Stressed Out Childhood
During the Pandemic-led Lockdown

(Formerly known as Save The Children India)

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Executive Summary

In the times of the ongoing pandemic, many activities have been disrupted in the way they use to function in the 'normal' times; one of these being the process of teaching and learning. A vast majority of children do not have access to help in identifying authentic sources of information and filtering out misinformation. The schools provide a social space to the children where they gain experiences beyond textbooks. **Vipla Foundation** *formerly* **Save the Children India (STCI)** undertook a study **'Challenges Faced by Primary School Children: Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic'** to document the lived experiences of school age children and their mothers in eight community locations (15 schools) in Thane, Mumbai and to plan need based intervention for the year ahead.

The report titled **Stressed Out Childhood During the Pandemic-led Lockdown** presents the details of the study which aimed at identifying the socio-emotional and cognitive challenges faced by primary grade children across eight community locations (15 schools) in Mumbai and Thane. A total of 140 children and 144 women selected through random sampling (from the 15 schools) were interviewed telephonically according to different schedules and then their responses were categorized. The participants interviewed live in the slum areas of the mentioned localities of Mumbai and Thane: Lower Parel, Wadala, Sion Koliwada, Vakola, Santa Cruz, Kurla, Charkop, Kandivali and Vikhroli in Mumbai and Kajuwadi, and Kalwa in Thane. The participants belong to the lower socio-economic strata that did not have much access to learning except for the foundational support from Vipla Foundation *formerly* STCI.

Of the total 140 children, 48 were boys and 92 were girls, majority of them belonging to the age group 8-13 years. The 144 women interviewed (they were also the mothers of the children interviewed) were reported to be between the ages of 20-49 years, the majority being in their 30s.

Children

The effects of the pandemic in the lives of children and women were studied in terms of what they think they have missed out on the most. When asked from children, the major responses were: missed going to school, studying and playing. Additionally, the children expressed the lack of everyday vibrance, entertainment activities and also ritual celebrations. The impact of the important experiences that children are missing due to the closing of schools for two academic sessions is widespread. They will suffer the loss of knowledge, of proper physical development due to non-availability of nutritious meal (which they used to get as mid-day meals in schools) and no physical exercise or work-out. The schools also were a ground where children from various backgrounds came and existed together which made them aware, tolerant and respectful of the diversity. This distance from schools will further widen the gap between the ones who could afford online learning and the ones who couldn't. The daily routine of the kids during these times included household chores (57%), having a meal (55.5%), self-study (45%), playing with siblings (38%) and watching TV (35 %). These activities too were gendered as the weight of doing the household chores, taking care of siblings, filling water was mainly taken up by the girls and very little by the boys. None of the boys reported that they took care of their siblings. Activities like watching television, playing, and tuition work were reported more by the boys.

From the data collected by the researchers, it was evident that either the children had no contact with their school teachers or they met them only to take supplies as a part of some government scheme. It was also found out that the children spend almost two academic years without any significant engagement with learning material due to various reasons namely, no access to mobile phones and internet being the highest (60%) and the other was non-

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availability of textbooks and parents getting jobless (32%).

Schools are a social site which also help in social development of the learners. UNESCO has outlined some of the adverse effects mass school closure has had on both the learners and the teachers. The teaching-learning process has been interrupted for two academic sessions, there is no surety of if the students will rejoin the schools when they reopen since many might have joined the economic market to help in the family income, many of the students found a safe environment at school and now they have been exposed to the harsh and violent experiences like early marriages, it has also been difficult for the teachers to maintain contact and assess the students. There will be a need to track and identify children to join back the school. To provide any assistance if they have gone through any traumatic experience, provide help in learning and recovering from the memory gaps and loss due to the schooling gap.

About 26.5% children knew someone who had suffered or died at the hands of the virus. About 43% of the children clearly denied having any knowledge about the virus. The rest 57% had heard something or the other like the symptoms, its contribution to sudden deaths, precautions, etc. the children were curious about various things they asked the researchers like how does it spread? why are people not wearing masks? What is it? Why did the police close their shop, but there was a section of 20.4% of children who were just not interested in knowing anything more about the virus? There is a lesson in their indifference for their teachers and those who work in the field of education. This might be the internalization of the practice of learning as only absorbing what the teacher tells. To break this pattern, there should be more interactive modules and other resources in the native languages. The situation has induced fear in children. The cause of fear ranges from about catching corona to there being no food at home to the grim scenario shown in the environment and in television news. It emerges as an issue of academic intervention and also a mental health issue for children that must be addressed by the school and other organizations.

Women

There were 64% women who reported having lost their jobs to the pandemic. Many women narrated that they had immense issues relating to finances and availability of food due to unemployment. The negative psychological impact of mother's unemployment anxieties, inadequacy, financial worries and internalized frustration must be taken into consideration while planning interventions when children are back to school.

An expected pattern was found in the daily routines of women, whose time was majorly spent in household chores, filling water and taking care of their children. Watching programs on television also emerged as a major activity in both the children's and the women's responses. Parents spending more time on the screen also encourage the children to engage in the same. The categories that emerged out regarding what the children and the women watch on the television or on the mobile include tik-tok and other videos on You Tube that include crime-based series and horror films. The mothers didn't express the need to cut either their screen time or their children's. A smaller number of both the children (20.7%) as well as the women (8.3%) spent time on looking for covid-related information. Over-engagement with screen creates 'addiction' to excitement in children which may lead to problems like late bed time. Most children reported going to bed very late during the pandemic. A very few of them reported 'stress about money, food' to be the reason for their late sleeping habit. Most of them attributed it to watching television and playing mobile games.

At least 60.4% women also agreed to have faced increased incidents of domestic violence and they didn't think anything was wrong with it. They had internalized the inhumane treatment as a part of their being in the chains of this patriarchal world. Children witnessed domestic violence from close quarters for a sustained period of time because they were at home for longer hours than. This in itself needs to be studied more carefully and in a deeper manner.
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There were 18% women who reported pregnancy. Whether they were unwanted or planned was out of the scope of the study. When the participant women were asked about if they would send their children to school again, 18.5% of them appeared skeptical, 9% wanted the children to do part time jobs along with school and 7% maintained that till the time such conditions persist, they will not send their children to school. There are about 30% children whose mothers were not confident about continuity in their education. The policy makers need to ascertain that all the points taken up here among many other that may come up with regular studies be considered when the shift to the old ways of school learning is re-established.

The unavailability of school and supporting institutions in the life of children for two years has meant a significant loss. The terms such as 'learning loss', 'learning lag' or 'gaps' do not cover adequately what children have lost. Their growth was interrupted and the lack of institutional space and provisions has several long-lasting implications. We need to bring in place several robust plans to recognize and then address the real implications of what children have missed.

Introduction

Background

The Covid-19 pandemic led to a mass school closure in all parts of the world; a 'phenomenon' that one hadn't heard of or imagined except for war-torn areas. Lives have been massively disrupted – many lives have been lost – and yet the effort to continue learning are being made. Learning itself got disrupted and got transformed as schools around the world changed how they had worked, so far. In India, all the institutions have been completely inaccessible to teachers and/or students which served not only the function of education but also as 'spaces' that enabled children's safe childhood, their growth and provided for experiences that their homes lacked. Children spent a home bound life for almost 18 months which impacted their development and characterized this phase in childhood with peculiar experiences. What exactly did the children do? Such questions must be asked and to which answers will have to be found for a long time to come. The studies are already being undertaken to assess the extent of domestic violence and mental health issues experienced by people during the pandemic (Constant A, 2020 and WHO, 2020).

Many stakeholders in education are identifying and re-conceptualizing the priorities. They have recognized the need to identify afresh what should be most important after having gone through a phase of blocked or restricted access of children to school and educational resources. Across societies, the pandemic has led to a narrowing of the sphere of human interaction and a focus on immediate surroundings and a greater mistrust or fear on those who are beyond the immediate. The COVID-19 outbreak has upend critical structures, such as health systems, economic life, socioeconomic class structures, fundamental institutional arrangements, communities and everyday family life. A new canvassing of experts in technology, communications and social change by Pew Research Center and Elon University's Imagining the Internet Center have found that there will be worsening economic inequality and also the spread of misinformation. "They worry about significant damage to social stability and cohesion and the reduced likelihood of rational deliberation and evidence-based policymaking." (PRC, 2021). The need to research has rarely emerged as urgent and necessary. This is now the time to explore the existential questions in order to make an informed move ahead with children's education, growth and well-being. Kumar (2021) has asserted for a need to recognize that that 17 months without teaching in a physical classroom has made a strange impact on teachers as well as on children. We cannot simply carry on with an approach of 'where we left it'.

Any efforts to understand the predicaments that people and children have faced, their issues and research on it itself has been restricted as lockdowns restrict access to the full range of people typically encountered in everyday life. In India, children have been away from school for 17 months and most of them are still away must be recognized as a predicament. Several households are focused on home-based education – and survival but only those who could afford it in terms of having access to the digital tools and the required space at home. Locking down people in their homes to control the spread of virus also had other implications. They largely spent time inside the homes, big or small, and they killed their time by watching television or social media news and entertainment programs. With their family members and themselves, children were exposed to suitable as well as unsuitable entertainment programs for a very long duration. For most children, there was no teacher in their reach to ask, talk, voice out their mis-conceptions and express their anxieties to or to even share what all they were experiencing, witnessing and absorbing. For a tiny majority, it remained possible to maintain some kind of dialogue at a distance, but online communication tends to be an echo chamber where you can't address anxieties and debunk misinformation logically; where you can't really systematically engage with children on issues in a progressively planned way (Stern, 2021). There is an urgent need to recognize that we must make all efforts to understand the nuances and implications of what children experienced at home over these 17 months while they suffered the educational disruption in a massive way.

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Voice of the International Agencies

Vickers (2021) argued that most of the responses of international agencies to the educational disruption caused by Covid 19 share a failure as they don't critically reexamine key assumptions concerning education's socio-economic and political functions. They remained focused on viewing education as human capital generation and the losses incurred from that perspective. These responses fail to envisage what children have endured in the long gap without the company of their teachers, other children and the physical space of school.

The United Nations' response, Education during COVID 19 and Beyond (2020a) emphasized the wider functions of schooling. This document brings into consideration a concern with 'productivity' or 'growth' model and also with 'rights' approach. It emphasizes how the ramifications of the pandemic, especially mass school closures, threaten to exacerbate pre-existing educational inequalities. It reminds us that closing schools has effects that extend beyond the acquisition of skills to provision of children's services, and to the ability of parents, especially mothers, to work. It carries an important reminder that education is not simply a 'fundamental human right', but an 'enabling right with a direct impact on the realization of all other human rights' (3).

Education in a post-COVID world: nine ideas for public action (UNESCO 2020) urges that 'our common humanity necessitates global solidarity 'to ensure that disadvantaged communities are not further marginalized (3), warning of the risk to 'decades of progress' in addressing poverty and gender inequality (3-4). Securing funding for education for the poorest societies and communities, and refusing to accept 'current levels of inequality' (let alone their increase) are the urgent necessities for those who work in the education sector. It is well known that school serves functions of education well beyond skills formation. There is significance of schools as 'social spaces' where children get all those social experiences, in the company of their teachers, that they do not get at home.

This had triggered a widespread interest among various stakeholders to remind the society collectively about the learning loss as well as the developmental loss that children have endured. There have been reflective writings in the newspapers and other periodicals and several researches initiated by a variety of agencies.

Related Research Studies

India is the only country in which schools were not opened in the last 17 months. In several other nations, considerable efforts were made to support the schools to function in an in-person mode on several occasions even if it entailed a clumsy affair of periodic closure and then reopening. (Kumar, 2021 and Chebrolu & Raman, 2021) As a result, school closures in India have created a serious interruption in children's development and growth.

 According to UNICEF's research conducted in India, the Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, school closures in South Asia due to the Covid-19 pandemic have interrupted the learning of 434 million children. Students and parents reported that students learnt significantly less compared to pre-pandemic levels. "In India, 80% of children aged 14-18 years reported lower levels of learning than when physically at school. 42% of children between 6-13 years reported not using any type of remote learning during school closures." The research highlights that even when the devices were available, children's access to them is often limited. The research found that student-teacher engagement, when regular and reciprocal, is a strong predictor of success in children's learning, especially for younger students. However, most students had little or no contact with their teachers during the mass school closures. "School closures in South Asia have compounded a situation which was already precarious." In India, Computer Assisted Telephonic Interviewing was used to survey over 5,800 parents of children aged 5-

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13 years, and students ages 14-18 years, as well as government school teachers, across six states: Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. To ensure representation of marginalized groups - parents from migrant families, and from tribal and remote locations were included. (UNICEF, 2021)

While the pandemic-led mass school closures were in effect, Government of India's agency UDISE+ released the school-based data for the year 2019-2020. It revealed that in the academic year that ended with school closures due to COVID-19, only 22% of schools in India had Internet facilities. Among government schools, less than 12% had Internet in 2019-20, while less than 30% had functional computer facilities. This is bound to affect the kind of digital education options available to schools during the pandemic, as well as plans for hybrid learning in the days ahead. The availability of digital education — whether via live, apps like Google Meet, or through recorded lectures, emails, WhatsApp or educational apps — has largely been dependent on whether schools, teachers and parents had access to the necessary infrastructure. Even for online teaching, in several places, teachers came to school and taught in their own empty classrooms, while facing a computer screen that communicated to their students at home. However, the UDISE+ data gives a clear picture of the digital divide. In Maharashtra, (71%), private schools had higher levels of computer availability than in government schools. (UDISE+, 2021)

A recent survey of nearly 1,400 schoolchildren (Classes 1 to 8) in underprivileged households (the kind that send their children to government schools) done by the School Children's Online and Offline Learning (SCHOOL) in August 2021 team recently released its report titled 'LOCKED OUT: Emergency Report on School Education'. Lack of access to devices and data, among other factors, has been detrimental. have been studying online regularly. The main findings of the report are:

- In rural areas, only 8 percent and in urban areas, only 24 percent are studying online regularly.
- Over 40 percent of the sample children, in both rural (48) and urban (42) areas, are not able to read more than a few words.
- About 11% children, particularly the younger ones, lack understanding of online study in any case, or find it difficult to concentrate.
- Only 25.5 percent of all children were studying online (occasionally or regularly) at the time of the survey, with an unbalanced advantage to those from urban areas.
- Out of this small percentage, as many as 65 percent students in rural areas and 57 percent students in urban areas faced connectivity problems.
- Over 40 percent students, in both rural (43) and urban (46) areas, found online classes/ videos difficult to follow.

The shortage of digital study materials, the lack of awareness on the part of parents, and the concentration difficulties faced by young children have made things worse. The hardest hit group is of tribal and Dalit children: only 4% and 15% respectively studied online regularly. Some even faced outright discrimination from their teachers.

Those who faced connectivity problems reported poor network and inability to afford data and other technology. The inability of children's families to cope with the demands of online education can be understood well by paying attention to the latest Pew Research Center Analysis report finds that the middle class in India is estimated to have shrunk by 32 million in 2020 as a consequence of the downturn, compared with the number it may have reached absent the pandemic. Meanwhile, the number of people who are poor in India (with incomes of $2 or less a day) is estimated to have increased by 75 million because of the COVID-19 recession. the number of poor in India is projected to have reached 134 million, more than double the 59 million expected prior to the recession. The poverty rate in India likely rose to 9.7% in 2020, up sharply from the January 2020 forecast of 4.3% (Kochhar, 2021)

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The impact of poverty has already started reflecting in the numbers of children who are being withdrawn from private schools all over the country including Maharashtra. According to a Times of India report, the education department found that on account of limited digital access, over 25,000 children remained out of schools in the state of Maharashtra. Of these, the highest share—10,820—is from Mumbai in April 2021, a year after the first-time schools were closed. Among the students who had dropped out of schools in the state, 288 said they were now employed as child labour and 1,212 couldn't attend due to their special needs. (Borwankar, 2021)

Vipla Foundation-STCI Study

With this awareness, sensitivity and a desire to understand the predicaments with their truth, Vipla Foundation *formerly* STCI, undertook a study in order to document the pandemic-related experiences of children and women living across eight community locations (15 schools) in Mumbai and Thane. The reality had already started unfolding through various media reports and research undertaken by different agencies that children had endured a great disadvantage by being away from school and their teachers and friends for a long duration. It arose as a genuine curiosity to find out what did those children do when they were not accessing any kind of learning opportunity. Where did their time and attention go? In the absence of school and any institutional learning, what shape did the childhood take? STCI team conceptualized a study to capture the lived reality of children and their parents during the lockdown. An effort was made to construct their life narratives in their words in order to document their plight and identify intervention goals for future interventions. The United Nations' response, Education during COVID 19 and Beyond (2020a) had highlighted that school closures and parents' especially, mothers' ability to work were intricately linked. A decision was, therefore, taken to include the experiences of children's mothers in the study.

The next section presents the methodology for this report.

Methodology

STCI-Mumbai found out how did the children spend their time during the pandemic-led lockdown. The key data source for this analysis was interviews held with approximately 150 children and their mothers living in different parts of Mumbai and Thane. The interviews were held telephonically in the month of July 2021. School teachers and the students of education facilitated the study by interviewing the participants.

