

The functioning of children and adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic

Funkcjonowanie dzieci i młodzieży podczas pandemii COVID-19

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SUMMARY

Purpose: This is a review to assess the psychosocial organization of children and adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 pandemic and required changes in legal acts resulted in lockdown and the introduction of distance learning at all levels of education. During that period of time children and youth found themselves in a crisis situation because they met obstacles that changed their daily living activities and caused negative emotions related to for example a different type of learning and communication in a pandemic situation.

Methodology: This is a Systematic review paper. The PubMed, Cochrane Library, and Google scholar search were used to analyze the problem. The following keywords were used to search for information sources: psychosocial functioning, children, adolescents, lockdown, remote learning, COVID-19. Articles were selected according to the psychosocial organization of children and adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Main Findings: During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a significant reduction in contacts both among adults and among children and adolescents. Both distance learning and numerous legal restrictions resulted in the lack of opportunities for meetings, especially among children and adolescents. As a result of lockdown and distance learning, social ties are loosened and impaired, especially among children and adolescents, which poses a very serious threat to their mental health and their development of social competences in the future, therefore both parents and teachers should monitor children and provide organizational and psychological support to children and adolescents affected by the psychosocial effects of the pandemic.

Implications of this study: The above results should be taken into account by educational institutions. The paper indicates the occurrence of negative psychosocial effects of lockdown and distance learning and as a consequence the need to train children, youth and teachers in the field of adaptation to the new epidemiological situation, lockdown and distance learning.

Novelty in this study: There is a lack of systematic reviews of the psychosocial organization of children and adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper is an attempt to assess the psychosocial organization of children and adolescents during the first 1 year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Psychosocial functioning, children, adolescents, lockdown, remote learning, COVID-19.

Slowa kluczowe: funkcjonowanie psychospoleczne, dzieci, młodzież, lockdown, zdalne nauczanie, COVID-19.

INTRODUCTION

Regulation of the Minister of Health of 13 March 2020 on the Declaration of an Epidemic Threat in the Territory of the Republic of Poland and then *Regulation of the Minister of National Education of March 11, 2020 on the Temporary Limitation of the Functioning of Education System Units in Connection with the Prevention, Prevention and Combating of COVID-19* and subsequent numerous changes in legal acts resulted in the introduction of distance learning at all levels of education (Rozporządzenie Ministra Zdrowia z Dnia 13 Marca 2020 r. w Sprawie Ogłoszenia Na Obszarze Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej Stanu Zagrożenia Epidemicznego [Regulation of the Minister of Health of 13 March 2020 on the Declaration of an Epidemic Threat in the Territory of the Republic of Poland], n.d.) (Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z Dnia 11 Marca 2020 r. w Sprawie Czasowego Ograniczenia Funkcjonowania Jednostek Systemu Oświaty w Związkach z Zapobieganiem, Przeciwdziałaniem i Zwalczeniem COVID-19 [Regulation of the Minister of National Education of March 11, 2020 on the Temporary Limitation

of the Functioning of Education System Units in Connection with the Prevention, Prevention and Combating of COVID-19], n.d.). As a result of the pandemic, there was a revolution in education, logistical and technical problems and an immediate and radical change in the form of education. Schools were closed and students were locked at home. There were additional obligations for parents, which not all were able to cope with. The home became the primary place of education and the family the basic unit of support. As a result of significant difficulties, the educational processes were not withheld, but significantly interrupted and modified. The situation of children and adolescents was additionally worsened by the prohibition of leaving the home unaccompanied by adults, initially from April 1 to 19 for all minors but from April 19 to May 17 it was eased and applied only for children under 13 years old. In autumn, the restriction on the leaving from home of children and adolescents under the age of 16 until January 5, 2021 only applied between 8:00 am and 4:00 pm. During that periods of time children and parents found themselves in a crisis situation because they met obstacles that prevented the fulfillment of life goals, which resulted in experiencing strong negative emotions related to for example a different type of learning and communication in a pandemic situation (Sieradzka-Baziar, 2020).

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

This is a review to assess the psychosocial organization of children and adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic.

METHODOLOGY

The PubMed, Cochrane Library, and Google scholar search were used to find literature to analyze the problem. The following keywords were used to search for information sources: psychosocial functioning, children, adolescents, lockdown, remote learning, COVID-19. Articles were selected according to the psychosocial organization of children and adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic. The analysis has been done by the systematic review analysis method. The articles were selected in terms of psychosocial organization of children and adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic. 24 articles were being reviewed.

REVIEW ANALYSIS / DISCUSSION

Distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic

Distance learning, i.e. implementing the assumptions and goals of remote learning using digital technologies and digital tools (Miotk-Mrozowska Magdalena, 2011) without prior training has become another obstacle. Providing effective distance education requires meeting certain conditions. First of all, a computer is in most cases required, but also a camera, microphone and loudspeakers and also Internet access with a sufficiently high speed, as well as appropriate conditions ensuring, for example, peace and quiet during the connection.

