



BINDING BHARAT

BINDING BHARAT

Kanupriya Jaju (Founder and Chairperson)

Binding Bharat is a collective youth network founded to identify and meet the challenges that nation-states are facing all over the world today. Binding Bharat is based on a single premise that young people have the potential and willingness to bring about momentous changes, and therefore they must be provided with opportunities to play a significant role in creating better lives for themselves, their communities, and society. We strongly believe that as we continue to work, in our ways, in our respective communities, there is great value to be gained through the exchange of experiences, information, and ideas, and by supporting one another at a global level. This network is, therefore, our tool through which we can become more familiar with the realities of young people in our regions and elsewhere, and can express freely our expectations, hopes, and concerns. At a time when information is becoming more and more accessible through new technological advancements, we have a greater awareness than ever before of the world outside our own. Each day we see the devastating effects of conflict, poverty, injustice, homelessness, crime, environmental degradation, inequality, drug abuse, and disease. We can, as individuals, feel overwhelmed or frozen by a sense of helplessness in the face of such tremendous problems.

For a better tomorrow, the world needs to form common grounds & who else better to voice it than the youth. We talk about winning hearts, we talk about reaching out to each other, about hearing each other out, about lending support, about understanding each other's sensitivities. We talk of binding hearts. We, at Binding Bharat, believe that the only sustainable way of moving in today's world is with respect for territorial integrity & reverence for global rules for global commons. Exclusion & exclusivity are colonial notions. We appreciate the difference of opinions, for the fact that to differ is to think. We dream of a world where ideas flourish regardless of borders.

It is not only a question of proposals but also of actions!

Impact of Pandemic on Children

Introduction	3
Webinar Details and Participation.....	5
Webinar Record	6
Speech summary of the Participants.....	14
Outcomes and Suggestions.....	22

Introduction

According to UNICEF, children constitute 28% of the world's population. Those aged between 10 years to 19 years constitute 16%. COVID-19 has altered the lives of these young boys and girls in an unprecedented manner. The primary method of prevention from infection has been lockdown, isolation, quarantine and social distancing and countries around the world have used such techniques in varying degrees at national, provincial and local levels. This has included the closure of school, colleges, universities etc. to prevent the younger population from contracting the virus. The notion of predictability acts as a stabilizing factor in the development of children in their formative years. Due to COVID, the predictability has been snatched away from these children. COVID-19 might not be as lethal in children and adolescents as it is in adults, but it does cause a lot of psychological distress in this age group. Adolescents are experiencing acute and chronic stress because of parental anxiety, disruption of daily routines, increased family violence, and home confinement with little or no access to peers, teachers, or physical activity.

Mental illness can affect children at any point during their childhood, but it most significantly affects them during adolescence. Among the several mental illnesses that can be prevalent in childhood, depression is one of the major leading causes of mental illness amongst children. Numerous studies have shown that the pandemic may have increased long term effects on children and adolescents as compared to adults. The nature and extent of such an effect may vary though, depending upon the age, socio-economic background, physical and mental health condition etc. During the pandemic, adolescents at high risk of psychological problems might fall through the safety net provided by a protective family life, peer support, and psychological support from teachers.

It is high time that adolescent mental health is addressed systematically, and various incidences of psychiatric disorders (example depression, anxiety, and self-harm behaviours) monitored and factors of risk and resilience identified. The present conference tried to address this issue of deteriorating mental health amongst children and adolescents as a result of the pandemic. It tried to engage with various stakeholders from six countries, namely, Canada,

Hong Kong, India, Ireland, Mauritius, and United Arab Emirates and analyse the factors leading to deterioration of mental health of children in their respective countries. The panel also discussed the various measures being taken in their countries and that can be taken to address the rising levels of stress, anxiety and depression in young children and adolescents.