The objectives of the study were:

- To identify the socio-emotional difficulties faced by children in urban slums during covid-19
- To understand the factors causing socio-emotional difficulties in children in urban slums during covid-19.
- To identify the cognitive challenges faced by children in urban slums during covid-19.
- To understand the factors influencing cognitive difficulties among children in urban slums during covid-19.
- To know how the pandemic impacts the holistic development of children in low-income urban dwellings.

Location

The state of Maharashtra especially Mumbai and its suburbs have been the worst-hit areas of India during the Covid-19 pandemic. It continues to struggle with the virus when the other states have more or less overcome it barring Kerala. Maharashtra became a hotspot that accounts for nearly 22.35 % of the total cases in India as well as about 30.55 % of all deaths. About half of the cases in the state emerged from the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) (HT and Zee News 2020). Maharashtra government cancelled school and college exams at all levels in 2020. The students of grades 1 to 8 were directly promoted to the next grade in the entire state including the children in MMR.

It is important to keep a picture of this region in our mind as an opportunity of survival and future hopes. Millions of people migrate from different parts of India and come to Mumbai and the metropolitan region around it in order to make a living and aspire for a brighter future for their children. In 2011, more than 40 percent of the state's urban population was in Mumbai and its surrounding areas, including Thane, Nasik and Nagpur (Khadke et al. 2017). Urbanization in Mumbai is characterized by the growth of informal settlements. It is a city with a population of 12.44 million and almost 5.2 million live in urban informal settlements (Kshetrimayum 2020: 5).

The children who were interviewed in the study lived in such urban informal settlements. "Most people in the informal settlements lack tenurial security, inhabiting cramped houses vulnerable to monsoons, lack of access to sufficient and clean water and sanitation, suffer from frequent state or private demolition, live in highly polluted environments prone to illness and disease" (McFarlane 2008). The participants lived in the following localities of Mumbai and Thane: Lower Parel, Wadala, Sion Koliwada, Vakola, Santa Cruz, Kurla, Charkop, Kandivali, Vikhroli, Kajuwadi, and Kalwa in Thane.

Interview Themes

The study was aimed at documenting children's experiences during the lockdown i.e., the time that they spent largely at home and away from school. They were asked questions about the following:

- Activities they couldn't do during the lockdown
- Their daily routine
- Reasons for delayed bed-time
- Details of interaction with their school teachers and classmates
- Details of 'studying' at home
- Personal familiarity with victims of Covid-19
- Choice of programs on television and on mobile through internet
- Information and knowledge about corona virus

The women or children's mothers were asked questions about the following:

- Activities they couldn't during the lockdown
- Their daily routine
- Problems faced on account of the pandemic-led lockdown
- Familiarity with the cases of domestic violence
- Personal familiarity with victims of Covid-19
- Choice of programs on television and on mobile through internet
- Information and knowledge about corona virus
- Incidence of pregnancy
- Nature of telephonic conversations held during the lockdown

Sample

A total of 150 children and women were interviewed in the study. However, the interviews could be completed with 140 children and 144 women, so their data was analyzed. The responses of 10 children and six mothers were not included as they were incomplete. The demographic details of the participants are presented below:

(i) Children

Table 1 Age and Gender distribution of children

B/G \ Age	5-7 years	8-10 years	11-13 years	14-16 years	Total
Boys(B)	-	18	28	2	48
Girls(G)	1	50	39	2	92
Total	1	68	67	4	140

The children were approached randomly on the basis of their availability as a result of which there is a difference in the number of boys and girls. With the help of age-ranges represented in Table, it can be deduced that most children should be in Grades III-V. These are the school grades that the bulk of our participants represent.

Figure 1: Age and Gender Distribution of Children

Age and Gender distribution of children
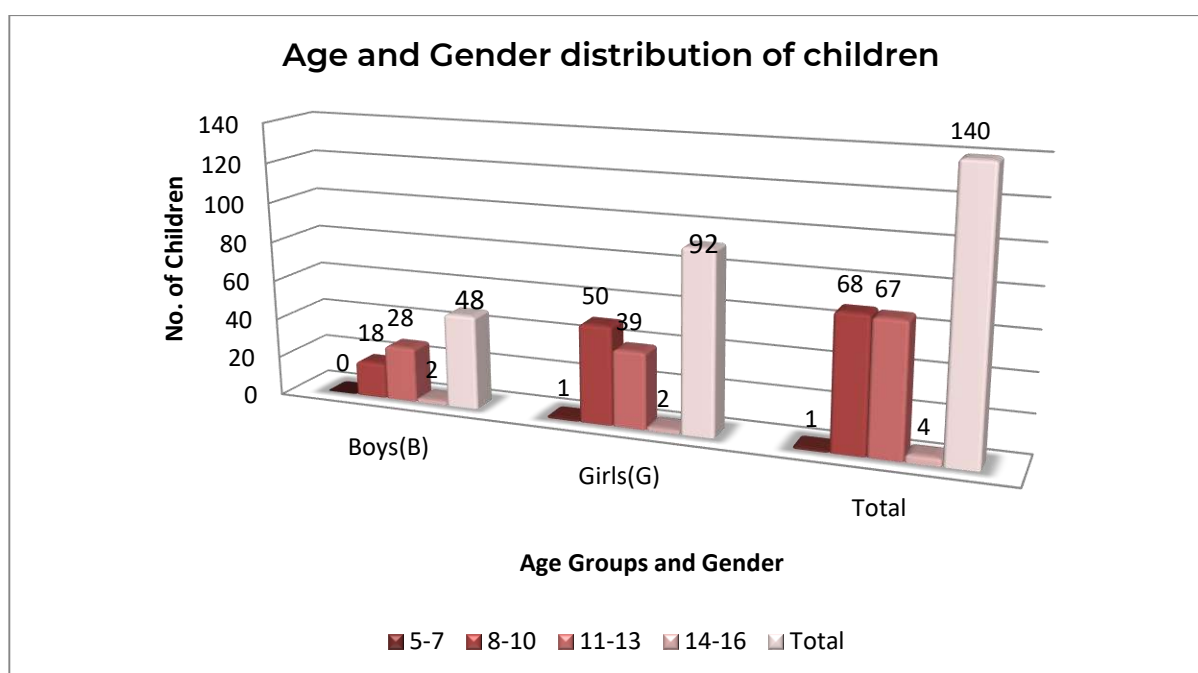
The data presented in Table 2 helps us to construct the life sketch of women in terms of their household responsibilities as a 'mother'. There a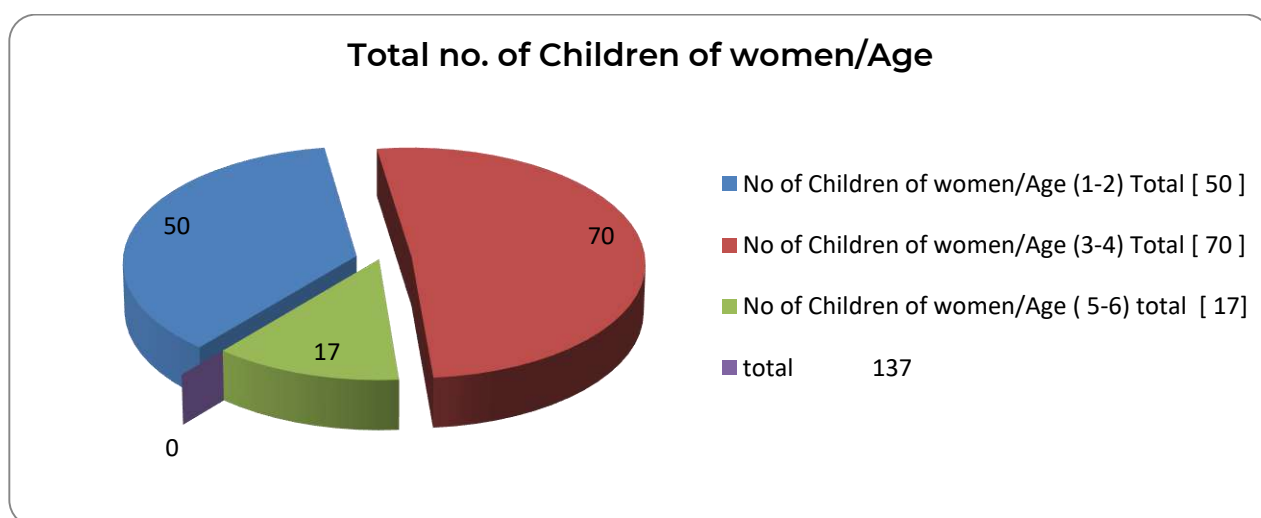re 48.6% women in the sample who have 3-4 children and almost 35% women have one or two children. A tiny number of women at 12% also reported having 5-6 children. Maximum number of women with four children were in their thirties. The number of children that every woman is mothering helped us to construct the physical and psychological space that she could have in a one room house. Higher the number of people, lesser the probability of getting any relief from household chores and physical and psychological relief from the responsibilities.

Table 2 Women's Age Profile along with the Number of Children they had

No. of children per woman / Woman's Age	1-2 children	3-4 children	5-6 children	Only mothers' age was mentioned not no. of children	Total
20 -24 years	3	-	-	-	3
25-29 years	7	8	1	2	18
30-34 years	21	35	2	3	61
35-39 years	13	22	9	2	46
40-44 years	4	4	4	-	12
45-49 years	-	1	1	-	2
no. of children were mentioned not mothers' age	2	-	-	-	2
Total	50	70	17	7	144

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Figure 2: Number of Children that Participant Women had along with their Age*.

Total no. of Children of women/Age

- No of Children of women/Age (1-2) Total [50]
- No of Children of women/Age (3-4) Total [70]
- No of Children of women/Age (5-6) total [17]
- total   137
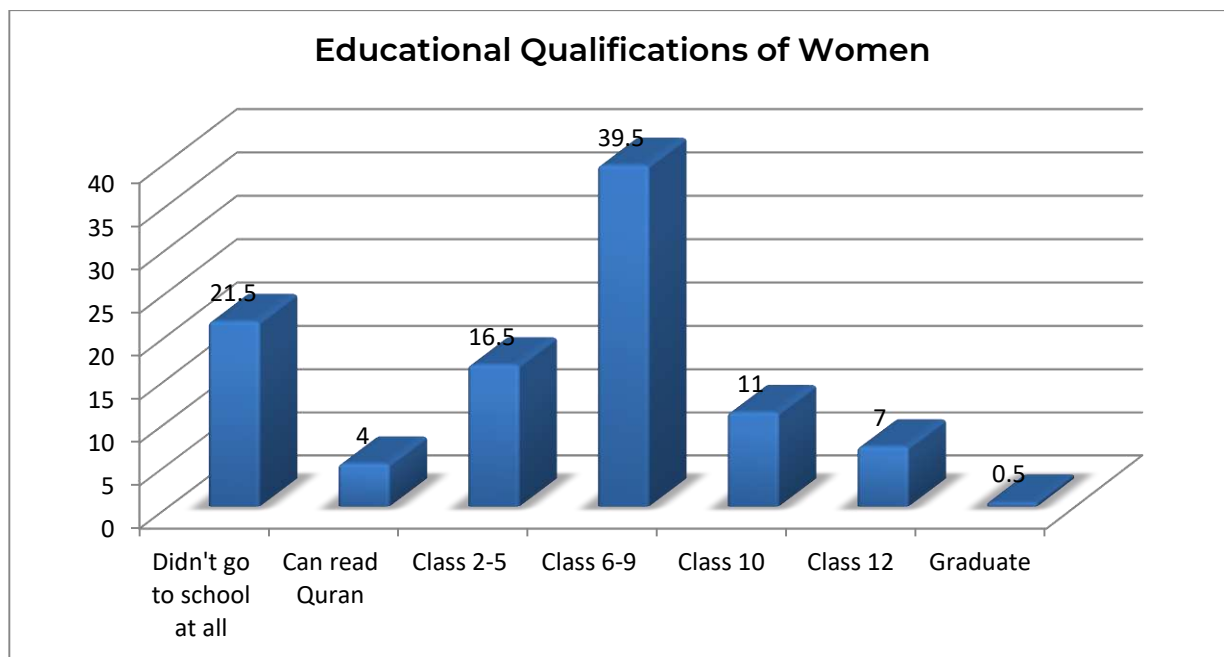
*Seven women didn't report age or number of children

The next table (3) presents the details about the educational qualification of women who participated in the study. It can be seen that the majority of women were either illiterate or barely literate. There were 21.5% women who hadn't studied at all. There were 56% women who studied at school but didn't cross the milestone of Grade X. Out of these, 16.5% women had attended school only till Grade V, at the most, so their educational attainment could not have given them sustainable reading-writing skills.

Table 3 Educational Qualifications of Women

Education / Age of women	20-24 years	25-29 years	30-34 years	35-39 years	40-44 years	45-49 years	Didn't report age	Total	%
Didn't go to school at all	-	2	15	10	3	-	1	31	**21.5**
Can read Quran	-	1	-	4	1	-	-	6	**4**
Class 2-5	-	1	15	4	1	2	-	23	**16.5**
Class 6-9	-	9	22	21	4	-	1	57	**39.5**
Class 10	1	3	6	3	2	-	1	16	**11**
Class 12	-	3	3	4	-	-	-	10	**7**
Graduate	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	**0.5**
Total	1	19	62	46	11	2	3	144	**100**

There were approximately 18.755 women who have reasonable educational attainment up to Grade X and beyond which would have enabled them to play some role in their children's education during the pandemic-led lockdown.
Figure 3: Educational Qualifications of Women

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Educational Qualifications of Women

Category	Value
Didn't go to school at all	21.5
Can read Quran	4
Class 2-5	16.5
Class 6-9	39.5
Class 10	11
Class 12	7
Graduate	0.5

The data of women's educational qualifications enables us to grasp their occupational status. Most of them must be employed in the unorganized sector.

An attempt was made to understand their occupational profile and they give contradictory answers to that. Initially, 62.5% women identified themselves as housewives and only 37.5% women reported being engaged in any kind of work. However, on further probing about the activities they couldn't do during the lockdown, 79% women reported having lost their source of income/livelihood. This demographic detail has implications to understand the experiences of children during the lockdown, so it has been discussed in the next section in which findings have been presented and analyzed.

Findings & Analysis

This section presents the findings of the study which have been drawn out on the basis of the data collected in the form of the children's and their mother's responses. The data has been categorized into six themes which were the main categories of life experiences on which participants were interviewed. The interviews of the children and their mothers helped us to identify the following details of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on their lives. The complete and then partial lockdown implied a lot of restrictions in everybody's life including children. The mass school closure was known to everybody and some of the implications can be figured out easily. However, it was important to understand how children viewed their life under restrictions and what did they perceive as having missed or lost. In this section, an attempt has been made to capture children's and mother's responses and then insights have been drawn for further implementation.

## 3.1 Lockdown led Deprivation and Incurred Disadvantage

In this part, children's and women's responses have been presented on the activities that they missed because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The data helps us to construct their deprivation and the long-term disadvantage that the lockdown has created in their lives. The responses of children and their mothers have been presented in separate tables.

3.1.1 Effect on Children

Table 4: Activities Reported by Children that they couldn't do (Age wise distribution)

Responses Boys+ Girls	5-7 (1)	8-10 (68)	%	11-13 (67)	%	14-16 (4)	Total	%
Couldn't study	1	29	**42.6**	35	**52.2**	4	69	**49.2**
Couldn't go out to play	-	22	**32.3**	36	**53.7**	2	67	**48**
Couldn't go to school		21	**30.8**	57	**85**	1	79	**56.4**
Couldn't play with neighborhood friends or meet them	1	29	**42.6**	35	**52.2**	4	69	**49.2**
Couldn't go to tuition	-	2	3	5	7.5	-	7	**5**
Did nothing	-	6	9	1	1.5	-	7	**5**
Couldn't eat outside food	-	3	4.5	1	1.5	-	4	**2.8**
Couldn't dance	-	2	3	2	3	-	4	**2.8**
Couldn't celebrate Eid	-	-		2	3	-	2	**1.5**
Couldn't do cycling	-	-		2	3	-	2	**1.5**
drawing	-	1	1.5	3	4.5	-	4	**2.8**
Sit at home peacefully	-	-		1	1.5	-	1	**0.8**
Couldn't sit at the shop	-	-		1	1.5	-	1	**0.8**
singing	-	-		1	1.5	-	1	**0.8**
mathematics	-	-		1	1.5	-	1	**0.8**
Read Arabic	-	-		1	1.5	-	1	**0.8**

Figure 4: Activities Reported by Children that they couldn't do (Age wise)
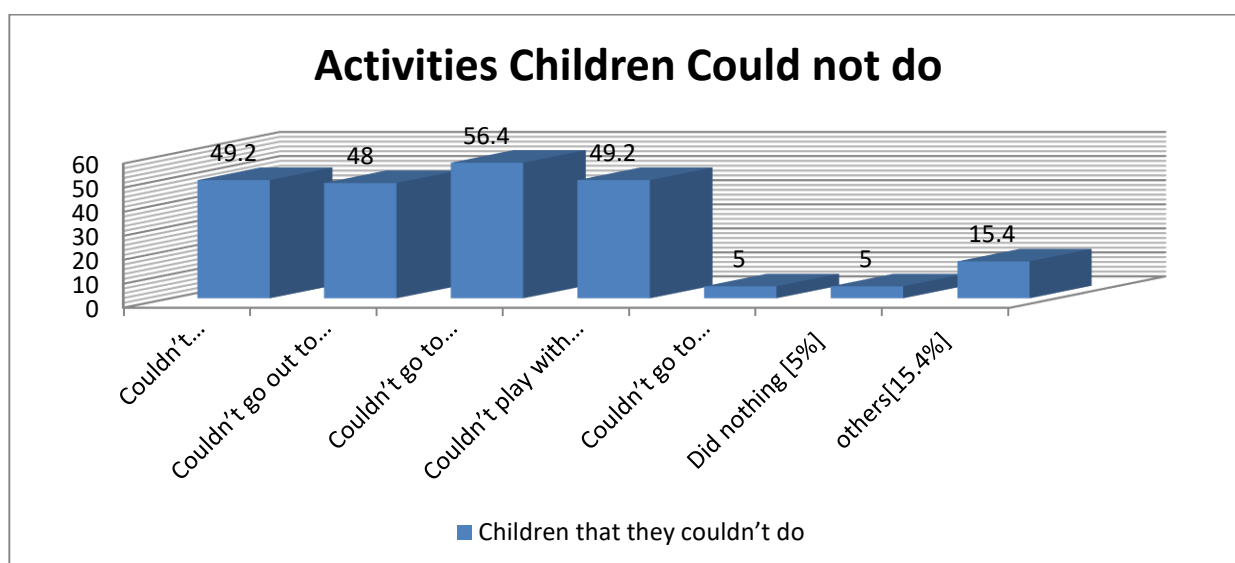
It can be seen in Table 4 that not going to school, not going out, not studying and not meeting neighborhood friends emerge as top categories of the activities that children reported having missed during this period. An overwhelming data is of 49.2% children who said that they couldn't study during the lockdown. As high as 85% of 11–13-year-old children reported that they missed going to school and 52.2% children in the same age group also said that they didn't study during this period. Even in younger children's thought what was dominant was the absence of school experience and that of being with other people of their age group. Children have themselves felt that they lacked something by not going to school, by not studying and by not playing with their neighborhood friends or meeting them. A clear mention by 49.2% children reflects similar findings that have come out in other similar studies that a large proportion of children were not studying at all during the lockdown. According to UNICEF's *Rapid Assessment Report* "Forty (40) per cent of students in the six surveyed states did not use any form of remote learning in the past six months" (p.12).

