



The COVID-19 Challenges in Pakistan and the Significance of Strategic Management in Mitigating Inequality and Safeguarding Children

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Abstract: This article explores the pressing issues faced by children during the COVID-19 pandemic. The main goals involved in this endeavor are to minimize potential risks to the physical and mental well-being of children, ensure their access to necessities such as food, shelter, and education, and provide support and protection to those who are especially vulnerable, such as those living in low-income households or requiring additional assistance. Underprivileged populations have seen a disproportionate impact resulting from the accumulation of risks associated with COVID-19, hence emphasizing the urgent need to address these issues to alleviate additional instances of injustice. This study provides evidence that Pakistan's response to the unintended impacts of the COVID-19 epidemic on children's well-being needed to be more clear, despite worldwide efforts to reduce transmission. This underlined the significance of formulating and implementing a comprehensive policy aimed at safeguarding the safety and welfare of children amidst the ongoing pandemic. The research methodology employed in this study centered around the systematic observation and resolution of six prominent obstacles. The challenges encompassed in this context encompassed the improvement of the accessibility of safe water, sanitation, and hygiene, the mitigation of environmental degradation and climate change, the reduction of child poverty rates, the preservation of children's mental well-being, the expansion of educational opportunities for all children, and the guarantee of access to health and nutrition services. The main aim of this study was to support stakeholders and policymakers in formulating a policy framework that prioritizes the safety of children, especially those who are most vulnerable, both during and after the COVID-19 epidemic.

Keywords: COVID-19, Strategic Management, Inequality and Safeguarding Children

1. Introduction

Children are disproportionately affected by the current COVID-19 pandemic, even though they are not considered a medically high-risk demographic. The most important issues will be given priority in this summary, along with suggestions for quick actions that governments can take to lessen the negative consequences on children. Ensuring children receive enough nutrition, protecting them from physical and emotional harm, preventing damage, and minimizing academic failures should be the short-term policy priorities. Limitations, including substandard housing, destitution, and restricted access to essential services, are

common components of concentrated disadvantage that significantly affect people's outcomes from childhood to adulthood. The poorest children are likely to be the most severely affected by COVID-19, which will seriously damage their prospects for a better life unless swift action is taken to stop the virus's spread (Akseer, 2020).

According to preliminary medical data, adolescents are not disproportionately affected by COVID-19. Exposed children are likely to get a coronavirus infection, and they may have moderate symptoms compatible with COVID-19. However, young people bear a disproportionate amount of the COVID-19-related financial and social burden. One significant contributing element is the growing financial gap between parents, which affects their household standard of living and, in turn, their children's possibilities (Durrani, 2018).

The global COVID-19 pandemic is profoundly impacting children's daily lives. The disease and the seclusion and quarantine laws have an impact on almost every aspect of children's lives. The spread of COVID-19 interferes with the official care plans, educational programming, and leisure activities that early childhood programs, institutions, and other related entities provide. Over 1.5 billion kids and teenagers have been impacted by the 188 countries' school closure policies. COVID-19 increases vulnerability to abuse, malnourishment, and domestic violence. It is crucial to recognize that these policies will have a disproportionately negative impact on some young groups. Vulnerable populations include children living in poverty, disabled children, children receiving care outside the home, children in custody, and children who may be forced into child work. Governments will need to be ready to support a larger population because there is a chance that the epidemic may put more kids in danger (Rizwan, 2023).

1.1 Aim of the Study

Any strategy aimed at supporting children in navigating the current COVID-19 epidemic should prioritize the protection of the most susceptible persons, improving their availability to nourishing sustenance and educational prospects, and reducing potential threats to their physical and psychological welfare. Children hailing from socioeconomically disadvantaged origins, exhibiting special needs, or dwelling in households with limited financial resources are subject to a disproportionate impact of the hazards linked with the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to promote equitable economic development and mitigate the exacerbation of disparities among present and forthcoming cohorts of youngsters, expeditious measures must be taken to address these concerns.

Governments across the globe are currently implementing several steps in order to lessen the impact of the epidemic and hinder its propagation. In contrast to other nations that have implemented legislative measures to protect children from the unanticipated consequences of the epidemic, Pakistan needs a clearly defined strategy to respond to the COVID-19 crisis effectively. The administration of vaccines to children below the age of 15 has begun. Nevertheless, there currently needs to be a comprehensive strategy to ensure the protection and safety of these youngsters during the ongoing epidemic. Currently, it is imperative to develop and execute the policy.

2. Literature Review

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionately severe impact on the most economically disadvantaged children, particularly those who are homeless or under custodial care. The current crisis significantly impacts their health and social and financial well-being. The closure of educational institutions, the isolation of communities, and the confinement of children collectively contribute to the heightened susceptibility of youngsters to domestic violence, stress, and anxiety. Additionally, these circumstances impede their capacity to receive crucial family and care services (Nazroo et al., 2020).

