

## Impact of Disaster on Underprivileged Children in the COVID-19 Pandemic: Policy Response for Emergency Education

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### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received : 2021-07-31

Revised : 2021-10-18

Accepted : 2021-10-28

### KEYWORDS

COVID-19 pandemic

Social disaster

Underprivileged children

Marginal section

Right to education



### ABSTRACT

It is necessary to recognize and address the differential impact of disasters on society. It is quite possible that a significant number of children to become victims of the COVID-19 caused the social disaster. As a result, there would be an increase in school dropouts and child labor, which indicates a substantial number of children will be deprived of their right to education. Any alternative response during school closure, like internet-based remote teaching-learning, might not compensate for the loss of learning as nearly half of the world is without access to the internet. "Emergencies" are considered any situation; either artificial or natural disasters suddenly disrupt the ordinary course of life, empathy, and educational opportunities of children. The present study intended to find out the nature of social disaster caused by COVID-19 and how it impacted the learning loss and socio-emotional immunity of the underprivileged school-going children. A narrative review technique was used for this research study to explore the policy advocacies adopted on an emergency basis in mitigating the impacts of the ongoing pandemic on such underprivileged children. The data were derived from published articles and reports available in national and international data repositories. The findings reveal that the closure of schools raises the vulnerability of underprivileged children as they are being deprived of their right to education and socio-emotional security. The present pandemic has led to an adverse situation, disrupting delay or denying the right to education. It is time to rethink adopting a new policy and mechanism to continue their education and provide socio-emotional immunity in time of emergency to address the gravity of the crisis.

### 1. Introduction

In an emergency, when normalcy remains being paralyzed, children usually are the worst sufferer. In the history of humanity, children remain most vulnerable in all kinds of natural and social disasters. Billions of children are suffering each year in the different parts of the world by conflict caused by war, rampant criminal violence, climate disaster, and contagious disease outbreak (World Bank, 2016; World Bank, 2011; Laframboise & Loko, 2012). UNESCO (2011) asserted that the world needs to respond for 'emergency learning,' realizing the simple truth of the suffering of the millions of children in the regions of the globe which are highly affected by crisis and children are being deprived of their right of access to education. In conflict-affected parts of the world, almost 50 million elementary school goers are already denied the right to education. (Save the Children, 2013). In the same way, natural disasters have impacted negatively on children's education for a long (United States Agency for International Development, 2014). The world is witnessing the

disaster caused by epidemic and Pandemic in the last couple of years by contagious SARS, Ebola, and now Covid-19. The unprecedented Pandemic caused by COVID 19 seems to have brought drastic changes affecting all aspects of the daily lives of crores of people across the world. Education is one of the worst affected sectors as institutional closer was the immediate response to the COVID 19 outbreak. As far as World Bank data in 2020, the global number of students in countries where schools remain fully closed is 1,220,242,191, and the number of students is 84,184, 176 in the countries with partially closed schools.

Research findings in the backdrop of previous episodes of short-lived infectious disease outbreaks and epidemics found substantial evidence that child protection risks are exacerbated. Early studies show alarming signals on children's sufferings in the context of the COVID-19 Pandemic as a significant socio-economic impact. Children who are immediately separated from parents and family and are deprived of alternative care are more vulnerable

(UNICEF, 2020a). The marginalized section was facing dire consequences and other crises during this period of the Pandemic, and such social fragility needs to be handled carefully with much care and state responsibility (UNESCO & CDMRP, 2020).

COVID-19 Pandemic has already created a situation that puts children and adolescents at various risks, millions of them including their wellbeing and safety with the exploitation of gender-based violence, abusive and negligent treatment, social exclusion, and often the separation of children from caregivers. In recent pre-COVID years, adolescents' mental disorders and psychosocial disabilities have been increasingly recognized as global development issues (Mukherjee, 2020). The previous experience of epidemic exhibited that adolescent girls are disproportionately affected in such extreme emergencies. School closures as a response to contagious disease outbreaks deny access to educational facilities and are also being deprived of minimum healthcare services. While going through trauma and stress, the children are being deprived of livelihoods, and they are forced out of any social support system. Quarantine, lockdown, and subsequent disruptions of earning and wages due to COVID-19 caused the Pandemic to impact the children and their families of the marginal section to a higher degree. Withdrawal of emergency services has further dismantled the stability of this section of people who were already suffering from the inadequacy of resources and marked by poverty. Measures like movement restrictions shutting down public transport have further dented their income and thrown many as jobless. Most importantly, school closure indulges social isolation, delinking from a social service support system for such marginalized children as programs like 'direct cash transfer' and 'direct food transfer' also hampered to some extent. Then the stress level of home climate has further aggravated the degree of domestic abuse, conflicts, and violence led to civil unrest (UNICEF, 2020b).

In the Pandemic, as migrant workers earn less in a compulsive situation due to business closure and economic slowdown, their families suffer. Previous research of the earlier recession proved that it considerably cut remittances in most of the countries affected. Here it is worth noting that forty-one of the Asian financial crisis studies have shown that remittances support family businesses while supporting education and preventing child work (Yang, 2008). In earlier cases of a social disaster, the value of the financial contribution of a child may be reduced by the forced return of these migrant workers, or the commitment of children in the employment could increase if new resources, protocols, and technologies were brought to the home by the mobile workforce (Dinkelman et al. 2016). The gender perspective of such a crisis period is crucial to societal design as children usually work by their mother's side.