This data becomes more accessible for drawing insights when we segregate it on the basis of gender of the children.

Table 5: Activities Reported by Children that they couldn't do (Gender)

Responses	Boys (48)	%	Girls (92)	%	Total 140
Couldn't study	25	**52**	44	**48**	69
Couldn't go out/play	24	**50**	43	**47**	67
Couldn't go to school	31	**64.5**	48	**52**	79
Couldn't play with neighborhood friends/meet	25	**52**	44	**48**	69
Couldn't go to tuition	2	4.1	5	5.5	7
Did nothing	1	2	6	6.5	7
Couldn't eat outside food	2	4.1	2	2.2	4
Couldn't dance	2	4	2	2.2	4
Couldn't celebrate Eid	-		2	2.2	2

The data presented in Table 5 helps us to see that there indeed is a gender dimension in the children's responses. The gender differences that have come about in the study are insightful. 'Not going to school' appeared as the top response but boys expressed it more. The total number of boys was significantly less in the sample yet the percentage of boys who said that they missed going to school and studying is higher than girls. There were 64.5% boys who said they couldn't go to school and 52% boys who said that they couldn't study as compared to 52% and 48% girls in both the categories. It can be attributed to a basic gender-difference in need perception and its articulation. Boys get socialized to express their needs and discomforts early in our society whereas girls get socialized to curb their needs and discomforts.

Figure 5: Activities Reported by Children that they couldn't do (Gender)
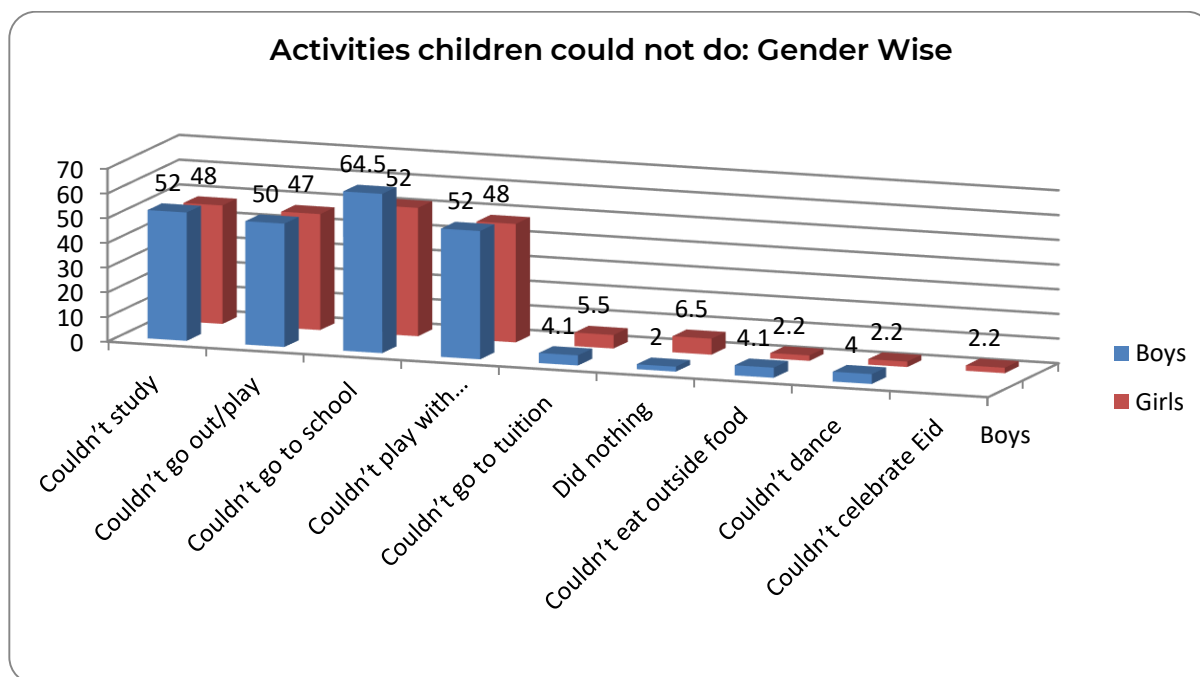
Tables and Figures 4 and 5 present us to what is already known that children couldn't go to school and they missed playing with their friends, same age and level children and they missed several vital activities. We shouldn't consider the responses with less frequencies as inconsequential because they offer the details of the activities that children were engaged in before the pandemic and they missed. This list present to us normal life activities that involve physical thrill, sensory pleasures and ritualized celebrations and children registered having missed them.

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3.1.2 Effect on Women

Closing schools has effects on the ability of parents, especially mothers (UNESCO, 2020a), to work which in turn has affected the children's well-being for a long time to come. Several studies have focused on the long-term effects on children whose parents suffer from extended periods of unemployment. This can lead to poor academic performance, behavior issues and effects that may last for the rest of the child's life. Table 6 presents the activities that women reported that they couldn't do during the lockdown.

Table 6 Things women couldn't do during the lockdown

Responses	20 -24 years	25 -29 years	30 -34 years	35 -39 years	40-44 years	45-49 years	Total (144)	%
Lost their job / there was no work	-	12	38	23	5	1	79	**55**
Stayed at home only	2	6	15	18	5	-	46	**32**
I was working during lockdown	-	-	4	1	1	-	6	**4**
Was unemployed during the lockdown for one year	-	1	5	4	3	-	13	**9**
Total	3	20	68	47	14	1	144	**100**

In response to a question about their curtailed activities, 55% said that they lost their work and 9% women reported having lost their employment for one year. In all, 92 women (64%) women reported that they were unemployed during the lockdown and had no source of income. The other response that the women stayed at home only also points in a similar direction that they couldn't go out to do whatever they wished to do. A tiny minority of 4% women had some occupational continuity implying uninterrupted inflow of income. A large majority at 64% associated missed activities with lost income during the lockdown.

Figure 6: Things Women Couldn't do During the Lockdown

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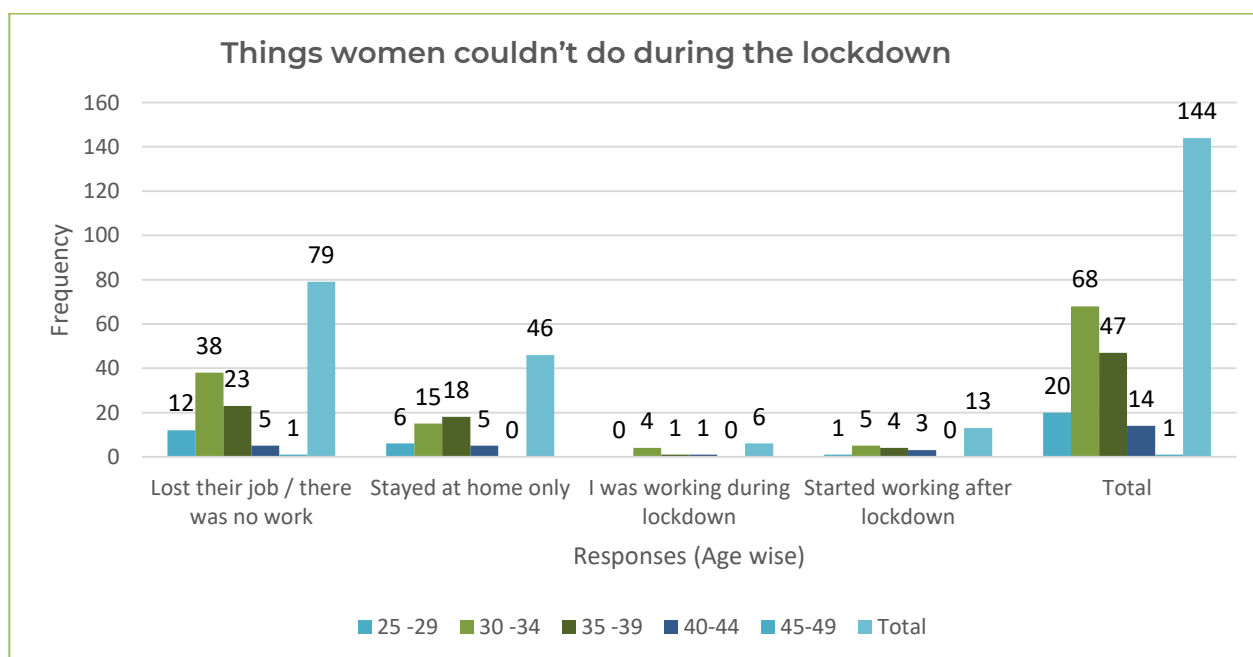
Parents' unemployment has been studied for its effect on children in the current as well as long term context. In one such study, tracking children and their parents for over three decades in Germany, it was found that respondents who experienced parental unemployment during early (0–5 years) and late (11–15 years) childhood have lower life satisfaction at ages 18–31. A finding of the study done by Nikolova and Nikolaev (2018) was that the psychological cost of parental unemployment was higher for young children because negative experiences accumulate over life and stressful events early in life have a stronger effect on outcomes later in life. Older children, on the other hand, may feel pressured to take more responsibility in the family. Mooi-Recci and Baker (2015) studied a large sample of Dutch children who were exposed to parents' unemployment. Their three key findings were: First, it is the volatility-rather than the average- in the occurrence and duration of parent unemployment that inflicts the largest negative effects on children's educational attainment. Second, the negative effects of father's unemployment are primarily transmitted through the changing views of their wives and mothers towards the importance of work. These become negative over the duration of their husband's unemployment and influence negatively their children's educational attainment. Final, younger children are more adversely impacted.

The findings of these two studies give us a frame to deconstruct the life of children who were interviewed in our sample. They suffered the deprivation caused by the loss of their mother's income during the lockdown to Survival issues and lack of money emerged as a dominant factor in the women's interviews. They repeatedly uttered the phrases *ration panee nahin hai, paisa nahin hai bilkul, bahut samasya hai,* (there is not enough to eat, no money in hand, too much suffering). It can be argued that children of this cohort have gone through the trauma of parental unemployment and it will have, negative consequences, in all likelihood in their later lives. The mothers' negative messaging and frustration owing out of her husband's unemployment emerged as a factor in the above two studies. In our study as well, women were asked to narrate their hardships. Their expressions have been tabulated in Table 7.

Table 7 Problems faced by women during the lockdown

Responses	20 -24 years	25 -29 years	30 -34 years	35 -39 years	40-44 years	45-49 years	Total (144)	%
Not much	-	-	2	1	-	-	3	**2**
Had to face lots of problem	-	7	34	33	2	1	77	**53.4**
Financial crisis	1	8	28	22	4	1	64	**44.4**
Unavailability of food	1	11	31	19	4	1	67	**46.5**
Didn't have work to do	1	6	15	17	3	1	43	**30**
Children's education/online study	1	3	6	2	1	-	13	**9**
Couldn't go out	1	2	5	4	1	-	13	**9**
Borrowed money	-	2	6	3	-	-	11	**7.6**
Workload increased at home	-	3	4	1	-	-	8	**0.5**
School had to give us food, grains &water	-	-	3	2	-	-	5	**3.4**
Total	5	42	136	105	15	4		

The figures presented in Table 7 reveal that mothers of the participant children were stressed during the lockdown. They were anxious about their weak financial position and were facing food and other hard ships. There were 46.5% women who mentioned food hardships and 44.4% women mentioned financial crisis. Several of them reported having taken loans at high interest rates and several had taken loans against whatever gold the family had. 53.4 % women reported multiplicity of problems. There were 30% women who reported unemployment as a problem that they had to cope with.

Problems faced by women during the lockdown
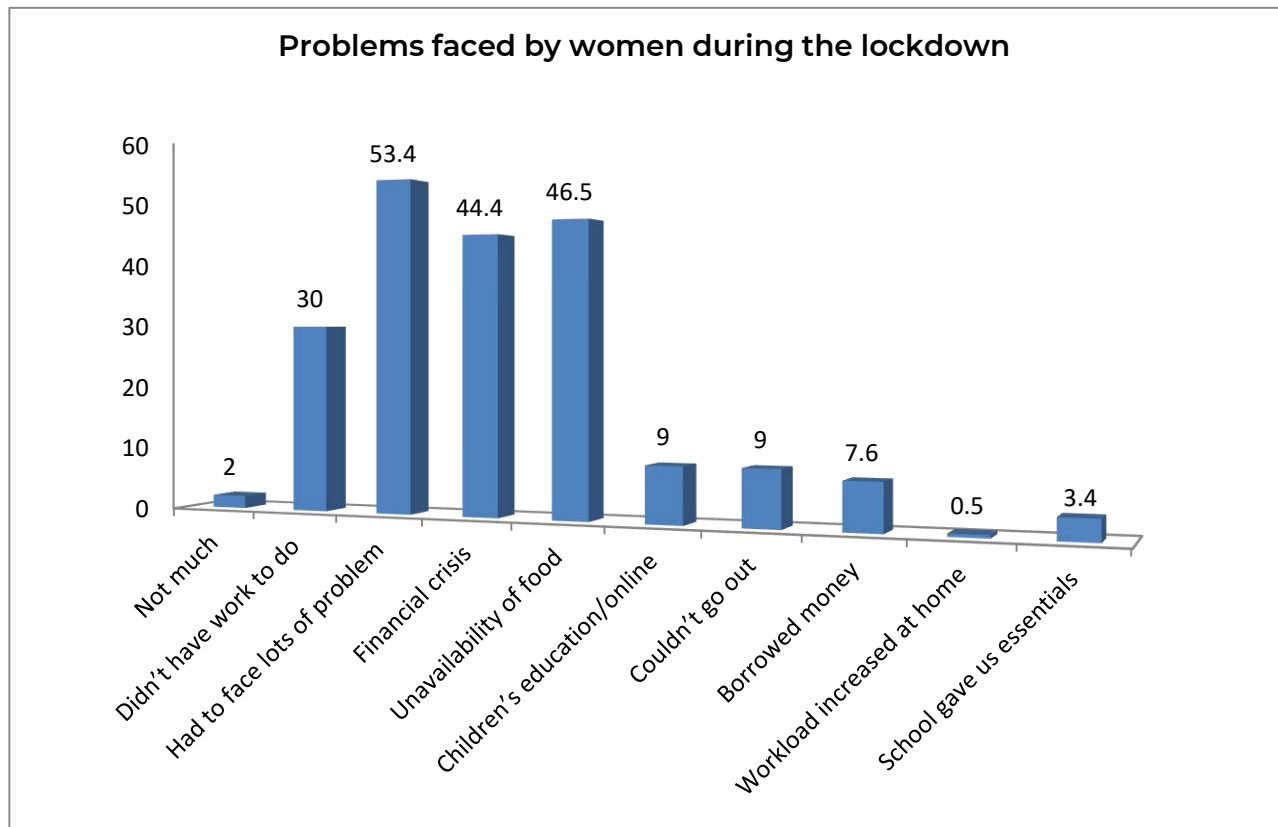
In mothers' responses, lockdown carries an overwhelming image of a problematic period which brought financial stress, food hardships, unemployment and the worry of mounting interests borne out of the loans. The worry about future, which will be consumed in repaying the loans, overshadowed their responses. The data reveals that children lived with parental anxiety and stress on losing their income and struggle to fend for food and other basic necessities.