Webinar Details and Participation

Date and Time: 18th April 2021, 1530 hrs (IST)

Topic of Discussion: Impact of pandemic on Children

The central objective of the webinar was the discussion of following parameters with regards to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children:

1. Vulnerability of children in face of the Pandemic
2. Impact of quarantine and isolation on children (like Growth in anxiety levels and stress related disorders).
3. Role of parents, teachers, mental healthcare workers and the society in catering to the emotional needs of the children along with helping them develop socially while being stuck at home
4. Use of technology to mitigate the risks associated to lockdown and coronavirus (stress, lack of socialisation, education).
5. How the world can be prepared for future epidemics and pandemics - Is Health & Fitness a way forward.

PANELISTS			
	Name	Professional Details	Location
1.	Ms. Shivani Agarwal	Clinical Counselor, Art-therapist	<u>Canada</u>
2.	Mrs. Raneen Nundah	Child Rescue and Prevention Service, Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare	<u>Mauritius</u>
3.	Ms. Teresa Siu	TV Host, International Wellness Speaker, Mental Health Educator, Lecturer	<u>Hong Kong</u>
4.	Dr. Rajiv Mehta	MD Psychiatry, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, New Delhi	<u>India</u>
5.	Dr. Beethue Raksha	Healthcare Practitioner working as a Registrar	<u>Ireland</u>
6.	Mr. Navin Taukoordass	Child Rehabilitation Services, Ministry of Gender Equality and Family welfare	<u>Mauritius</u>
7.	Dr. Radhika Batra	Pediatrician, Founder and President of Every Infant Matters	<u>India</u>
8.	Mrs. Shaadia Zareen	Director of Royal Kids – Nursery & Pre-Primary School	<u>Mauritius</u>
9.	Ms. Nudrat Azam	High School Counsellor and Facilitator	<u>UAE (Dubai)</u>

Webinar Record

Time	Speaker	Event Summary
15:30	Ms. Kanupriya Jaju	The event started with thanks and an introduction from Kanupriya followed by an introductory video highlighting the work and role of Binding Bharat.
		She introduced the expert panel and topic by underscoring the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on daily life, specifically for children and young adults, who are among the worst hit.
		She referred to the behavioural and mental health challenges that come with uncertainty of the future and the adaptation to the new normal.
		Ms. Kanupriya introduced and invited Ms. Shivani Agarwal from Canada to speak.
15:39	Ms. Shivani Agarwal	Ms. Shivani began by speaking about the role early years play in setting up foundations of children's lives and how it has become more challenging while adjusting to the pandemic.
		She highlighted the hinderance in achievement of social and emotional milestones for a child because of constant concern for the safety of their loved ones over usual childhood concerns, which is leading to anxiety at a very early age.
		She highlighted that children with special needs have been affected worse and parents have had to dedicate specific time for them.
		She mentioned the lack of opportunities for children to enjoy and celebrate as one does during childhood
		She spoke about how early exposure to grief has resulted in frustration and anger in some children, which when coupled with hormonal changes during childhood, makes things difficult and challenging.

		<p>She spoke of children affected by domestic abuse.</p> <p>She highlighted the need for setting professional and professional boundaries and how the pandemic may be encouraging us to do so by setting aside time for family and self.</p> <p>She closed on a positive note by speaking of how the pandemic may be encouraging us to be kinder & more creative and by putting discussion and conversation on mental health issues at the forefront.</p>
15:50	Dr. Beethue Raksha	<p>Dr. Raksha began by highlighting that children are the most vulnerable to the effects of the pandemic – social, educational and otherwise.</p> <p>She elaborated on the significant negative impact on the physical and mental health of children, by highlighting the effects of isolation on social skills leading to a disturbance in growth.</p> <p>She talked about domestic abuse and how parental negligence forms a core part in cases where the child is not given enough care and attention to their physical and mental health needs.</p> <p>She spoke about the effects of the immediate and extended environment on child health and what steps can be taken to help children in this difficult time – also highlighted policy steps taken in Ireland.</p> <p>She emphasized on the role of technology in keeping some level of social connectivity and providing a platform for virtual consultations in helping mitigate the effects on mental health due to the pandemic.</p> <p>She concluded by saying that the world is better prepared now, for a future pandemic.</p>
16:02	Ms. Teresa Siu	<p>Ms. Teresa began by highlighting the difference in pandemic experiences in Hong Kong and the rest of the world.</p>

