

Child Protection during Pandemics

Module 8

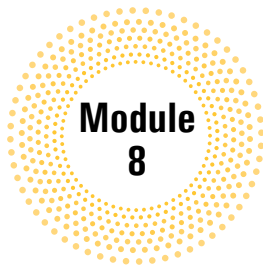


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Abbreviations

CCI	Child Care Institution
CCL	Children in Conflict with Law
CNCP	Child in Need of Care and Protection
CWC	Child Welfare Committee
CWPO	Child Welfare Police Officer
DCPO	District Child Protection Officer
DCPU	District Child Protection Unit
GBV	Gender-based Violence
JJB	Juvenile Justice Board
NCPCR	National Commission for Protection of Child Rights
NIMHANS	National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences
SJPU	Special Juvenile Police Unit
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
WHO	World Health Organization



Time
4 Hours

..... Session 1.1

Understanding pandemics and need for child protection during pandemics



Session Objectives

At the end of the module, participants will be able to:

- ♦ Define pandemics
- ♦ Describe COVID-19 and its control and prevention
- ♦ List out emerging child protection issues during COVID-19
- ♦ Special Juvenile Police Unit (SJPU), District Child Protection Unit (DCPU), Child Welfare Committee (CWC), Juvenile Justice Board (JJB) and Child Care Institutions (CCIs)
- ♦ Explain strategies to provide psychosocial support to children and addressing stigma and discrimination



Step 1: Start the session by showing the film; 'My Hero is You'

<https://youtu.be/FdO7MHICKys>

Credit: "My Hero Is You" video is produced by Maya Adam based on "My Hero Is You" book by Interagency Standing Committee.



Step 2: After showing the video, ask the participants the following questions. Encourage them to answer.

1. What are some of the challenges children may face during COVID-19?

Possible answers could be:

- a. Loneliness
- b. Psychological distress
- c. Disruption of daily routine
- d. Risk of contracting the disease

2. Based on the video what are some of the things that caregivers can do to ensure children's well-being during pandemics?

Possible answers could be:

- a. Spend time with them
- b. Read them good books
- c. Encourage them to meditate and do yoga
- d. Help them connect with friends by maintaining physical distance of one metre

3. Which behaviours must be followed during COVID-19?

Possible answers could be:

- a. Washing hands
- b. Wearing masks
- c. Covering mouth and nose while sneezing



Note for the facilitator: Encourage the participants to answer, and add the missing points from the ones given, if required.



Step 3: Summarise

- ◆ Infectious diseases like COVID-19 disrupt the environments in which children grow and develop
- ◆ Measures to prevent and control the spread of COVID-19 can expose children to protection risks
- ◆ Home-based, institution-based quarantine and isolation measures may negatively impact children
- ◆ During national lockdown, vulnerable families faced economic hardships
- ◆ Children become vulnerable to neglect, abuse and violence
- ◆ Child protection functionaries must be equipped to respond to these risks



Pandemics, examples of pandemics and understanding COVID-19



Activity 1: Group work and discussion



Step 1: Divide the participants into four groups. Ask the groups to brainstorm and answer the following questions:

Group 1: Definition and examples of pandemic

Group 2: What is COVID-19?

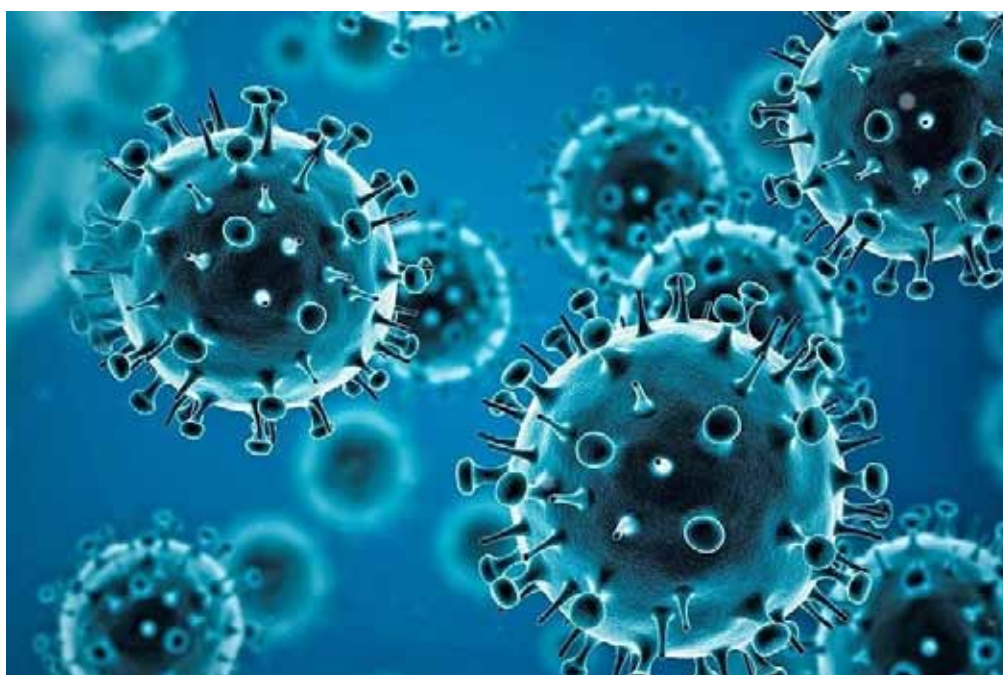
Group 3: Symptoms of COVID-19

Group 4: Control and preventive measures

Give the groups about 5 -7 minutes to brainstorm and come up with their answers. Once they have finished the task, ask the groups to identify a representative to share the findings with the larger group. Appreciate the groups for their work and summarise as below:

Definition of pandemic

- ♦ A pandemic is defined as “an epidemic occurring worldwide, or over a very wide area, crossing international boundaries and usually affecting a large number of people.



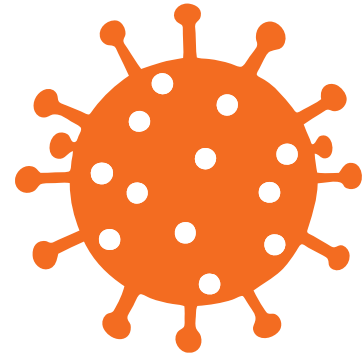
Source: https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1

Examples of pandemics:

- ♦ Various types of Plagues, Flus, Cholera, HIV/AIDS, SARS, COVID-19

What is COVID-19?

- ♦ Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) – ‘CO’ stands for corona, ‘VI’ for virus, and ‘D’ for disease – is a disease caused by a new strain of coronavirus first identified in Wuhan, China.
- ♦ World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared COVID-19 as a pandemic on March 11, 2020.
- ♦ Characterising COVID-19 as a pandemic is not an indication that the virus has become deadlier. It is an acknowledgement of the disease’s geographical spread.



