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A Study of Covid-19 Pandemic Towards the Changing Scenario of School Education and Its Effects on Children

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Abstract: ***The outbreak of Covid-19 epidemic has affected our education system. The educational institutes were closed due to the this epidemic around the world, due to which the education and the learning process of children was badly affected. During the pandemic, due to the sudden closure of schools, the traditional classroom based Indian schooling system has now shifted to an unplanned online based education system for which we were not prepared well neither mentally nor technically. The access to digital devices is not very common in India especially in those areas which are backward in network and other cyber facilities. A group of guardians, one of the main constraints is the ability and affordability of the device and the internet. Due to this pandemic the child labours are increasing and the mental health of the children is also affected adversely.***
Keywords: Covid pandemic, online education

I. INTRODUCTION

From the year 2020, the corona virus spread worldwide from Wuhan province of China wreaked havocs the entire governments and public systems and still continuing. Now the year 2022 has started and still the question is arising in everyone's mind that when is the end of this pandemic which is coming again and again in different forms with different names of mutated strains. At present, even doctors and scientists do not have the answer to this question. But in the midst of this havoc, people have learned to live with it. Masks and sanitizers have become the parts of our daily life styles.

While the first and second waves of the corona pandemic affected people of all age groups in almost every country, the recently revealed new variant of the virus, Omicron, has raised the possibility of a third wave. In such a situation, once again the brakes have been put on the vehicle of life that was recently returned on track. In view of this, strict restrictions have been imposed in all places especially during festivals. After a long time, open schools and colleges are once again on the verge of closure. The outbreak of this epidemic has also affected our education system. Schools were closed due to the Corona epidemic around the world, due to which the education and the learning process of children was badly affected. In the present article, we have discussed about the effect of Covid-19 on the education system and the school going children.

II. EFFECTS OF COVID-19 EPIDEMIC ON SCHOOL EDUCATION

Covid-19 entered the country on 30 January 2020 from a patient found in Kerala and gradually by the end of 2020; it showed many scenes of devastation in the country. This had a huge impact, not only on industries and business, but it also had a major impact on schools and therefore on the mental state and mood of children. Most of the schools across India have been closed for almost two years due to the pandemic. Children are studying online at home. The normal routine of school students, which does not only involve direct learning in the classroom, but also sports, hobby development, other extra-curricular activities, has been disrupted.

This sudden change has affected a large number of children from all states, classes and genders. The children are imprisoned in a kind of prison especially the houses which belong to single family and are already living in a kind of isolation in small flats or houses. There is some relief in joint families and big houses, but the children of nuclear families and working couples' families have been adversely affected by this pandemic-induced prison. According to a recent UNICEF study, the closure of schools has affected 286 million students, of whom 48 percent are girls, and who study in pre-primary to higher secondary schools. In India, during the pandemic, due to the sudden closure of schools, the traditional classroom based Indian schooling system has now shifted to an unplanned online based education system. We were not prepared well neither mentally nor technically for this sudden challenge of online education. This unexpected technological change is not only dividing students, digitally, but also slowing down their ability to learn and their overall progress. Collectivism not only enhances the ability to learn in different ways, but it also prepares the children mentally to deal with different types of challenges. On children, in addition to their learning capacity and diversity, the absence of schooling will also have a long-term impact on the overall development of children and adolescents.

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III. ONLINE EDUCATION SYSTEM AND THE MAJOR PROBLEMS IN ITS IMPLEMENTATION

The concept of school-college itself changed due to the pandemic. Classes and exams were taken virtually during the pandemic. Physical presence of a student in school-college, university is important for intellectual, social and emotional development, but due to the pandemic, many students were forced to take online admission, classes and exams. Due to which the students and teachers were physically away. The problems also started arising due to continuous hours of sitting on the screen of mobiles and computers.

One of the key findings of this study is that, "Students are spending more time on self-study but learning less when school is closed, whereas, they spend less time in school and learn more." In schools, they learn courses in greater quantities and more rapidly, despite less time. Whereas giving more time on self study at home, i.e. online, they are not able to learn much. The difference lies in the merits of group and individual studies.

According to the data in the study, 97% of the students spend an average of 3 to 4 hours a day studying and learning. But 3-4 hours of reading per day is less than the amount of direct schooling. Also, even after school opens, students usually spend time on homework, tutoring, and other self-directed, things-to-know activities. Collectivism increases the ability to learn, craving and eagerness, while solo study becomes dull and boring. This study is on school children and not on those with a tendency to self-study.

The access to digital devices is not very common in India especially in those areas which are backward in network and other cyber facilities. This was the reason that where a large number of students could not attend the classes due to lack of smartphones, computers, networks etc. On the other hand, in spite the online classes, the grade level of the children dropped because the childrens' ability to learn was affected.

The loss in education was mainly due to five reasons- digital divide, sluggish administration in government institutions, lack of already existing capacity, prolonged lockdown and weak online study/teaching content. In many surveys, it was revealed that children of primary classes were also backward in language and mathematical ability.