		<p>She talked about the uncertainty and inconsistency that the children had to deal with, which led to increased levels of stress, anxiety and other mental health issues.</p>
		<p>She spoke of academic repercussion of the effects of the pandemic, specifically with regards to school exams.</p>
		<p>She highlighted the struggles of the parents to provide their children with opportunities to learn and grow while keeping them safe and healthy.</p>
		<p>She discussed the need for encouraging children to come forth to talk about their mental health issues and the need for generating individual well-being awareness in families, schools and other organisations.</p>
		<p>She spoke of the importance of parents showing love and care to their children, spending quality time with them, breathing sessions, good and healthy food and keeping them occupied by getting them involved in activities and daily chores to help them keep a positive mindset.</p>
		<p>She talked about the ‘Let’s Talk’ campaign by the Hong Kong government to encourage school children to come forward to talk about their emotions and wellbeing.</p>
		<p>She concluded by highlighting the importance of creating positive energy and keeping a healthy mindset during times like these.</p>
<p>16:22</p>	<p>Dr. Rajiv Mehta</p>	<p>Dr. Mehta began by speaking about how children are the most vulnerable group, and that child growth is being hampered throughout the world.</p>
		<p>He talked about the importance of early years for growth and brain development, where they look to their parents and education for understanding their internal and external world.</p>
		<p>He directed attention to children with special needs and how they seem to fare worse in low-income households.</p>
		<p>He listed and discussed various factors affecting the health of the children during the pandemic, including</p>

		<p>their sex, age, parent-child relations, family conditions, among others.</p> <p>He spoke about key concerns among children, frustration displacement by parents unto children and the existence of burnout accompanies with feelings of frustration among children.</p> <p>He highlighted the downsides of increased digital dependence, like cyber bullying, and of constant exposure to grim news.</p> <p>He spoke about the role of parents in channelling their children's high energy levels through activities.</p> <p>He listed and explained various ways for parents to help children during this time of crisis, including spending family time, teaching social etiquette, leading by example, limiting digital times, physical activities, respecting their privacy, being non-judgemental, expressing love and affection, among others.</p> <p>He ended by highlighting the role of teachers, mental health professionals, society and technology in helping children through the pandemic.</p>	
16:47	Mrs. Nundah	Ranee	<p>Ms. Nundah began by speaking of the direct socio-psychological impact on the lives of children the pandemic has had.</p> <p>She spoke of the impact on children who had parents that had contracted the virus, children being cared for care institutions during the pandemic and the difficulties faced by children with physical and mental special needs.</p> <p>She noted that children with single parents had a higher incidence of domestic abuse, and that the stress and anxiety may have a deep impact on their social and personal skills.</p> <p>She observed that parents might actually have lesser time for their children due to professional and personal boundaries becoming blurred, which may cause increased digital dependence and addiction</p>

		<p>She highlighted the need for the creation of a safe environment, opportunities to continue social interactions and the need for communication with their children & family time, by the parents.</p>
		<p>She spoke of the roles of teachers in helping build timetables and schedules for the children's days, encouraging them to read & write more and to participate in hands-on activities.</p>
		<p>She encouraged the use of technology to increase social interactions with their friends and family but warned of downsides like cyber bullying and addiction.</p>
		<p>She spoke about the need for stronger systems & institutions for child health and welfare in a similar future situation and for further research into the physical & mental impact of the pandemic and how to protect and keep the children safe.</p>
		<p>She concluded by emphasising on the need for proper communication to help children become healthy and responsible adults in a post-pandemic world.</p>
<p>17:05</p>	<p>Mr. Navin Taukoordass</p>	<p>Mr. Taukoordass began by speaking of his work in child rehabilitation and the role of integrated technology platforms and services in resolving and addressing the rising cases.</p>
		<p>He spoke of the Integrated Support Centre at the ministry that handles cases for child abuse, provides care services & consultations, looks after children at risk and provides rehabilitation support to affected children.</p>
		<p>He highlighted the role of local law enforcement and technology in enforcing child protection law and policy enacted by the government.</p>
		<p>He warned against the extensive use of mobile phones, games and social media and asked that parents regulate and control technology use at home.</p>
		<p>He concluded by encouraging better use of technology, information and knowledge to build robust systems for the protection and rehabilitation of our children.</p>