Symptoms of COVID-19

- ♦ Fever, tiredness, and dry cough
- ♦ Aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat or diarrhoea
- ♦ Some people become infected but don’t develop any symptoms and don’t feel unwell
- ♦ Most people recover from the disease without needing special treatment
- ♦ Some people develop severe form of the disease with symptoms like shortness of breath and loss of appetite or pressure in the chest and high temperature



Control and preventive measures

- ♦ Physical distancing of at least one metre
- ♦ Use of face covers/masks
- ♦ Practise frequent hand washing or use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers
- ♦ Strict practise of covering one's mouth and nose while coughing/sneezing with a tissue/handkerchief /flexed elbow and disposing of used tissues properly
- ♦ Self-monitoring of health and reporting any illness at the earliest

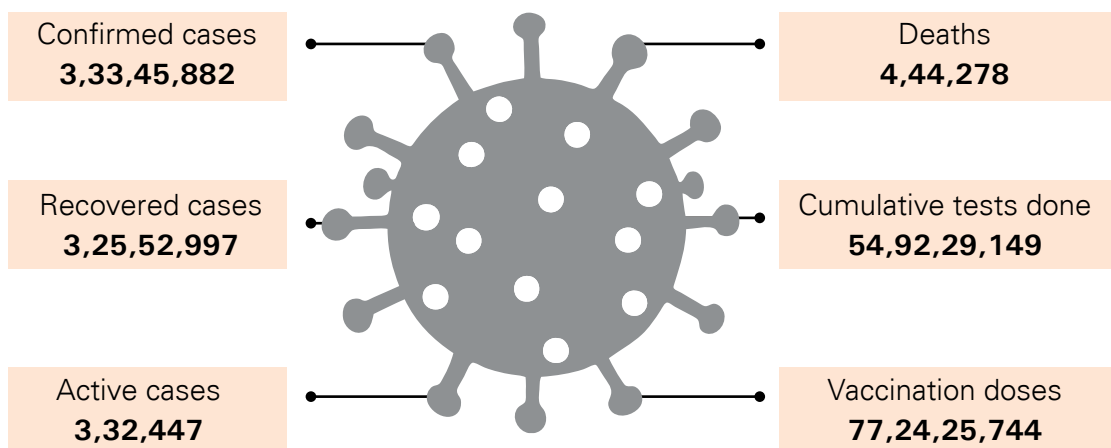
Show the video on prevention of COVID-19

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1bLg4c_p2ECRWim7BD6hB9eTozzSBiuZI/view?usp=sharing



Step 2: Share with the participants the status of COVID-19 in India

As on September 16, 2021, India had

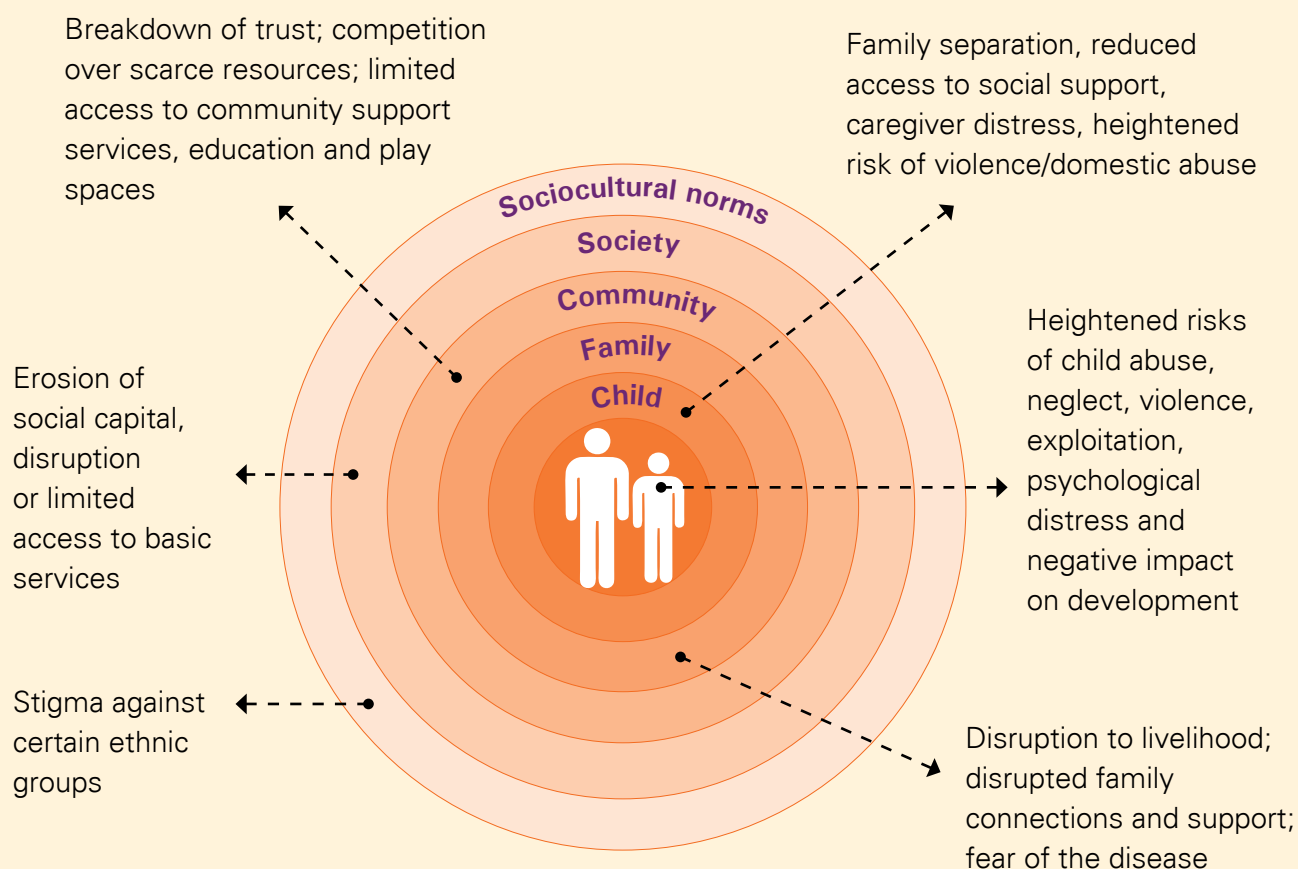


Socio-ecological impact of COVID-19

Step 1

Discuss that COVID-19 led to national lockdowns, restriction on mobility and massive migration from cities to rural areas. These factors resulted in:

- ♦ Erosion of social capital; disruption or limited access to basic services
- ♦ Breakdown of trust; competition over scarce resources; limited access to community support services, education and play spaces
- ♦ Family separation, reduced access to social support, caregiver distress, heightened risk of violence/domestic abuse
- ♦ Heightened risks of child abuse, neglect, violence, exploitation, psychological distress and negative impact on development



- ♦ Stigma against certain ethnic groups
- ♦ Disruption to livelihood; disrupted family connections and support; fear of the disease¹

