

Paediatric Mental Health Disorder Post-Pandemic: Anxiety, Depression and the Role of Nurses in Early Identification and Counselling

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted the mental health of children and adolescents, leading to a significant rise in anxiety and depression worldwide. Prolonged school closures, social isolation, and family stressors have disrupted emotional stability and psychosocial development among the paediatric population. This narrative review explores the prevalence of anxiety and depression in children during the post-pandemic period and highlights the essential role of nurses in early identification, counselling, and preventive interventions. Findings from global and Indian studies (2020–2025) reveal that 25–27% of children experience depression and 20–25% suffer from anxiety, with higher rates reported in urban regions such as Chennai. Contributing risk factors include social isolation, excessive digital exposure, family conflict, and reduced physical activity. Nurses play a crucial role in recognizing early signs through tools such as the Child Depression Inventory (CDI) and Spence Children's Anxiety Scale (SCAS), while providing psychoeducation, emotional support, and school-based counselling. Strengthening nursing involvement in community and educational settings can facilitate early intervention, reduce psychological distress, and promote mental resilience among children and adolescents in the post-pandemic era.

KEYWORDS: Paediatric mental health, anxiety, depression, post-pandemic, early identification, counselling, nursing interventions.

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INTRODUCTION

The study examines how the COVID-19 epidemic has affected children's mental health, with a particular emphasis on anxiety and depression in young people. It draws attention to the duty of paediatricians and primary care physicians to conduct mental health screenings during this period. Emphasis is placed on how the epidemic has negatively impacted patients' mental health as well as that of their family and the community. The complications brought on by long-COVID and its effects on paediatric mental health are also covered in the paper. The significance of early detection and intervention is highlighted by the strategies and resources provided for paediatricians to evaluate, triage, and start treatment for mental health issues. Although the context given does not specifically address the role of nurses in early identification and counselling¹.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a lasting impact on young people's mental health, with higher rates of anxiety and depression among kids and teenagers. - Loneliness, social isolation, financial stress, domestic disputes, and changes in living conditions are some of the factors that contribute to these mental health disorders. This population's mental health problems have been made worse by the pandemic's impact on healthcare availability. Appropriate interventions must be put in place as soon as mental health issues like depression and anxiety are identified. Early diagnosis and counselling can help de-escalate distressing feelings and prevent suicide thoughts and attempts, and school nurses and multidisciplinary teams are essential in this regard. Youth's mental health issues will continue as they go back to school, underscoring the significance of continuous intervention and support².

EPIDEMIOLOGY AND PREVALENCE POST-PANDEMIC

Global (children & adolescents) — Depression (25–27%), Anxiety (20–25%) (pooled estimates of *clinically elevated* symptoms across multiple studies). These come from large meta-analyses of studies conducted during the COVID-19 period³.

India — reported prevalence varies by study and setting; examples:

- **16% depression, 20% anxiety** among school-going adolescents in India⁴.
 - **30% depression, 36% anxiety** reported in some community and college (higher estimates seen in some post-COVID regional studies)⁵.
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Chennai — Moderate-to-severe depression **30.8%**, Anxiety **21.7%** (13,362 youths in schools and colleges in Chennai). Use this for a city-specific prevalence⁶.

IMPACT OF THE POST PANDEMIC ON PAEDIATRIC MENTAL HEALTH

Vaccination may not be able to mitigate the long-term, worldwide impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people's mental health. Significant obstacles have been faced by kids and teenagers, such as social isolation, loneliness, financial strain, domestic disputes, and shifting living situations. Youth mental health problems like anxiety, depression, and disruptive behaviours have increased as a result of these circumstances. It is anticipated that students' mental health problems would continue as they resume their studies and will need continuous care. In order to address the growing prevalence of mental and behavioural health disorders in this population, school nurses and multidisciplinary teams are essential⁷.

The study highlights how crucial it is to quantify and talk about the pandemic's long-term effects on the mental health of at-risk kids and teenagers. Research has shown that evidence-based interventions, such as teleconferencing to keep family members in touch and giving lonely youngsters video games, can help hospitalized children feel less anxious. To better understand and manage the post-pandemic mental health issues that the paediatric population faces, more research and data gathering are required⁸.