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3.2 Routine during the Lockdown

We tried to understand what did children and women largely do during the lockdown while they were restricted to be in their homes. Children were asked to narrate their routine from morning to night by prodding them to narrate all the activities in a sequence. Since, the interviews were conducted telephonically, as a result of which, their narrations were not coherent. The interviewers had to prompt them by repeatedly asking for more details. However, the narration gave us a good idea of how they spent their time on a daily basis during the lockdown. Those activities have been listed in Tables 8 and 9 which enable us to construct their routine.

Table 8 Children's Routine During the Lockdown (age-wise)

Responses	5-7 years (N=1)	8-10 years (N=68)	11-13 years (N=67)	14-16 years (N= 4)	Total (140)	%
House hold chores (sweeping, mopping, dishes) and help my mother	1	39	40	2	82	58.5
Breakfast	1	35	41	3	80	57
Self-study	1	28	33	3	65	46
Play at home with siblings	1	25	26	3	55	40
Watch TV	1	22	23	4	50	36
Sleep at night	-	17	29	3	49	35
School work	-	11	20	1	32	23
Online study	-	14	16	-	30	21.5
Fill water	-	12	17	2	31	22.5
Go to tuition	-	7	5	1	13	9.3
Go to Madarsa	-	4	7	1	12	8.5
Stay at home	-	-	6	2	8	6
Don't do anything at home	-	3	1	-	4	3
Take care of sibling	-	3	1	-	4	3

The children were asked to narrate their daily routine out of which a chart of activities was culled out. They were prodded to carry on narrating from morning to evening activities. As a result of which, there is a mention of breakfast, sleeping at night etc. However, the relevant categories for us are those that describe the nature of engagement or the work done by them. The most reported activities were: household chores (57%), having a meal (55.5%), self-study (45%), playing with siblings (38%) and watching TV (35 %).

It is important to pay attention to the study-related responses in Table 7 and their occurrence. Forty Six (46) % children reported doing self-study as a routine activity which means that 54% children did not do self-study. Similarly, 23% children reported doing school work. This data is consistent with the findings of the report *Locked Out of School* (2021) that the proportion of children who were studying online regularly was just 24% in urban areas. The proportion of children who reported online study in their routine is also roughly the same at 21.5%. Remaining children who were not accessing online classes were probably not studying at all. A supplementary possibility of tuition emerged as a possibility in the responses of only 9% children. It has been found that children who get one resource are usually the one who also get the other resources. In all likelihood, the children who were participating in online classes were also the same children who were studying at home as a follow up activity and some of

them were being sent to tuition classes too. The proportion of mothers, who were educated till grade X and above, is 18.75% and the proportion of children who have reported some continuity in learning during the pandemic are 21.5%.

The findings bring out a direct connection between mother's educational attainment and a continuity in her child's engagement with studies. We also need to pay attention to the most reported category of household chores in the responses of 58.5% children and 'play at home' reported only by 40% children
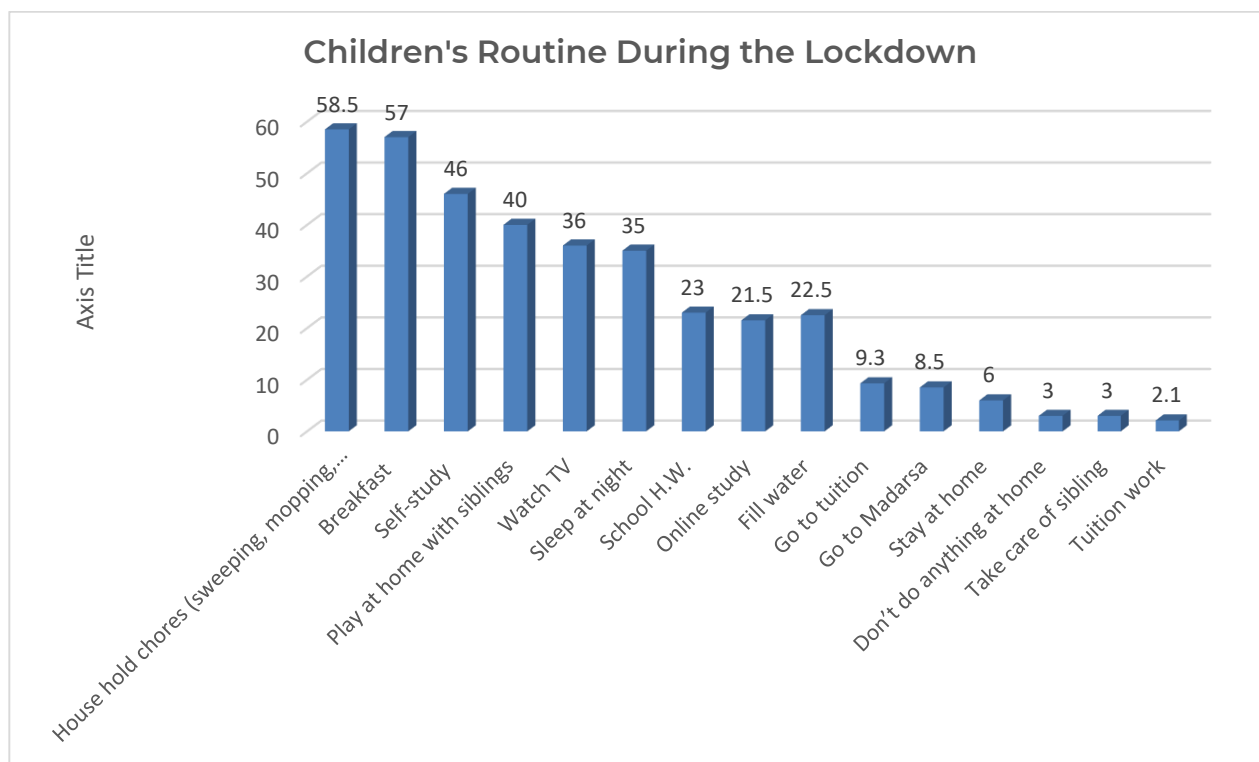
Capelle, Chopra and others (2021) analyzed the findings from a UNICEF survey targeting parents and adolescents across 6 states in India, and identifies lessons learned for addressing learning inequities during future school closures. Their analysis reveals that each additional hour of time spent on domestic chores significantly decreases reported levels of perceived learning. Furthermore, they found that female adolescents perceive their learning to be significantly less than their male counterparts. They argue that gender inequality in perceived learning is linked to the increased time spent on domestic chores for female adolescents. The data collected in the present study also points in the same direction. The gender wise break up of children's routine is presented in Table 9.

Table 9 Children's Routine During the Lockdown (Gender)

Responses Boys+ Girls	Boys (48)	%	Girls (92)	%	Total (140)
House chores (sweeping, mopping, dishes and help my mother)	18	37.5	64	69.5	82
Breakfast	30	62.5	50	54.3	80
Self- Study	22	45.8	43	46.7	65
Play at home with siblings	21	43.8	34	37	55
Watch TV	32	66.6	18	19.5	50

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Sleep at night	17	**35.4**	32	**35**	49
School H.W.	13	**27**	19	**20.6**	32
Online study	10	**21**	20	**21.7**	30
Fill water	6	**12.5**	25	**27**	31
Go to tuition	6	**12.5**	7	**7.6**	13
Go to Madarasa	4	**8.3**	8	**8.6**	12
Stay at home	2	**4.1**	6	**6.5**	8
Take care of sibling	-	**-**	14	**15**	14

It can be seen that the burden of household drudgery fell more on the girl participants than boys. Even though the number of boys was less as compared to the girls, yet the comparison in percentage helps us to identify that the house-bound life was a heavily gendered life for young children. As compared to 69.5% girls, only 37.5% boys reported performing household chores.

Figure 9: Children's Routine During the Lockdown (Gender)
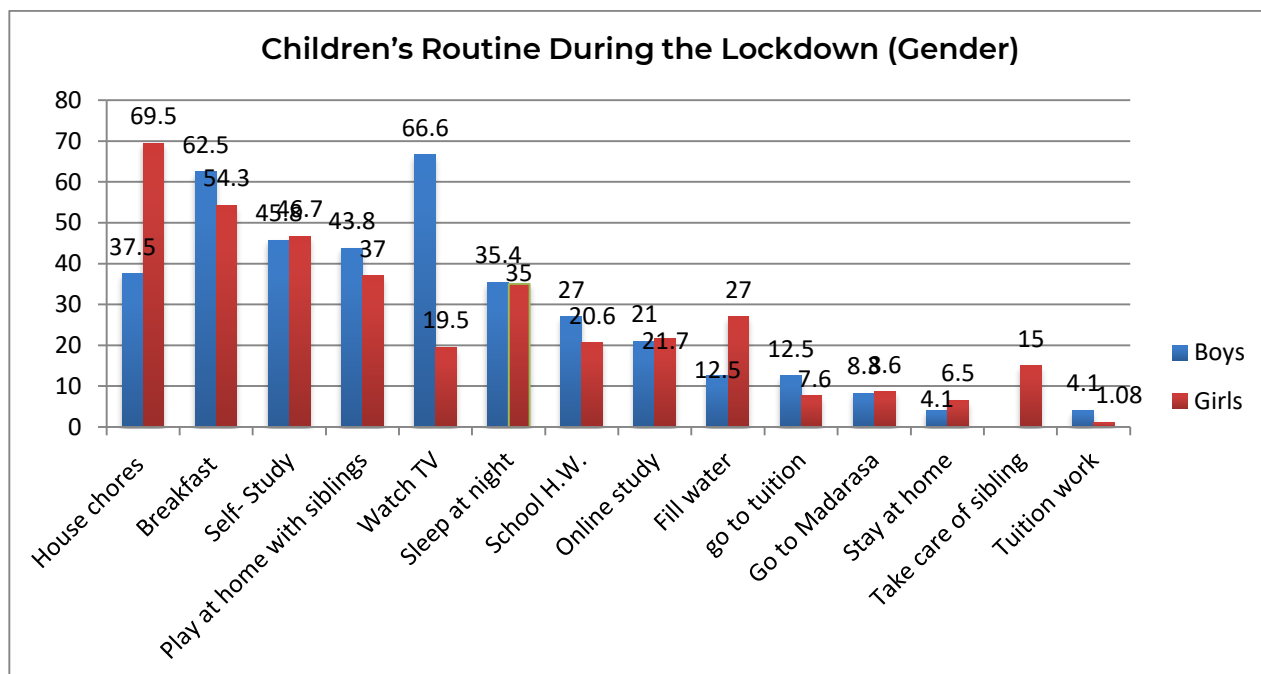
Similarly, 27% girls filled water from an outside tap as compared to 12.5% boys. However, when it comes to leisure activities such as playing with siblings and watching TV, the percentage of boys is much higher at 43.8% and 66.6% respectively whereas only 19.5% girls mentioned watching TV and 37% played with their siblings. The girls' engagement in household chores seemed to have taken precedence in their narration. If we compare the responses of boys and girls about their studies, they are roughly at the same level i.e. 45.8% boys and 46.7% girls reported studying on their own. Similarly, 21% boys and 21.7% girls reported studying in online classes. Taking care of younger siblings figured only in the narration of girls and did not find any mention in the daily routine of boys. Thus, it can be argued that even though the number of activities that could be done were fairly limited, yet the time that girls could have got to do things of their choice wasn't there. They were sucked in their typical 'gendered' role of being a supplementary housewife.

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Siddharth Agarwal had done a study in 2016 on girls in urban slums of Indore city in India. It came out in his study that the girls' worlds remained small despite moving to a large city. Their life gets restricted by family members, economic circumstances, or factors related to their educational attainment before migration. The findings of our study are consistent with several international studies about girls in urban slums. Klett-Davies (2017) did a review of studies done on urban slum girls in Asia and Africa. They concluded that "urban girls are responsible for the lion's share of household work, including not only cooking, cleaning and childcare, but also water collection. This is not only time-intensive, but often exposes them to harassment and violence." (p.3) This holds true of the girls surveyed in our study too. They share the substantial proportion of household work and also collect water from an outside source. Such intensive work demands physical labour which leaves little room for intellectual activity after it.

The next table presents the details of routine activities reported by women. As expected, household chores occupy the top slot in the lives of participants who were interviewed in the study. As is the norm, 73% women reported various household chores as their routine activities. There were 32% women and 15% girls who reported child care as part of their routine. Mother's life pattern has already started unfolding in the life of young girls. It is intriguing that 26% women had to get up as early as 4 even during the lockdown when there was no morning rush or necessity to adhere to a schedule.

Table 10: Women's Daily Routine During the Lockdown

Responses	20 -24 years	25 - 29 years	30 - 34 years	35 - 39 years	40-44 years	45-49 years	Total (144)	%
House hold chores [sweeping,mopping,washing clothes,brooming,washing dishes,cooking]	2	13	50	32	7	1	105	73
Watch TV	2	13	50	32	7	1	105	73
Taking care of children	1	7	20	15	2	1	46	32
Get up @4-4:30am (very early)	1	5	16	13	1	2	38	26.3
Fill water	-	1	9	5	1	1	17	11.8
Could not go out	-	-	1	1	-	-	2	1.34
Read Namaz	-	-	1	1	1	-	3	2
Total	7	41	143	103	20	5		

One of the reasons could be that there is no water supply at home and they are dependent on a community tap or a tanker. Consistent to that, filling water emerged as a category in the responses of 22% children and almost 12 % women. The life conditions shaped by poverty kept the studied group at high risk of catching the infection through group activities such as filling water from a common source. At the same time, it kept the drudgery of household-based physical labour alive. There were 73% women who reported household chores as the most dominant activity in their lockdown routine. Same number of women reported watching TV as a routine activity. Watching TV programs emerged as a salient activity in children's responses too and the related findings have been presented in the next part.

## 3.3 Television and Internet-based Entertainment

A general trend is that children in homes with television spend very considerable amounts of time watching TV. During the Covid-19 pandemic, when they people were forced to stay at home, children and parents spent a lot of time watching television programs on TV and on internet enabled mobile sets. We wanted to know the frequency of its occurrence and reflect on the effects of this massive exposure to a mass medium. As a result, we also asked about the choice of programs that they often watched. Their responses have been presented in Table 11. It was found through their choices that at all age levels children seemed to do a majority of their TV-watching through programs which are not exclusively children's programs, so that their exposure to a variety of adult programs has been considerable as was reported by 73% women that they watched TV programs during the lockdown. In order to develop a full picture of TV exposure of children, we need to reflect on the mothers' as well as children's responses together. It is well known that children are likely to spend more time watching TV if their parents are devoted TV fans and the mothers in our sample turned out to be in that category. Their responses have been presented in Table 12.

Table 11 Programs Preferred and Watched by Children on TV and Internet

Responses	5-7 years (1)	8-10 years (68)	11-13 years (67)	14-16 years (4)	Total (140)	%
Tik-tok video on Youtube	1	34	38	4	77	**55**
Cartoons	-	28	31	2	61	**43.5**
Yes , I watch TV serials	-	25	23	4	52	**37**
Youtube on phone(news,cartoons,games,songs)	-	14	18	1	33	**23.5**
News only on corona	-	11	16	2	29	**20.7**
Study through youtube videos	-	5	6	-	11	**8**
Saw people distributing grains and helping	-	1	-	-	1	**0.7**

Watching Tiktok videos emerged as the most preferred activity of children when it comes to screen based entertainment reported by 55% children followed by cartoons liked by 43.5% children. There were additional 23.5% children who reported frequently watching videos on You Tube. It can be inferred that a large majority of participant children engaged in unregulated screen entertainment. A large amount of time spent with the screen, largely for entertainment must have replaced their physical activity which was anyhow not feasible during the lockdown and on account of limited open spaces in informal settlements to play and run around.