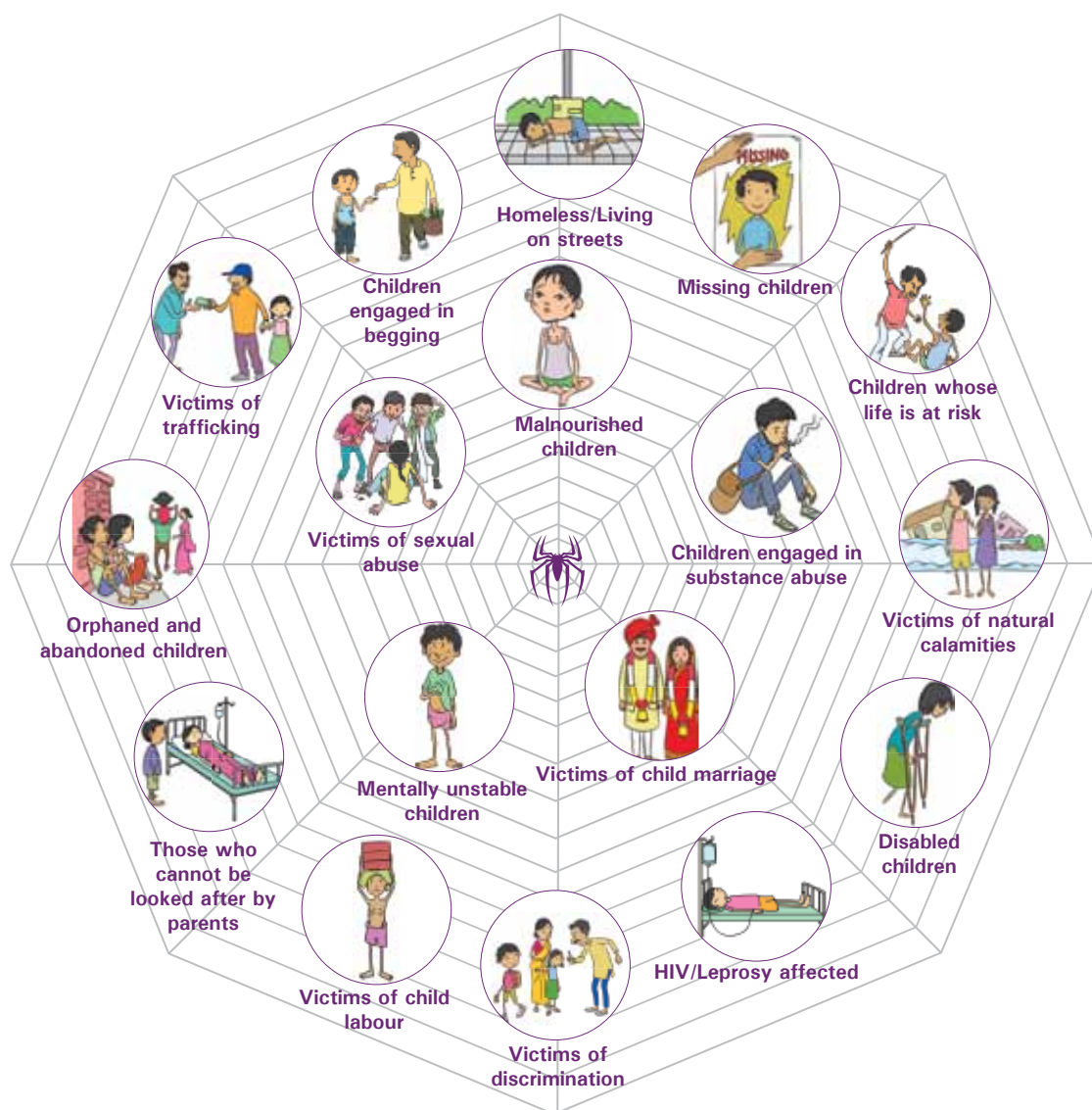


Step 2

Ask the participants if they are aware of a category of children that is most vulnerable during pandemics. Encourage them to identify such categories of children. After listening to their responses, summarise as below:

Most vulnerable categories of children during pandemics

- ♦ Children in CCI/alternative care/without family care
- ♦ Children in conflict with law (CCL)



¹ Technical Note: Protection of Children during the Coronavirus Pandemic (v.1), The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, Page 2

- ♦ Children on the move with migrant families or unaccompanied/ separated/ residing in isolation facilities
- ♦ Children on the streets
- ♦ Children with disabilities
- ♦ Children living with HIV
- ♦ Children of sex workers
- ♦ Children in other NGO shelters



Step 3

Share with the participants that it is necessary as professionals working in the area of child protection to know how COVID-19 or any such pandemics can impact the lives of children. Share that:

- ♦ Any pandemic situation like COVID-19 can create long term impacts on children's lives. Such situations disrupt the safe and secure environment in which they grow and develop.
- ♦ Disruptions to families, friendships, daily routines and the wider community can have negative consequences for children's well-being, development and protection.
- ♦ In addition, measures used to prevent and control the spread of COVID-19 can expose children to protection risks.
- ♦ Home-based, facility-based quarantine and isolation measures can all negatively impact children and their families.²
- ♦ Being at home shuts down the possibilities of sharing such experiences with friends or teachers whom they mostly trust.



Step 4: Share the specific effects of COVID-19 on children

COVID-19 is a health crisis that risks evolving into a broader child-rights crisis. The socio-economic impact of the virus is potentially catastrophic for many children.

- ♦ Millions of children are likely to drop out of school altogether in the absence of access to digital devices and internet for online classes. Many children may also drop out to provide economic support to their families.
- ♦ For children facing extreme deprivations, acute stress can trigger longer-term mental health challenges.



² Technical Note: Protection of Children during the Coronavirus Pandemic (v.1)

- ♦ Children, being out of school and stuck at home may be exposed to potential neglect, domestic abuse and exploitation. India has seen an increase in cases of child abuse since the lockdown measures were imposed, and there is evidence that child trafficking is on the rise.³
- ♦ Lockdowns come with heightened risk of children witnessing or suffering violence and abuse⁴ including
 1. Child sexual abuse
 2. Gender-based violence (GBV)
 3. Maltreatment
 4. Online abuse⁵
- ♦ COVID-19 pandemic has increased the vulnerability of those children whose families are already at risk of loss of livelihoods. The pandemic has deteriorated financial health of families; thus increasing the threat of child labour, child marriage, child trafficking and sexual exploitation and commercial exploitation.



Step 5: Now discuss the impact of lockdown on children

Events during lockdown further brought to the fore child protection concerns.

- ♦ CHILDLINE received more than **92,000 SOS** calls asking for protection from abuse and violence during March 20-March 31, 2020.
- ♦ The number of calls on the helpline since the lockdown increased by **50%**. Around 8% of other calls out of a total of **3.07 lakh** calls received were regarding child labour, another 8% dealing with missing or runaway children. The threat of physical, sexual, as well as emotional abuse, looms over the children along with COVID-19.

CHILDLINE received as many as 5,584 phone calls to prevent **child marriage** during the COVID-19 induced lockdown.

According to UNICEF, the estimated number of children exposed to **domestic violence** in India lies between **27.1 million to 69 million**.⁶

³ <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/india-covid-19-survey-eight-ten-households-are-struggling-meet-their-daily-expenses-warns-save>

⁴ Child Protection during COVID 19: Threat Of Trafficking Of Children, RLSA, UNICEF

⁵ Child Protection during COVID 19: Threat Of Trafficking Of Children, RLSA, UNICEF

⁶ <https://feminisminindia.com/2020/04/15/children-covid-19-lockdown-abusive-households-street-children/>

Child protection risks during pandemics



Step 1

Share with the participants that now we shall know about the risks that children may face during pandemics. Share that:

Pandemics like COVID-19 expose children to several risks. Some of them have been observed in the current COVID-19 pandemic and some are potential risks observed in previous infectious disease outbreaks.

Risks presented by COVID-19

- ♦ Physical and emotional maltreatment
- ♦ Gender-based violence
- ♦ Mental health and psychosocial distress
- ♦ Child labour
- ♦ Child trafficking
- ♦ Unaccompanied and separated children
- ♦ Social exclusion



Note for the facilitator: Discuss each of the above mentioned risks in detail.