IV. FAILURE OF ONLINE EDUCATION

In order to assess the impact of the closure of schools during the Corona pandemic on the learning capacity of students (the impact of Covid-19 on education), UNICEF has conducted six states, Assam, Collected data from Bihar, Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh and evaluated and studied them. This study has been done under the project "School closure in the context of "Covid".

According to this study, in the above six states, 10 percent of the students are deprived of any device like smart phone, feature phone, TV, radio, or laptop/computer etc. This is mainly the plight of rural areas, where there are schools and teachers but there are no necessary tools for online education. It can also be said in this way that the access of technology to the masses is still a long way off.

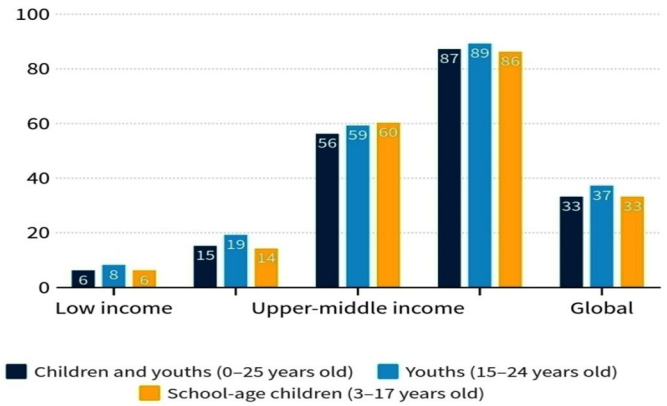


Figure 1: Percentage of children and young people with internet access at home

It is also an astonishing fact that despite the availability of distance learning resources, online facilities in many localities, 40 per cent of students in the six states surveyed have not accessed any form of distance or online learning since the closure of schools. When students who didn't use online learning were asked why they didn't use online learning tools, 73 percent of students attributed it to lack of awareness of learning materials or resources. Figure 1 shows the results of a survey regarding the access of internet by different income group people.

The above studies indicate two important problems. One, the potential of online learning resources and secondly awareness of them. For a parent or a group of guardians, one of the main constraints is the ability and affordability of the device and the internet (data), i.e. they want to teach online but do not have the financial capacity to provide the necessary tools for online education.

V. POSITIVE ASPECTS OF ONLINE EDUCATION

However, online classes have also had some advantages. From attending classes to participate in exams, doing everything online has enabled even small children to move ahead in technology. Along with them, such parents of children who used to run away from technology have also started learning it for the education of their children. From running smartphones, computers, laptops on their own for searching anything to make projects; small children and parents have started doing things together.

VI. SIDE EFFECTS OF PANDEMIC ON SCHOOL GOING STUDENTS

A. Increase in Child Labour

A recent survey in West Bengal has found that child labour among school-going children has increased by 105% during the pandemic. A similar survey also found that the study of children was affected by 62 per cent of the households, with 67 per cent in rural areas and 55 per cent in urban areas, respectively during this pandemic. Another similar survey was done on the different income groups in different areas as shown in the figure 2.

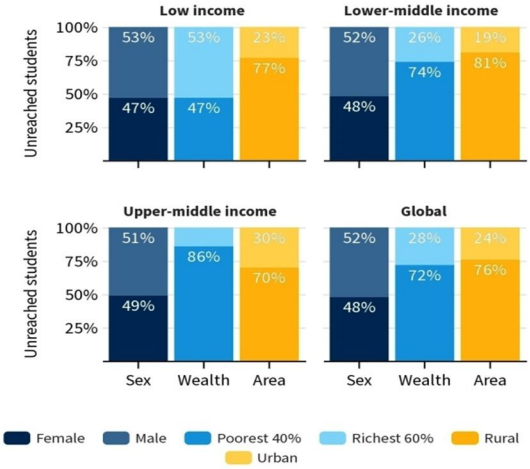


Figure 2: Representation of unreached students from different income groups

The pandemic had a massive impact on the country's economy. The country's GDP had already declined by 2 percent till March 31, 2020, due to the demonetisation in 2016. And when the pandemic hit, prolonged intermittent lock-downs, widespread and nationwide displacement of workers caused the country's unemployment rate increased further and subsequently causing a recession-like situation. It had a direct impact on the lifestyle of the people and hence the education of children. People lacked money to educate children in schools. So education, which is not in the government's priority anyway, is now slowly getting out of priority even in these poor families. Its impact will be more on those poor families who are facing budget constraints. As a result, children from poorer families will drop out of school and engage in economic activities to help in their parents' earnings. It is clear that the longer children are out of school, the more vulnerable they become and the less likely they are to return to school.

B. Impact on Mental Health of Students due to School Closure

In addition to the reduction in learning capacity, the mental health of students due to school closure has also been affected due to school closures. As students were confined to their homes in pandemic isolation, they were separated from their friends and teachers. At the same time, the impact of bad news coming in the epidemic which was on the elders of the house, their stress also adversely affected the mind and brain of children and adolescents.