Figure 9: Programs Preferred and Watched by Children on TV and Internet

Programs Preferred and Watched by Children on TV and Internet
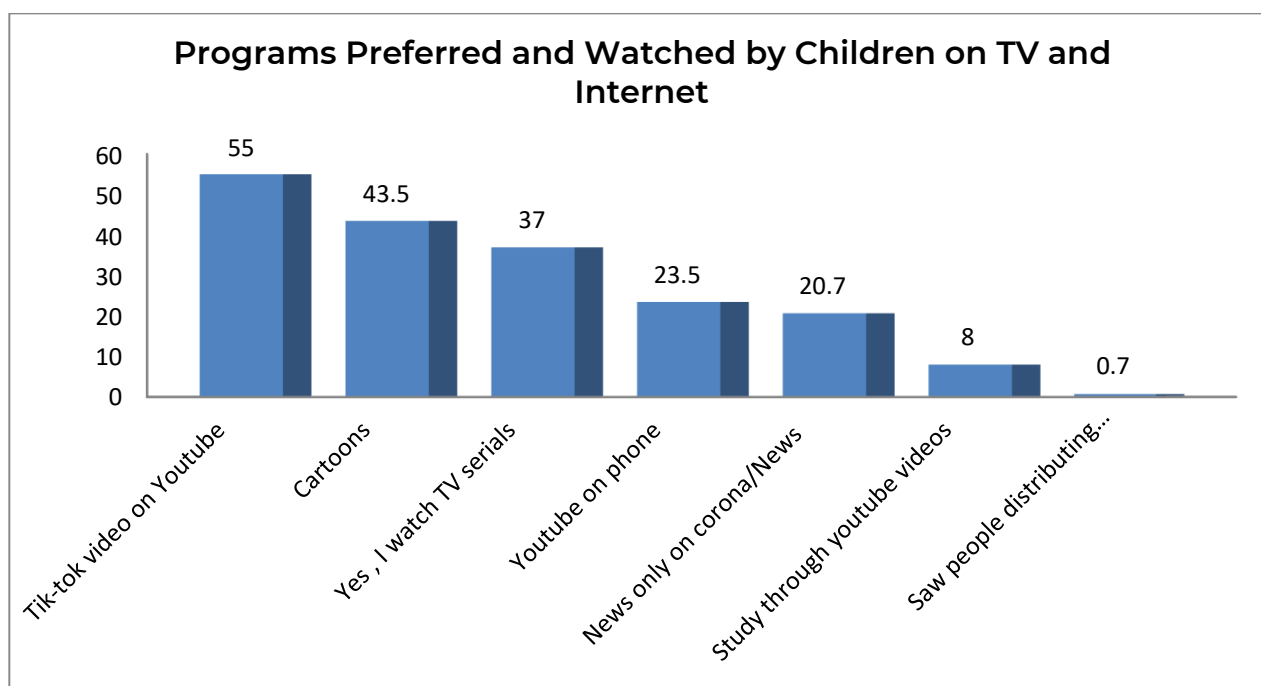
There have been several studies that study the effect of screen time on children's psychological well-being. Twenge and Campbell (2018) examined a large (n = 40,337) random sample of 2- to 17-year-old children and adolescents in the U.S. in 2016 that included comprehensive measures of screen time and an array of psychological well-being measures. In their findings, more hours of daily screen time were associated with lower psychological well-being, including less curiosity, lower self-control, more distractibility, more difficulty making friends, less emotional stability, being more difficult to care for, and inability to finish tasks. Among 14- to 17-year-olds, even moderate use of screens was associated with lower psychological well-being. Screen addiction has been diagnosed as a growing health issue, generally being referred to as screen dependency disorder (SDD).SDDs have become a new challenge for child neurology. The World Health Organization's (WHO) recent classification of 'gaming disorder' as a mental health condition has again brought the issue into focus.

Their mothers also reported a generous engagement with televisions programs on TV or through mobile screen. They gave a few specific replies and also gave clubbed responses such as 'Marathi serials' or 'All kinds of things on mobile'. None of them said that they have to exercise restraint over their screen engagement because their kids remain in their close company. Mothers emerged as screen fans in our data who didn't regulate their behavior on the basis of what is appropriate or inappropriate for children.

Table 12 Programs that Women Watch on Television and Internet Enabled Mobile

Responses	20 - 24 years	25 -29 years	30 - 34 years	35 -39 years	40-44 years	45-49 years	Total (144)	%
TV serial (Sab tv crime patrol, star plus)	4	6	32	14	2	-	58	**41.5**
Watch on mobile all kinds of things	-	4	15	16	4	-	38	**27**
News	2	1	15	8	2	-	28	**20**
Watch Marathi serial	1	1	6	1	-	1	10	**7.1**
Covid related info	1	-	6	5	-	-	12	**8.6**
Cooking related shows	-	-	7	2	2	1	11	**7.9**
Watch movies	-	2	4	3	-	-	9	**6.5**
film songs	-	-	2	4	-	-	6	**4.3**
Islamic channel on YouTube	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	**0.7**
Fashion and beauty	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	**0.7**
Religious shows	-	-	3	-	-	-	3	2.2
Cartoon with children	1	3	4	1	-	-	9	6.5

Watching television programs emerged as one of the significant activities in women's routine during the lockdown. The choice of their programs give us an idea about how did they keep themselves occupied when they didn't step out of their homes. Most preferred programs were television serials including soap operas on Sab TV and Star Plus channels. Parallel to the names of two channels, women mentioned Crime Patrol distinctly. It is a program bring the real stories of crime happening all around the country which were resolved by the police. A distinct mention of this program by 41.5% women reveals that it is very popular among them and they watch it without any consciousness that it's content may not be appropriate for children. A sizeable proportion of women at 27.5% reported that they watch all kinds of television programs on their mobile.

Let us juxtapose this data with the earlier mentioned date in Table 3 that only 21.5% reported attending online classes regularly. A functional mobile with internet connectivity was reportedly available in the house of 27.5% women but it was being used for their purpose including entertainment and not for classes. This is consistent with the findings of other studies such as *Locked Out* … that smartphones are often used by working adults , and may or may or not be available to school children.

Maccoby (1951) had done a path breaking study on television and its addiction among children. While discussing the findings of his empirical work, he argued that—if a child becomes accustomed to a heightened level of excitement and organizes much of his learned activity at that particular level of excitement, his behavior will be disrupted if the level of excitement declines, and he will be restless, bored, ill-at-ease until he does something to restore the particular level of excitement. If television does increase the level of excitement significantly, a mild form of "addiction" might take place in this way, and parents and teachers could get the child's interest only by making the things they want to present to him as exciting as the stories he is accustomed to seeing over television. Children also develop vicarious habits formation. Continually living through experience of violence and aggression, romantic and sexual excitement, vicariously should have two effects: it may momentarily reduce a child's need to be aggressive in real life, but if at some future time the need to be aggressive is aroused, it should increase the probability that the child will actually perform an aggressive act.

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Aggression of different kinds is a very common theme in all the stories children choose from the mass media, and insofar as this or any other action system is practiced conceptually through the mass media, the probability of the act's being performed in real life should of course be increased.

It is well known that heightened engagement with screen leads to other problems in children such as mean later average bedtimes for children, conflict with parents over meal time and children who remain withdrawn from the household activities (Bulck, 2010). Mothers commonly regard quiet children as virtuous children, so a withdrawn child doesn't appear problematic to them but the tendency to be quiet and the perpetual withdrawal interferes with educational attainment and social interaction. We found ample evidence of this in our study.

Further, children were asked about to give reasons for their delayed bed time and were also prodded to tell the kind of programs they enjoyed most. The responses are given below in Tables 13 and 14.

Table 13 Reasons for being awake till late in the night

Responses	5-7	8-10	11-13	14-16	Total(140)	%
Mobile	-	27	39	3	69	**49**
TV programs	1	28	23	11	63	**45**
Study	-	12	7	1	20	**14**
Mobile games	-	6	10	3	19	**13.8**
Playing with sibling	-	7	4	1	12	**8.5**
Youtube & Tiktok videos	-	3	7	-	10	**7.2**
Stress (food,clothes,money)	-	4	4	-	8	**5.5**

When children were asked to imagine the reasons for later bedtime than usual, only three responses were non-screen based. One of them was study, reported by 14% children, sibling time by 8.5% children and 5.5% said stress as a factor for lack of sleep. They would have acquired it from their parents' talk and the real experience of food hardship during the lockdown. The remaining four responses were in the realm of screen. The frequency is so high that it can be easily concluded that screen is one factor that influenced children's sleep in an adverse manner during the lockdown.

Figure 10: Reasons for Being Awake till Late in the Night

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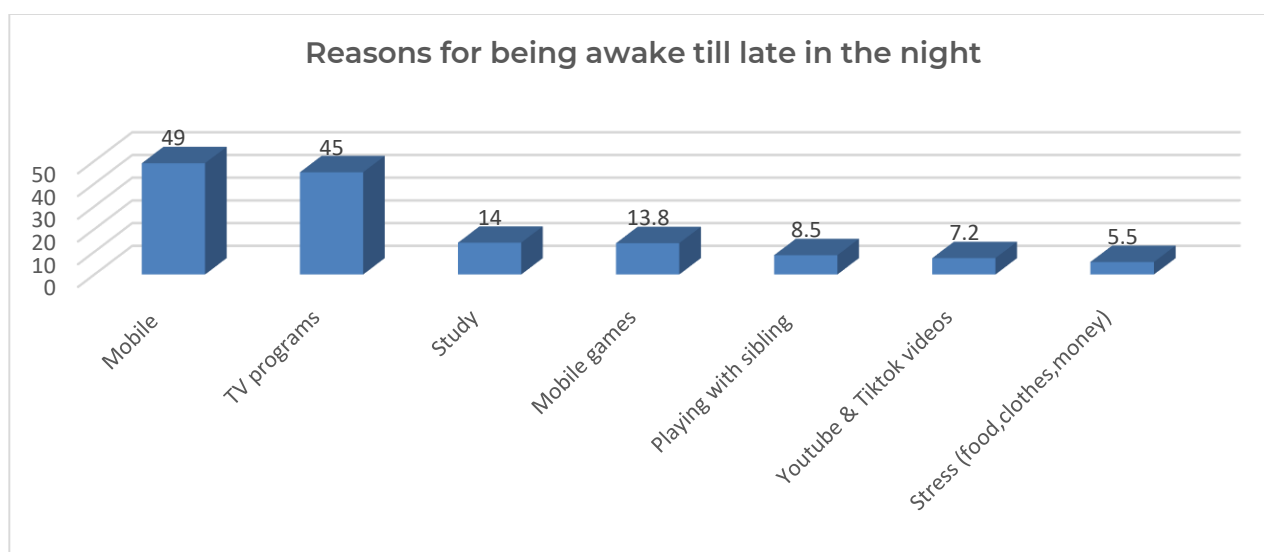
This can be deliberated upon further with the help of the data presented in Table 14. It helps us to capture the details of alternate activity that children did when they didn't sleep on time. In a way, Table 14 presents further details of what participant watched on screen.

Table 14: Specific Entertainment Programs Preferred by Children

Responses	5-7	8-10	11-13	14-16	Total(140)	%
Scary films	-	31	33	5	69	**49**
Horror stories/ crime		22	16	1	39	**28**
Corona death	-	10	5	-	15	**11**
black fungus/people are dying	-	6	7	-	13	**9**
Cartoons	-	9	5	-	14	**10**
Films/cinema	-	3	10	1	14	**10**

The top most choice of the surveyed children emerged as horror films and crime-based programs and films that involve plots around, murder, bloodshed, ghosts and so on. The inappropriateness of such programs for children is well known and has been a major concern for those who work in the field of education and children's mental health. The *American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry released a statement in 2014 stating the following:*

Unfortunately, much of today's television programming is violent. Hundreds of studies of the effects of TV violence on children and teenagers have found that children may:

- become "immune" or numb to the horror of violence
- begin to accept violence as a way to solve problems
- imitate the violence they observe on television; and
- identify with certain characters, victims and/or victimizers

Extensive viewing of television violence by children causes greater aggressiveness. Sometimes, watching a single violent program can increase aggressiveness. Children who view shows in which violence is very realistic, frequently repeated or unpunished, are more likely to imitate what they see. Children with emotional, behavioral, learning or impulse control problems may be more easily influenced by TV violence. The impact of TV violence may show immediately in the child's behavior or may surface years later. Young people can be affected even when their home life shows no tendency toward violence." TV Violence and Children (aacap.org)

Figure 11: Specific Programs Watched by Children
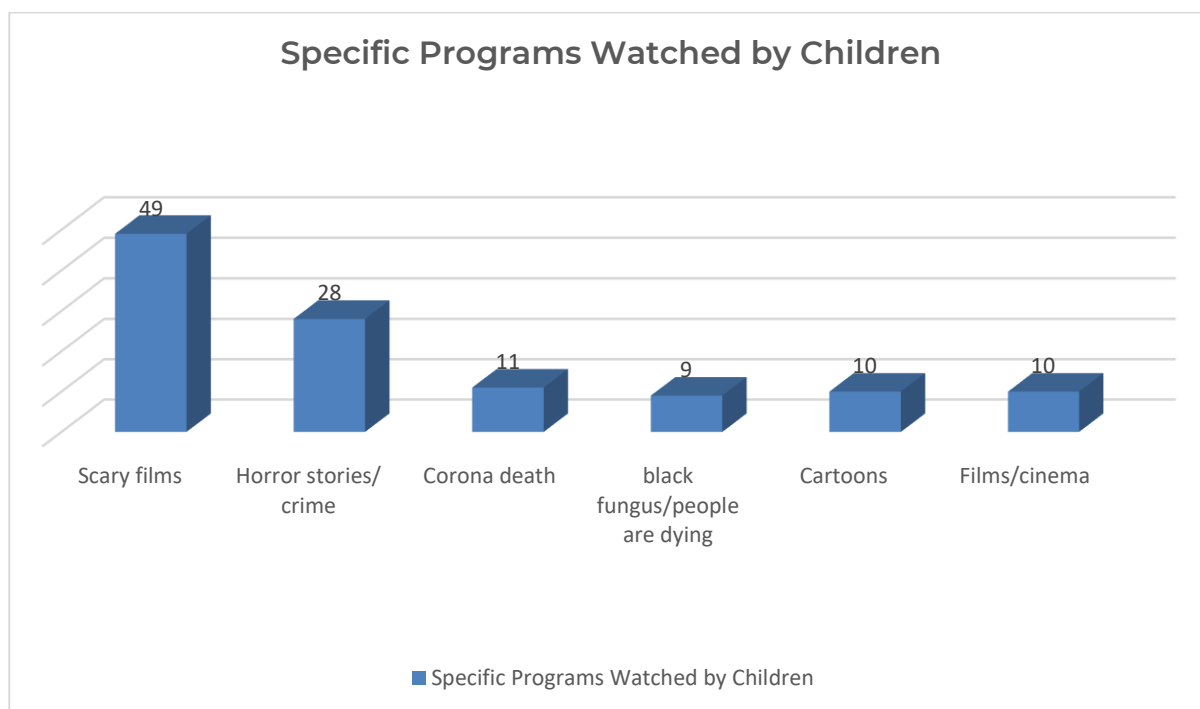
Huesmann (2007) critically assessed the research evidence since 1960s that suggests that exposure to violence in television, movies, video games, cell phones, and on the internet increases the risk of violent behavior on the viewer's part just as growing up in an environment filled with real violence increases the risk of them behaving violently. His conclusions are:

This review marshals evidence that compelling points to the conclusion that media violence increases the risk significantly that a viewer or game player will behave more violently in the short run and in the long run. Randomized experiments demonstrate conclusively that exposure to media violence immediately increases the likelihood of aggressive behavior for children and adults in the short run. The most important underlying process for this effect is probably priming though mimicry and increased arousal also play important roles. The evidence from longitudinal field studies is also compelling that children's exposure to violent electronic media including violent games leads to long-term increases in their risk for behaving aggressively and violently. These long-term effects are a consequence of the powerful observational learning and desensitization processes that neuroscientists and psychologists now understand occur automatically in the human child. Children automatically acquire scripts for the behaviors they observe around them in real life or in the media along with emotional reactions and social cognitions that support those behaviors. Social comparison processes also lead children to seek out others who behave similarly aggressively in the media or in real life leading to a downward spiral process that increases risk for violent behavior. (Huesmann, 2007, p: 10)

The next two categories which constitute about 20% children's choice were prima facie about the contemporary issue, the virus, but even in that child kept misery or death in focus. It emerges clearly from the data that children spent time watching programs which involved violence and aggression.

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## 3.4 School and Studies During the Lockdown

An impression got created in the minds of common people that despite problems involving life and death, learning had continued for most children. The idea was the only difference was that teaching and learning moved to various online media but it continued for everybody. However, several studies have already brought out that a large number of children not only remained outside the reach of online forums, but more alarmingly several of them completely dropped out of the school (UNICEF, 2021 and SCHOOL, 2021). STCI also collected the data about children's experiences with school, teachers and learning during the pandemic. This part presents the responses of the participant children about their experiences with school, learning and teachers during the lockdown.

Table 15 Interaction with School Teachers and Classmates during the Pandemic

Responses Boys+ Girls	5-7	8-10	11-13	14-16	Total (140)	%
Went to collect books, met teacher only once	-	33	35	3	71	**50.7**
Not at all	-	17	21	1	39	**27.8**
To collect grains met my teacher once	1	13	19	1	34	**24**
Talked on phone/online	-	5	9	1	15	**10.7**
They called to give question paper once	-	2	3	-	5	**3.5**
In my village school once	-	-	2	-	2	**1.4**
Happiness scheme once	-	1	-	-	1	**0.7**

It is evident from the data presented in Table 15 that children had either no contact with their school activities and teachers or had a one- or two-point contact in order to receive what was distributed by government as relief measures. Half the surveyed children reported having met their teachers only once or twice that too for a non-academic reason. However, there were still 27.8% children who hadn't met their teacher even once and 10.7% had spoken only on phone. There were 24% children who clearly said that they had met their teachers only once to collect books, grains, question paper or some other material.