17:21	Dr. Radhika Batra	Dr. Batra began by highlighting the unprecedented impact on children, where many are hungry, starving or have been orphaned. She presented that a happy child will have better immunity.
		She spoke of the uniqueness of the situation that the COVID-19 pandemic has introduced where both physical and mental problems have become apparent.
		She discussed the impact on children of having a parent contract the virus, manifesting as fear psychosis and maybe as PTSD in the future.
		She spoke of the snowballing of hampered child growth and health into affecting the world economy and society.
		She highlighted that lockdown induced migration has displaced many children and increased levels of starvation and malnutrition due to the pandemic.
		She elucidated on the lack of standards in home-schooling which has significantly impacted the quality of education received by the children.
		She noted that the lack of social interactions has led to increased screen time which has further led to increased levels of stress and anxiety.
		She spoke of lack of vitamins and good healthy food that can cause immunity deficiency in children, and how 'Every Infant Matters' helps combat this by providing food & vitamin supplements and educating mothers on food nutrition.
		She spoke of various ways to address the needs of children which included showing love and affection to children, not being judgemental, providing them with nutritional food, among others.
		She highlighted the need for conducting online sessions for online learning, sessions, seminars, social interactions, etc.

		She concluded with another helpful tip for parents – to get their children involved in chores and other activities and giving them rewards for small achievements.
17:42	Mrs. Shaadia Zareen	Mrs. Zareen began by highlighting a change in the attitude of children where they have become restless after having nothing to do and being confined to their homes. She spoke of the resulting unhealthy eating habits and their effects on child health.
		She spoke of revamped classes called sessions where children were also being given opportunities to interact with their friends and teachers and helped them address their issues, through fun interactive sessions.
		She referred to a high participation rate for these sessions which also involved small physical activities at home, like cooking in the presence of parents.
		She stressed on the importance of social interactions, the need for giving children an opportunity to express themselves and the existence of a routine to help provide some semblance of normalcy.
		She ended the discussion by adding that children trust and confide in their carers and teachers, and that we must create an environment for them to do so safely.
17:57	Ms. Nudrat Azam	Ms. Azam started by highlighting that higher screen time leads to lower cognitive engagement and that students are tired of having their classes and lives online.
		She noted that some families have had to shift back to their native countries, with completely different cultures, lifestyles and education, which has added to their already overwhelming emotions of confusion, stress, uncertainty and anxiety.
		On highlighting the lack of support for children with special needs, she talked about support groups that have been started to provide parents and teachers of children with special needs to provides a safe environment to talk and for catharsis.

		<p>She spoke of a reduction in teaching hours which has been beneficial for both teachers and students, and how vocational education and project-based learning has been introduced so that children can feel in control of their education and can take charge of their learning.</p>
		<p>She highlighted the use of training of learning support assistants that help take the load off of the teachers and help while addressing the needs of children with special needs.</p>
		<p>She emphasised on the importance of organising non-academic sessions like for yoga and art. She encouraged the inclusion of physical and mental health aspects into everyday academics to help build trust and better communication channels.</p>
		<p>She spoke of training parents to deal with their frustrations better to prevent displacement onto their children.</p>
		<p>In the end she highlighted the importance of children being allowed to talk about their feelings and how food can play a crucial role in improving moods.</p>
18:14	Mr. Akhilesh Gunpath	<p>Mr. Gunpath began by thanking the speakers and summarising key points made by the speakers.</p>
		<p>He highlighted the physical, mental and emotional toll the pandemic has taken on us and the increased levels of stress and anxiety that the children are facing today. He spoke of the role of schools, parents and society to help children during this crisis.</p>
		<p>He concluded by saying, “We don’t inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.”</p>
18:18	Ms. Kanupriya Jaju	<p>Ms. Jaju began by thanking the speakers sincerely and spoke of the many learnings from the webinar.</p>
		<p>She closed the event on a hopeful note, that the world must be one family for us to move, grow and prosper.</p>

Speech summary of the Participants

Ms. Shivani Agarwal



Clinical Counsellor, Vancouver, Canada. Also, an Art Therapist and Vice President of British Columbia Art Therapy Association. Director of 'She-one-ness Wellness' which is a culturally blended wellness centre.