When a mother is absent from home, her children are less likely to work than when the economically active mother is present (Acosta, 2011). According to a recent study in Nepal, the sudden shutdown of brick kilns and subsequent lack of transportation left approximately 12,000 people, including 2,000 children, stranded for a long period and forced to suffer intensely. According to sources, about 1359 children had returned from Kenya, Lebanon, Mozambique, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan as part of public health responses to COVID-19 as of June 2020. (ILO & UNICEF, 2020). Legally working adolescents having age between 15-18 years are already going through a highly stressful situation. Approximately 63% of India's child labor workforce are aged 15-18 are employed in hazardous work (Save the Children, 2016). In the context of minimizing force and other restrictions to compensate the rate of production during COVID-19, in many cases, the working hours have been extended to 12 hours a day. So the adolescent workforce is compelled to work for more than standard time with a lower rate of income. According to the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2018, published by the University of Oxford (Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, 2018), India still has 156 million children under poverty, amongst which 27.1%, around one in four, are younger than ten years. No doubt such dismantled socio-economic situation will further severely affect the Indian children by the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Governments worldwide have kept close educational institutions as an immediate response to break the epidemiological cycle of the COVID-19 Pandemic. According to the data of UNICEF, globally, 214 million students from early childhood care education to higher secondary education in 23 countries have missed at least three-quarters of classroom instruction time since March 2020. Of these 214 million students, 168 million in 14 countries missed almost all classroom instruction due to school closures (UNICEF, 2021). Overall, about 43% of schools are closed partially or fully for face-to-face instruction, including in India.

The education as suffering as a result of the institutional shutdown was regarded as a distortion, and it was thus deemed an emergent situation. (Reimers and Schleicher, 2020). In tune with the global pattern of immediate response in India, nationwide school closure was imposed by the relevant Union Government authority and respective state government authority. Approximately 32 crore students are affected in India only, with 15.8 crores being female and the rest being male. Upholding the right of such learners in its policy advocacy, UNESCO appealed to all the countries to engage a wide variety of ways to continue learning teaching either with high tech or low tech or even without involving technology as possible considering the ground-level reality.

It was pretty impossible to reach all the learners at the school level while strict social isolation was imposed and the school remained closed. So, the expectation and situation were quite contradictory. Online emergency remote learning teaching appears as a practical solution despite the ground reality where half of the world is without access to internet facilities. As per UNESCO estimations, nearly two-thirds of the school-level learners are denied such facilities globally. In the backdrop of the above context, the study examined the objectives mentioned here.

Due to the Pandemic mediated economic downturn, household income losses will be caused, and more children will be forced into dangerous and exploitative jobs. Those children who are already engaged in such an effort could be further exploited. Gender disparities will be a significant concern, and other inequalities within families can become acute. Girls of a tender age may be put under pressure to do further household work and external work. As school closures are extended from time to time, household engagement is enhanced further.

The global community must keep in mind that the scale and depth of the impact of the COVID 19 mediated social disaster are not comparable with any such previous crisis. Its magnitude is more significant than we anticipated, and it may cause social harm in novel ways. If such newer injuries are not sought, identified, and addressed, society may suffer for a long time, and the global aspiration of inclusiveness will lag far behind. As of now, there are some impact studies available that have focused only on a few aspects, and some policy instruments have been adopted as emergency response without studying feasibility and efficacy. So, it is high time to analyze the gravity of the crisis more holistically and address the emergency to protect children from the disaster of a COVID-19 mediated pandemic.

The present narrative review, in that sense, is unique in that it explores the impact of policy responses to sketch an overall picture of social disaster. Such an endeavor of analyzing the nature of the effects of the current Pandemic mediated social disaster and related responses would be an instrumental template to address the future crisis and related policy-level challenges.

- 1) The present study seeks to determine the nature of social disaster in the context of education caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic.

- 2) The present study seeks to find out how this Pandemic mediated social disaster impacted the learning loss of the underprivileged school-going children.
- 3) The present study seeks to determine how this Pandemic mediated social disaster impacted the socio-emotional immunity of the underprivileged school-going children.
- 4) The study also intended to identify and analyze the policy response adopted by international and national agencies to mitigate the negative impact of the Pandemic mediated social disaster.

## 2. Method

A narrative review technique was used in the research (Demiris et al., 2019; Fins et al., 2000). The articles explored in this literature study were chosen based on the research's direction from two preceding research repository groups: for policy papers, UNESCO, UNICEF, and World repository (e.g., World Bank) along with the official website of the relevant department of Government of India, and education-specific databases, Google Scholar repository; particularly SCOPUS, Web of Science, and JSTOR. A few key phrases were chosen to locate publications in the 'Google search' relevant to the present study's goal during the search.

As such, the key-words were 'COVID-19 as a social disaster, 'policy response to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on children', 'policy on emergency learning during pandemic' OR "policy on online learning or virtual learning during COVID-19, 'State of underprivileged children in COVID-19 pandemic', and 'socio-emotional impacts underprivileged get school-going children during COVID-19'.

Finally, the articles from research reviews and other works that have been published not more than fifteen years were chosen and scanned to locate articles from additional databases that may have been missing and omitted in the preliminary searches (Corry and Stella, 2018). There are a total of 60 titles that are relevant and fulfill the selection criteria. All duplicates were deleted once the search was completed. Ultimately, 28 research papers were finalized (refer to Table 1) to meet the study's objectives. The data was analyzed by reading the abstract (for scanning purposes) and the entire article (for final research).

