

EXPLORING THE DIMENSIONS OF CHILD RIGHTS AMIDST COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract: The paper aims to counter the pessimistic attitude of the people towards the pandemic with an optimistic and futuristic approach. The research revolves around the questions of change in dimensions of child rights during a pandemic, efforts of the government/ authorities and its future consequences. The research paper is descriptive in approach and qualitative in nature. The data collected involves both primary and secondary resources. The results of the study highlight that the government, policymakers, and all those in power tried to reduce the vulnerability of the children through viable solutions so that the child's rights may be protected.

Keywords: Child Rights, Child Rights Dimensions, Pandemic and Child Rights

INTRODUCTION

The pandemic of COVID- 19 was catastrophic and turned the world upside down. It had a long entrancing impact on the lives of people specifically the school-going children. The effect can be witnessed in different ways such as emotional, social, psychological, and others which will be discussed in detail in the paper.

United Nations Human Rights Office given the aftermath of the pandemic showed its concern about overachieving the agenda 2030 of SDGs as the inequalities and disparities could be seen in almost all areas related to child rights and their protection such as education, nutrition, health, the standard of living, digital access, and others. Therefore, there is an urgent need for states to respond to the maximum number of children possible in the view of their target. (UNHR)

Given the above issues, it becomes necessary for us to firstly, explore the dimensions of a pandemic that had changed the arena of child rights. Secondly, identify the efforts that were made by the government and the authorities in power to overcome the situation. Finally, to evaluate the consequences it will have on the future goals.

The paper is important as it will be beneficial for the researchers, academicians, social workers, activists, government officials or public policymakers and anyone who share an interest in exploring the dimensions of the child rights that shifted during a pandemic. This paper will help us to look for the solutions for the existing as well as the uncertain future threats will be addressed, and we can plan for targeted policy/ measures and be prepared with the action plans.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology carried out for this research paper has descriptive characteristics. The analytical approach has been applied to comparing the situation during the pandemic with normal times. The study also explores several factors from different angles which gives it an exploratory blend. The data collection method used for this study is qualitative. The primary sources such as research papers, official reports and advisories along with the secondary resources such as the articles from newspapers, and magazines all gave the study a theoretical base.

The research was carried out by exploring the transformation that existed in various dimensions of child rights during the ongoing pandemic situation. The next step undertaken was identifying the necessary solutions that were adopted by the governments to meet the challenges. The final step was an elaboration of the aspiring goals to give it a futuristic approach.

DISCUSSION

According to the (World Bank Group, 2020), there existed a learning crisis but with the advent of the pandemic of COVID 19 education will deteriorate and so will the economy of the countries. The major reasons that it highlighted were:

1. School closure affected the learning process, increased learning inequality, and declined child's attachment to school.
2. There was a diminishing nutrition value in the children, worse mental health conditions and an increase in student vulnerability.
3. Increasing dropout rates, especially in the case of disadvantaged groups, child marriage, child labour and a decline in educational investment by parents.
4. Reduction in government expenditure on education, the decline in quality of education and teacher quality.
5. Eventually, a pandemic will have an adverse effect as there will be an increase in learning poverty, inequality, overall poverty due to dropout, social unrest, and a decline in human capital.

According to (World Bank, 2020) UNICEF¹ WHO² guidelines and campaigns for adopting safety measures during pandemics gave impetus to WASH services.

¹ United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

² World Health Organisation

UNICEF helped many Indian states in attaining WASH responses with the collaborative effort of the government partners, NGOs, and private sectors through CSR³ initiatives. In the beginning, it was difficult for line ministries to understand and implement the health responses led by the government during policy advocacy. Gradually things got better when various other actors started to join in reaching the targeted beneficiaries by providing the WASH services. (UNICEF, 2021)

KEY IMPACT OF PANDEMIC ON THE DIMENSIONS OF CHILD RIGHTS

- Nutritional Rights:**

The Mid-Day Meal scheme was launched in India to combat the dropout rate, nutritional demand, and deficiencies in the children so that they can have internal strength that will help them to grow, develop and focus on the learning process. The nutritional value in the school going children was low and there was a dire need to reach the beneficiaries through this scheme but with the emergence of the pandemic of COVID-19, there is a decline in the trend. Therefore, several states adopted different strategies such as providing dry rations to the targeted children with the support of volunteers, Anganwadi workers, village workers, NGOs etc. (Devikrishna N B, 2021)

- Digital Service Rights:**

Digital Payment Index which reflected the use of digital mode for the transaction saw a significant change seen from 2019-to 2021. From Fig.1, we can say that it was only after the emergence of a pandemic that the people became more aware of the digital facilities and started using mobile for their basic services. (Behera, 2021)

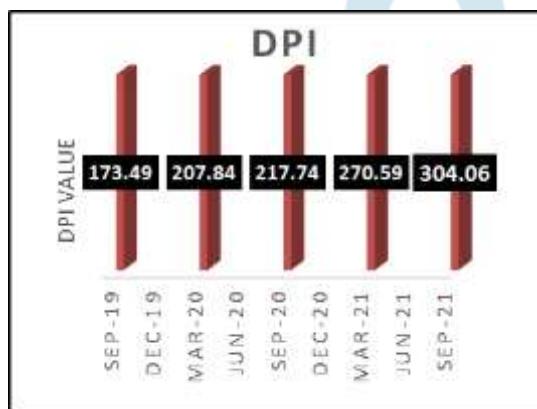


Figure 1 shows the increase in DPI (RBI, 2022)

In this process, the entire family including the children who usually help parents with technical issues became aware of the technology and diverse services that they could avail themselves of without the help of an intermediary person.