Ms. Agarwal set the tone by defining and identifying the age group in question to include children, teens and young adults. She offered to present her findings and observations on the trends and facets of the impact that the pandemic has had on children. She began by relaying the importance of the early stages of life in building a foundation for adult life, which already fraught with its own problems, like hormonal changes and other challenges, now has been greatly affected by the adaptation and adjustment necessary to survive the pandemic. She recognised that now instead of growing and developing, children are now concerned with safety and survival, therefore hindering the achievement of their emotional and social milestones. She elaborated on the fact that consistent exposure to their parents may have caused an early and escalated onset of parent-child conflict that one usually sees during a child's growth. She directed the panel's attention to the asymmetrically worse hit group of children with special needs, which has caused their parents to redirect more of their time and energy to help them out. She posited that children not being able to celebrate and enjoy their journey's milestones and their hard-earned achievements may have taken away their incentives to grow and develop. She highlighted the effect that early exposure to grief can have on a child's mental health, often resulting in feelings of frustration, fear and anger, which is immensely unhealthy for themselves and their family. She spoke about increased incidences of child abuse which have made matters worse for the child. She ends on a positive and hopeful note by positing that the pandemic may be encouraging us to set personal and professional boundaries for our time and headspace. She also spoke about how the pandemic may be encouraging us to be kinder and more creative with our time and limited space. She pointed to the growing conversation and discussion on mental health issues brought about by the pandemic and how it has helped us bring these issues to the forefront.

Dr. Beethue Raksha



Healthcare Practitioner and practicing as a Registrar in Ireland. M.D from the University of Oradea.

Dr. Raksha highlighted the negative impact the pandemic has had on the physical and mental health of children. She referred to domestic abuse, specifically to negligence in care leading to increased mental and physical health issues, like increased levels of malnutrition among others. She posited that social isolation has caused a growth disturbance by blocking out the development of their social skills. She highlighted the responsibility of the parents to build and provide a safe environment to emotionally, physically and mentally stimulate their children. She identified the immediate environment, consisting of their homes, families and personal growth & development, to be the responsibility of the parents, while identified the external environment, consisting of their schools and the outside, to be the responsibility of guards, teachers, doctors, mental health professionals, policy makers and others. She asked that these environments must be taken into consideration while recognising and addressing the emotional needs of the children and cases of child abuse. She referred to government policy in Ireland that identifies concerns for child health and their emotional needs in the extended environment and provided proper channels and mechanisms to help address them. She spoke of the role of technology, referencing a study conducted in Italy, in helping mitigate mental health effects of the pandemic by maintaining some level of social connectivity and providing a platform to conduct online consultations to help children. She concluded by asking whether the world was better prepared for a future pandemic when concerning the mechanisms and tools needed for better child health and welfare and responded with a resounding, hopeful and promissory yes.

Ms. Teresa Siu



International wellness speaker, TV Host and mental health educator. An experienced educator of journalism, communication, media, health and wellness, Teresa is a qualified yoga teacher, integrative nutrition and health coach and Reiki practitioner. Her mission on health and wellness takes her around the world.

Ms. Siu focused on the impact on mental health of children due to the pandemic. She spoke about the uncertainties and inconsistencies rising from the pandemic as well as the government response to it. She described feelings of uncertainty and unawareness giving rise to stress, anxiety and other mental health issues among children, giving the panel actual words of a student who said they felt like the world was falling apart. She highlighted the effects of exams and academic work on children and how it has caused some to fall behind in Hong Kong. She spoke of children feeling cramped and enclosed in the houses of Hong Kong that are smaller than the global average. She stressed that it is the responsibility of the parent to provide their children with opportunities to grow and develop while keeping them safe and healthy. She asked for parents and teachers to sit with the children and encourage them to come forward with their problems and talk about how they're feeling. She highlighted the importance of individual well-being awareness in families, schools and other organisations, by giving the example of the Hong Kong government's campaign, 'Let's Talk' that helped students come forward to talk to each other and their teachers. She suggested that good nutritious food and encouraging them to be involved in activities like cooking can help keep them engaged and happy. She concluded by highlighting the need for families and children to be heard and seen and asked that we all keep and help build a positive mindset and energy amongst ourselves and others.