Figure 12: Interaction with School Teachers and Classmates during the Pandemic
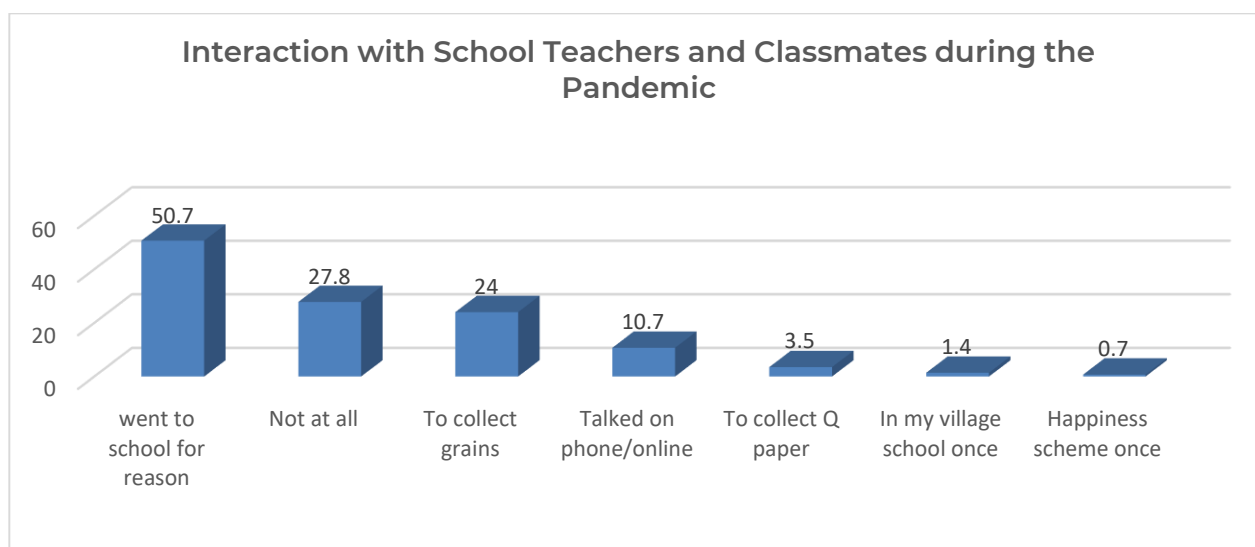
Since long, there has been consensus among researchers and teachers that missing school has an adverse relationship with academic success. Several studies have established that children's absence from school have a consistently negative association with multiple measures of student achievement (Gottfried 2009; Lehr et al. 2004). It has been proved that upon their return to school, absent students may feel a greater sense of alienation from their peers and teachers which adversely impacts their educational attainment. (Johnson, 2005). In 2011, Gottfried, concluded a study in which she tracked five cohorts of elementary school siblings over six years to study the impact of their absence from school. A longitudinal data set was observed as children progressed through elementary, middle, and high school. The study upholds the conclusion that missing school has direct damaging effects on multiple measures of academic performance.
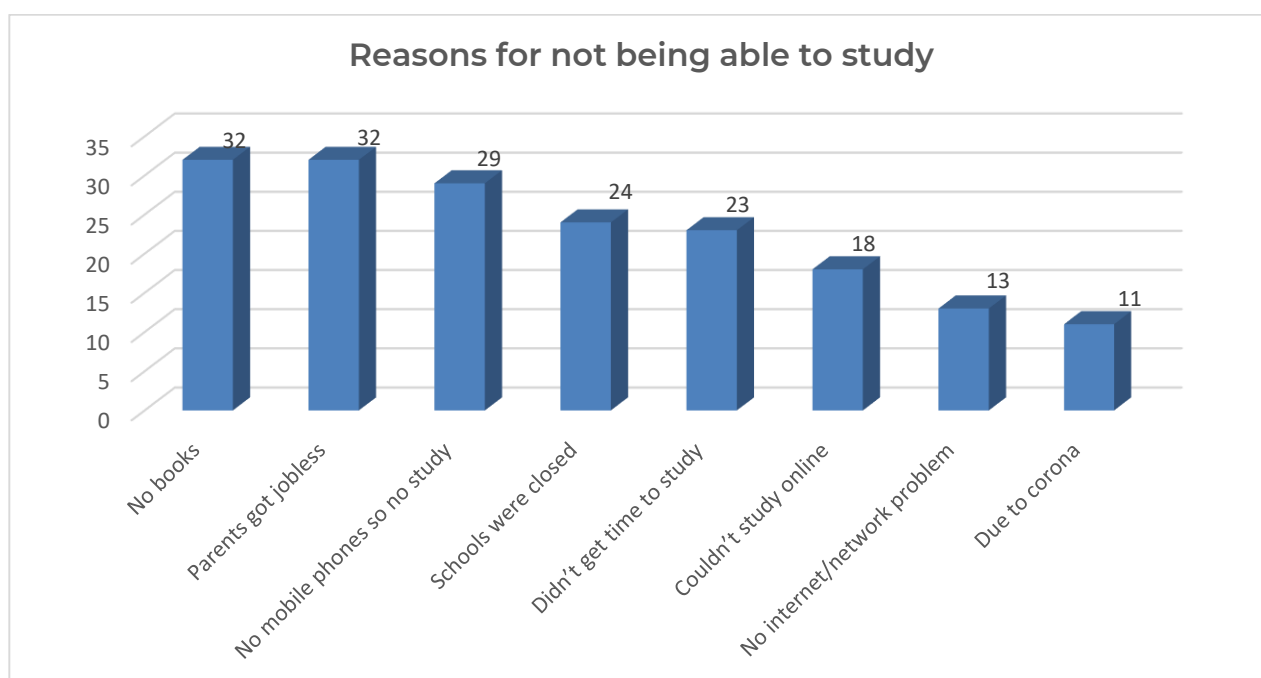
As is evident from Table 3 that almost 50% children had reported upfront that they couldn't study at all during the lockdown. This aspect was probed in further and the children were asked to narrate the reasons for not being able to study. Their responses are presented in Table 16.

Table16: Reasons for not being able to study

Responses	5-7	8-10	11-13	14-16	Total (140)	%
No books	-	16	17	12	45	**32**
Parents got jobless	-	17	18	10	45	**32**
No mobile phones so no study	-	17	22	2	41	**29**
Due to lockdown schools were closed	-	17	15	2	34	**24**
Didn't get time to study	1	11	17	3	32	**23**
Couldn't study because it was online	1	9	14	1	25	**18**
No internet/network problem	-	7	11	-	18	**13**
Due to corona	-	4	11	-	15	**11**

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There are 32% children who gave absence of books as a reason for not being able to study. It is a telling data as it tells us that these children spent almost two academic years without any engagement with textual material. Another 23% said that they couldn't study because they didn't get any time for it. It implies that they must be busy in household chores or assisting their parents in making a livelihood, somehow. Their engagement with textual or learning material can also be assumed to be nil during this period. Parents' loss of income for 32% children, mobile instrument deprivation for 29%, online medium being inaccessible for 18% and network issue for 13% verify what has been counted in several reports.

Figure 13: Reasons Given by Children for not Being able to Study During the Lockdown

Reasons for not being able to study

(Bar chart values: No books = 32; Parents got jobless = 32; No mobile phones so no study = 29; Schools were closed = 24; Didn't get time to study = 23; Couldn't study online = 18; No internet/network problem = 13; Due to corona = 11)

The picture that emerges from our study is that children spent most of their time without any significant engagement with academic or learning activities. There appears a serious gap of two years in their school-based growth and development. The findings of STCI study are consistent with that of UNICEF survey and SCHOOL study.

UNICEF has issued a warning that long term school closures lead to social isolation. Schools are hubs of social activity and human interaction, when they are shut down for long, many children miss out on time with friends that is essential to social development.

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3.5 Experience and Familiarity with Covid-19

This has been a phase of fear of the unknown and incomprehensible virus, mis-information and news about misery all over. Its impact on children must have been detrimental in many ways. In our small study, we tried to identify what all children knew about the virus, what was their emotional state and what is it that they wanted to know further. This part presents the data pertaining to their familiarity with those who suffered during the pandemic.

Table 17 Awareness of illness and deaths on account of Covid-19

Responses	5-7	8-10	11-13	14-16	Total	%
No awareness/don't know	1	44	55	2	103	**73.5**
Yes					37	**26.5**
People are dying	-	9	9	1	19	**13.5**
Relatives suffered	-	3	3	-	6	**4.2**
Yes, I know those who suffered	-	3	2	-	5	**3.5**
Nearby, two people died	-	2	1	-	3	**2.2**
A friend's parent died		1	2	1	4	**2.8**

Table 17 presents children's responses to the questions about personal familiarity with those who had suffered in the pandemic. A clear majority at 73.5 denied having any personal interface with the one who had suffered or died in the pandemic. There were 26.5% children who knew somebody in their neighborhood or in the families of friends and relatives who had suffered the ills of the pandemic. This data is fairly consistent with the percentage of people who have suffered in the overall population at about 25%. The children know that the person suffered or died on account of the Covid-19 infection but doesn't know its details. As is reflected in Table 19 that their understanding about the infection was sketchy and based on what they had heard over news and social media. It lacked the knowledge-based details that can be easily expected from the children or adolescents studying in upper middle grades.
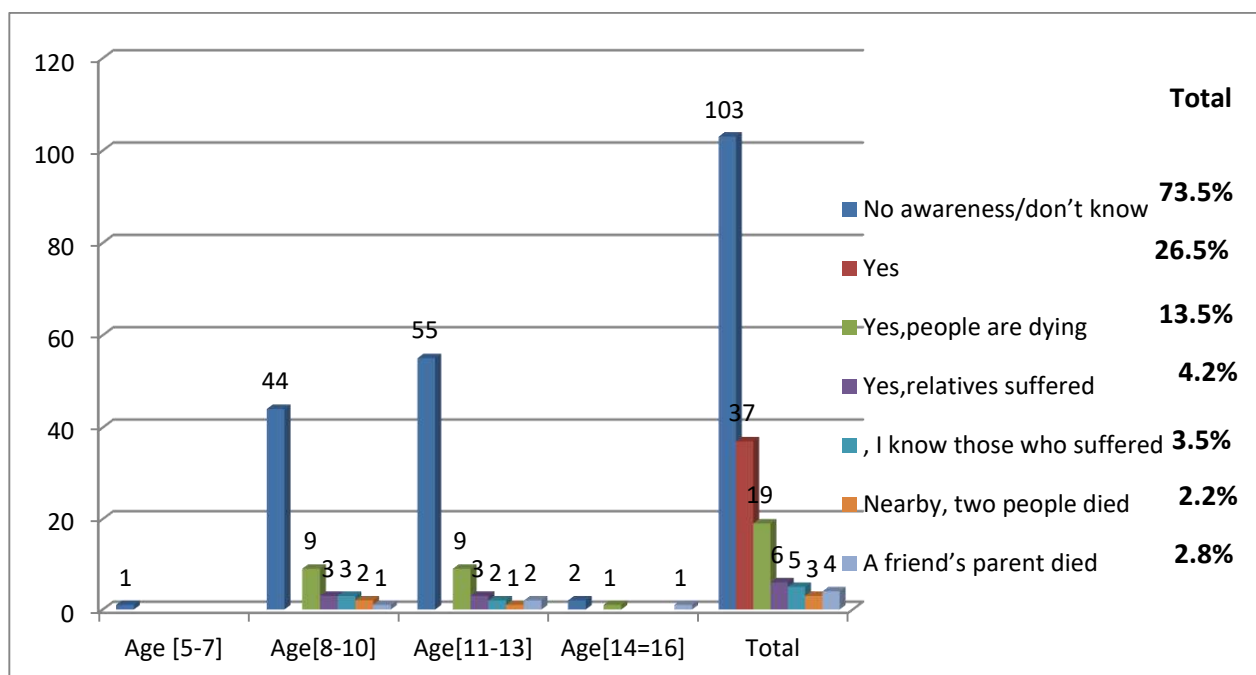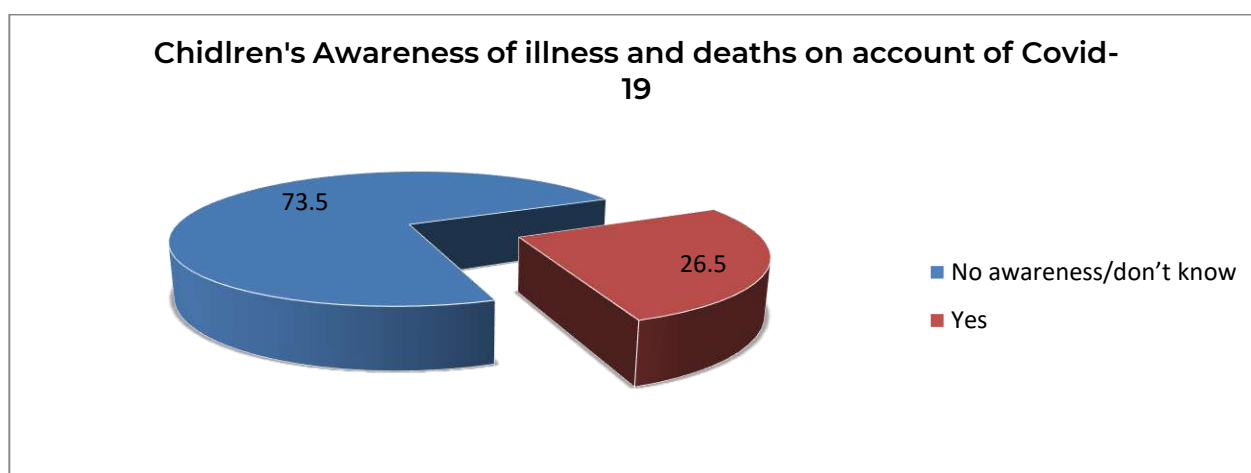
Figure 14: Children's Awareness of Illness and Deaths on Account of Covid-19

The NCERT's supplementary reader *Vimla in the Virus Land* has been written for the children of 10-14 year old children with a clear assumption that they can understand virus, its propagation and its interaction with human body. However, through any medium, schools or the other educational material publishers did not consider it viable to enhance children's learning about the Covid-19 virus. NCERT itself did not bring any notice of the education departments on its publication.

Table 18 Children's Perceptions about Covid-19, Pandemic and resulting lockdown

Responses	5-7	8-10	11-13	14-16	Total (140)	%
Don't know	-	36	24	-	60	**43**
Yes						
Lockdown was because of corona virus	1	34	41	4	80	**57**
It is a disease (causes fever, cough , cold)	-	19	35	4	58	**41.4**
Patient of corona lasts for few days at home	-	8	6	18	32	**23**
Wear masks		5	18	3	26	**18.5**
Use sanitiser		4	14	3	21	**15**
Wash hands		5	14	2	21	**15**
Lockdown is for the safety of people/ Government imposed	-	4	2	1	7	**5**
Respiration problem	-	1	3	-	4	**2.8**
It spreads through air	1	1	1	1	4	**2.8**
Don't go in crowd	-	2	2	-	4	**2.8**

There were 43% children who clearly denied having any understanding of the Covid-19. This is a significant data as it tells us that children have spent 17 months coping with the implications of something that they don't know. Sigelman et.al.(1977) had examined the development of knowledge of germs and viruses in relation to AIDS and Flu in a predominantly Mexican American sample of children aged 8-9, 10-11, and 12-13. They found that acquiring knowledge of germs and viruses in relation to a particular disease appears to help children understand the causal processes involved in that disease but does not make them less susceptible to factual misconceptions about which behaviors cause the disease or improve their understanding of other diseases. From their sample, 8–9-year-old children appeared to be quite familiar with the concept of germs and quite ready to associate them with AIDS.

Kafai (2008) examined online and classroom participants' under- standing of a computer virus using surveys and design activities. Their analyses revealed that students had a mostly naïve understanding of a computer virus influenced by mythological or anthropomorphic perspectives; only few were able to describe computational elements.

It is an important first level finding of STCI study that children's conception of the Covid-19 must be studied by using models of child development. It will bring out important insights for the teachers to be able to teach effectively in the class. Teachers would know what are the kinds of misconceptions and assumptions with which children approach learning science and topics that cover related aspects of life.

