

Children of Africa as Silent Victims of COVID-19 Pandemics

Francisco Jose Lopes Junior 

General Practitioner, Adnan Menderes University, Aydın, Turkey

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Francisco Jose Lopes Junior

General Practitioner, Adnan Menderes University, Aydın, Turkey

ORCID: 0000-0002-6696-9768

 fcojoselopesjr1@gmail.com

In December 2019, there has been an increase in the cases of pneumonia in China especially in Wuhan spread to China and all over the World. On January 30th the WHO declared the situation of the outbreak as a public health emergency of international concern. In February, Africa registered the first case of COVID-19 and later in the second week of March, the WHO declared a pandemic. COVID-19 was expected to provoke more deaths in Africa than in other parts of the World but as seen now, the infection itself did not cause enormous loss of life according to the daily published number of cases. The effect of restrictions and other measures of mitigation taken by different governments of African countries to prevent the spreading of the disease need to be taken into consideration.¹⁻³

The socioeconomic impact of these measures brought a bigger problem since Africa has already had its economic problem. Many people lost their jobs because of closed companies, because of those

that stopped due to the lack of circulation of people and goods, closure of schools and other important places. Productivity reduced and lack of first need products was a problem in some countries. The fact that there is a percentage of people who work daily to live and also the number of displaced people as well as those who even though are not displaced but in limits of starvation makes it a bigger challenge.^{4,5}

The closure of schools did not help many countries since they did not have a background in distance learning as well as are not technologically ready for online education. During these 9 months since the first case was reported in Africa, education has not been on the priority list for most African Governments.

Educational infrastructure and well trained human resources were the main challenges of African countries even before pandemics, it is almost impossible to fulfill physical distancing rules at



schools in general, especially primary school with more challenges. Since the lack of technological resources to support online lessons, lack of electricity in rural areas, and limited internet connection are still problems to solve.⁶

As a result, these factors have affected children in the following ways:⁷⁻¹³

1. Lack of good nutrition that was a problem even before the pandemic and during the pandemic, there is a lack of first need products and problems of food access;
2. Education and teaching should have been a continuous process, should continue even at home but the level of literacy is still a challenge to defeat and the children whose parents do not know how to read will not have access to information, this is what kills the society;
3. The closure of schools makes children more vulnerable to many forms of violence because it is more difficult to monitor pupils that are not in school. Others due to the economic impact of the pandemic may be forced to prostitution especially females and other forms of violence against children;
4. Information about COVID-19 prevention as well as ways of transmission seems not to reach every part and every child of Africa, in contrast, European countries were able to make information reach everywhere by using social media and local broadcast means, in some countries of Africa there are still limitations in this matter; so increasing awareness should be door by door to be effective and could be more terrible if not done correctly;
5. The number of laboratories and daily test capacity, as well as limitation in the number of laboratories, led to the low number of positive cases, though in some studies African countries having a high percentage of youth population contributed to less mortality and the existence of more asymptomatic patients;
6. Think about online lessons in places where less than 20% of the population have access to computers; and most of them are university students;
7. Lack of measures reflected from local problems during this pandemic, we have more children at home and it is boring when they are not able to share the same environment with their friends because of pandemics and do not have another way to overcome the loneliness;
8. The information about how to prevent the disease of COVID-19 is not accessible for children who cannot read, for those who have a visual deficiency, for those who have an auditive deficiency as well as some families with a low level of literacy. And the more interesting is that in some places people do not even believe that COVID-19 exists and some people think that they can defeat the disease with superstitious power and traditional plants;
9. Negative impact on the mental health of the parents due to loss of jobs and the difficulty in surviving led to social agitation which has a very negative impact on the relationship with their children;
10. Displaced families due to crises other than COVID-19 are more susceptible to other problems that could lead them to death;
11. Studies have shown that the more people are staying together and as predictable there is an increase in the incidence of violence mainly domestic violence;

Lack of short-time production leads to insecurity and lack of first need products. Since the pandemic diminishes the circulation, export-import most African countries are industrially weak and depend on the imported product of first need. Even before COVID-19, the number of people that are on break of starvation was 1.350.000.000 people according to WFP Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger similar to other countries, this number is now 270.000.000 and by the end of this year, it is estimated to be millions of people have been displaced because of internal wars, civil wars, and coups.¹⁴

Lockdown in Africa makes fewer people die from COVID 19 but more people from the consequences such as food insecurity, lack of Access, the rise in prices of food, economic deterioration as well as a good number of people who lost their job because

of COVID-19. In this situation as we know Africa is a burden of infectious diseases. Malnutrition is going to increase and the susceptibility of dying from diseases that could otherwise be easily treated. Before the pandemic African children were very vulnerable to diseases especially infectious diseases, apart from the challenges mentioned above, we can conclude that there is an aggravation of the problem and the pandemic of COVID-19 makes it worse and worse.¹⁴

The budget of countries to respond to the challenges was insufficient even in periods before the pandemic. Therefore, African governments should do their best to prioritize the best interest of their children in the next year general budget plan so that they can continue their process of learning and have good health (physical, mental and social); reduce the differences between children of rural and urban areas and ensure that children are well protected against violence of every nature under the measures of restrictions that the pandemic can bring to us in the future; prepare a system that will be suitable with future decisions if the number of cases increases. As data suggests COVID-19 itself only causes hospitalization in a minority of the infected children, this appears that in the pandemics children are not a priority in many countries of Africa. Any plan or measure of mitigation to fight COVID-19 should put into consideration the major interest of children's rights because they are the most affected in every aspect of pandemics other than severe disease.

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