

COVID-19 related home confinement: A dual concern for children and adolescents?

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Dear Editor,

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has become a threat to humans, causing substantial morbidity and mortality. In response to controlling the outbreak, different measures are taken including closure of educational institutions, worldwide. Though children and adolescents are least affected by this infection directly, there is a need to draw attention to the pandemics' immediate as well as long-term effects on their health. Prolonged school closure due to the pandemic situation may immediately impact on their psychological wellbeing¹, and also pose a long-term risk of weight gain and obesity².

Immediate consequences of home confinement amid this pandemic are devastating, such as stigma, fears of being infected, frustration and boredom, misinformation, lack of personal contact with friends and class fellows, lack of personal space at home, and family economic crisis, all of which can become more serious and problematic for children and adolescents¹. A previous study revealed that quarantined or isolated children during pandemic diseases were at higher risk of developing acute stress disorder, adjustment disorder, and grief³. Besides, this emergency situation causes lifestyle barriers and distress on their physical as well as mental health, leading to a vicious cycle of disorders.

Due to school closures and physical distancing measures, implemented by many governments, school age children and adolescents are spending their time most sedentarily, going to bed later and sleeping later. Typically, they used to do daily physical activity through travel to school, involvement in sports, and also spending time in playgrounds and parks. There is a behavioral movement guideline for this age group (5–17 years) to maintain a healthy life, for instance, involving at least 1 h of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity, not more than 2 h sedentary recreational screen time, and 9–11 h good-quality sleep each day⁴. However, children are less active and more sedentary, with abnormal

sleep patterns when they are not physically at school⁵. Evidence shows that prevalence of unhealthy weight gain (i.e. overweight and obese) associated with summer months when they are out of school^{6,7}. Rundle et al.² also anticipated that the COVID-19 pandemic will likely double out-of-school time this year for many children and will increase the risk factors for weight gain, usually associated with summer vacation.

To tackle the consequences of home confinement, government and non-government organizations, and parents, need to be conscious about the downside of the situation and emphasize these issues immediately. Albeit, many schools have already started online classes to overcome educational losses, but the situation demands focus on mental and behavioral issues. Apart from academic classes, provision of motivational videos or online classes on health and behavioral issues at home would be conducive to a healthier lifestyle and mental stability. Therefore, to overcome these dual consequences, a holistic approach of early design and implementation of psychological and behavioral interventions is highly recommended.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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