Certain age groups will be disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and its attendant economic and societal implications. The degree to which children are exposed to the risks associated with COVID-19 is heavily influenced by socioeconomic factors, such as poverty and income disparity. School closures disproportionately impact children from low-income families due to their families' lower financial stability and increased vulnerability to employment and income losses. In developing nations, where a significant proportion of destitute households reside in densely populated areas and face extremely poor housing conditions,

implementing measures to control and reduce the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic may pose particular challenges (Azizi, 1999).

The incidence of child maltreatment has witnessed a notable surge in the wake of the COVID-19 epidemic. Factors like poverty, overcrowding, social isolation, intimate partner violence, and parental substance misuse have further intensified this unfortunate trend. The extended or intense activation of stress responses might potentially harm the well-being and growth of young children, especially those in their early stages of development. Moreover, the COVID-19 epidemic has had a substantial impact on the effectiveness of child protection services in assisting children who have experienced maltreatment. Child protection staff encounter challenges in assisting vulnerable children and their families, as well as effectively identifying possible hazards due to diminished interpersonal interactions (Durrani, 2017).

The COVID-19 pandemic poses a multitude of risks to the social, familial, and health aspects of children with disabilities. The scenario has caused significant disruption and strain for children, who generally experience positive development by establishing stable routines. Children who have disabilities may necessitate supplementary assistance in adjusting to the multitude of alterations and obtaining the essential safety competencies. The closure of schools has been found to result in a disproportionate impact on the attendance of children with disabilities. The viability of distance education relies on several elements, one of which is the ability of educational institutions to provide individualized instruction to each student. Children with impairments are more prone to experiencing a heightened vulnerability to learning regression during school holidays (Burki, 2015).

Roughly 20% of the global child population consists of individuals who are either internationally born or have at least one parent possessing a foreign passport. About the COVID-19 pandemic, these children are confronted with the highest degree of susceptibility. In each immigrant household, there exists a child who is below the relative poverty level. Moreover, the presence of excessive numbers of individuals in a household poses a substantial risk for children who are immigrants. The current economic climate is a significant challenge to immigrant parents, as they face unstable job circumstances that may have detrimental effects on the well-being of their children (Khushik, 2018). An estimated population of over thirteen million children currently resides as refugees, with a significant majority originating from poor nations. A considerable portion of these youngsters find themselves in a state of solitude without the presence of adult guardians. The presence of colonies or densely populated settlements in these nations poses increased risks for individuals residing there. These risks stem from their limited opportunities for formal education, exclusion from social protection programs, and potential negative impact on their overall well-being due to restrictions on their mobility. Moreover, the current COVID-19 crisis presents the potential for refugee children to be forcibly separated from their families if a parent contracts the virus and is placed under quarantine. This situation would have a detrimental impact on a significant portion of the child population (Nazroo et al., 2020).

3. Methodology

The research procedure will reveal the subsequent obstacles that hinder the development of efficient policies.

It is imperative to guarantee universal access to education for all children, which can be achieved, in part, by addressing the digital gap. The closing of international schools had a significant impact on the education of a substantial majority, specifically 91%, of children during the height of the closures. During the summer break, an estimated 463 million teenagers could not use distant learning opportunities. These children are currently facing an inherent disadvantage. Moreover, historical evidence indicates that female pupils, specifically, exhibit a decreased likelihood of re-enrolling in school following prolonged absences due to closures. Moreover, it is imperative to guarantee that every child possesses the necessary financial resources to access vaccines and healthcare services.

The COVID-19 epidemic has led to a child survival crisis for the most vulnerable children, exacerbating the already precarious state of their health and food systems. A disorganized and unjust approach to the vaccination

and treatment of COVID-19 will inevitably contribute to the protraction of the epidemic. In order to mitigate instances of child neglect, gender-based violence, and abuse, it is imperative to prioritize the protection and promotion of the mental well-being of children and adolescents. There is an increasing global recognition of the wide-ranging and pervasive ramifications stemming from instances of child abuse and neglect. The COVID-19 crisis has resulted in an exacerbation of violence, exploitation, and abuse, as it imposes an additional strain on families already experiencing high levels of stress and deprives children of crucial assistance. Due to the growing incidence of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy, females are more vulnerable to experiencing adverse consequences. Strengthen efforts focused on ameliorating and averting environmental deterioration and global warming.