**Table 1.** List of Finalized Articles

<b>Total article selected=60 Selected for final study= 28</b>	
<b>Repository group(s)</b>	<b>Author(s)</b>
1. Policy Papers & related report (13 were selected from a total of 22 papers/report)	UNESCO, 2021; United Nations, 2020; ILO & UNICEF, 2020; UNICEF, 2020a; UNICEF, 2020b, UNESCO & CDMRP, 2020; MHRD, 2020; MALALA FUND Report, 2020; BBC NEWS, 2020; World Bank, 2020; Sidhu Kanho Birsha University of Purulia (2020) Save the Children, 2016; Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2008.
2. Published research studies (15 were selected from a total 38 studies)	Mukherjee, 2021; Kaur & Byard, 2021; de Winter et al., 2020; Correia, 2020; Imran et al, 2020; O'Brien & Tolosa, 2016; Campbell, 2020; Fuhrman et al., 2020; Idris, 2020; Thanthong-Knight, 2020; Sonawane, 2020; Dhenuka,2020; Reimers and Schleicher, 2020; Torani et.al., 2019; Yakubu & Dasuki, 2019.

### 3. Findings

The analysis reflected many layers of the crisis. Such a pandemic is very complex for school-going children, and the results are different for different sections of society. No doubt that the underprivileged school-going children are the worst victims. The overall findings may be analyzed in the following subsections:

#### 3.1 Social Disaster caused by Pandemic: Gravity of the crisis

An endeavor has been made to ascertain the very nature of the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 to address the study's first objective. UNESCO has been apprehending with a projection that nearly 24 million children may not return to education, estimating 190 countries of the world after 2020 due to social disaster caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (United Nations, 2020). The worldwide closure of schools due to the COVID-19 outbreak is unprecedented in history. More than 1.5 billion children and youth are affected by the 188 country-wide closures.

Concerning the pandemic, school closures were implemented ahead of time: closures were implemented in 27 nations before any instances of the virus were reported. Because several countries' schools are planning protracted lockdowns, at least 58 countries and territories have postponed or rescheduled exams, with 11 countries canceling exams entirely. Thus, the school closures have forced school-aged children and adolescents at home, leading to not only creating learning poverty but also resulting in an educational backlog; social and peer support offered by schools, and associated organs have also evaporated (de Winter et al., 2020). Henceforth, education has been jeopardized by such social disasters.

#### 3.2 Impact of Pandemic on Education and socio-emotional immunity of Underprivileged Children

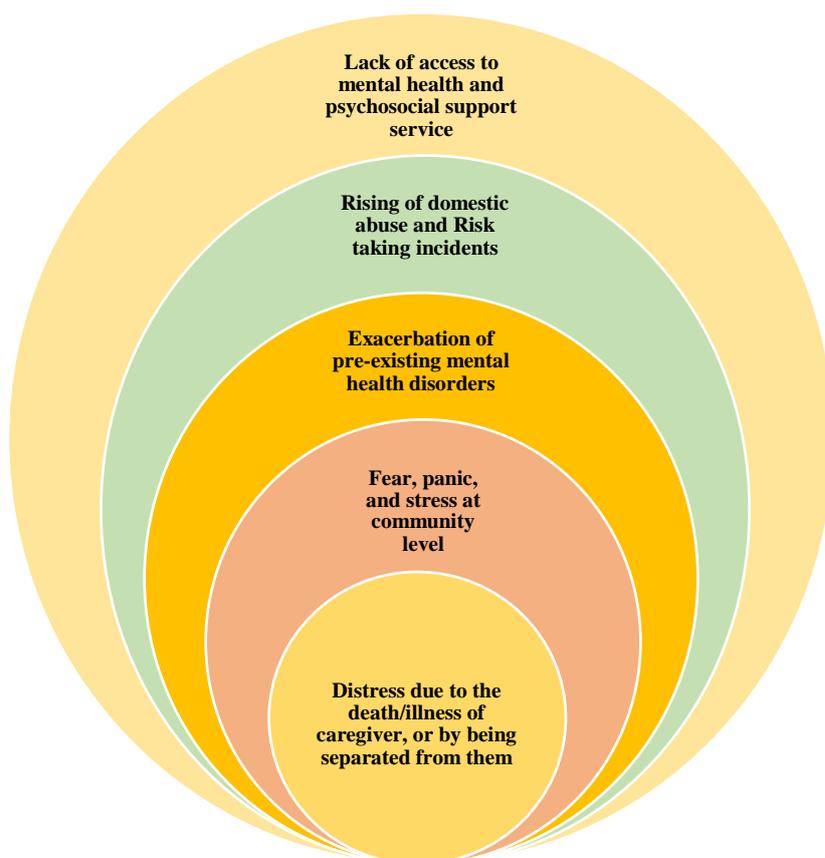
While the documents are analyzed to satisfy the second and third objectives of the present study, it was quite alarming for all stakeholders. The potential losses in learning for today's new generation and the development of their human capital are challenging to comprehend. Many schools are now giving remote learning to their students to reduce these losses. This option, however, is only available to a selected few. Only 30% of low-income nations have implemented a national distance learning platform, even though more than two-thirds of countries have done so. Girls have less access to digital technology than boys, limiting their online learning opportunities and involvement. The digital divide and inequalities have surfaced among students in the backdrop of pandemics (Correia, 2020). Children in informal settlements, camps with little infrastructure, and those without access to the internet are disproportionately affected.

The closing of schools raises several concerns about the vulnerability of students (Imran et al., 2020). Children having legal working age may leave school and enter the workforce with limited knowledge and skills. Children under the age of majority may seek work in informal and home settings, where they are exposed to hazardous and exploitative conditions (Save the Children, 2016). The evidence on the long-term impact, on the other hand, is mixed. According to reports, in Sierra Leone, children had generally returned to school by the end of the Ebola epidemic. This may not be true for those who live in poor households or areas most affected by COVID-19. Parents may not be able to afford to send their children to school, even after classes resume. Slowly but surely, there is more and more evidence that child labor is on the rise during the global school closure.