Figure 15: Children's perceptions about Covid-19 virus, Pandemic and the Lockdown.
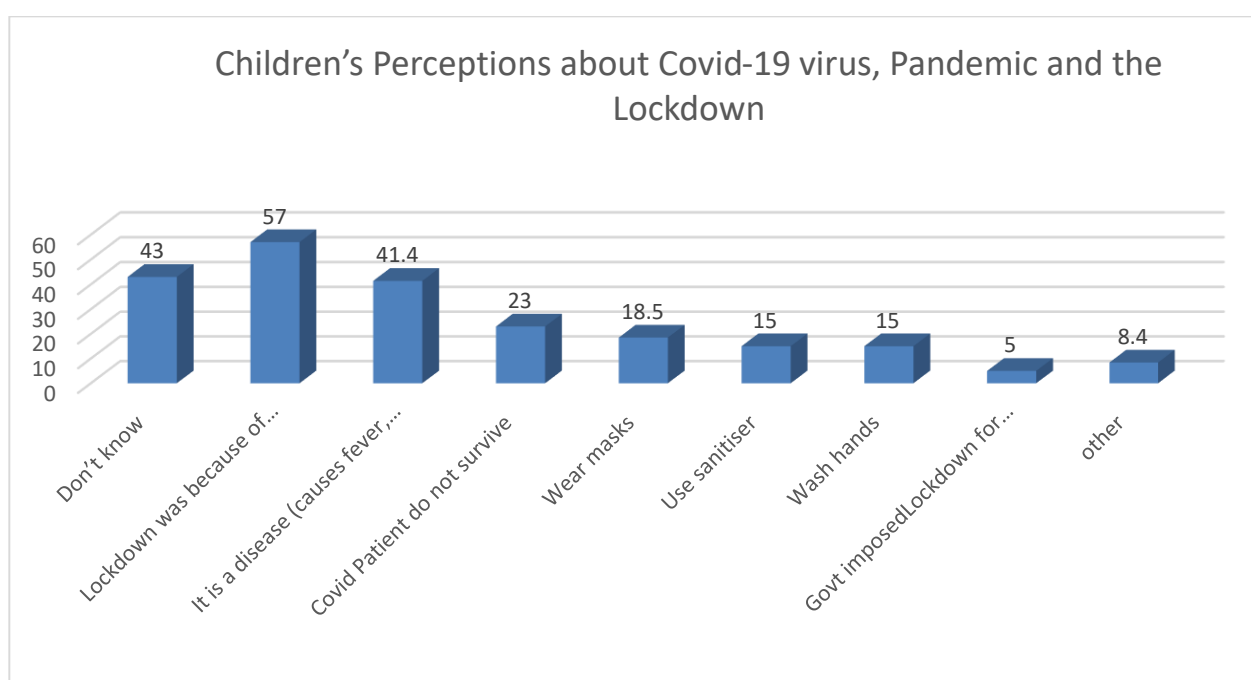
The remaining 57% children expressed what they must have heard over media and in people's conversations that lockdown has been imposed because of the virus which makes death imminent and spreads through close contact and in crowded places. Nearly 18% children mentioned the precautions to be taken.
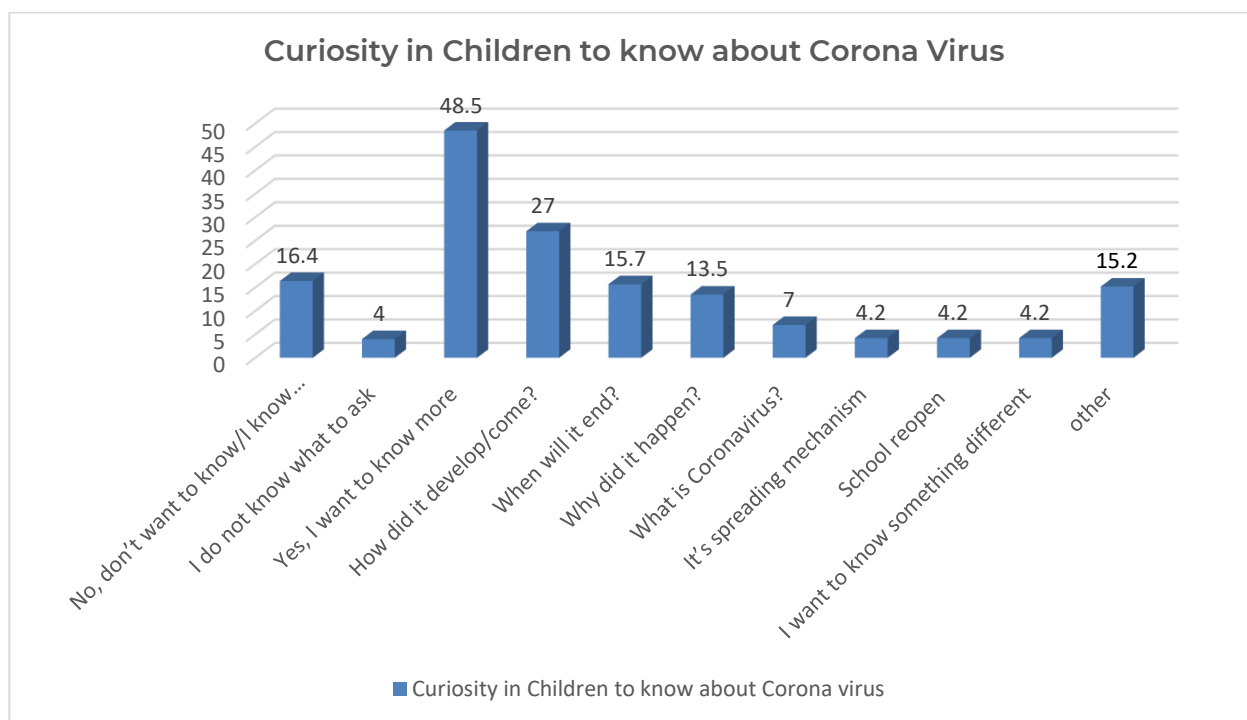
Children's curiosity has been a topic of academic enquiry as well as several government surveys on quality of education. For instance, PROBE (2002) and PROBE Revisited (2011) have brought out the issue of quality in teaching and learning experiences in which children's curiosity has been considered an important element. STCI study also made an attempt to examine children's curiosity about the Covid-19 virus. The findings are presented in Table 19.

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Table 19 Curiosity in Children to know about Corona virus

Responses	5-7 years	8-10 years	11-13 years	14-16 years	Total	%
No, don't want to know/I know everything	-	9	12	2	23	**16.4**
I do not know what to ask	-	2	3	-	5	**4**
Yes, I want to know more	1	31	34	3	68	**48.5**
How did it develop/come?	-	16	22	-	38	**27**
When will it end?	1	7	13	1	22	**15.7**
Why did it happen?	-	6	13	-	19	**13.5**
What is Coronavirus?	-	5	4	1	10	**7**
It's spreading mechanism	-	4	2	-	6	**4.2**
School reopen	--	3	3	-	6	**4.2**
I want to know something different	-	1	4	1	6	**4.2**
About vaccine/ sure shot medicine to cure	-	1	4	-	5	**4**
How to save ourselves and others?	-	3	1	-	4	**2.8**
When we will be able to go out?	-	2	2	-	4	**2.8**
Did it exist previously? Is it true?	-	1	2	-	3	**2.1**
Why are people going out without masks? It is not yet finished.	-	-	3	-	3	**2.1**
Problems faced by doctors	-	-	1	-	1	**0.7**
Why did police close our shop?	-	1	-	-	1	**0.7**

There were approximately 20% children who did not know want to know anything about the pandemic and do not even know what to ask. They felt at loss of ideas when they were prodded on their curiosity about the pandemic. It is not strange and has been known in psychology as denial of a painful reality. It also reflects a usual problem of Indian education system that real life doesn't become a matter of intellectual engagement at school so children do not go to school with specific curiosities. They internalize this idea very early in life that school is not about what they want to learn rather about what the teacher has to teach. Though small in number, but these children represent this group. Others expressed a clear desire to know more about the virus, its ability to get communicated, the details of medicine including the doctors' work and so on. A lot of conflicts and miseries can be better coped in the world by knowing their causes and by understanding them.

Figure 16: Curiosity in Children to know about Corona Virus

Curiosity in Children to know about Corona Virus

Bar chart values:
- No, don't want to know/I know…: 16.4
- I do not know what to ask: 4
- Yes, I want to know more: 48.5
- How did it develop/come?: 27
- When will it end?: 15.7
- Why did it happen?: 13.5
- What is Coronavirus?: 7
- It's spreading mechanism: 4.2
- School reopen: 4.2
- I want to know something different: 4.2
- other: 15.2

■ Curiosity in Children to know about Corona virus

The target set in **SDG 4.7 is to achieve the following by 2030,** ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development. The children's ignorance as well as the desire to know about Covid-19 gives us an intervention direction.

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3.6 Trajectory in Making

It is extremely difficult to predict the overall and exact consequences of the massive interruptions in the life and learning of children that came about on account of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is also not possible to talk about it an objective manner especially, if they live in cramped spaces and are not used to the culture of holding discussions over struggles and planning for them. The sample of the women and child participants largely belonged to that category in which people are unable to plan for future in light of the present circumstances. The pandemic has anyhow thrown the life out of gear in such a manner that even experts and expert agencies are unable to give robust plans. However, we did capture some shades of people's thought and children's state of existence post pandemic and certain possibilities that hint towards the impending future. They have been presented in this part.

Table 20 Expression of Fear by Children

Responses	5-7 N=1	8-10 N=68	%	11-13 N=67	%	14-16 N=4	Total (140)	
I was scared due to corona	1	17	**25**	30	**44.7**	3	51	**36.4**
I was scared that I might get infected	-	22	**32.3**	19	**28.3**	1	42	**30**
I was scared that there was no food at home	-	14	**20.5**	18	**27**	-	32	**23**
I am scared due to disease	-	12	**17.6**	10	**15**	1	23	**16.4**
If I go out corona will come	-	6	**8.8**	3	**4.5**	-	9	**6.5**
Police might catch me or beat me up	-	3	**4.4**	2	**3**	-	5	**3.5**
Sadness	-	3	**4.4**	1	**1.5**		4	**2.8**
Seeing death on tv	-	-		3	**4.5**	-	3	**2.1**

The expressions tabulated in Table 20 reveal that there are a large proportion of children who have internalized fear and anxieties during this phase. They were clearly apprehensive about catching the infection themselves. There were 36.4% children who were scared due to corona and there were 30% of them who were scared of catching the infection. Approximately, 65% children reported that they felt scared of corona. There were about 23% children who expressed in clear terms that children were scared because there was no food at all at their home at some point. The experience of poverty and lack of real knowledge has led to fear and an air of worry. Even though, few children expressed it but the fear of police and the scenes of death have also impacted them. Table 20 and Figure 17 also reveal that children in the age group of 11-13 were more scared about the virus and its infection possibilities as compared to the younger children. Almost 45% were scared of corona and 28% were scared of getting infected by it.

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It is an interesting finding of the study. Children's fear of the virus and its infection can be appreciated in light of the fact that a substantial proportion at 43% didn't know about it. They couldn't fathom what it was and how did it travel so far across boundaries. The inability to understand must have increased the element of helplessness which in turn could have induced fear. The spread of misinformation during the Covid-19 pandemic has attracted a lot of attention. Some of the fear can be attributed to that also.

Figure 17: Expression of Fear by Children
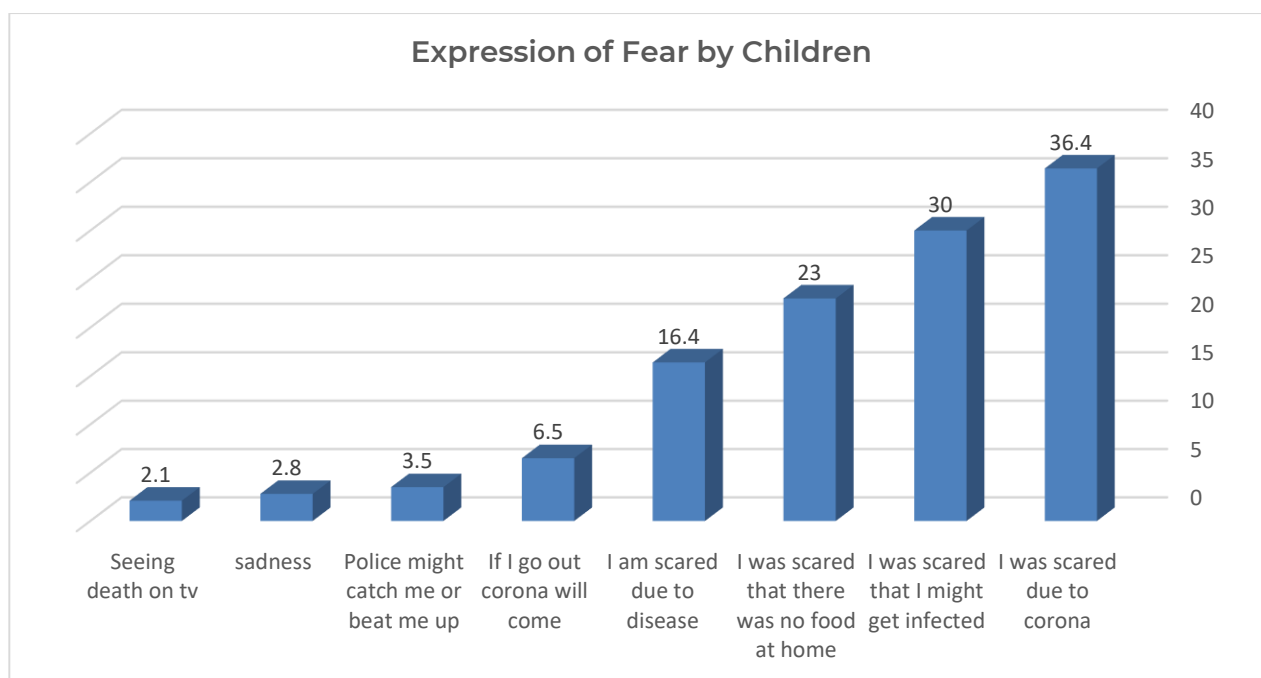
The denial conveyed by 20% children to know anything about the virus and their communication of fear also must be seen together. The denial may have been borne out of the fear of some thing that they have perceived as scary. As quoted earlier in Kafai's (2008) work, children attributed mythological properties to even computer virus. One needs to study at a deeper level, what all misconceptions and models have children made in their minds about the Covid-19 virus. It will be a necessary investigation from psychological as well as sociological perspectives, and not just for the immediate cause of effective science education.

When children were probed further about their familiarity with a child who is currently in crisis on account of the Covid-19 related problems, we found the responses that match with the larger pattern of devastation. There were 26.5% children who reported that they knew another child in crisis. The data is presented in Table 21.

Table 21 Children currently in crisis

Responses	5-7 N=1	8-10 N=68	11-13 N=67	14-16 N=4	Total 140	%
Don't know / No	1	50	50	-	101	**72**
Knows about a friend	-	11	24	4	39	**28**

Their teachers, policy makers and education planners' attention must be drawn to this finding. There were 26.5% who admitted a first-hand awareness of somebody in crisis. It could be a loved one or they themselves.

Figure 18: Children Currently in Crisis
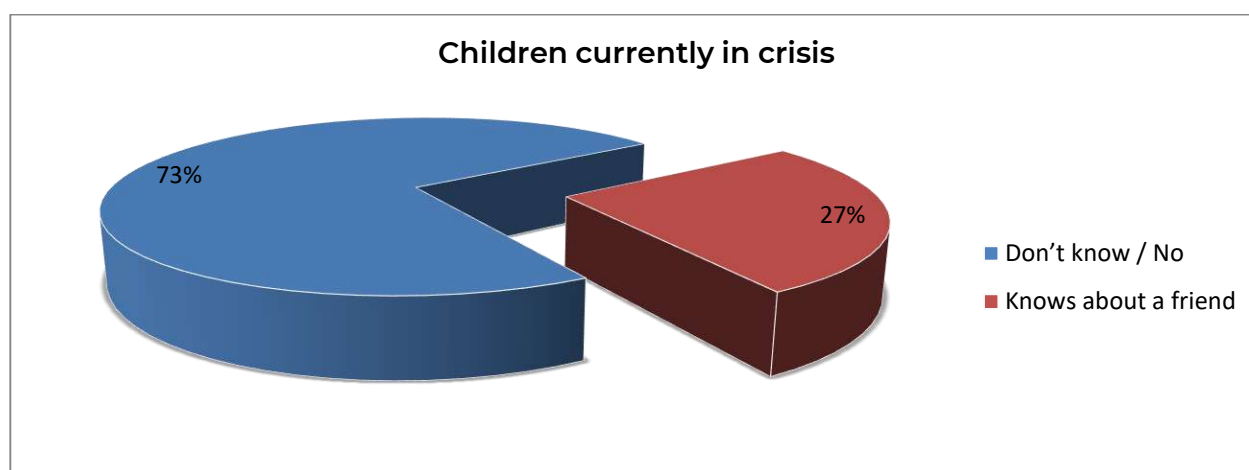
This finding is important as it reminds us seeing other children in crisis may affect the children who are witnessing it. It can be a disturbing experience; a mental health issue for young children who are seeing their friends or neighbors in difficulty. What are the ideas and mental maps that children have made about the virus and human misery that it created? This must be explored as an agenda and school teachers must be sensitized towards this. It emerges as a mental health issue for children that must be addressed by the school and other organizations that work with children and adolescents.

We can dwell further on the issue by paying attention to the women's experience of violence while they were restricted at home during the lockdown was imposed.

Table 22 Women's Experience of Domestic Violence during the Lockdown

Responses	20 - 24	25 - 29	30 - 34	35 -39	40-44	45-49	Total	%
Yes							87	**60.5**
Yes , it happens	-	4	16	14	4	-	38	**26.4**
Due to alcohol addiction of husband	3	6	8	8	6	1	32	**22.2**
due to financial crisis	3	5	10	12	1	1	31	**21.5**
Due to unavailability of food	2	2	5	6	2	1	18	**12.5**
No							57	39.5
/my husband doesn't beat me	2	8	26	9	3	1	49	34.1
No such thing in our area	-	8	20	15	4	-	57	39.5

There were 60.5% women who admitted that women experienced domestic violence during the lockdown. Some of them justified it by giving a reason such as husband's alcohol addiction, stress borne out of food hardship or the financial crunch. However, the prevalence was accepted by a majority at above 60%. The acceptance was far reaching and deep as some of them even made the following statements:

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So what! after all he is my husband

A husband has a right on his wife to express his anger as he wants

I don't mind if he expresses his anger. His tension gets released.

I have accepted it as a part of my relationship and life,

It doesn't affect me.

