

# The Mental Health of School Students and the COVID-19 Pandemic

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## ABSTRACT

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and the social distancing procedures that many countries have implemented have caused disruptions to daily activities. The first preventive procedures taken by responsible authorities are the closing of schools. In spite of these preventive procedures may be considered critical to contain the rapid outbreak of COVID-19, they will undoubtedly have short and long term consequences for the mental health of school students. The movement restrictions, school closures and stay-at-home during the COVID-19 pandemic will likely lead to a rise in the rates of domestic violence, loneliness, depression, fear, panic and anxiety, and substance use among school students. In this context, some procedures should be taken into consideration to help the students in minimizing the mental health consequences such as develop ways to interact with students to overcome loneliness and bridge the social distance. In addition, intervening in the event of violence cases involving children or their families because those sectors of the community may have not an opportunity to report and order urgent help.

**Keywords:** mental health, school students, COVID-19 outbreak, school closure, social distancing

## INTRODUCTION

Since the first case of novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) was discovered in December 2019, in Wuhan (Hubei, China), it has attracted significant attention around the world. The rapid outbreak of COVID-19 brought unprecedented efforts to institute the practice of physical distancing (also called “social distancing”) all over the world, resulting in changes in day-to-day behavioral patterns and stops of usual activities. Some of the first preventive procedures taken by responsible authorities are the closing of schools. The evidence that mandatory school closures reduce the number of cases and, ultimately, mortality comes from experience with the previous pandemic such as influenza (Bayham & Fenichel, 2020; Radwan & Radwan, 2020a; Sintema, 2020).

In spite of these preventive procedures may be considered critical to contain the rapid outbreak of COVID-19, they will undoubtedly have short and long term consequences for the well-being and mental health of school students especially those in primary school. Therefore, great and unprecedented efforts must be immediately made to address the influence of

the COVID-19 outbreak on the mental health of the individual level (Cao et al., 2020). For students with mental health needs, school closures mean an absence of access to the necessary needs they often have through schools. As of April 8, 2020, schools have been closed in 188 countries (UNESCO, 2020). Over 90% of enrolled students worldwide are now out of school. The responsible bodies warned that the speed of the present educational disruption is unparalleled.

It was reported that the consequences of the outbreak of epidemics or pandemics on mental health were more dangerous than that of the diseases itself (for example, mothers of children with Zika syndrome). The large-scale disasters, whether natural (Earthquakes, volcanoes, or hurricanes), traumatic (eg, mass shootings), or environmental (Oil spills deep in oceans or seas), are always accompanied by increases in anxiety, panic, fear and depression, substance use disorder, psychological distress and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Yang et al., 2020). In addition, it was also associated with domestic violence, child and women abuse, as well as a broad range of other behavioral and mental disorders. These crises affect mental health in the immediate aftermath of the crisis and then persist over a long period of time.

In the context of the outbreak of the current pandemic (COVID-19), it appears likely that there will be increases in loneliness, depression, fear, panic and anxiety and, substance use, and domestic violence (Xiang et al., 2020), in particular among school students. The movement restrictions, school closures, and stay-at-home during the COVID-19 pandemic will likely lead to a rise in the rates of domestic violence. In particular, the students and their women are more likely to be subjected to violence as family members spend more time with each other, where families cope with additional stress and potential economic. The current crisis has a significant impact on students with mental health issues where school activities are maintaining their mental health and help them to cope with the surrounding environment. The current crisis has a significant impact on students with mental health issues where school activities are maintaining their mental health and help them to cope with the surrounding environment.

During the COVID-19 outbreak, some students lock themselves up inside their rooms for weeks, refusing to take showers, eat, or leave their rooms. For some students with depression or fear, there will be numerous difficulties adjusting back to normal life when school resumes. Students with special education needs, such as those with an autism spectrum disorder, are also at risk. They become frustrated when their daily routine activities are suspended.

According to the statement of the specialists in this context, some procedures should be taken into consideration to help the students in minimizing the mental health consequences resulting from the COVID-19 outbreak (Galea et al., 2020).

Firstly, it is necessary to develop ways to interact with students, as using modern communications, to overcome loneliness and bridge the social distance. The contacts that include video and/or voice are better to that of email and text messaging. Extensive efforts should be made to ensure connections with students who are usually isolated and marginalized, in particular homeless students, immigrants, and those with mental illness. The different platforms of social media play a key role in encouraging connect among students with their friends, classmates and educators as well as it is considered a trusted resource for mental health support of them. Furthermore, social media also provide enough space to share information with others about their well-being and resource needs (Radwan & Radwan, 2020b). However, some students, especially in developing countries, will still lonely, isolated and lack social support. Developing and implementing new activities, as online substitute activities, can be helpful to the students. The main obstacle is that not all students have the ability to access technologies that enable them to remote connectivity with their friends or relatives. In this context, the local authorities in the countries should work to resolve this problem and provide those students with free remote connectivity to mitigate the effect of short- and long-term movement restriction period.

Secondly, we must intervene in the event of violence cases involving children or their families because those sectors of the community may have not an opportunity to report and order urgent help. Safe places should be provided for students who have experienced violence or those who likely will be exposed to domestic violence (Duan & Zhu, 2020).

Thirdly, it necessary to enhance student's mental health to overcome challenges resulting from the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was reported that step-by-step care may be a helpful procedure if applied at the proper time (Winsper et al., 2013). In addition, it's necessary to training specific groups to provide urgent psychological first aid and provide social support (Liu et al., 2020). It is very important to create a, well known on the population level, reliable platform to provide online psychological counseling as well as to work as a contact tool with the supportive team. This platform should be administrated by the mental health doctor, psychologists and social workers who provide the students with reliable information based on the psychological status of the patient. In the urgent times, this platform should coordinate with the local authorities to help students to receive the required medicines.

## CONCLUSION

The rapid outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic infection among the public and its spreading around the globe is heavily impacting on global health and mental health of school students during the closure of schools. During this critical period, we should implement the procedures needed to mitigate its consequences post-COVID-19. Here we have highlighted the mental health problems that face students caused by emergency school closure resulting from the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic.

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