Dr. Rajiv Mehta



Consultant Psychiatrist at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, New Delhi, India.

Advisor for Indian Council for Journalism. Also, Special Advisor and author for a monthly child magazine 'GEO CHILD' since January 2019. Quoted multiple times by leading English & Hindi newspapers and has appeared on various English & Hindi News Channels. Author of a book published in 2018 named- "Speak to anyone, easily".

Dr. Mehta begins by pointing to the universality of the hinderance in child growth due to the pandemic, making them one of most vulnerable age groups because of the importance and the role that early years play in setting up foundations for their adult life. He highlighted how the pandemic has disrupted education and parent-child relationships, which form the backbone of the trust and understanding mechanism used by children while growing and developing to understand better their internal and external worlds. He pointed to the more

vulnerable groups of children being children with special needs, those who lack nutritional food, those facing domestic abuse and those that belong to low-income households, when explaining how different factors influence how the pandemic will affect the children of a household. Some of the factors he discussed included, their sex, age, family type, presence of domestic help, whether they are raised by a single parent or by both, economic conditions, family equations, urban or rural upbringing, among many others. He laid emphasis on the existence of burnout among children from frustration rising from doing the same things daily. He spoke of increased digital dependence and the subsequent risk of cyber bullying, sexual harassment and breach of data privacy. He spoke of frustration displacement by parents on to their children leading to physical and mental abuse. He then highlighted the roles that every stakeholder must play in protecting our children from parents and teachers to society and technology.

He asked for parents to be more loving and affectionate, looking for opportunities to better channel their children's energies, respecting their privacy, to not compare or criticise their children, to lead by example, to not show any form of aggressiveness or hostility, to help them in their process of identity formation, to spend quality time with them and to listen and talk to them compassionately and with empathy. He asked for teachers to reduce academic strain, show leniency while grading, to prevent displacement of their negative emotions on to children, to make their students aware of domestic abuse, to create a safe environment for their students to approach and talk to them and encourage them to get involved in physical activities and help out with chores. He highlighted the role of society to help create a safer environment for children, creating better and more robust systems, policies and institutions for child protection and welfare and to be a role model and take care of each other. He identified technology's role as a medium for learning, social interactions, medical consultations and other activities while keeping vigilant about abuse and addiction. Dr. Mehta, using his expertise and experience, offered a complete overview of the impact of the pandemic on children and highlighted the roles and responsibilities the stakeholders involved in helping build a better environment for our children.

Mrs. Raneë Nundah



Coordinator at the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare, Mauritius. Currently works at the Child Development Unit. Conducts training of officers; organises workshops and seminars on Child Development, Protection and other Early Childhood Development issues.

Mrs. Nundah spoke of the socio-psychological impact of the pandemic on the lives and psychology of the children. She spoke of the impact of increase levels of stress, anxiety and overthinking on the development of the child's social and personal skills. She brought the panel's attention to difficulties being faced by children housed in care institutions who are no longer able to interact at all with the outside world and to the higher incidence of domestic abuse in households with stressed single parents. She posited that parents may actually have lesser time with their children despite being home most of the time due to the blurring of personal and professional time boundaries making parent-child interactions difficult and rare. She spoke of the effects disruption in sleeping habits, lockdown induced disharmony in family interactions and increased screen time. She highlighted the role and responsibility of parents to communicate with their children, spend quality time with them to reinforce their relationship and creating opportunities for them to stay engaged and occupied. She stressed on the importance of creating a safe environment and opportunities for social interactions with friends and family. She asked that we must prepare students to re-enter school with the increased safety and precautionary measures. She recommended that teachers build a positive student-teacher relationship by checking up on them regularly and by helping students create a timetable/schedule for their days. She also asked teachers to encourage their students to read and write more, help their siblings and other students and to remain active and participate in hands-on activities. She highlights the importance for stronger institutions, policies and framework for child welfare and protection for better preparedness for future pandemics. She asks for increased research into the mental and physical impact of the pandemic and into how we can protect and take care of our children better. She concluded by stressing on the importance of building and maintain proper communication amongst us and with our children to help them become healthy and responsible adults.