1. Physical and emotional maltreatment

Under economic duress and psychological stress parents may not be able to ensure well-being of their children. This may manifest in the following forms:

- ♦ Reduced supervision and neglect of children
- ♦ Increase in child abuse and domestic/ interpersonal violence
- ♦ Poisoning and other dangers and risks of injuries to children in the absence of adult supervision
- ♦ Pressure on or lack of access to child protection services



Let's now see the specific **causes of physical and emotional maltreatment**

- ♦ School closures, continued work requirements for caregivers, illness, quarantine/isolation of caregivers
- ♦ Increased psychosocial distress among caregivers and community members
- ♦ Availability and misuse of toxic disinfectants and alcohol
- ♦ Increased obstacles to reporting incidents

2. Violence, particularly GBV

- ♦ Increased risk of sexual abuse, including online sexual abuse and harassment
- ♦ Increased risk of sexual exploitation of children, including sex for assistance, commercial sexual exploitation of children and forced early marriage
- ♦ Pressure on or lack of access to child protection/GBV services



Let's now learn about the causes of GBV during COVID-19.

- ♦ Reduced family protection of children
- ♦ Lockdown created conditions – the child and the abuser forced to be together for long periods of time
- ♦ Reduced household income and/or reliance on outsiders to transport goods and services to the community.
- ♦ Girls' gender-imposed household responsibilities such as caring for family members or doing chores
- ♦ Increased obstacles to reporting incidents and seeking medical treatment or other support

3. Mental health and psychosocial distress

- ♦ Distress of children due to the death, illness, or separation of a loved one or fear of disease
- ♦ Worsening of pre-existing mental health conditions
- ♦ Pressure on or lack of access to Mental Health Psychosocial Support services

What are the causes of risk?

- ♦ Increased stress levels due to isolation in treatment units or home-based quarantine
- ♦ Children and parents/caregivers with pre-existing mental health conditions may not be able to access usual support and treatment
- ♦ Quarantine measures can create fear and panic in the community, especially in children, if they do not understand what is happening



4. Child labour

- ♦ Increased engagement of children in hazardous or exploitative labour

Major causes of child labour during lockdown are:

- ♦ Loss or reduction in household income
- ♦ Opportunity or expectation to work due to school closure



5. Child trafficking

- ♦ Increase in trafficking of children for child labour/ bonded labour
- ♦ Increase in trafficking of children for commercial sexual exploitation

Causes of risk:

- ♦ Lack of resources available during pandemic for tracking missing children
- ♦ Stalling of functioning of government departments/police that deal with trafficking
- ♦ Follow up of cases in courts hampered



6. Unaccompanied and separated children

We know that unaccompanied and separated children are the most vulnerable children during any pandemic due to

- ♦ Separation: Children can be separated from their caregivers in case their caregivers are placed in isolation/quarantine
- ♦ Becoming unaccompanied or child head of household
- ♦ Being placed in institutions



Causes of vulnerability of such children:

- ♦ Loss of parents/caregivers due to disease
- ♦ Isolation/quarantine of caregiver(s) apart from child(ren)
- ♦ Children sent away by parents to stay with other family members in non-affected areas

7. Social exclusion

Social exclusion leads to discrimination against people and depriving them of opportunities, choices and dignity.



How social exclusion is a child protection risk during COVID-19?

- ♦ Social stigmatisation of infected individuals or individuals/groups suspected to be infected
- ♦ Increased risk/limited support for children living/working on the street, other children already at risk and those in institutions
- ♦ Increased risk/limited support to CCL including those in detention

Causes of risk of social exclusion:

- ♦ Social and racial discrimination of individuals/groups suspected to be infected
- ♦ Disproportionate impact on more disadvantaged and marginalised groups
- ♦ Closure/inaccessibility of basic services for vulnerable children and/or families⁷

8. Children of sex workers

Children of sex workers are most vulnerable and invisible. Since their parents are without livelihood and facing stigma and discrimination they are at an increased risk of malnutrition, being forced into trade, exploitation and abuse at the hands of traffickers.⁸



Activity 2: Case study and discussion

Step 2: Read the case story and ask the participants to answer the questions that follow.

Kajal, a 14-year-old girl, belongs to a low income family in a remote village in Rajasthan. Kajal, her younger brother and father live in a small house. Despite economic hardships, her father struggled to educate her. During the lockdown, he bought a mobile phone for Kajal to enable her attend online classes. Her father worked hard and remained engrossed in his work.

Gradually Kajal started using social media. She came in contact with a man and liked talking to him. After lockdown was relaxed, they started meeting in some nearby places. One day she went missing. Her father was shocked and informed the police.

She along with some other children were rescued from Mumbai with the help of anti-trafficking police unit and railway CHILDLINE. They found that the man she was talking to was one of the traffickers in the gang. She was given admission in a children's home for few days where she could recover from the trauma she went through after being trafficked. In a couple of days, Kajal was handed over to her family after carrying out all the procedures under JJ Act.

⁷ Technical Note: Protection of Children during the Coronavirus Pandemic (v.1), The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action

⁸ <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page/covid-19-and-children/article32124061.ece>

Questions

1. What was wrong regarding Kajal's use of social media?
2. Identify the functionaries that were involved in rescuing Kajal?
3. Reflect upon whether COVID-19 induced lockdown had a role to play in increasing Kajal's risk to trafficking?



Step 3: Ensuring online safety of children

Share that in the above story we saw that Kajal was trafficked because she befriended a stranger online. With increasing use of technology, more so during lockdown, children's risk to online abuse is increasing. Thus, online safety is an important child protection issue.

- ♦ Sensitisation of children and parents, especially on online safety.
- ♦ Strengthening child protection system at all levels



Share the 'Five Golden Rules to Stay Safe Online':

Teach children these five golden rules to stay safe online.

- ♦ It is OK to block someone you are not comfortable communicating with
- ♦ Do not accept friend requests from strangers
- ♦ If an e-mail looks suspicious it is best to delete it or mark it as junk
- ♦ Passwords are not social; do not share your password with anyone
- ♦ Remember to log out while using a public computer⁹



Step 4

Summarise the section by showing video on UNICEF's call for action to protect children during COVID-19

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kp_Cwr3A4zI

⁹ Child Protection during COVID 19: THREAT OF TRAFFICKING OF CHILDREN, RLSA, UNICEF

Role of child protection functionalities in pandemics



Session Objectives

At the end of the section, participants will be able to describe the role played by various child functionalities such as:

- ♦ Police
- ♦ JJBs
- ♦ CWCs
- ♦ CCIs
- ♦ District administration
- ♦ Local governance bodies (Panchayats)



Step 1

Inform the participants that in this section, we will discuss the role played by various child functionalities during pandemics, including police, JJBs, CWCs, CCIs, district administration and local governance bodies viz., panchayats.



Step 2

Share the following points with the participants regarding protection of children during pandemics:

- ♦ We already know that under the Juvenile Justice System, Children in Need of Care and Protection (CNCP) and Children in Conflict with Law (CCL) are eligible for support under Mission Vatsalya (erstwhile Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS)).
- ♦ The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) is mandated to monitor the rights of all children, especially those from vulnerable communities.
- ♦ Guidelines have been issued by the NCPCR for children of migrant workers, those living on streets, in institutions under the Juvenile Justice System and residential schools.