The COVID-19 mediated pandemic-induced economic and labor market ramifications are currently wreaking havoc on people's lives and livelihoods. Unfortunately, impoverished families and their youngsters are generally the first victims of the situation, putting many more children at risk of being forced into child labor (Kaur & Byard, 2021). Governments in Malawi closed schools to prevent virus spread, for example. Children, unable to learn, were soon tasked with other duties (ILO & UNICEF, 2020).

As advocated by the UNICEF (2020b) in the draft titled 'Technical Note on Covid-19 and Harmful

Practices,' the impact of pandemic COVID-19 on mental health includes five significant issues. These include the personal stress of the children who became sudden orphans by the death of parents or close ones, and widespread fear and panic exist in the community. Such a situation aggravates fragile mental health, increased use of substances abuse, and deprivation of mental health support services, further upscaling the degree of crisis. The following figure 1, adapted from UNICEF (2020b), reflects the harmful impacts of COVID-19 on school-going children, especially underprivileged ones.



**Figure 1.** Harmful impacts of the pandemic COVID-19 on mental health

On the same note, UNICEF cautioned about the factors that might contribute to violence towards children. Long-term isolation from society and quarantines poses the children and adolescents in conflict and violent in-home. In many cases, it has amplified the probability of sexual exploitation, and the rate of unlawful early marriage increased rapidly. Such confinement increasingly reduces the access to options of social protection and gender-based violence services and support. This is comparable to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014, when gender-based violence, sexual exploitation, and abuse were more prevalent among women and girls. (O'Brien & Tolosa, 2016).

UNICEF also alarmed the nations that family care for the children is disrupted heavily due to COVID-19 caused by hospitalization and the death of parents or immediate relatives. In case of the sudden death of parents or caregivers, the children and adolescents compelled to live with another family may also enhance the risk of abuse, especially girls are more vulnerable. In a few cases, social stigma may lead to discrimination for individuals and groups suspected of being infected. In many instances, in the south East Asian context, such discrimination aggravates violence against children. In such context, Idris (2020) reported that loss of livelihoods and economic opportunities; increased discrimination against minorities and migrants; school closures; and

heightened financial pressures on families are all (potential) pathways through which the current COVID-19 pandemic could lead to increased enslavement and child labor in the developing world, including in South Asia. Furthermore, it is alarming that children and adolescents of marginalized sections, particularly those with disabilities, are more prone to such offenses.

UNICEF emphatically cautioned that such extended closures of schools in pandemic lead to many adverse consequences, which may include disruption and loss of learning; an increase of permanent dropout as children might have to work or look after sick relatives; rampant incidence of sexual misconduct, marriage much earlier and teenage pregnancy. It has been found from Indian experiences that lack of social interaction among the peers and interruption and, in some cases, discontinuation of other school-based services like including mid-day meals, support to menstruating adolescent girls, and the distribution of nutrition supplements have enhanced the intensity of the crisis. The marginalized section of school-going learners is deprived of any alternative education organized remotely based on the internet and digital gazettes.

Disasters have negatively impacted the children in several ways, and the influence might be gender-based in the backdrop of the severe economic impact of the pandemic. Such implications of the increase of significant drop out are likely to be maximum in the south and West Asia. 'Room to Read' organization conducted a survey involving 28,000 girls in Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Laos, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, and Vietnam to determine the impact of the virus outbreak on girls' education. There was a decline in family income for 42 percent of the girls surveyed, and one in two girls surveyed was at risk of dropping out of school (Thanthong-Knight, R. 2020). Even those who will continue education there will be severe learning loss, particularly in the foundational years. The data shows even before COVID-19 caused the pandemic in India, there were 30 million out-of-school children, and strikingly, 40 % of them were adolescent girls (MALALA FUND Report, 2020). It has been projected that such extension of school closure may cause 10 million secondary school girls to discontinue their education globally, where India will have the lion's share of it. Research reveals that concerning access, diminished or inequitable access to education drives conflict; conflict reduces boys' and girls' access to education differently. Among the marginal section in India, gender bias is more prominent for the students who belong to the poorest class. Those are from either slums of urban or rural areas in terms of access to connectivity and technology. India is already suffering a massive gender gap in terms of mobile and the internet that amounts to nearly 50%. At the same time, recent studies during COVID-19 showed that

girls have less access than their counterparts to digital infrastructure (Sonawane, 2020). Such a scenario indicates that it will further disengage girls from enjoying the opportunity of remote learning and widen the gap. Child marriage is highest in India in terms of number, and child Line India has reported in mid-pandemic 17% increase in distress calls related to early marriage in June to July 2020 than the previous year (BBC NEWS, 2020).

The school closure due to COVID-19 caused pandemic has disproportionately affected children who are already suffering from a lot of trouble accessing educational opportunities and therefore are highly vulnerable to exclusion. All children of different marginal groups, including differentially abled children, remotely located students, children of migrant workers, and others who are marginal for several reasons. Therefore, the COVID-19 posed a severe threat to the chances of continuation of education of such borderline children. Pandemic either delimits their opportunity of learning or no education at all. The situation is alarming because the pandemic crisis is accelerating, taking several twists and turns, and school closure is getting extended. Furthermore, it isn't particular whether the schools will bring back all the children even if normalcy is restored in a close quarter. The answer may be no, as there is a high probability that many of them are already engaged in child labor.