Mr. Navin Taukoordass



Coordinator at the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family welfare, Mauritius. Currently works at Child Rehabilitation Services.

Mr. Taukoordass gave the panel an overview of the Mauritius government's efforts and successes in child rehabilitation during the pandemic. He spoke of the Integrated support centre at the Ministry that functions as a platform for receiving call and request for help. Help offered ranges from care services to consultations and from rehabilitation centres to intervention for child protection with the help of local law enforcement. He highlighted the increased and efficient use of technology in making the system robust and responsive. He highlighted the need for increased measures for enactment and enforcement of child protection, care and support regulations and policy. While he highlighted the use of technology and how it has helped through services like online consultations, he asked parents to be vigilant and regulate the use of technology to ensure their children do not get addicted to mobile phones, social media and games. Speaking from experience, he spoke about our preparedness for future pandemic and how we must be ready for them. He underscored the importance of protecting our children and offered that through proper and efficient use of technology, information and knowledge that we have gained and adopted now, we must build better and more robust and responsive systems for child protection, welfare and rehabilitation.

Dr. Radhika Batra



Paediatrician, New Delhi, India. She is the Founder and President of Every Infant Matters, a non-profit organisation dedicated to the upliftment of disadvantaged children. She is a Forbes Asia 30 under 30 honouree, a One Young World ambassador, a Trust Changemaker with Thomson Reuters Foundation, WEDU Rising Star and Changemaker, and a Global Peace Index Ambassador for the Institute for Economics and Peace, Sydney.

Dr. Batra highlighted the impact on children of parents who contracted the COVID-19 virus, specifically with respect to the effect on the child's physical and mental health, leading to a future which could have disastrous consequences for the world's economy and our society. She introduced the possibility of occurrence of PTSD and fear psychosis in children who saw their parents contract the virus. She spoke of the relationship between nutrition,

immunity and mental health. She brought the panel's attention to certain topics like the effect of lockdown induced migration on child displacement and malnutrition, the lack of common standards of home-schooling impacting the quality of children's education, lack of social interactions leading to increased screen times causing anxiety and stress and the lack of proper nutrition leading to reduced immunity levels. She offered some do's and don'ts to help tackle these issues that included showing love and affection to children, not being judgemental, not displacing negative emotions on to the children, providing children with nutritional and good food, holding events that function as support groups, learning sessions, activity sessions and social interactions, and by encouraging children to help with house chores and other activities by offering them small rewards for their achievements. She highlighted the work of 'Every Infant Matters' in providing children with healthy and nutrition food and helping mothers learn about health and food nutrition. She provided the panel with a touching anecdote of helping children through this difficult time, to show the effect of good food and nutrition on a child's mental and physical health – A healthy child is a happy child.

Mrs. Shaadia Zareen



Director, Royal Kids – Nursery & Pre-Primary School, Mauritius. Her goal is to provide an affordable high-quality education to the Mauritian young children. An education which will develop a strong base for primary schooling.

Mrs. Zareen brought the panel's attention to changing attitudes, unhealthy eating habits, lack of space for children's growth and the effects of a lack of routine and normalcy. She presented with some measures to help address these factors which included converting academic online classes into fun and interactive sessions, which could also help provide a platform for the children to interact with their peers and teachers. She referred to a high participation rate of over 85% for these sessions. She discussed various activities that could be done over these sessions that included physical activities at home like cooking with the supervision of a parent and interactive activities with their friends. She mentioned about the consistency of these sessions which helped the students build a daily routine helping them retain some semblance of normalcy. She stressed on the importance of children being given the opportunity to express themselves, verbally or otherwise. Speaking from

experience, she highlighted that it is a teacher's responsibility to build trust and a safe environment for their students to provide the opportunity for them to come forward, confide in and talk to them about their feelings, issues and to ask for help.