- ♦ You can see the link for the guidelines 'NCPCR - Advisory regarding care and protection of children moving with migrant families; children living on streets/CCIs in light of COVID-19' : https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ZWkz3M8kSbEeUek0y7vw_fzjSzF7U8Rc/view?usp=sharing and
- ♦ 'NCPCR - Addendum to NCPCR - Advisory' regarding care and protection of children moving with migrant families; children living on streets/CCIs in light of COVID-19 dated 28.03.2020' : https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OeNP18KWFPKjv_A2SEOI2hpjxiu0IP-D/view?usp=sharing
- ♦ NCPCR has also issued a Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) on "Rescue, Care and Protection of Children in Street Situations". Link: https://drive.google.com/file/d/14_ZSOZyWEI4sqF8iEzX4NbaArqv0EvCn/view?usp=sharing
- ♦ There have also been directives from the Supreme Court for children in CCIs, Shelter Homes and Observation Homes. Link: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Ub8uMh1rfgiiZbi_JnLC9FPlcN7Tw2EX/view?usp=sharing
- ♦ The institutional mechanism under Mission Vatsalya in collaboration with civil society organisations are striving to reach out to these vulnerable groups.¹⁰
- ♦ With regards to the protection of street connected children, the latest SOP issued by the NCPCR is one of the key documents. It presents a framework to provide care and protection to the Children living in Street Situations through application of relevant legal mechanisms, provisions provided under different schemes and programmes for their successful rehabilitation either through institutional care or family-based care by strengthening families with the benefits provided under different schemes and programmes.¹¹



Step 3: Role of Police

Police has to play a crucial role in child protection. Let us understand what are the roles of police during pandemics:

- ♦ Rescue and rehabilitation of children in street situations, children of migrant workers and unaccompanied adolescent workers
- ♦ In the case of quarantine camps, police should ensure safety and protection of children in these camps
- ♦ Safety of children affected by COVID-19 and in quarantine/ isolation
- ♦ Violence prevention during COVID-19



¹⁰ <https://www.cry.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/COVID-19-Its->

¹¹ <https://ncpcr.gov.in/showfile.php?lang=1&level=1&sublinkid=2005&lid=1915>

- ♦ Awareness on CHILDLINE services and psychosocial support services to vulnerable children
- ♦ Implementation of the Supreme Court Guidelines dated 03 April 2020 on child protection in the context of COVID-19

Police has a crucial role to play in mitigating the extended impact on children such as:

- ♦ Identifying and supporting missing/unaccompanied children
- ♦ Violence prevention and response
- ♦ Prevention of child labour, trafficking , early marriage¹²

Additionally, the status of these children is to be monitored and maintained by the Head of of SJPU and DCPO in in the District.



Step 4: Let's now discuss the specific roles of various functionaries of the child protection system in pandemics.

1. Role of DCPU

- ♦ In case of absence of CCIs registered under the JJ Act, 2015 in a particular district or in case of lack of space in the available CCI, DCPU shall ensure that the respective CWC identify such fit facility under Section 51 of the JJ Act, 2015 to temporarily take the responsibility of the children moving with migrant families or living on the street.¹³
- ♦ The District Authority should ensure that the CHILDLINE is active 24*7 for providing assistance to the administration in ensuring safety of children.¹⁴
- ♦ Prioritise the safety of children who are already placed in CCIs as these children are in care and protection of the Government. For this, DCPO should take the following measures:
 - a. Ensure that the staff is regularly sensitised and updated on the measures for preventing the spread of COVID-19.
 - b. The importance of physical distancing or staying indoors should be reiterated to the CCI staff and resident children.



¹² Child Protection during COVID 19: THREAT OF TRAFFICKING OF CHILDREN, RLSA, UNICEF

¹³ <https://ncpcr.gov.in/showfile.php?lang=1&level=1&sublinkid=1983&lid=1904>

¹⁴ <https://ncpcr.gov.in/showfile.php?lang=1&level=1&sublinkid=1983&lid=1904>

- c. The donor should not be allowed to visit inside the premises. A separate counter may be placed near the entrance of the Home where the donations can be accepted. The donors may be requested to provide dry ration/uncooked food material instead of cooked meal.
- d. The CCLs may be equipped with sufficient academic and recreation material for the children.
- e. If required, therapeutic counselling services may be provided to the children and staff to ensure social well-being.
- f. Medicines and medical facility for children with HIV/AIDS should be made available in all CCLs and other places where these children are residing.
- g. If the release of funds to the CCLs is pending, it should be expedited and funds be provided at the earliest.

2. District Collector/Magistrate should ensure the following:

- ♦ Given the high risk of COVID-19, it is the responsibility of the hostel/madrasa/ government/private residential institutions to take care of the children staying there. No institution should ask these children to vacate the hostel/madrasa/ residential institutions during this period.
- ♦ There should be no shortage of basic facilities such as food, water, medical aid, sanitation for these children.
- ♦ If the release of funds to these institutions is pending, it should be expedited and funds be provided at the earliest.
- ♦ Support from CHILDLINE may be sought to conduct visit to these institutions and report any kind of shortage or safety issue.¹⁵

3. Role of SJPU

SJPU has a key role in protection of CCL during COVID-19. It should take appropriate measures for CCL who are lodged in Observation Homes and Special Homes.

We know the multiple vulnerabilities of children in street situations. These children are either orphans or abandoned, missing or run away; begging on the street or are living with family who do not have a place to stay. In the wake of COVID such children are more prone to violence and abuse.

So, SJPU should take specific measures to ensure protection of children living on the street. In the previous sessions we have learnt about specific responsibilities of the Child Welfare Police Officer (CWPO) under SJPU. During COVID also CWPO needs to take some specific steps to ensure protection of these children. Let's learn what these roles are!

¹⁵ <https://ncpcr.gov.in/showfile.php?lang=1&level=1&sublinkid=1982&lid=1903>

4. Role of CWPO

We already know that CWPO is the key official in SJPU in terms of child protection. Let's now learn the role of CWPO during COVID-19.

- ♦ Regularly monitor if any CNCP are there in the area within the police station's jurisdiction. CHILDLINE may be requested to identify such children and bring to the notice of CWPO for further action.
- ♦ Record the details of each child such as name, age, gender, place of origin, alone or with family etc., whenever such children are found.
- ♦ Send the details of such children to the concerned CWC.
- ♦ After the preliminary enquiry and interaction, if the child is alone, place him/her in CCI or a Fit Facility on a temporary basis with approval of the concerned CWC.
- ♦ In case the child is with family, adequate measures to provide shelter to the family may be taken as deemed appropriate by the competent authority designated by the State, keeping in view the best interest of the child.
- ♦ In case of children with families, adequate food for children and food appropriate for infants may also be made available.
- ♦ Make arrangements for conducting medical check-up of each child.
- ♦ In case, any symptoms of COVID-19 or any other condition requiring medical attention are identified, contact nearest health facility. In this, the NGOs may be involved for assistance.
- ♦ In case the sitting of CWC is not feasible in the current circumstances, to facilitate the process, the CWPO may share the information and details of the child/children along with photograph (taken by the CWPO on mobile) with the CWC Chairperson and CWC may then approve their temporary rehabilitation in appropriate place.
- ♦ Whenever any CWPO comes in contact with any child/children in need of care and protection for the purpose of rescuing them, for producing them before CWC and for any other purpose connected to rehabilitation/repatriation of such child/children, all the protocols issued by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare shall be strictly adhered to, keeping in view the safety and security of such vulnerable children.



5. Role of JJBs

- ♦ Proactively consider steps that are to be taken in the light of COVID-19, while conducting their inquiries/ inspections.
- ♦ Online or video sessions can be organized.
- ♦ The JJBs/Children's Courts may consider measures to prevent children residing in Observation Homes, Special Homes and Places of Safety from risk of harm arising out of COVID-19.



So, JJB should proactively consider whether a child or children should be kept in the CCI considering the best interest, health and safety concerns.