The data presented in Table 22 and its details are consistent with the findings of the latest round of NFHS that 45% of women consider it justifiable for a man to beat his wife for any reason. The prevalence of domestic violence and its acceptance by looking for reasons give us a direction to think about what children have got socialized into during the last two years. Children get socialized into several models of social conduct that are steeped in gender and caste hierarchies. Peraud et.al.(2021) conducted a prospective survey between April 2th 2020 and July 5th 2020 to to investigate the impact of the first COVID-19 lockdown (March 17th-May 11th 2020) on violence against women in France. The results of their survey were that psychological distress was elevated and remained stable for most of the 1538 female respondents during lockdown. More than 7% of women were affected by physical or sexual violence post lockdown. They also found that the risk of being abused was higher for participants who had changed anxiety/insomnia symptoms over the lockdown period, and a history of abuse. UN for Women also released a statement that Since the outbreak of COVID-19, emerging data and reports from those on the front lines, have shown that all types of violence against women and girls, particularly domestic violence, has intensified. They called it *The Shadow Pandemic.*

The act of beating one's wife or woman partner is one such practice which keeps the men-women asymmetry alive. The decision of people being locked down in their homes to control the spread of virus has exacerbated some of the social evils which have inter-generational consequences. Domestic violence is one of them and children becoming witness to it from close quarters has to be appreciated in a new frame. There were 18% women who reported pregnancies during the lockdown. This study was too limited in its scope to find out if they were unwanted pregnancies, but the women who reported it already had more than two children.

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With the experience of persistent fear, witnessing violence in close angles and the long-drawn food hardship, it was expected that family's stress and struggle will lead to some concern about children's continued engagement at school. We asked women an upfront question about their plans for their kids' stay at school. Their answers have been presented in Table 23 below:

Table 23 Possibility of children not joining their school after reopening

Responses	20 - 24	25 - 29	30 - 34	35 -39	40-44	45-49	Total (144)	%
If all remains well	1	5	29	17	4	-	56	**39**
We will send our children to school	-	7	14	10	4	2	37	**25.7**
We will not make my children work	-	2	11	5	1	-	19	**13**
Things are uncertain	2	6	10	8	1	-	27	**18.75**
I will send my children to work if they do not study	-	-	1	1	-	-	2	**1.3**
They can do a part time job along with school	-	-	6	4	3	-	13	**9**
Till the time this disease persist we will not send our children	-	2	5	3	-	-	10	**7**

A clear-cut idea was available only in the two following expressions given by almost 26% of the mothers and 13% for the latter:

ham to apne bachchon ko school bhejenge (We will send out children to school.)
ham apne bachchon se kaam nahin karvaenge (We will not make our children work.)
There was a sense of uncertainty in the expression of 18.75% mothers when they said,
Kuchh nahin kahaa jaa saktaa ab to (Nothing can be said at the moment.)

 An additional 9% parents hinted towards the possibility of a part-time job for children along with school or a complete withdrawal in case of children's lack of interest in school. We are looking at roughly 30.5 % children whose circumstances are adverse. They may have to struggle to be in school or may get easily pushed out of the school in the near future because lack of interest and inability to cope after a gap of two academic years will be monumental. This will require some focused effort to identify children who may face parental apathy on account of their financial and other duress and the availability of listed coping mechanisms.

Discussion and Implications

The mass school closure on account of the Covid-19 pandemic has brought about enormous damage and disruption in the lives of children and families. The school closure has been one of the longest in the world i.e. 17 months at the time of the writing of this report. Most other nations made attempts to open and close the schools several times but not India. As a result, the damage is colossal here. It will take a gigantic effort and a high motivation to plan a correctional effort and work on it consistently over a long period of time. The schools and the organizations working with children should not simply prepare themselves to 'resume where we left approach'.

As we enter the COVID-19 recovery phase, it will be critical to reflect on the role of various stakeholders in educational systems namely, teachers, principals, parents, counsellors, non-governmental organizations, government departments, policy designers and media and so on. Educational disruptions on the scale we are witnessing are not only due to the pandemic, but also a result of poor planning and not keeping children's well-being in our priorities. There is a need to maintain a discourse that will contribute to the government's foresight, readiness and preparedness to recognize and address the damage. A fresh planning needs to be done by keeping children and teachers at the heart of it. It will be the nature of our collective and systemic responses to the disruptions and damage that will determine how effectively we work with children to compensate for the loss and associated problems. In this sense, the pandemic is also a call to renew the commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals. Ensuring that all children have the opportunity to succeed at school and develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will allow them to have a flourishing individual and social life must inform all our actions in future. We have survived a disruption at an unprecedented scale and it is now up to us to build a resilient society that is responsive and sensitive towards children.

Stress Born out of Converging Issues

The findings of Vipla Foundation student suggest that several key issues need to be recognized to be able to offer meaningful support to children when life is resumes, the schools re-open and they start coming every day.

1. Missing school for two years : loss of enabling physical and psychological space

The loss of two years active engagement with teachers in an institutional ethos means educational disruption. It also means that school's larger function of serving as an enabling physical and psychological space got disrupted. Children were deprived of the experience of a larger, open space, physical as well as emotional, in which they were not confined by the unresourceful and poverty-ridden home. The pandemic led restricted life meant that children's precious two years were spent in a resourceless ethos at home where habits of learning, thinking, paying attention etc were not encouraged. Their familial disadvantage took over their lives. The school closures have exacerbated the pre-existing educational inequalities between the children of poor and well-off families. Children have endured learning loss and also learning lags especially, those who were already lagging behind and struggling at school. Being out of touch with school and related processes and the practice means that several children may have forgotten a lot of foundational knowledge. They have developed physical development lag on account of lack of play, physical activity and expansive activity in open grounds and clean spaces.

The importance of schools has one more dimension for they serve as 'social spaces' in which they central role is of teachers. In a highly divisive society of India, school functions as an equalizer. It brings children of different linguistic, religious, regional and caste backgrounds together. By eating, playing and learning together, they become more tolerant of differences between various groups. conscious and aware of several social evils. The 17-months long disruption created a disruption in the school's ability to play the role of a socializing agent as well.

2. Food Hardships : disruption in the midday meal provision

In India, school has served as a compensatory mechanism for a lot of resources that are not adequately available in the homes of a large number of children. One aspect is nutrition. The school closures also meant deprivation of cooked, warm mid-day meal on a regular basis. While the schools were closed so were the employment avenues for children's parents. The economic crisis resulted in high rates of unemployment. As families lost income, more and more families required assistance who had already been coping with bare minimal survival. This led to what can be termed as 'food hardship'. While food hardship has started to decline now in 2021, as more relief has reached low-income families, the number of children in households where children aren't getting enough to eat appears to be many times higher than pre-pandemic levels. And, more importantly, the food hardship of 2020 needs to be addressed in medicinal terms. The physical lag in development doesn't go away with time. It remains intact until it is addressed by compensatory mechanisms.

3. Impact of Parental Unemployment

Parental unemployment inflicts strong detrimental effects on their children's educational attainment. Younger children show more adverse effects of adverse family economic conditions. The employment and stable income of parents is an essential determinant of children's educational success. unemployment limits families' ability to invest in the lives and learning environments of their children, which in turn hampers their educational development and outcomes. The effects may be stronger when parents, and in particular mothers, become discouraged and detached which happened with great intensity during the pandemic as the mothers were locked down and coped with heightened insecurities and worries for the future.

4. Gendered Experiences During the Lockdown

The house-bound life was a heavily gendered life for young children. The world of the girls remained small during the pandemic. They got into the customary role of supplementary house wife by sharing their mother's load. It has come out in the study very clearly that girls shared the drudgery of household chores much more than the boys as a result of which their engagement with activities that lead to growth has been limited. The opportunities for reading, thinking and accessing new ideas was limited to the girls because significant time was devoted to cooking, cleaning and washing. Additionally, witnessing domestic violence at home and seeing their mothers closely being hit by their fathers would have reinforced gendered hierarchies and roles.

The acceptance of domestic violence on various grounds by the participant women has far reaching consequences for girls as well as boys in terms of being a socializing force. Children get socialized into several models of social conduct that are steeped in gender and caste hierarchies. The act of beating one's wife is one such practice which keeps the men-women asymmetry alive. Its impact and consequences on children have been studied and documented extensively. A beating father becomes a role model for the sons and a beaten mother becomes a role model for the daughters. The school has to intervene and create a dent in this model by addressing its impact and by engaging boys and girls on this issue through various means. Gender-based interventions must be planned for boys as well as girls once the children are back to school. The experience of violence on television and the experience of violence at home especially, seeing your mother being beaten has serious consequences for their educational attainment. The decision of people being locked down in their homes to control the spread of virus has exacerbated some of the social evils which have inter-generational consequences. Domestic violence is one of them and children becoming witness to it from close quarters has to be analyzed in a new frame.

5. Heightened Engagement with Violence on Television and Entertainment Apps on Mobile

Children and their mothers spent a lot of time watching programs on television and on the internet-enabled mobile instruments. Their engagement was absolutely unregulated in terms of the number of hours spent and the kind of programs watched and preferred. Children didn't spend time only with programs exclusively for their age group. In fact, they largely reported having watched adult programs and developed a preference for horror movies, crime-based televised series involving violence of all kinds along with cartoons, film-based programs. As television or screen increases the level of excitement significantly, a mild form of "addiction" might take place in this way, and parents and teachers could get the child's interest only by making the things they want to present to him/her as exciting as the stories s/he is accustomed to seeing over television. Children also develop vicarious habits formation. Continually living through experience of violence and aggression, romantic and sexual

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excitement, increases the probability that the child will actually perform an aggressive act. Aggression of different kinds is a very common theme in all the stories children choose from the mass media, and insofar the probability of the act being performed in real life should of course be increased.

The heightened engagement with screen leads to other problems in children such as mean later average bedtimes for children which emerged in the study too. Despite being at home, children didn't sleep enough and on time. Mobile and television emerged as key factors in their responses to the queries about delayed bed time. A large number of children are likely to come back to school with the following: addiction to screen, increased appetite for heightened level of excitement in all activities, internalization of aggression and violence as normal, aggressive responses to daily life events, inability to cope with resistance, denial and disappointment. It has been a phase of stressed-out childhood while being locked at home without any scope to read, write, play, think and wonder about the world. Children spent the time rather, killed the time by being passive consumers of adult entertainment programs. Alongside, they experienced fear, violence and insecurities.

6.   Disruption in Learning on Account of School Closures

Children had either no contact with their school activities and teachers or had a one- or two-point contact. Missing school has an adverse relationship with academic success. UNICEF has issued a warning that long term school closures lead to social isolation. Schools are hubs of social activity and human interaction, when they are shut down for long, many children miss out on time with friends that is essential to social development. Their mental health can be diminished. Provision of access to learning and stimulation in early years of life yields high returns not just from an economic perspective but also from a human development perspective since the foundation for life-long successes in health, development, learning, and earning potential is laid during this period. With ECCD centers and primary schools closed, this critical window of investment has been missed with high costs for society.

UNESCO has listed out the following adverse effects of mass school closures:

The impact of school closure is particularly severe for the most vulnerable and marginalized boys and girls and their families. The resulting disruptions exacerbate already existing disparities within the education system and lead to following problems:

- **Interrupted learning**: As a result of mass school closure, children have been deprived opportunities for growth and development. The disadvantages will be disproportionate for under-privileged learners who tend to have fewer educational opportunities beyond school.

- **Confusion and stress for teachers**: As schools closed, especially unexpectedly and for unknown durations, teachers were unsure of their obligations and how to maintain connections with students to support learning. Transitions to distance learning platforms was messy and frustrating and extremely limited in their outreach. It left out a large number of children from educational outreach especially, the ones for the disadvantaged sections of society.

- **Challenges measuring and validating learning**: Calendared assessments, and periodic examinations got thrown into disarray when schools closed. Strategies to postpone, skip or administer examinations at a distance raise serious concerns about fairness, especially when access to learning has become variable. Disruptions to assessments results in stress for students and their families and can trigger disengagement from school activities.

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- **Rise in dropout rates**: It is a challenge to ensure children will resume school when schools reopen after closures. This is especially true of protracted closures and when economic shocks place pressure on children to work and generate income for financially distressed families.

- **Increased exposure to violence and exploitation**: There is enough evidence that school closures have increased the possibility of early marriages and of sexual exploitation of girls and several children have got inducted into child labour in India.

7. Pandemic : Experience ridden with Fear, Ignorance and Denial

A significant proportion of children clearly denied any understanding about the virus and the pandemic and a sizeable proportion had no curiosity to know about it. They expressed fear in clear terms of catching the infection and suffering on account of it, but lacked any relevant information and knowledge. It is not strange and has been known in psychology as denial of a painful reality. It also reflects a usual problem of Indian education system that real life doesn't become a matter of intellectual engagement at school so children do not go to school with specific curiosities. They internalize this idea very early in life that school is not about what they want to learn rather about what the teacher has to teach. Though small in number, but these children represent this group.

A lot of conflicts and miseries can be better coped in the world by knowing their causes and by understanding them. The target set in **SDG 4.7 is to achieve the following by 2030:** ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development. The children's ignorance as well as the desire to know about Covid-19 gives us an intervention direction. What are the ideas and mental maps that children have made about the virus and human misery that it created? Teaching children in a concerted way through modules, videos and activities will contribute in the direction of developing knowledge through education to promote sustainable development through education for sustainable lifestyles and others.

8. A monumental challenge to assess the consequences of the massive interruptions

With the experience of persistent fear, witnessing violence in close quarters and the long-drawn food hardship, it was expected that family's stress and struggle will lead to a complete break for children continued engagement at school. It reflected in the anxieties expressed by a sizeable proportion of women that continuing school may not be feasible for their children. UNICEF warned us about two salient possibilities namely, child marriage and child labour by releasing following statements: The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly affected the everyday lives of girls: their physical and mental health, their education, and the economic circumstances of their families and communities. Over the next decade, up to **10 million more girls** will be at risk of becoming child brides as a result of the pandemic.

The risk of child marriage increases when families endure serious economic setbacks, school closures and disruption in other services. Economic insecurity has emerged as a strong factor that enhances the possibility of child marriage as a means to relieve financial pressure on a family. Mass school closures during the pandemic is likely to have pushed girls towards marriage since school is no longer an engaging option. The disruption of reproductive health services will have a direct impact on early pregnancy and reproductive health of girls.

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The pandemic has increased economic insecurity, dramatically restricted supply chains and brought production to a colossal halt. The resulting losses in household income will in turn push children to contribute to family's income to ensure survival in the times to come. More and more children could be forced into exploitative and hazardous jobs. Those already working may do so for longer hours or under worsening conditions. Such a long school closure will exacerbate these tendencies, as families will struggle to survive.

Implications

Following implications have been drawn from the study:

- **Collaborative campaigns to prevent drop out**

There is a need to put in a place a robust mechanism to do child tracking so that children do not drop out from the school permanently and fall prey to the incidence of child marriage and labour. There is a need to start with an immediate effect through conduct virtual (call/ SMS based) and in-person meetings with parents, and children to ensure that every child is ready to get re-inducted in school and its activities.

- **Assessment of nutritional deficiency and medicinal intervention**

There is a need to identify the consequences of disruption in the meal provided at school and other growth enabling provisions such as deworming and anemia curing medicines provided by several states and organization. A comprehensive program for nutritional deficiency must be addressed.

- **Stress must be recognised and addressed as a serious mental health issue**

There is a need to recognize that children have experienced fear, violence and insecurities over a long duration of 17 months and continue do so. The restorative programs must be planned and put in place to work on their mental and social health with the help of music, art, play and theatre-based therapeutic activities as a regular feature at school. This should be planned for all children and not with isolated cases in which the results may be pronounced.

- **Further investigation on abuse**

There is a need to study extensively the experience of violence, abuse and other forms of pain that children may have endured on account of the lockdown and the suspension of all kinds of services including the emergency ones. The investigation must by taking different cohorts of children in different regions such as very small children, teenagers and so on. Psychologists and counsellors must be roped in to identify the extent of abuse and then plan a correctional intervention.

- **Television and Mobile de-addiction**

There is a need to recognize that children will not automatically make the transition from a screen governed life for entertainment to a school governed life for knowledge, skills, attitudes and value learning. Programs must be designed to achieve this transition and a robust mechanism must be developed to re-induct children into expansive activities such as sports, yoga and other forms of physical activities.

- **Address the gap in their learning and development**

There is a need to conceptualize bridge courses for children so that when they are back to school, they get the opportunity to get re-inducted in to a school culture. They may resume their studies, habits of consistent engagement with knowledge and other activities for their physical and mental development. Bridge courses must also be designed with an aim to teach at least a part of what children would have learnt if they were going to school. Learning remained suspended for a significant proportion of children and it must be compensated for them.

- **Teachers should be sensitized**

There is a need to constantly remind everybody in the system of education that 'business as usual' approach will not prove to be an efficient and humane approach to take with children. They will have to keep their eyes and ears open for a long time to recognize the consequences of the experience that children had and fear and insecurities they may have internalized. They will have to work to bridge the learning gaps and also learn to see the signs of stress and mental health issues in children without getting judgemental and impatient.

- **Greater resource allocation and funding**

There is certainly a need to pump in more resources to be able to work out all the above implications and to ensure that school system is well prepared to work with children as learners and healthy individuals. It demands more collaborative efforts to generate more resources and a pooling in of resources from various players namely, government, non-governmental organizations, funding agencies and society at large. Resilience will require investment of resources and our emotional as well as intellectual energy to be able to do justice to children.

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