As part of distance learning, modern information and communication technologies had been introduced already few years earlier. Computers and multimedia portable devices are used to communicate information and interact between teachers and students. Knowledge is acquired through the use of educational platforms and portals. This process is supported by websites and online forums, including parenting forums. (Miotk-Mrozowska Magdalena, 2011). The low quality of equipment used by students and teachers causes problems with the receipt of the transmitted content, the lack of the ability to fully use the available technologies is a problem in the entire process. The problem is that even during the 21st century complete access to mobile devices and ideal connectivity of the global computer network is not available for all people, that is why during lockdown it is still a challenge for local government bodies to ensure equal access to education for every child. Only 93% of students, 92% of parents and 82% of teachers could use the computer in the beginning of the pandemic (Ptaszek et al., 2020) however it should be noted that often one computer must be shared by several siblings and parents who study or work remotely. In the period under discussion, the process of accelerated digitization in families was visible: purchasing electronic equipment and connecting to the Internet network, however unexpected expenses may be a burden on the family budget. Access to the Internet is also a problem, especially in the first days of distance learning, when the internet providers were not prepared to be able to bear such a large number of Internet users at the same time. Data limits are also a problem, which as a result of intensive Internet use by several users in one home are often insufficient. Problems with access to remote education may lead to the exclusion of poorer individuals. Educational and technological exclusion and numerous limitations reduce the chances of a good start in the future for individuals less familiar with digital tools and limit the possibility of maintaining contacts with peers using communicators such as skype, videomessenger, whatsapp or zoom.

Due to the pandemic the school ceased to fulfill its socializing function. The ordinance of the Ministry of National Education of March 20, 2020 only regulated the function of the school in terms of education, apart from the upbringing and care of the student. In the period of remote education, the main purpose of the functioning of educational institutions was reduced only to the exchange and transfer of educational materials in a remote form, in order to check the level of acquired knowledge as a result. (Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z 20 Marca 2020 r. w Sprawie Szczególnych Rozwiązań w Okresie Czasowego Ograniczenia Funkcjonowania Jednostek Systemu Oświaty w Związku z Zapobieganiem, Przeciwdziałaniem i Zwalczaniem COVID-19 [Regulation of the Minister of National Education of March 20, 2020 on Special Solutions in the Period of Temporary Limitation of the Functioning of Education System Units in Connection with the Prevention and Combating of COVID-19], n.d.). In the opinion of almost 1/3 of students, remote education mainly consisted in sending e-materials for

self-study and assigning tasks by teachers (Plebańska et al., 2020). This has contributed to the development of methods of independent learning by students and taking responsibility for their own education by students, however, it may cause stress and frustration among the weakest students. Striving to implement the assumptions of the curriculum leads to a crisis in the educational and care function of the school. In order to meet government expectations, the school ignores an individual, subjective approach to each educational or pedagogical problem (Żytko, 2020). The problem was exacerbated by the lack of direct contact between students and teachers during the pandemic. It should be remembered that the restriction of access to free attendance has also had a negative impact on students who are at specialized support units and socialisation is a kind of therapeutic process in the context of their problems. (Poleszak & Pyżalski, 2020a). Especially considering that in the light of philosophical thought, the priority in the context of development and educational activity was to strive to equalize the educational perspectives of children and youth (Serafin, 2018) . Especially that disabled children need much more attention and care from teachers', relations with the environment, which is very difficult in the context of remote educational activities (Poleszak & Pyżalski, 2020b)

The impact of lockdown on children and adolescents

Problems of children and adolescents are related not only to technical issues and low quality of Internet connection. They also resulted from quarantine and social isolation. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a significant reduction in contacts both among adults and among children and adolescents. Both distance learning and numerous legal restrictions resulted in the lack of opportunities for meetings, especially among children and adolescents, with a complete ban on meetings in larger groups for several months. Lack of physical contact with peers due to restrictions on leaving the home by minors in certain periods of the pandemic, the need to maintain distance and limitations in meeting in larger groups during a pandemic has become a serious problem among children and adolescents. Often, problems related to communication and infrastructure affect the occurrence of fewer opportunities for the development and success of the child, which depends on the place of residence. During pandemic, exceptionally, living in a rural area offers more opportunities for students, as it also appears to have a positive impact on the process of social isolation due to the possibility of being physically active and using the outdoors in their own area. (Długosz, 2020). In addition, the skilful use of modern technologies is a method of equalizing opportunities for people who live in an urban agglomeration and rural areas.

In the process of secondary socialization, the most important human need is contact with other people, functioning in society and fulfilling specific social roles assigned to an individual. In the difficult time of lockdown and uncontrolled sudden change of the current way of life and the uncertainty of further changes, belonging to social groups and, in particular, other humans physical presence constitute the existence of every person's life in a social community (Sztompka, 2012). The pandemic and remote learning changed the possibilities of building direct relations among children and adolescents, which is why during a pandemic it is so important, in this difficult time, to maintain and improve interpersonal relations in every possible way, even in the form of online conversations until the situation stabilizes.