These may include:

- ♦ Consider taking steps to release all CCL residing in Observation Homes on bail, unless there are clear and valid reasons for the application of the provision to Section 12, JJ Act, 2015.
- ♦ Video conferencing or online sittings can be held to prevent contact for speedy disposal of cases.
- ♦ Ensure that counselling services are provided for all children in Observation Homes.
- ♦ Monitor the situation in the Observation Homes on a regular basis.

6. Role of CWCs in child protection during COVID-19.

- ♦ Proactively consider steps that are to be taken in the light of COVID-19 while conducting their inquiries/inspections and also whether a child or children should be kept in the CCI considering the best interest, health and safety concerns.
- ♦ In case of the absence of CCI registered under the JJ Act, 2015 or lack of space in the available CCIs, the CWCs shall identify Fit Facility under Section 51 of the JJ Act 2015, to temporarily take the responsibility of the children.
- ♦ For this, nearby Government school buildings and/or private schools and/or other facilities run by registered NGOs or community centres may be converted into Fit Facilities for these children.
- ♦ Wherever, a meeting of CWC is not possible, the same may be conducted through online methods such as video calls, WhatsApp etc.
- ♦ In case of a girl child, she should be sent to a shelter or Fit Facility exclusively meant for girl children and adequate arrangements for safety should be made.
- ♦ In case the girl child is alleged to have been trafficked, immediate relief such as food, shelter, toiletries, clothing, counselling, medical aid, etc. be provided under MWCD's Ujjawala Scheme during the interim period.

- ♦ Similarly, in case of a child with special needs, he/she should be placed in facility specifically meant for such children.
- ♦ Once the lockdown is removed and after the situation returns to normal, the children shall be produced before the CWC for further orders after following due procedure. The CWC shall then decide and give further orders for their rehabilitation/repatriation as deemed appropriate. Hence, proper maintenance of record of all children and the place they are accommodated in is to be maintained by the CWPO. The same may be shared with CWC and SJPU regularly.¹⁶

7. Role of CCIs during COVID-19

- ♦ The Person in Charge of the CCI and all other staff working in the CCI shall proactively and diligently take all necessary steps to keep the children safe from the risk of COVID-19, in furtherance of the fundamental principle of safety enshrined in the JJ Act, 2015.
- ♦ The Health Ministry has set up new **National Helplines on COVID-19, which are 1075 and 1800112545**. In case of any queries or clarifications related to Coronavirus pandemic, call on these numbers. In addition, **CHILDLINE 1098** continues to be operational.
- ♦ In the case of staff or children with symptoms, call the helplines mentioned above and/or a local doctor. Go to the hospital only if doctor/helpline advises or if symptoms are severe.
- ♦ Staff or any other individual found to be exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 should not be permitted to enter the CCI.
- ♦ CCIs should promote physical distancing. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has issued Guidelines on Social Distancing. Link: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1EXBdV4RYAppS7XDZyuRmiPbpF8KMelPa/view?usp=sharing>
- ♦ CCIs should enforce regular hand washing with safe water and soap, alcohol rub/hand sanitizer or chlorine solution and, at a minimum, daily disinfection and cleaning of various surfaces including the kitchen and bathrooms.
- ♦ Where adequate water is not available, immediate steps should be taken to ensure it is made available through necessary action, including enhancing budget allocation for the said purpose.
- ♦ CCIs should provide appropriate water, sanitation, disinfection, and waste management facilities and follow environmental cleaning and decontamination procedures.



¹⁶ <https://ncpcr.gov.in/showfile.php?lang=1&level=1&sublinkid=1983&lid=1904>

PM CARES for Children Scheme

The PM CARES for Children Scheme was launched by the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India on 29th May 2021. It aims to support children who have lost both the parents or legal guardian or adoptive parents or surviving parent to COVID-19 pandemic during the period starting from 11th March 2020. For non-institutional care, financial support at the rate of Rs. 4000/- per month per child shall be provided to Children (in account of guardian) under the Mission Vatsalya Scheme. For children in institutional care, a maintenance grant @ Rs. 3000/- per month shall be given under the Mission Vatsalya Scheme, to Child Care Institutions.

COVID-19 control and prevention measures for CCIs



Session Objectives

At the end of the section, participants will be able to describe control and prevention measures for COVID-19 in CCIs including screening, health referral system, quarantine facility and handling emergency situations.



Step 1

Share with the participants that the CCIs must conduct the following for the control and prevention of COVID-19:

1. Conduct regular screening
2. Health referral system to be followed
 - ♦ Discuss that as per the earlier information, the CCI should immediately follow procedures established by the Ministry/Department of Health and Family Welfare, if children or staff or other service providers working in the CCI become unwell.
 - ♦ First step is to inform the nurse/doctor attached to the CCI at the earliest, when there is a suspicion of COVID-19 infection in any staff/child.
 - ♦ CCIs can call the helplines referred above or a local doctor.
 - ♦ Children or people affected should go only if such advice is given by doctor/helpline, or if symptoms are severe.
3. Quarantine

In case of symptoms, the children in the CCI should have a quarantine/ segregated section (*where possible*) and alternate arrangements where a quarantine facility is not possible.
4. Planning in advance for emergency situations

The Person in Charge of the CCI shall, in coordination with the health staff attached to the CCI, plan ahead with the local health authorities for any emergency that may arise due to the COVID-19. This shall include:



- ♦ Updating the emergency contact lists.
- ♦ Separating sick children and staff from those who are well, without creating stigma.
- ♦ For informing parents/caregivers, and consulting with healthcare providers/ health authorities, wherever possible, on whether children/staff need to be referred directly to a health facility, depending on the situation/context, or sent home, after obtaining the necessary orders from the concerned CWC or JJB, or Children's Court.
- ♦ Information about such procedures shall be shared with staff, parents and children ahead of time.¹⁷



Activity 3



Step 2

Divide the participants into two or three groups and distribute copies of the given case story to each of the groups. Instruct the group members to read the case story and brainstorm to find suitable answers to the question that follow.

Thirteen-year-old Aman is a street-connected child living in a CCI in Delhi. His parents are migrant workers. During the lockdown he was shifted to a children's home run by an organisation. One day he fell ill and started showing symptoms of COVID. He was isolated in a room. The caretaker excluded him from all the recreational activities. He was provided only food. The children in the CCI stigmatised him. Aman stopped talking to anyone.

One day Aman's parents came to meet him. They found him depressed. Aman's parents need help. A social worker helped them in contacting CWC.

Question:

What steps should CWC members take to ensure protection of Aman?

- Telling Aman's parents that due to COVID-19 they can't communicate with CCI
- Telling the parents to take him along with them
- Call CCI over phone and ask for details
- Listen to the CCI side of the story and stop taking any action
- Ask them to inform the nurse/doctor attached to the CCI
- Ensure that the child gets medical treatment
- Ensure all the precautionary measures are in place

¹⁷ NCPDR Advisory

- h. Ask the caretakers to shift Aman to a shared room so that he won't feel excluded
- i. Ensure proper quarantine facility to Aman with psychosocial support
- j. Shift the child in to another CCI without taking any action
- k. Conduct an enquiry about the incident

Correct answer: c, e, f, g



Step 2: Discuss the role of local authorities i.e. panchayats or municipal authorities.

Local governments have been playing a key role in addressing COVID-19 pandemic. Let us understand in detail the role they can play for children's protection during the pandemic.

