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## Abstract

COVID 19 virus outbreak shuttered the whole world which termed as pandemic by World Health Organization in March, 2020. (WHO, 2020). The physical risks of COVID-19 were promoted elaborately and very few were discussed about mental health issues of COVID-19 on children with disabilities and their families. The present paper reviewed about major mental health issues relating to children with disabilities and their families during COVID19 and suggested measures to meet the emergency crisis of pandemic in future.

## **Introduction**

Today nearly 240 million children in the world have some form of disability. This estimate is higher than previous figures and is based on a more meaningful and inclusive understanding of disability, which considers several domains of functioning, including those related to psychosocial well-being. Children with disabilities who develop an illness or infection are more susceptible to severe illness, poorer health outcomes and hospitalization than children without disabilities. However, around the world, children with disabilities face significant barriers in accessing care, including stigma, lack of financial resources, inaccessible facilities, lack of transportation, an absence of privacy at care facilities and inadequately trained health-care staff. (UNICEF,2022).When compared to children without disabilities, children with disabilities and their parents/families face lot of problems and it was accelerated during COVID19.

The present paper reviewed about major mental health issues relating to children with disabilities during COVID19.The barriers to health care during COVID-19 make the parents and children with disabilities more vulnerable. Last two years have been tough for children with disabilities and their parents due to long hours of isolation, prolonged care and fractured learning routines.

## **COVID -19 Education of Children with Disabilities**

Education provides children with the knowledge and skills they need to grow and prosper, creating well-being, pathways to future opportunities and healthier lives. As mentioned in Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG) has put quality education for all children and specifically focus on ensuring equal participation in education for children with disabilities. Despite that children with disabilities falling behind, due to multiple barriers, including stigma, lack of trained teachers, inadequate learning materials and inaccessible facilities. This can be compounded by negative beliefs about the capabilities of children with disabilities. COVID19 make the situation more worsen. Prolonged lockdown make children confined to home, and parents faced more stress and burden to handle their children with Disabilities.

## **COVID-19 Crisis and Parents of Children with Disabilities**

COVID-19 has unprecedented and disproportionate impact on children with disabilities, their parents and families. Research on experience of parenting of children with disabilities shows that, multiple challenges it poses on parents and families. These parents are at risk of distress, agony, poor physical health, mental health and general wellbeing. (Estes et.al, 2009). Worldwide, the restrictions imposed during pandemic leads major disruptions in the lives of families of children with disabilities and also families of children without disabilities. Studies on COVID -19 lockdowns have pointed to the potential adverse impact on the mental health and wellbeing of parents and other family members. Especially parents of young children have been especially vulnerable, as they were confined to their homes, lost financial resources, confused with conflicting information from media, suffered with multiple roles, last special education services and welfare service supports (Yale et.at. 2022).

Children with disabilities affected much due to COVID-19, with disruption in their routines, loss of essential services and supports. Shutting down of Day care as well as inclusive school services is a big blow to the parent's especially primary caregiver faced a lot of problem with heavier responsibilities such as to meet the demands of family members, take care of children with special needs, to meet the demands of normal siblings lead lot of mental pressure to the mothers in the families. Further the parents are not able to use the support of therapists (Speech Therapy, Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy and Yoga therapy) due to the pandemic situation. Social Distancing and Confinement to home can prove to be real struggle to the children with disabilities especially children with Intellectual disabilities and Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (Yale et.al. 2022).



During April,2020, overall in 189 countries in the world suspended schools (UNICEF,2020).Entire Education system moved to online classes and very little benefitted to children with special needs because most of online platforms are not compatible with assistive technology used for teaching Visual impairments or who are hard of hearing (Hills,2020).Children with Special Needs not able to enjoy the recreational activities that can be done at home can prove to be more frustrating for children with physical disabilities. And it is more difficult to teach social skills and social interaction skills to children with Autism Spectrum disorders (ASD). Uncertainty and lack of routine can make children with Autism Spectrum disorders feel more anxious, restless and irritable, develop more maladaptive behaviours. Social distancing and lack of outdoor activities deteriorate the development of children with Disabilities