As the use of digital transactions increased so was the digital frauds through Phishing, QR code/ UPI frauds, and card scams all related to online modes of payment. Children spent more time on online games and got trapped in this vicious cycle. The unemployment, loss of job along with online scams led to a monetary crisis in the family which made them unable to pay school fees and deprived students of educational opportunities. (Vijayakumar, 2021).

From time-to-time awareness and cautions/ warnings were circulated via SMS, advertisements, and emails to alert the citizens, especially children about the issue.

The digital platforms such as Aarogya Setu, UMANG, E-office, and several others were proactively used during the pandemic which gave technological strength to the country to overcome the hurdles that the COVID – 19 offered (ETGovernment, 2020). This is a step toward a fair, transparent and accountable government that create honest citizens for the future.

- Rights for clean & hygienic environment**

WASH⁴is emphasised by SDG⁵ No 6 as a public issue and it is the responsibility of the school to ensure that this scheme is taken care of properly.

Swatch Bharat Abhiyan which was launched in 2014 shares the same vision and attained enormous success since the beginning of the scheme. But during the pandemic, it all went deeper into the roots as the children at an individual level along with family and finally the nation started being aware of the ways to maintain hygiene, cleanliness, and precautions to be taken at home and other places. The children and their families started using masks, sanitisers, use of disinfectants, washing hands etc were inculcated in their daily routine (The Economic Times, 2020). This is a step toward healthy, safe, and good sanitation practices for the child rights arena.

³ Corporate Social Responsibility

⁴ Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

⁵ Sustainable Development Goals

- Online Education**

The Indian Education system since the beginning was based on the traditional way of teaching which is the offline mode of education while in the countries like Singapore and Norway online education and blended education existed which helped them cope more positively with the educational needs of the students. The e-content such as recorded lectures, modules, e-books, and online presentations are a part of their academic practices while in India the entire pedagogy was offline and the digital divide deprived the Indian students of the practices and connection to the global education. With the emergence of the pandemic, the education system was at a halt for a certain period then gradually it paced with time and Indian academicians, researchers, teachers, policymakers, and content makers as ways out and developed how they could switch to online mode. The first step towards it was to provide the children with digital gadgets at subsidized prices.

The online platforms which already existed in the domain but were never so popular to be used for regular education got a chance to be practised and revised. The educational online tools such as SWAYAM portal, SWAYAM PRABHA, OLABS, PRAGYATA, Google classroom, Shiksha Vani, Virtual Labs etc. were used for impactful learning. The audio-visual has always been considered the best way for the learner to be attentive and grasp the topic easily without putting much pressure on their brains in the process of learning. Thus, it helped them learn in a better way. Now at least India started working on its electronic resource creation so that we can be prepared for a further future situation like that of the existing Pandemic of COVID 19.

Despite, so many benefits it had its repercussions as the children were exposed to cyber threats and ways were to be identified to sort this problem at hand by creating good cyber security.

- Psychological Dimension**

Online education was adopted as a remedy to deal with educational needs. The platforms such as zoom video conferencing, Microsoft Team, WhatsApp, Google Meet etc were used to overcome the learning obstacles but it led to issues such as strain, dryness, redness, itching in the eyes and poor sight due to long lectures online. Headache and fatigue were the other issues that were witnessed. A certain section of students faced psychological issues such as stress, hyperactivity, anxiety, depression, loneliness, and feeling of being isolated due to the restricting environment.

- Social Dimension**

According to Aristotle, man is a social animal by its nature. The students missed the part of being socially free. Children do not like to be restricted as they are free birds who wish to laugh, play, study, and develop by socializing with others in their family, neighbourhood, community, society, schools etc.

The school administration took notice of the existing situation and introduced co-curricular activities such as yoga, painting, cooking, music, dance, plays, video making, developing games through coding etc. Thus, learning was made interesting to overcome boredom.

- Access to Institutions**

There is again another dimension to this situation as well. There existed a certain section of the children who did not pay much attention to studies as they were unable to attend school and tuition for their studies. They did not have internet access or connectivity issue or devices to attend classes online. As a result, children spent their entire time playing, eating, and watching TV. In this case, the parents were very worried about their future and kept complaining that their child has become a worse performer during the pandemic phase. (Jim Soland, 2020)

CONCLUSION

The paper can be concluded after exploring the dimensions of child rights that changed during a pandemic, identifying the efforts of the government /people in power and evaluating its future consequences, with the fact that even though the hardship of the pandemic was extensive still efforts were made to cope with the given circumstances of a pandemic. The scope of the paper is high as it has opened the doors for futuristic approaches and ways to look at possible threats in the future and be prepared for the same so that the vulnerability of the children could be reduced, and child rights may be protected in all ways.

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