Although establishing a direct causative link between climate change and COVID-19 is unlikely, there is substantial evidence suggesting that environmental degradation may act as a significant underlying risk factor. The implementation of life-saving sanitation practices, such as hand washing, is hindered by the inconsistent accessibility of safe drinking water, which can be attributed to the impacts of climate change. The present outbreak has highlighted the dangers of a delayed response to environmental deterioration and climate change. Cease the progression of child poverty and endeavor towards a thorough recuperation that benefits all members of society. It is projected that, by the conclusion of the current year, over 140 million more children will live below the poverty threshold in their respective countries as a consequence of the economic upheaval resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. During moments of economic recession, it is frequently observed that government projects aimed at minors are often scaled back. If this pattern continues on a global scale following the conclusion of the COVID-19 pandemic, the incidence of poverty and hardship among children will likely endure, extending beyond the resolution of the current crisis. Developing a comprehensive recovery strategy is of utmost importance in order to mitigate the risk of an extraordinary surge in child poverty, reaching levels not witnessed in decades.

Strengthen your efforts to protect children and families affected by calamity, conflict, and forced migration.

Prior to the onset of the pandemic, it was widely expected that the year 2020 would experience an unprecedented surge in demand for humanitarian aid, with a significant increase in the number of individuals in need of assistance. The increased vulnerability of children who are displaced, refugees, migrants, or residing in countries experiencing a crisis can be attributed to the widespread transmission of COVID-19. Furthermore, the ability to obtain essential and life-preserving aid for the most susceptible youngsters is progressively challenging, either as a result of ongoing conflicts or newly imposed limitations stemming from the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic should not serve as a justification for diminishing our attention and care towards these youngsters.

4. Discussion

An Urgent Appeal to Address the Detrimental Impact on the Physical and Emotional Well-being of Children

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, children are confronted with distinct health hazards, albeit typically exhibiting less severe manifestations compared to adults. However, it should be noted that these hazards may not be universally applicable to all infants since neonates with previous medical issues may demonstrate a heightened vulnerability. A matter of concern is the lack of a well-defined strategy in Pakistan to effectively address the distinctive health needs of the nation throughout the present pandemic (Malik, 2011). The potential presence of a viral danger, the implementation of school closures, and the adoption of isolation measures may hurt the psychological well-being of children. The prompt emphasizes the importance of promptly assessing and attending to the emotional well-being of persons as a means of mitigating any long-term adverse effects on mental health.

It is imperative to establish a reliable and continuous availability of nourishing meals for persons. The issue of food insecurity is becoming a growing concern due to multiple factors, such as inadequate financial assistance

for school lunch programs, interruptions in the distribution of food supply chains, and reductions in household income. Children from low-income households exhibit a higher incidence of malnutrition, which can lead to significant health and developmental challenges (Kema, 2006). The food of a child has a significant impact on both their physical and mental development. The absence of a well-defined policy may have adverse effects on the academic performance and overall health of children who are at risk.

The increased prominence of online learning has highlighted inequities in children's access to computers and internet connectivity. Children from low-income families may experience academic disparities compared to their more economically advantaged peers due to limited access to high-quality online learning resources. Extended periods of school closures can have a substantial negative impact on pupils' academic advancement, especially for those from socioeconomically challenged homes who do not have access to supplementary educational resources. To provide equal access to educational opportunities for all students, it is crucial for governing bodies to prioritize efforts aimed at reducing the achievement gap (Naveed, 2020).

In the context of a pandemic, children who possess inherent susceptibilities, such as impaired immune systems or belonging to economically disadvantaged households, encounter an escalated level of danger. Personalized assistance is vital in mitigating potential hazards to the security, welfare, and educational progress of persons. It is imperative to implement stringent procedures in order to ensure the protection of these children. This may involve the delivery of assistance services, psycho-therapeutic interventions, and access to resources for children with disabilities, alongside implementing various strategies aimed at ensuring the protection of children from unsafe household settings. In order to facilitate a comprehensive and prompt recovery among youngsters, implementing a vaccination campaign is of utmost importance. The administration of vaccinations has begun for those aged 15 and above. However, it is important to note that there is currently no established standardized process to protect younger individuals from the rapidly spreading epidemic. The successful return to normal activities and educational endeavors in youngsters relies on strict adherence to a vaccination schedule (Conway, 2021).

When formulating vaccination policy, it is imperative to take into account not only the physical health of children but also their educational advancement and social interactions, as these variables exert a substantial impact on their individual growth and maturation. Failing to acknowledge the challenges children face during the pandemic may lead to long-lasting consequences. The occurrence of negative experiences in this particular time frame has the potential to impede a child's prospects and exert long-lasting impacts on their development and advancement (Chachar, 2022). The widening of the wealth divide can be attributed to the disproportionate impact of the epidemic on children from low-income homes. It is crucial to prioritize the resolution of these challenges in order to hinder the proliferation of these disparities effectively (Akseer, 2020).