### **3.3 Providing Education and Socio Emotional Protection for Underprivileged Children in Emergency: Analysis of Policy Response**

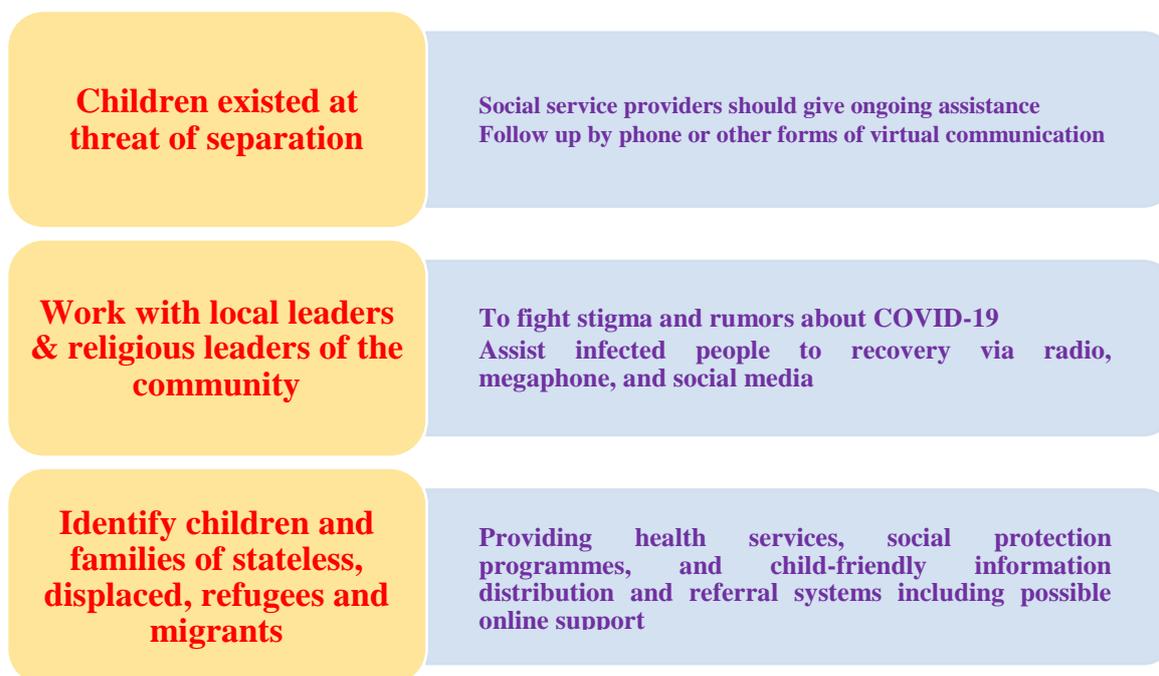
While addressing the third objective of the study, it is found that social science has made us aware that children's physical and emotional dependence on adults is quite natural, and children depend entirely on adults for their protection in the time of emergencies and all kinds of disasters. As we are witnessing natural and artificial disasters in the last few decades, different countries have adopted innovative approaches as 'disaster education programs. Empirical data-based research has come forward with new theoretical postulations which justify the effectiveness of such education programs. Learned children usually have a better perception of the risk of disaster. One such study conducted in Japan by Torani et al. (2019) found that 'there is a direct link between education, increased risk perception, and students' risk reduction measures. Such findings are instrumental in adopting the strategy and planning to provide immunity to underprivileged children from a different perspective.

Empowering children to speculate and acknowledge the significance of preventive measures and preparedness for crisis and thus could transform inert knowledge into working knowledge that they can act with their knowledge. In the context of COVID-19 caused pandemic, 'disaster education'

should have the potential to enhance the capacity of child resiliency and rapid transmission of information to scale down the risk of disasters in their immediate social unit. Understanding of 'disaster education' is a form of emergency education that suggests that functional benefits during a disaster education starting at a lower age might be effective.

In the policy documents titled 'Protection of Children during the COVID-19 Pandemic', UNICEF (2020a) explicitly recommends the category of

incredibly vulnerable children. The advocacies stressed support to children under threat of separation, engaging the local community in developing awareness and combating the stigma. This policy further prioritizes the need for program design that could tackle the internally displaced and migrant refugees. The following figure 2 is a synopsis of the advocacy.



**Figure 2.** Policy of prioritising of action for protection of Children during the COVID-19 Pandemic

World Bank (2020), in their policy advocacy '*15 Ways to Support Young Children and their Families in the COVID-19 Response*', highlighted vital messages that the early years are an instrumental phase to develop human capital. Hence strategic investments in Early Child Development need to be prioritized within the framework of COVID-19 emergency response. Such endeavor is required to protect young children who are generally vulnerable. This is an effective way to minimize the rate of child deaths and propel economic recovery and productivity in a sustained manner. Because young children are disproportionately at risk, the policy must be prioritized in COVID-19 responses to ensure food security for their families. The recovery from the COVID-19 problem is expected to take longer, and families will suffer significant financial difficulties. Even in severely low-resource settings, it is necessary to develop ways to help parents and caregivers since they are the first-line responders for children's care survival and education. The 15 ways to support young children and families in the COVID-19 response are depicted as:

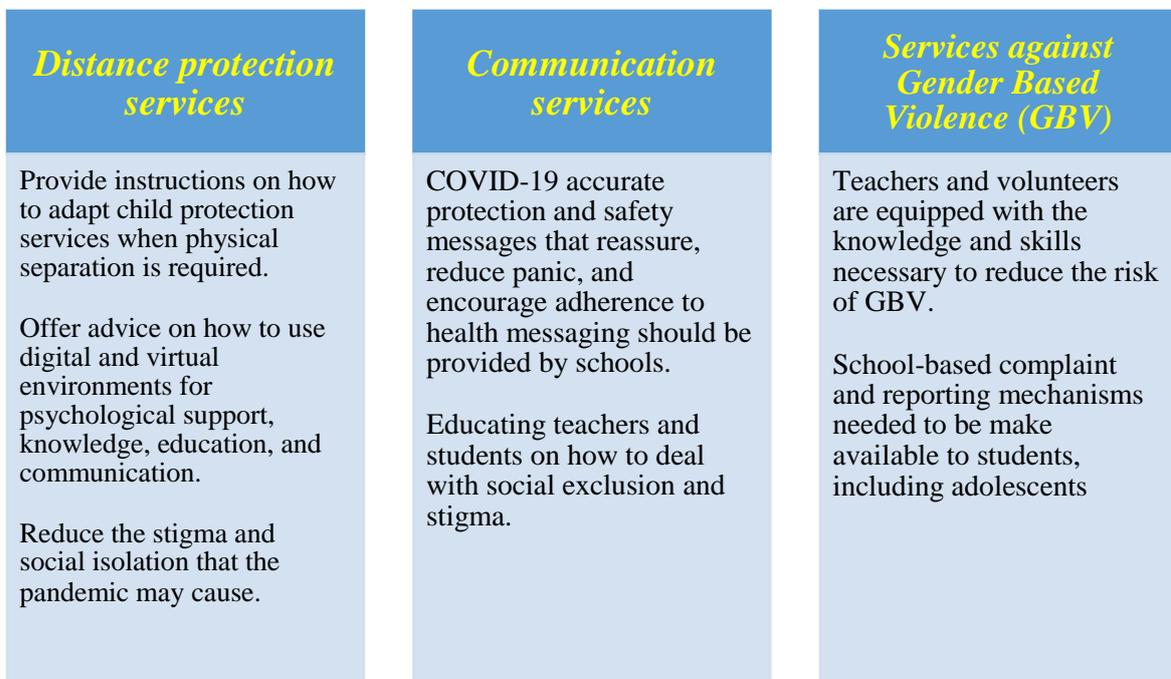
- 1) Emergency food delivery for pregnant women and small children, including micronutrient and ready-to-use medicinal food supplements.
- 2) During COVID-19, provide health/breastfeeding/care counseling to pregnant women and new mothers.
- 3) Use health and nutrition platforms to spread coping, parenting, and early stimulation messages.
- 4) Encourage family handwashing and hygiene, especially in low-resource situations.
- 5) Specialized childcare and emotional assistance for crisis responders.
- 6) Deliver books, learning materials, and playthings to people's homes or through community resource drops.
- 7) Incorporate early childhood education (ECE) into distant learning programs for primary education.
- 8) Radio, television, the internet, and social media provide educational pleasure for young children.
- 9) When schools reopen, make sure that ECE is included in considerable re-enrollment efforts,

- that accelerated learning programs for young children are implemented, and that hygiene measures that involve young children are implemented.
- 10) Provide information and resources to encourage ECD through cash transfers, child grants, and social safety nets.
  - 11) Provide parents with coping, stress management, and parenting methods via phones, radio, television, the internet, and social media.
  - 12) Provide frontline staff with training and information on how to recognize and respond to child protection and mental health concerns.
  - 13) Create support services for women and children who are victims of domestic violence.
  - 14) Ensure that essential themes relating to nutrition, health, stimulation and learning, violence prevention, and psycho-social support are

included in information campaigns to promote ECD.

- 15) Agriculture extension programs for young children and their families to provide services and information.

As almost all of the research studies have hinted that the emotional well-being of underprivileged children is at risk in the prevailing pandemic social climate, it is an urgent need to design and implement service programs for protecting their mental health. UNICEF (2020a) urged the following actions with immediate effect, recognizing the urgency of the need for children's socio-emotional protection and strengthening child protection and mental health systems at the community level. The following figure adapted from the advocacy of UNICEF is an illustration of focal areas of service design that needed to be implemented.



**Figure 3.** Children's basic socio-emotional Protection Services at community level with immediate effect

Domestic abuse in China is said to have increased during the country's shelter-in-place requirement, according to Campbell (2020) in his article. In addition, France has reported a 30% increase in domestic violence reports, Brazil estimates a 40–50% upsurge in violence reports, and Italy has reported a rise in domestic violence reports. Writings have appeared in Spain of a tragic domestic violence-related homicide, a pattern that is unfortunately set to continue worldwide as stress rises and shelter-in-place procedures are extended. The increasing worldwide trend of more domestic violence incidents is anticipated to continue throughout the pandemic, and it may simply be the "tip of the iceberg," as many

victims remain trapped with their abusers and unwilling to report the abuse.

It is time to formulate and adopt the 'Emergency Education Policy.' Education in the emergency came to force in the 'Emergency situations' are considered as situations that are either artificial or are natural disasters which suddenly disrupt the ordinary course of life, empathy, and educational opportunities of children. Such adverse conditions, therefore, disrupt delay or deny the right to education. Such emergencies can be indulged by, among other things, armed conflicts, post-war social climate, and all types of natural disasters' (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2008). Education is a human right and

therefore must be protected for all children irrespective of social class. But in reality, it has been observed that it became of great significance to protect people's human rights, particularly those already marginalized. It is a bare fact that is shocking that in emergencies, the right to education is used to deny as observed globally. It is, therefore, collective responsibility for the international community to be active to minimize and alleviate the detrimental effects of emergencies.