Deterioration of the psychophysical condition of students

Stress is constantly present in the student's life in the context of the growing expectations of the educational system, staff, and the hierarchy system. Caring and empathy for a child are often forgotten. The idea of education and knowledge, spreading horizons is usually pushed aside in favor of achieving results, obedience or statistics (Turczyk & Kusztal, 2019). It was indicated that interference with the freedom of an individual in the context of the imposed quarantine has a negative impact on physical and mental health, because the school regulates the rhythm of a person's life by shaping a specific life attitude, acquiring good eating habits or is a place of activity, physical development, and spiritual development of a student. (Liu et al., 2020).

The pandemic caused significant problems in the relations of children and adolescents with their peers. Ptaszek's research shows that more than half of the students indicate that their relationships with their peers have deteriorated since the pandemic and lockdown. The main reasons were distance learning, the inability to leave home, limitations in practicing sports and meetings in larger groups (Ptaszek et al., 2020) .According to the report of the Foundation "We give children strength" published at the end of 2020, the most difficult thing for children and adolescents was isolation from schoolmates and friends from school or from the yard and the inability to leave the house (*Negatywne Doświadczenia Młodzieży Podczas Pandemii. Raport z Badań Ilościowych*, 2020). Children experience fears, uncertainties, and physical and social isolation and may miss school while staying at home for long period (Jiao et al., 2020). Prolonged distance learning can create mental health problems.

Around two thirds of the children and yountsters reported being burdened by the pandemic. They experienced significantly lower quality of life, more episdes of mental health problems and higher anxiety levels during the pandemic (Ravens-Sieberer et al., 2021). The results of a study from China conducted among 320 children and adolescents indicated that during the pandemic, problems with concentration, attention, and fear of the pandemic and asking questions about COVID-19 were the main psychosocial and behavioral problems among respondents aged 3 to 18 (Jiao et al., 2020). 85.7% of the parents in Italy and Spain observed similar changes in their children's emotional state during the quarantine. The most frequent symptoms were problems with concentration, boredom, irritability, restlessness, nervousness, feelings of loneliness and worries (Orgilés et al., 2020).

What is worrisome, in Ma research 20,7% of study population experienced depressive symptoms and 7,2% children reported post-traumatic stress disorder due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Ma et al., 2021). On the basis of observations, it can be noted that during the pandemic depression is a significant and noticeable problem of adolescents in Poland, however, there is no objective quantitative data in the literature on the incidence of depression and other mental disorders as a result of social isolation among children and adolescents in the Polish population. This problem requires further quantitative research.

Remote education unfortunately requires long-term sitting. Spanish study evidences the negative impact of the COVID-19 confinement on physical activity levels and sedentary behaviours of children (Medrano et al., 2021) Lack of physical activity in longer perspective can cause not only physical problems but also self esteem decrease (Sothern et al., 1999). A sedentary lifestyle is a risk factor for many diseases, including diseases of the musculoskeletal system and cardiovascular diseases, therefore preventive measures should be taken to encourage physical activity adapted to the current restrictions.

In addition, constant isolation, loneliness from society influences the emergence of specific problems with regard to shaping and acquiring social skills by an individual. It is influencing cognition and emotional and cognitive impact usually occurring through interpersonal communication. The epidemiological status of COVID-19 has significantly increased the incidence of internal anxiety among the population, and there has also been a significant drop in self-esteem, resulting in an inability to cope with problems (Yao et al., 2020). Widespread isolation, the use of security measures, and prevention of the spread of infection have shown how important it is to properly perceive and face reality, bearing in mind the role of education and development of the individual, perceiving it in the context of the future, and fostering bonds. Therefore, it is particularly important to build relationships in order to increase competences in the development of both students and teachers in the period of limited freedom in taking specific actions and implementing plans. (Szumski, 2019)

CONCLUSIONS

The socially desirable mission of the school should be to fulfill the educational function, but with respect for the educational care function. Unfortunately, during a pandemic, it is limited due to the remote form of education and the lack of direct contact, support and control of teachers in the teaching process. Thus, appropriate learning conditions and parental support become crucial during a pandemic. As a result of the limitations caused by the pandemic and the related legal regulations, social ties are loosened and impaired, especially among children and adolescents, which poses a very serious threat to their mental health and their development of social competences in the future, therefore both parents and teachers should monitor children and provide organizational and psychological support to children and adolescents affected by the psychosocial effects of the pandemic. After the pandemic and its limitations, attention should be paid to leisure activities. It should be noted that at the beginning of 2021 there is still little research on the impact of a pandemic on the psychosocial functioning of children and adolescents. This topic should be expanded. It is worth paying attention to this when writing preventive programs for the next years and lesson plans for teachers and educators, in order to take into account not only what the student knows or can, but how the epidemiological condition will affect the behavior. The implementation of the idea of educating children and youth is important in the context of building a civil society.

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