The forced solitude of the home and the communication gap caused by the lack of close friends has greatly affected children's ability to learn and their natural inquisitiveness. One-third of students and nearly half of adolescents by age 13 have had poor or very poor mental health. Social isolation, learning disruption and family financial insecurity are major causes of poor mental health.

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VII. CONCLUSION

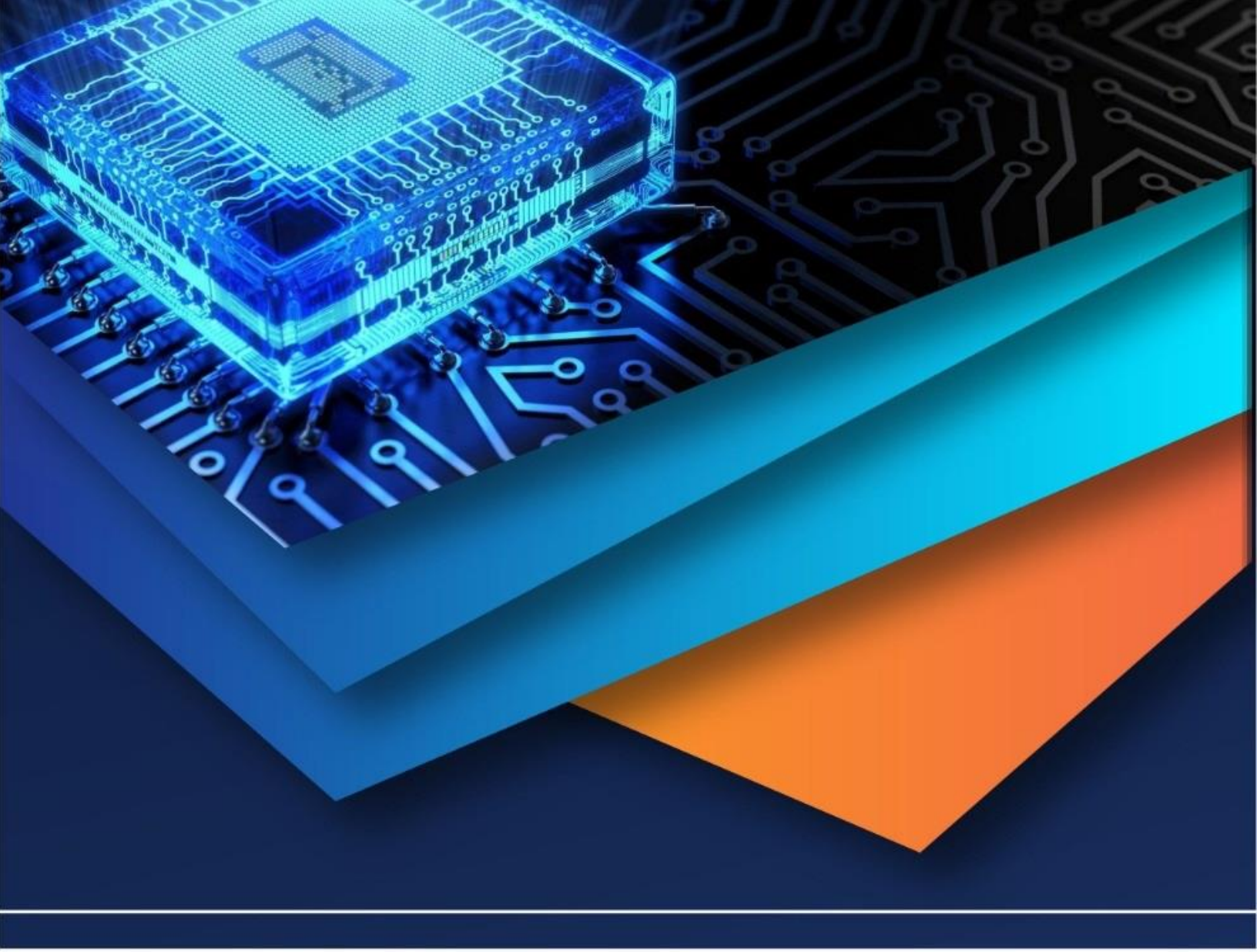
The government has to take the problems related to education seriously, especially school education. Talking about government school education in the country, its condition is not very good. Private schools are certainly many and are still opening, but they are also becoming expensive day by day and are beyond the reach of a normal salaried or lower middle class families. The government either has no control over the fee structure of such schools or the government deliberately does not want to control them. In such a situation, the real foundation of education which is laid in school education is not being formed well.

Epidemic is a temporary problem. The possibilities of vaccination and other treatments are being explored. The situation will be normal and schools will also open. But the education, at least school education should be accessible, it is essential for the betterment of the country and the society.

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