- ♦ In case of children of families involved in seasonal labour, adequate arrangements of basic facilities such as food, shelter and medical facilities (if required) shall be made available at the local level by local authorities i.e. panchayats or municipal authorities. For this, such families and children should be enlisted by DCPO.
- ♦ The entire process and status of children is to be monitored and maintained by District Collector/District Magistrate.¹⁸

¹⁸ <https://ncpcr.gov.in/showfile.php?lang=1&level=1&sublinkid=1983&lid=1904>

Providing psychosocial support to children and addressing stigma and discrimination



Session Outcomes

Share that in this session we will discuss:

- ♦ What is mental health and psychosocial support?
- ♦ What is stigma and discrimination?
- ♦ Stigma and discrimination during COVID-19
- ♦ Addressing stigma and discrimination
- ♦ Ways to provide psychosocial support to children during COVID-19



Step 1

Inform the participants that we shall now watch a video on psychosocial well-being during COVID-19. This will help us understand the mental health issues during COVID-19 and the importance of addressing them. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U_WgwbAtpjk

Source: Icall, Tata Institute of Social Sciences



Step 2

After showing the video, discuss that as we saw in the video, pandemics are not only a physical health issue, but they badly affect our mental health also! We have already discussed about the **mental health and psychosocial distress as one of the child protection risks**. Let's discuss it further in detail.



Step 3: What is mental health and psychosocial support?

Share that the composite term 'mental health and psychosocial support' (MHPSS) refers to any type of local or outside support that aims to protect or promote psychosocial well-being or prevent or treat mental disorders.¹⁹

COVID-19 and the related lockdown have pushed children to potential vulnerability and risky situations since there have been restrictions of mobility and interaction with peer group, teachers and the larger community.

¹⁹ <https://emergency.unhcr.org/entry/49304/mental-health-and-psychosocial-support>

School closures are affecting children's access to learning and limiting their interactions with peers. Children may feel confused and at loss with the current situation, leading to frustration and anxiety, which will only increase with the over-exposure to mass and social media, especially among adolescents.

Further, stigma related to COVID-19 has left some children more vulnerable to violence and psychosocial distress.²⁰



Step 4: What is stigma and discrimination?

Say that throughout the sessions we have been mentioning about stigma. Ask the participants if they know what stigma means? Encourage them to answer the question and thank the participants for correct answers. Then discuss further in detail:

- ♦ Stigma is a major cause of discrimination and exclusion. It affects people's self-esteem, disrupts their family relationships and limits their ability to socialise and obtain housing and jobs. It hampers the prevention of mental health disorders, the promotion of mental well-being and the provision of effective treatment and care. It also contributes to the abuse of human rights.²¹
- ♦ **Stigma during COVID-19**
 - Social stigma in the context of health is the negative association between a person or group of people who share certain characteristics and a specific disease. In an outbreak, this may mean people are labelled, stereotyped, discriminated against, treated separately, and/or experience loss of status because of a perceived link with a disease.
 - Such treatment can negatively affect those with the disease, as well as their caregivers, family, friends and communities.
 - People who don't have the disease but share other characteristics with this group may also suffer from stigma.
 - The current COVID-19 outbreak has provoked social stigma and discriminatory behaviours against people of certain ethnic backgrounds as well as anyone perceived to have been in contact with the virus.



Step 5: Why is COVID-19 causing so much stigma?

The level of stigma associated with COVID-19 is based on three main factors:

- ♦ It is a disease that's new and for which there are still many unknowns
- ♦ We are often afraid of the unknown
- ♦ It is easy to associate that fear with 'others'. It is understandable that there is confusion, anxiety, and fear among the public. Unfortunately, these factors are also fueling harmful stereotypes.

²⁰ <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/covid-19-children-heightened-risk-abuse-neglect-exploitation-and-violence-amidst>

²¹ <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/noncommunicable-diseases/mental-health/priority-areas/stigma-and-discrimination>

Ask the participants what does stigma do? Listen to their responses and summarise that stigma has the following impact:

- ♦ Drives people to hide the illness to avoid discrimination
- ♦ Prevents people from seeking healthcare immediately
- ♦ Discourages them from adopting healthy behaviours²²



Step 6: Show the video on addressing stigma during COVID-19

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1kwpjqe62J30mtDe2XQiT_5l15KIB7Z8J/view?usp=sharing

Addressing stigma and discrimination during COVID-19

Let us understand what should we do to address stigma and discrimination



Dos

- ♦ Allay anxiety through FACTS and POSITIVE and accurate MESSAGES
- ♦ Speak out against false information and double check facts before sharing to stop rumours
- ♦ Share positive stories of those who have recovered from COVID-19
- ♦ Appreciate efforts of health workers, essential service providers and support them and their families
- ♦ Promote kindness, solidarity, compassion

What we should not do to fight stigma and discrimination



Don'ts

- ♦ Do not indulge in spreading rumours, myths and misinformation
- ♦ Do not attach locations or ethnicity to the disease and do not label any community or area for spread of COVID-19
- ♦ Do not talk about people "transmitting COVID-19" or "infecting others" or "spreading the virus" as it implies intentional transmission and assigns blame
- ♦ Do not target health workers and essential service providers
- ♦ Do not fuel fear and panic
- ♦ Due to fear, stigma and discrimination associated with COVID-19, it is important to provide psychosocial support to children

²² <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/covid19-stigma-guide.pdf>

Let's now understand the major roles of parents or caregivers in providing psychosocial support to children

- ♦ To promote an environment where children can grow up and develop their full potential having fun and being safe and healthy.
- ♦ To facilitate a space where children are listened to, they can express their thoughts and feelings, and are free to ask any question and are answered honestly.²³



Step 7: Discuss how to help children deal with stressful events

- ♦ **Listen:** Give children opportunities to **talk** about what they are feeling. Encourage them to share concerns and ask questions
- ♦ **Comfort:** Use simple tools to **comfort and calm** children, e.g. telling stories, singing with them and playing games
- ♦ **Praise them frequently** for their strengths, such as showing courage, compassion and helpfulness
- ♦ **Reassure** children that you are prepared to keep them safe. Provide them with correct information through valid sources

Let's now understand how to **recognise signs of psychological distress in children which needs specialised help**.

Some children may face serious mental health issues and show symptoms such as:

- ♦ Difficulties in sleeping and eating
- ♦ Nightmares
- ♦ Being withdrawn or aggressive
- ♦ Complain of pain in stomach or headache
- ♦ Having fears, afraid of being left alone
- ♦ Clinging, depending behaviours
- ♦ New fears manifest (for instance of the dark)
- ♦ Decreased interest in playing and engaging in playful activities
- ♦ Being sad, crying more than usual or for no apparent reason

Children may experience psychological distress and stress in situations of any pandemic. Parents and caretakers need to understand the communication with children during such situations.

²³ **Psychosocial Support for Children during COVID-19:** A Manual for Parents and Caregivers, UNICEF, CHILDLINE India Foundation



Step 8: How to talk to children about COVID-19?

- ♦ Make sure you talk positively and emphasise on the importance of effective prevention measures, including following safe tips on handwashing
- ♦ Remember to not make the conversation scary or fear-based for the child

How to help children cope with stress during COVID-19?