COMMON PAEDIATRIC MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS POST-PANDEMIC

1. ANXIETY DISORDERS

The study examines how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected children's mental health, emphasizing anxiety and depression in particular as prevalent issues. - During the current pandemic, paediatricians are in charge of identifying and treating these mental health conditions in kids and teenagers. - The epidemiology of childhood anxiety and depression is reviewed in the study, which shows that the pandemic has increased the prevalence of these conditions. - It highlights how crucial it is to diagnose, classify, and start treating anxiety disorders in children. - The study also outlines strategies and resources that paediatricians can use to successfully manage and assist their patients' mental health needs⁹.

2. DEPRESSION

According to the research article, up to 20% of children globally suffer from childhood depression, a serious mental health condition. It highlights the significance of early identification and successful treatments for childhood depression in order to enhance the lives of impacted kids. - It is noted that instruments like the Child Depression Inventory (CDI) are useful for identifying depression in children early on. - It has been demonstrated that Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)-based interventions are successful in lowering depressive symptoms¹⁰.

RISK FACTORS IN CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

Specific risk factors for anxiety and depression in children and adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic are not mentioned in the context that is provided. - Although it does not include specific risk factors, it does discuss the detrimental consequences that mental health has on individuals, families, and the community. - As a result, given the situation at hand, no precise information about risk factors in kids and teenagers can be given¹¹.

The frequency and incidence of mental health problems in teenagers, which may involve a number of risk factors, are covered in the article. Examined are contributing causes to children's and teenagers' mental health problems during the COVID-19 epidemic. Since the emphasis is on recognizing and treating new mental health concerns, advance practice nurses should be cognizant of certain risk factors. However, the context given does not go into detail on the precise risk factors¹².

ROLE OF NURSES IN EARLY IDENTIFICATION

Nurses are essential in detecting mental health problems in young people early on. They are in charge of identifying symptoms of sadness, anxiety, and disruptive conduct among pupils. Appropriate interventions to address these mental health issues are made possible by nurses' prompt recognition. Nurses can assist in de-escalating distress and preventing suicide thoughts and attempts by recognizing these problems early. In order to address the rising prevalence of mental and behavioural health disorders among young people, the multidisciplinary team which includes school nurses is crucial¹³.

SCREENING AND ASSESSMENT

The study highlights how critical it is to identify mental health issues in children early on, especially those related to anxiety and sadness. The Child Depression Inventory (CDI) and the Spence Children's Anxiety Scale (SCAS) have been found to be useful screening instruments. In order to lessen the impact of these diseases on children's quality of life, the systematic review emphasizes the necessity of prompt assessment. In order to improve children's mental health treatment, it recommends that public policies concentrate on educating professionals on screening and assessment methods. The difficulties in putting these ideas into practice are also mentioned in the research, and they could have an impact on the screening and evaluation procedures¹⁴.

OBSERVATION

The study emphasizes how the Covid-19 epidemic caused a notable increase in symptoms of anxiety and depression in children. It highlights the significance of examining how mental health affects children's and teenagers' neurodevelopment, illness, and mortality as well as the social and scholastic spheres. Isolation, inactivity, and sociodemographic characteristics like age, sex, residency, economic level, and educational class are among the major risk factors that have been discovered. According to the research, hospitalized children's anxiety levels may be lowered by interventions like teleconferencing to keep family contact and

giving lonely kids electronic games. In the post-pandemic setting, there is a need for ongoing discourse and the development of evidence-based policies to address the mental health needs of children and adolescents who are at risk¹⁵.

COMMUNICATION

It is the duty of paediatricians and primary care physicians to screen children impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic for mental health conditions like anxiety and depression. Assessment and treatment of children's mental health depend on having effective conversations with them about it. Paediatricians should assist children in expressing their emotions and worries by using language and methods that are appropriate for their age. In order for kids to feel comfortable talking about their mental health, therapists must establish a secure and encouraging environment. Clinicians can encourage children to discuss their pandemic-related experiences by using techniques and resources to promote candid conversation. Frequent check-ins and follow-ups can support communication and track the impacted children's mental health¹⁶.