Ms. Nudrat Azam



Facilitator of Psychology, Adolescent Counsellor and Career Guidance Counsellor, Dubai. She possesses 10 years of experience imparting education and providing guidance to students regarding career development, academic achievement, social behaviour, as well as mental & physical health.

Ms. Azam introduced new facets of the problems presented by the pandemic like expatriate families moving back to their home countries and the effects it had on children, the difficulty of dealing with and addressing the needs of children and parents online, effects of higher screen time and the needs of children with special needs. She highlighted various steps taken to help children, families and teachers deal with the issues presented by the pandemic. The key measures she offered were the creation of support groups for parents and teachers to provide a safe and non-judgemental environment for conversation and catharsis, training parents to handle their frustrations better, reducing teaching hours and moving to project-based and vocational education, the use of learning support assistants to help with children with special needs, holding non-academic activity sessions and arranging counselling sessions for both parents and children. Her expertise and experience pointed to a promising result by not limiting sessions to academics only but to also help with addressing mental and emotional needs of children, parents, and teachers by building trust among the stakeholders and better communication channels.

Outcomes and Suggestions

It was unanimously agreed by all the panellists that the deteriorating mental health of the children and adolescents as a result of the pandemic is a growing cause of concern which needs urgent attention. It became evident that the factors contributing to such deterioration were multi-faceted in nature and not just borne out of the unpredictability prevalent in today's world. The factors range from change in dietary habits to expatriate families moving back to their parent country to being cramped up 24*7 in small homes especially in developing countries. Further, parent-child conflict along with domestic violence in homes were other major factors leading to the growth of stress, anxiety and depression amongst young children.

While the response to the problem at hand requires a concerted effort by all the stakeholders, parents and families have to act as the first line of defence while countering this menace. As mentioned by Dr. Rajiv Mehta, the need of the hour is for parents to be loving and affectionate towards their children and create an atmosphere of dialogue and discussion rather than one of instruction and argument within their household. At a time when parents and children are residing together all the time, it is imperative that parents respect and regard their children's privacy and avoid hostility at all costs. The pandemic has led to an increase in domestic abuse and domestic violence in homes across the world which causes a deep negative impact on the minds of children especially when they are really young. While it leads to the development of resentment towards their parents in some cases and in some cases, it also leads to some children imbibing it as normal behaviour which leads to them behaving the same in the future. Hence, it becomes extremely important for parents to establish an environment where they can discuss their daily problems and issues with them without being afraid to do so.

As far as teachers are concerned, it was discussed that it is imperative for them to make the classes more fun and interactive with daily activities so that it not only enhances the learning process but also relieves the anxiety and stress that they may have. It shall also bring in some semblance of normalcy in the lives of these children. Schools along with parents should build a support group which discusses best practices related to maintaining the emotional and mental well-being of children.

In India, National Mental Health Programme (NMHP) is the Government's only Centrally Sponsored Scheme regarding mental health and remains heavily underfunded with only Rs. 40 crores being allocated for Financial Year 2020-21. The amount is too small to handle the impact on mental health of children and adults due to the pandemic. What is needed is not just capital but also innovation. While the Indian Government's Fit India scheme focuses on the physical health of children and is laudable initiative, dedicated schemes related to mental health are needed to counter this menace. The Indian Government can draw inspiration from the initiatives such as Let's Talk in Hong Kong where kids are encouraged to come out to speak to their teachers and each other. Recently, the Government of United Kingdom has sanctioned 500 million pounds for Mental Health Recovery Action Plan out of which 79 million pounds was sanctioned for Children and Young People's mental health services to expand community mental health services and provision of mental health support teams in schools. India can take a leaf out of such initiatives and test schemes like these on pilot basis in metropolitan cities first and then carry it forward on local and state level rather than at the national level given the size and population of the country.

Thus, all the stakeholders, the government, schools, teachers and parents have to come together to address the issues regarding mental health of children which is of utmost importance since these children are our planet's future. With a concerted effort by everyone along with the right approach, we can help our children have a better tomorrow.

- Report by Aayush Tripathi (Advocate, Member Binding Bharat)