- ♦ Children may respond to stress in different ways such as being clingier, anxious, withdrawn angry or agitated, bedwetting etc.
- ♦ Respond to the child's reactions in a supportive way, listen to their concerns and give them extra love and attention.
- ♦ Children need adults' love and attention during difficult times. Give them extra time and attention.
- ♦ Remember to listen to your children, speak kindly and reassure them. If possible, make opportunities for the child to play and relax.
- ♦ Try and keep children close to their parents and family and avoid separating children and their caregivers to the extent possible. If separation occurs (e.g. hospitalisation) ensure regular contact (e.g. via phone) and re-assurance.
- ♦ Keep to regular routines and schedules as much as possible, or help create new ones in a new environment, including school/learning as well as time for safely playing and relaxing.
- ♦ Provide facts about what has happened, explain what is going on now and give them clear information about how to reduce their risk of being infected by the disease in words that they can understand depending on their age. This also includes providing information about what could happen in a re-assuring way (e.g. a family member and/or the child may start feeling unwell and may have to go to the hospital for some time so doctors can help them feel better).



Activity 4



Step 9

Inform the participants that we shall now do an activity to understand how words matter in providing psychosocial support to children. Say that we must remember to use positive words while talking to children.

In the activity we shall play a word game as 'positive words' bring positivity in children.

Ask the participants to identify the positive and negative words from the given list:

- a. Physical distancing – Social distancing
- b. S/he is affected with COVID-19 – S/he is a COVID-19 case
- c. S/he contracted COVID-19 - S/he spread COVID-19

- d. COVID-19 victims – COVID-19 survivor
- e. People from specific community/region/country can spread COVID-19 – Any person from any community/region/country can spread COVID-19

Correct answers

Positive words

- ♦ Physical distancing
- ♦ S/he is affected with COVID-19
- ♦ S/he contracted COVID-19
- ♦ COVID-19 survivor
- ♦ Any person from any community/region/country can spread COVID-19

Negative words

- ♦ Social distancing
- ♦ S/he is a COVID-19 case
- ♦ S/he spread COVID-19
- ♦ COVID-19 victims
- ♦ People from specific community/region/country can spread COVID-19



Step 10

Now we know how to provide psychosocial support to children. We know that CNCP and CCL need special support during a pandemic like COVID-19. The Hon'ble Supreme Court has recently circulated specific measures to ensure well-being of such children. Let's now understand them.

Measures to ensure well-being of children (CNCP and CCL)

- ♦ It is important to acknowledge that for children, it is natural to feel stress, anxiety, grief, and worry during an ongoing pandemic like COVID-19.
- ♦ Reassure the children that they are safe. Let them know it is okay if they feel upset.
- ♦ Encourage children to connect with each other and to talk with people they trust, about their concerns and how they are feeling.

- ♦ Avoid watching, reading, listening or discussing too much news about COVID-19 and persuade children to divert their attention to other topics as well.
- ♦ Disruption of routine and closure of schools may be stressful for children. Try to continue with the regular routine maintained at home, with minimal disruptions.
- ♦ Spend time with children and help them to unwind, preferably doing activities they enjoy.
- ♦ Do not use corporal punishment/violence to discipline children.
- ♦ Guide students on how to support their peers and prevent exclusion and bullying.
- ♦ Work with the health staff/social workers/counsellors to identify and support children and staff who exhibit signs of distress in the CCI.
- ♦ In CCIs, there may be some children who are undergoing some kind of counselling or treatment for pre-existing mental health issues. Ensure continuance of the treatment/therapy of children in consultation with the therapist/psychiatrist.
- ♦ Ensure that no staff or child is subject to any form of stigmatising words or behaviour arising due to coughing, sneezing, etc., as this violates the principles of 'equality and non-discrimination, 'dignity and worth'.
- ♦ Encourage and support children to take care of their bodies, taking deep breaths, stretching, doing yoga/meditation, eating healthy, well-balanced meals, exercising regularly, getting plenty of sleep, etc.
- ♦ Work with social service systems to ensure continuity of critical services that may take place in CCIs, such as health screenings, or therapies for children with special needs.
- ♦ Consider the specific needs of children with disabilities.²⁴

You already know that there are many children engaging in productive activities during COVID-19. Creating a positive atmosphere will bring out their creativity such as making kitchen garden, making handicrafts, painting, learning cooking etc.



Step 11

Share with the participants that we shall now look at one of the best examples from Manipur where a 13-year-old child has created something amazing during COVID-19. Let's watch this video.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4gmg39oT8xc>

Source: Hindustan Times

²⁴ SC Guideline



Step 12: Initiatives of the Government of India on psychosocial support during COVID-19

Discuss that realising the impact that COVID-19 may have on the mental health of the people, including children, the Government has taken a number of initiatives to provide psychosocial support during COVID-19. These initiatives include:

- i. Setting up of a 24/7 helpline to provide psychosocial support, by mental health professionals, to the entire affected population, divided into different target groups including children.
- ii. Issuance of guidelines/ advisories on management of mental health issues, catering to different segments of the society.
- iii. Advocacy through various media platforms in the form of creative and audio-visual materials on managing stress and anxiety, and promoting an environment of support and care for all.
- iv. Issuance of detailed guidelines by the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), “Mental Health in the times of COVID-19 Pandemic - Guidance for General Medical and Specialized Mental Health Care Settings”. All the guidelines, advisories and advocacy material can be accessed on Ministry of Health and Family Welfare website under “Behavioural Health – Psychosocial helpline” (<https://www.mohfw.gov.in/>)
- v. Online capacity building of health workers by NIMHANS in providing psychosocial support and training through (iGOT)-Diksha platform.²⁵



Step 13: Summarise the session by saying that we have learnt about dealing with child protection issues during COVID-19

We shall now see various examples from the States:

West Bengal

In West Bengal, UNICEF is supporting the Kolkata Police in planning and implementing programmes to ensure prevention of violence against women and children utilising the Nirbhaya fund.

Odisha

In Odisha, UNICEF and the state police led a statewide campaign on prevention of child sexual abuse demonstrating the significant role police has in prevention and response.²⁶

²⁵ <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1654456>

²⁶ <https://www.unicef.org/india/stories/re-imagining-role-police-covid-19-times>

Chhattisgarh: Chakmak Campaign

To ensure learning of children at home and to bring positivity and hope in the community (with paintings and creative work of children), a campaign called Chakmak" (means firestone) was launched in April-June 2020 jointly by UNICEF and the Department of Women and Child Development in the State. It ensured involvement of parents and grandparents in learning of children at home and promoted creative expression of children in terms of paintings, stories, knitting works, songs etc.

Campaign 'Chakmak' emerged as a platform for children of Chhattisgarh to express in creative ways and have fun at home and share joy and happiness with their family members. Children painted thousands of paintings and created many creative works, as part of the campaign. Each week a list of activities and tasks were identified, and children were encouraged to share their paintings/work in the campaign's Facebook page called 'Chakmak'.

Kerala

During the lockdown period 'Our Responsibility to Children' (ORC), a child protection programme initiated by Kerala Police has launched various initiatives to engage children in more productive ways and also to help lives of deprived ones. Let's learn about two major programmes in this regard.

1. **Kutty Desk:** This programme led by children provides telephonic guidance to their peers on various aspects such as how to keep personal hygiene and stay safe during the COVID threat and on how to spend time effectively and creatively during the lockdown.
2. **Play Hub:** Play hub is an infotainment programme engaging children, to help them get rid of the boredom and tension due to social isolation. Children are encouraged to do dynamic and productive activities on a daily basis and with the help of parentts, they are expected to make videos of their productive engagements. The programme is anchored by a puppet show.²⁷

Show the video on Kutty Desk from the given link

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4IAwf3CGItU&feature=emb_logo

²⁷ <https://orcindia.org/kuttydesk.html>