ROLE OF NURSES IN COUNSELLING AND SUPPORT

During primary care visits, nurses can be extremely helpful in putting the suggestions for anxiety screening into practice. They can offer youngsters who could be suffering from anxiety help and counselling. Nurses can assist in educating families about anxiety and how it affects kids. They can help children and their families create resources and coping mechanisms. When needed, nurses can also help with referrals to mental health specialists¹⁷.

PSYCHOEDUCATION

Psychoeducation is teaching kids and parents about typical emotional reactions and assisting them in identifying potential psychological problems. It seeks to improve knowledge of coping mechanisms and emotional control. People can learn to distinguish between normal emotional swings and those that might be signs of anxiety or depression through psychoeducation. Families are more equipped to seek the right kind of help and interventions when needed thanks to this information.

Basic Counselling Skills: active listening, empathy, reassurance, building resilience¹⁸.

HEALTH PROMOTION

Children's mental and physical health can be enhanced by paediatricians encouraging regular physical activity. It is important to promote healthy sleep practices for children's mental and general health. Maintaining physical and emotional well-being requires a balanced diet, and paediatricians should help families make wholesome food choices. Controlling screen time is crucial to avoiding detrimental effects on mental health, and paediatricians should offer techniques for efficient screen time management¹⁹.

SCHOOL-BASED INTERVENTIONS

Structured programs designed to enhance teenagers' psychological health and emotional control are included in school-based therapies. These interventions can involve diverse modalities such as cognitive behavioural therapy, mindfulness-based techniques, psychoeducation, and physical exercises. As educators, counsellors, and caregivers, paediatric nurses play a critical role in these treatments by assisting adolescents in developing coping mechanisms and emotional awareness. Although peer support groups, stress-management seminars, and mental health awareness sessions are mentioned in the specific user instructions, these kinds of interventions are not specifically covered in the context that is supplied²⁰.

NURSING STRATEGIES FOR PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT

Specific nursing techniques for managing and preventing children anxiety and depression during the COVID-19 pandemic are not included in the context that is presented. The context mainly focuses on how paediatricians and primary care physicians can help children and adolescents with mental health issues. As a result, given the context at hand, no pertinent information about nursing strategies can be given²¹.

EARLY DETECTION THROUGH ROUTINE SCREENINGS

Regular screenings in a variety of contexts can help identify mental health problems in young people early. In order to detect pupils who might be exhibiting disruptive behaviours, anxiety, or depression, school health services are essential. In order to meet the mental health needs of young people, community camps can also be used as venues for screenings and support. Early identification made possible by these programs can result in suitable therapies, which are crucial for averting more serious mental health problems²².

STRESS REDUCTION ACTIVITIES

The effectiveness of mindfulness-based techniques in fostering psychological well-being and lowering anxiety and depression is emphasized. Although they aren't discussed explicitly in the context given, art therapy and breathing techniques are frequently linked to mindfulness exercises and can help with emotion management. It is stressed how important paediatric nurses are in helping pupils with these exercises since they can improve their emotional intelligence and coping mechanisms²³.

COMMUNITY AWARENESS PROGRAMS

Programs for community awareness might be created to inform the public and families about the difficulties that children and adolescents encounter in their mental health during emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic. These initiatives could lessen stigma and encourage kids and teenagers to get treatment when they need it by fostering an awareness and acceptance of mental

health concerns. Emphasizing the value of mental health in public discourse can help create a supportive atmosphere for people who are struggling with anxiety and depression²⁴.

Through raising public awareness of these problems, community awareness initiatives can significantly contribute to the reduction of the stigma attached to paediatric mental health disorders. Talking about mental health with families and community members can help to promote acceptance and understanding, which can lessen stigma. According to the study, youth resilience is a critical component of mental health and can be developed through reestablishing ties within the community. Cutting-edge school-based initiatives that include the community can also help to increase knowledge and lessen the stigma associated with mental health issues in young people²⁵.

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 post pandemic has had a major impact on children's and teenagers' mental health, causing anxiety and depression to significantly increase globally, especially in Chennai and India. Thus, early identification and prompt action are essential to avoiding long-term effects on children's growth and well-being. When it comes to identifying early indicators of mental distress, screening, counselling, and psychoeducation, nurses are essential. Advocates for raising awareness of mental health issues and encouraging coping mechanisms and resilience. Interventions in schools and community outreach initiatives are crucial for bolstering therapeutic and preventative strategies.

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