5. Conclusion

The analysis highlights key aspects of this matter, such as the state of children's physical and mental health, their access to school and nutrition, the lack of a standardized immunization procedure, and their safeguarding against potential risks. The failure to address these concerns may lead to the emergence of persistent disparities that have immediate and long-term consequences for children (Durrani, 2017). There is an urgent need for the implementation of policies and initiatives that place a high priority on the well-being of children. These actions are necessary to address existing disparities and guarantee the safety of children effectively. In order to achieve this purpose, it is imperative for civil society, governmental agencies at various levels, and other stakeholders to engage in collaborative efforts. Amidst the ongoing pandemic, it is imperative to prioritize the allocation of resources towards the enhancement of children's welfare in Pakistan. This need stems not only from a moral standpoint but also from a strategic perspective, as it is crucial for nurturing the development of a society that is both robust and characterized by equitable opportunities (Garcia, 2021).

The main aim of this study is to function as a catalyst for action, motivating readers to address these pressing concerns promptly. Prioritizing the needs of children will serve to alleviate the impacts of the pandemic and

foster a future society marked by equity and inclusiveness. The research article highlights the importance of special activities tailored to Pakistan, such as the formulation and execution of comprehensive child-centric policies by government authorities and policymakers. The allocation of resources for children in Pakistan in order to facilitate the provision of social services, education, and high-quality healthcare to children in Pakistan, it is imperative to allocate a budget that is specifically designed to meet their unique needs. To ensure the provision of immunizations and medical care for children living in marginalized areas of Pakistan, the country must prioritize the advancement of its healthcare infrastructure (Chachar, 2022). In order to ensure equal access to high-quality education for all children, regardless of their families' socioeconomic condition, it is crucial to commit money towards the improvement of Pakistan's technology infrastructure and support services.

To mitigate the psychological repercussions of the epidemic on children in Pakistan, it is crucial to ensure the availability of mental health services, encompassing assistance and therapy. The impact of the epidemic on children in Pakistan raises questions about the suitability of current understandings of socioeconomic inequality, suggesting the need for potential revisions. To effectively tackle the distinct obstacles encountered by children in Pakistan, it is imperative to reevaluate prevailing child development theories in view of the persistent influence of the epidemic on their developmental trajectory. The theoretical foundations of educational policy in Pakistan: In order to overcome obstacles such as the erosion of knowledge, disparities in educational access, and the limitations of remote learning, it is crucial to undertake a comprehensive reassessment and adjustment of Pakistan's education policy framework to suit the country's distinct conditions better. To enhance the efficacy of interventions targeting the unique health requirements of children in Pakistan during times of health crises, it is crucial to undertake a comprehensive reevaluation of public health theories that are contextually relevant to the country.

To enhance the efficacy of efforts aimed at assisting children in Pakistan during challenging circumstances, it is imperative to develop policies and interventions that are cognizant of the determinants that contribute to the resilience of children and their families in Pakistan throughout periods of crisis. Theoretical Perspectives on Child Rights and Human Rights in Pakistan The impact of the epidemic on the human rights of children, specifically in Pakistan's most susceptible groups, underscores the importance of integrating a child rights framework within the country's strategies for addressing the pandemic. The study's limitations revolve around issues related to the accessibility and credibility of the data, potentially hindering a thorough assessment of the impacts of the epidemic, particularly in underdeveloped regions of Pakistan. Furthermore, it is plausible to consider that while the findings of the study hold relevance within the specific context of Pakistan, their direct applicability to other regions marked by unique socioeconomic and cultural dynamics may be limited. Additional investigation is necessary to explore the barriers that hinder the successful execution of policies that prioritise the needs and well-being of children. This facet has yet to be comprehensively discussed in this article. Additional research is necessary to determine the long-term effects of the pandemic on children, a demographic that may have been underrepresented in the current study.

Additional research is necessary to explore the long-term consequences of the pandemic on the psychological, educational, and physical well-being of children in Pakistan, utilising longitudinal studies as a methodological approach. In order to develop a more comprehensive comprehension of regional differences and devise efficacious resolutions, it is advantageous to engage in cross-regional comparisons. Conducting qualitative research to examine the lived experiences of children during the epidemic is crucial for obtaining a more comprehensive picture of the difficulties and needs they face. The evaluation of the efficacy of interventions implemented to ensure the welfare and educational advancement of children during the pandemic holds significant significance. Furthermore, it is imperative to undertake thorough policy evaluations in order to identify specific shortcomings and obstacles in the implementation of policies. The anthology offers a comprehensive examination of comparative worldwide studies and research focused on the protection of child

rights during crises. This collection of work provides significant contributions to our understanding of effective tactics and helpful insights for ensuring the well-being of children in the face of health emergencies. In order to facilitate equitable access to education for all citizens of Pakistan, the country must implement strategies aimed at mitigating the prevailing disparities in technology and digital resources.

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