In this context, UNICEF (2020a) directives cover- Continued education – partner with the education sector and programs to:

- 1) Provide access to distance education through television, radio, or online learning and virtual platforms.
- 2) Monitor school dropout of girls and ensure their return to school.

In India, the Ministry of Education (MHRD, 2020) announced a policy that states, "to ensure that school-going children have access to education with quality and equity and to minimize the impact of the pandemic on school education across the country." The relevant guideline advocates the necessity of access to digital resources with remote learning facilities. Major policy advocacies as emergency response for continuing education for school children may be summarized as follows:

- 1) Emphasis is given to increasing access to online and digital resources, as well as televisions and radios. Relaxation of detention norms to minimize the dropout rate
- 2) Appropriate authority of state governments is directed to conduct door-to-door surveys to identify children out of school and migrant students.
- 3) A location-specific action plan might be prepared to continue education to compensate for learning loss and ensure quality and equity.
- 4) In every state and union territory, an awareness campaign needs to be launched and conducted enrolment drives to ensure that such children return to the school system.
- 5) During emergency remote learning, teaching while students stay at their home, frequent visits to the children at their home, counseling for the behavioral disorder, and distributing worksheets and other supplementary material to support home-based education are advocated.
- 6) Apart from maximizing the facility of remote learning facilities, it is advisable to arrange the classrooms-on-wheels involving small groups.
- 7) Guidelines for continuing non-residential training through volunteers, local teachers, and community participation have been provided.

8) Children with special needs have been in priority so that they can receive home-based educational support. Children with special needs and girl children also are in focus to receive financial aid with volunteers.

9) On the assumption of possible challenges that the children might face. At the same time, schools will reopen. There needs to be a plan to offer student orientations to adjust with school climate, grade-appropriate bridge courses, and remedial learning teaching programs to compensate for learning loss.

10) A prior plan is ready to teach COVID-19-appropriate behaviors such as wearing masks, physical distancing, hand-washing to tackle the situation.

In reality, these efforts are transmitted partly, and the planning has several limitations in apprehending, foreseeing, and mitigating the crisis.

#### 4. Discussion

The nature of the impact of the pandemic on education, in general, is critical, diversified, and unique, as reflected in the various research reports. The first objective of the present study, i.e., *"the nature of social disaster in the context of education,"* has been detailed in the finding section adequately. All other objectives of the study are subsets of this first objective. The analysis of the general impact of the pandemic on education indicates that schooling in general, and public schooling in particular, enjoys much greater appreciation, and the vital need for education is felt by society. In a progressive community, as parents struggle to work with their children at home while schools remain closed, the caretaking role of schools gains prominence.

While young children struggle to learn from home, parents' and caregivers' gratitude for teachers, their skills, and their priceless role in student wellbeing has become critical. As a result of the community's struggle to provide care and protection for their vulnerable children and young people, policymakers and program designers must devise new mechanisms for delivering essential services, ranging from food to education to health care, to mitigate the adversity of a social disaster such as a pandemic, definitely be invaluable for future policy and planning.

India is not only one of the world's most intensely populated areas but also immensely diverse. Mainly this area is unique as cutting edge industries emerged alongside primitive workshops, super-intensive technology-based agriculture exercised alongside traditional farming, and elite educational institutions co-exist with poor-quality schools. There are many billionaires in this region, and at the same time, this area is the home of the most significant number of the poorest commoners. Hence, any standard format of remedies that have been effective in other countries

may not necessarily be relevant for India in the replicable form in mitigating COVID-19 Pandemic crisis. Apart from general educational impacts, it needs to discuss the specific areas of concern regarding the current review.

*Learning loss of the underprivileged school-going children is the negative outcome of a pandemic caused social disaster:*

In India, the Government of India, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), has recommended that schools use digital platforms to communicate with students to compensate for the loss of school hours (MHRD, 2020). A significant number of schools are attempting to implement such a mode of continuation of learning-teaching but failed to get the desired result. However, most government institutions have been unable to reciprocate because most schools lack the technology and equipment needed to provide online instruction, and a large number of teachers are incapable of using the technology that can serve the purpose effectively. On the other hand, the majority of the students are devoid of access to the internet, smartphones, or any appropriate gadget. As a result, the lion's share of the student community at the school level misses the opportunity of getting remote education facilities.

Whatever government agencies made efforts were insufficient and failed to protect school-age children from learning loss. Furthermore, the fragility of commitment to inclusive education became unmasked during school closures in the pandemic. Underprivileged children are denied their opportunity to learn while the emergency learning teaching shifts to a virtual format and is organized remotely.

In emergencies, human rights law remains relevant in all possible contexts. In no way should the human rights of the people be ignored because of conflict-related to war, disease outbreaks, or natural disasters. The broader sense of 'right to education includes the related legislatures too. So, it is the immediate responsibility of the state to respect the international agreements and laws committed to protecting children, especially those who are underprivileged in many ways by the impact of the pandemic caused by COVID-19.

Now, naturally, the question arises: how far is the global standard of school education resilient? And the more pertinent question is whether policymakers on a global scale will be able to design a school system from such experience of a pandemic that will be stronger than before? What kind of components need to be included in powering up the school system? All these questions are generated from the findings as they have shown the lack and inadequacies.