As per UNESCO (2019) in India there were about 7.8 million children are in the age group of 0-18 years, out of which one fourth of children not attending any educational institutions. In the study of Tandon (2020), it was noticed that due to COVID 19, children with disabilities experiencing negative emotions, mood changes, changes in eating and sleeping patterns put them at a greater risk of experiencing relapse of mental health problems as well as aggravating existing mental health issues. In India, this becomes a cause of concern as there is lack of physical infrastructure, inclusive education facilities and assistive technologies. Along with these problems, being confined to home during pandemic leads to elevated level of frustration and helplessness in such children and their families. Many families of children with disabilities not having access of online classes like their counterpart's leads to a dearth of providing special education assistance to children. Parents cannot replace special teachers and there exists a lack of assistive technologies. (Rayan, 2008; Samadi et.al. 2018).These impacts on the development of Children with disabilities. Globally the lives of children with physical and mental disabilities need to be recognized and prioritized in the planning during pandemic situations.

Parents and families of children with disabilities experienced higher levels of stress and anxiety. Parents were left with little time to their own needs, reporting negative emotions stemming from the burden and from their perception of their parental functioning, including anger, guilt, nervousness, anxiety, fatigue, and loneliness (Samadi et.al. 2018). There is an extended responsibility for parents as they are playing multiple roles. Stress experienced by parents can negatively affect their children. Parents of young children face tremendous stress and it is their responsibility to explain to their children transparently about pandemic by getting down into their level. As effective communication about sensitive information has a long-term effect on

psychological wellbeing of children with disabilities. (Dalton et al., 2020). Lack of knowledge about pandemic leads to fear and which further lead to incorrect decision making by parents (Tandon 2020). Thus primary caregivers should spend quality time with their children with special needs. The other family members in the family must share the responsibilities. A system of online clinics or tele-clinics, volunteer based psychological interventions, supply of medicines to the needy families should be setup to mitigate effects of pandemics like COVID-19 on children with mental health issues (Holmes et al.,2020).UNICEF provided resources on children with disability during COVID-19 can be effectively followed (UNICEF 2020).

### **Recommendations**

Based on the themes identified in literature, it is recommended that:

- During pandemic situations, the education system and welfare system must address the emergency needs of Children with disabilities and families of Children with disabilities. For this long term planning is required and policy makers must brainstorm and develop appropriate infrastructure, Assistive Technologies to accommodate the needs of children with Disabilities and also training facilities to the parents of children with disabilities at their leisure times.
- A mechanism must be developed with National Institutions for persons with disabilities, Government and Non-Government agencies, Parents Associations, which are working for Children with disabilities, develop short videos' relating to functional training of children with disabilities with the duration of 20 minutes. So that, primary caregiver or any one of the family member can accommodate with child with disabilities during pandemic times.
- It is recommended to take the support of NSS units/NGO's/volunteer services of Ward and Village Secretariat system (System available in the state of Andhra Pradesh, India) to deliver medicines and to meet other medical emergencies of children with disabilities.
- Department of Humanities and Social Sciences in Universities/Colleges who are competent to deliver counseling services to parents of children with disabilities must establish a helpline during pandemic situation and voluntarily serve the needy. So that it gives psychological support to the family members.
- The Competent authorities must upgrade the tele-health platforms to meet the remote sustainable health care programs for children with Disabilities and also for parental consultations.



All the above measures will reduce the stress and anxiety among families of children with disabilities and make them to face the situation confidently during pandemic situation.

## Conclusion

Parents of children with disabilities facing complex situations as lack of services accommodated to meet the needs of children with disabilities. Families of children with disabilities must understand the burden of primary caregiver and extend their support to the primary caregiver to provide special education services in home. Along with this, it becomes important to keep children with disabilities not only physically safe, but also look after their psychological and emotional wellbeing. National and International research is required on impact of pandemic on mental health consequences on children with disabilities is of utmost importance to seek long term solutions to combat these issues.

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## *About the Editor*



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