*Socio-emotional immunity of the underprivileged school-going children during school closure:*

Globally, the COVID-19 is making the school-going children and adolescent population nervous and pushing them into a state of alarming stress leading to depression, anxiety, panic, and disappointment. They are showing weakness, fatigue, poor sleep (Mukherjee, 2021). Therefore, lack of socio-emotional immunity emerged as a significant concern. In the Indian context, apart from education, students are providing critical social exemption and other resources through the agency of school. Hence, such closure of schools suspended teaching-learning and these resources of survival instead of raising the vulnerability of the underprivileged children. So, the governments have to respond to make the facility of Food and Cash transfer programs. It is time to overcome the barriers while accessing all emergency resources by discarding the constraints of such programs as Direct Cash Transfers (DCT). There should be a review of policies to promote access to funds outside the populations' habitual place of residence. There is a need to devise a mechanism to ensure the rights of a child by informing families, teachers, health and other community workers on how to identify and respond to those children, especially for those at increased risk of separation, including those with disabilities, due to death or any other crisis in the family. Protecting food, health, and mental wellbeing for the underprivileged school children deprived because of school closure is a crucial and sensitive task. Hence, promoting women's and girls' leadership in health programming should be prioritized to ensure that COVID-19 prevention and control measures do not exacerbate harmful gender inequalities and social norms; and ensure that all COVID-19-related funding proposals and data analyses take age, gender, and sex effects into account (Fuhrman et al., 2020).

*Policy response adopted to mitigate the negative impact of the pandemic mediated social disaster:*

There are positive stories too, which need to be documented and showcased as best practices for future crises. Few instances of innovations adopted in such an emergency may be pertinent to mention here. In the context of the pandemic, shifting education to a compulsive virtual setting by technology integration was a natural response (Yakubu & Dasuki, 2019). Teachers have tried their best to continue teaching-learning with whatever technology, skill & techno-pedagogical knowledge available to them. But the major challenge is digital-divide. As a significant section was deprived of the internet and smartphones, the teachers and the organizations working in education had adopted a lot of unique and innovative methods in handling the crisis at the ground level. Here, one of such innovations is mentioned as a case study. Dhenuka (2020) reported that in a survey conducted by i-Saksham, only 50 percent of the 500 families included in the study had reported having smartphones with internet facilities. Compared to 100

percent, families had a primary phone at home. As an interesting case study with this in mind, Alka, a rural community education leader from Farda, in Munger district, Bihar, has started using regular conference calls to teach children of the surrounding villages. Such new-age youth from the community appeared as a front runner in crisis, who are trained to provide supplementary teaching assistance at local government schools.

Considering the ground-level reality utilizing the availability of primary phones, the enthusiastic education leader Alka reads stories to her students. It provides relevant assignments in the manner the children can do at home. For example, her designed assignments cover such as counting utensils to improve numeracy skills. Apart from that, she tries to deploy a trans-generational learning model by encouraging older family members like grandparents to conduct story-telling sessions to enhance language learning. This is a unique case study of how youth leadership can make a resilient community. And it has been found that community engagement can improve the delivery of public services, especially the continuation of education for children of a disadvantaged group.

In the Purulia district of West Bengal, 'Nityananda Gyanbani Community Radio Station' in collaboration with Sidhu Kanho Birsha University of Purulia (2020) (<https://bityl.co/6mhp>) stretched informal class from higher education school students, and their program was also having the scope of interaction through phone-in facility. Radio as technology has the unique capacity to reach people, and it could be easily adapted to meet the contextual needs of its target population. The local histories, folktales and fables, folk songs, and stories of local artisan were used as content and medium for joyful constructivist learning in such a time of social disaster.

It is the responsibility of educational planners and managers to learn from experience and society's feelings that the need for a strong and inclusive public education system is essential for the community's short- and long-term recovery. This could only be done by adapting befitting policies toward powered-up schools. The concept of a powered-up school puts a 'strong public school' at the center of a community and leverages the most effective partnerships. Such strong partnership-based networks add fuel to the school system that helps learners grow and develop a broad range of competencies and skills in and out of school. The policy of electrifying schools requires assistance, including technology for engaging the community, from parents to employers, to reinforce, supplement, and bring to life learning experiences in and out of the classroom. In such a powered school system, children's learning would complement and support teachers and support children's healthy physical and emotional development.

## 5. Conclusions

The differential impact of the disaster caused by COVID-19 on society demands an acknowledgment and appropriate policy response. There is a tremendous possibility that many children would emerge as victims of such tragedy posed by pandemic COVID-19. So, it is high time to rethink adopting a new locally appropriate emergency policy and mechanism to address the gravity of the crisis.

Children's right to free and compulsory education act (2009) came into effect in April 2010 in India. It was a pre-pandemic legal instrument meant for ensuring elementary education by the global policy commitment. But the pandemic has posed many questions about the existing modalities of implementation of this instrument through the program's current design as the conventional learning teaching is being challenged. It is time for global governance to redefine the right of education, keeping in mind the opportunity of accessibility of digital gadgets and internet connectivity, in particular for developing countries. Apart from that, the stakeholders of education, particularly school education, need to exercise extensively to create a framework so that the existing gap of access and usage of technology both for learners and teachers could be addressed. Government authority has many roles to play in this context. On the other hand, teachers' capacity to compensate for the pedagogical skill gap is also a pertinent area that demands policy intervention.

All the existing programs implemented for school children, especially underprivileged sections for social and emotional protections, are found to be inadequate in such gravity of the crisis. Hence reframing of policy for such socio-emotional immunity is needed of the time. The changing landscape of education and the fragility of societal structure indicate the necessity of better and effective policy intervention and implementations for underprivileged school-going children at the global, regional and local level.

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