



The Covid Generation. Children and youth in and after the pandemic

Responding to the world crisis



Under COVID, millions of children and youth are experiencing damage and dislocations likely to mark their developmental pathways for years to come. Indeed, COVID can be described as a long-lasting catastrophic shock robbing children and youth of learning opportunities, socializing with other children, seeking supports from care-takers, teachers, and extended family members. For millions, the pandemic suddenly disrupted access to school, health care, nutrition, and the various other scaffolds needed for normatively appropriate maturational development. According to UNICEF, “Across virtually every key measure of childhood, progress has gone backward in the 12 months since the pandemic was declared, leaving children confronting a devastating and distorted new normal.” <https://uni.cf/3b2FJVA>

Indeed, preliminary data suggest that, *inter alia*, food insecurity <https://bit.ly/3CluAW6>, child abuse <https://bit.ly/3cr04ET>, child and youth suicide <https://bit.ly/2RH6VDg>, risk of firearm injury <https://bit.ly/3CluAW6>, child trafficking <https://bit.ly/3watKya> have all become more insidious during the pandemic. According to The Lancet, from March 1, 2020, to April 30, 2021, over 1.3 million children saw the death of primary caregivers, “including at least one parent or custodial grandparent ... [and] 1,562, 000 children experienced the death of at least one primary or secondary caregiver” with Peru (10·2 per 1000 children), South Africa (5·1), Mexico (3·5), Brazil (2·4), Colombia (2·3) leading the way. <https://bit.ly/2XDmEWO> Children in minoritized populations

have been ravaged by COVID-related parental loss. <https://bit.ly/3nWBOzp>

The Workshop will assess the impact of COVID – 19 on children and families with a focus on the most vulnerable: children in poverty, racial minority children, refugee children, immigrant children, children in modern slavery, and children in war. In the Workshop, we shall examine the impact of COVID – 19 on the physical, socio-emotional, cognitive and meta-cognitive, moral development of children with a focus on education, health and mental health.

The pandemic stunned education systems with geologic force. UNICEF data suggest that for almost half-a-billion children whose schools closed due to COVID-19, there was no such thing as remote learning opportunities. A year into the pandemic, by the first quarter of 2021, more than 160 million children “around the world have missed school for nearly a year due to COVID-19 restrictions.” Fourteen countries “have remained largely closed since March 2020 to February 2021.” Two-thirds of those countries are in Latin America and the Caribbean. In addition, school closures disrupted immunization and other health services that are often provided at school and prevented many children from accessing the only nutritious meal of the day. COVID-19 put millions of children on the streets and at risk of abuse, trafficking and exploitation. David Bloom and Maddalena Ferranna of the Harvard School of Public Health summarize COVID’S impact on children and youth as, “degrading the emotional and mental health of students, and increasing the risk of domestic violence and abuse.”

WHO Global status report on preventing violence against children, warns of the “dramatic impact’ of COVID-19 on violence against children. <https://bit.ly/3cr04ET> Abused children, missing children, children in flight, the children of forcibly displaced migrants, children in modern slavery are enduring in an empire of suffering that COVID-19 made harder hard-to-survey, prevent, and heal. According to the United Nations office of Drugs and Crime 2020 *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons* “the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to increase trafficking in persons, particularly from countries experiencing the fastest and most persistent drops in employment. ... Children account for about one third of the detected victims of trafficking.” <https://bit.ly/3watKya> Under COVID-19 modern slavery has become more hidden and difficult to detect

COVID-19 put millions of children at risk for disparate reasons. First, extreme poverty compromises socio-emotional and cognitive development, health and wellness in vulnerable populations. The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to push approximately an additional 100 million human beings into extreme poverty (<https://bit.ly/3wpR5g9>). Global hunger and malnutrition — even as progress is made, continue to cripple millions around the world. According to the FAO, “The number of people in the world affected by hunger increased in 2020 under the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic. After remaining virtually unchanged from 2014 to 2019, the prevalence of undernourishment climbed to around 9.9 percent in 2020, from 8.4 percent a year earlier. In terms of population, taking into consideration the additional statistical uncertainty, it is estimated that between 720 and 811 million people in the world faced hunger in 2020. Considering the middle of

the projected range (768 million), 118 million more people were facing hunger in 2020 than in 2019 – or as many as 161 million, considering the upper bound of the range.” <https://bit.ly/3qjeu1B> Transnational pauperism, the implosion of the structures and strictures that codify familial and social norms, rachitic states with feeble institutions – accentuated by war and terror and unchecked climate change, continue to put millions of children and youth at risk.

Second, the pandemic, unchecked climate change, war and terror, are driving unprecedented levels of both legal and unauthorized migration worldwide. Over the last 12 months, the most trafficked border in the world – between Mexico and the United States has seen a skyrocketing surge of unauthorized immigrants with an all-time record 1.7 million from around the world, “many of them fleeing pandemic-ravaged countries ... trying to enter the United States illegally in the last 12 months, capping a year of chaos at the southern border.” <https://nyti.ms/3jxTrEy>

Research suggest that migrants are especially vulnerable to modern human slavery and trafficking (Zhang, 2012) but also are the targets of hate crimes, and social-exclusion. Millions of Asian immigrants became targets of xenophobic violence as the former President of the United States and others framed the COVID disaster with the vulgar term, “the China Flu.” Over 36 million children today are growing up as immigrants; in addition, approximately 18 million children under the age of 18 are internally displaced forced to flee war and terror, extreme poverty & climate change. <https://bit.ly/3aX64UL> Over half of the world’s refugees are children (Suárez-Orozco, 2020). COVID has made the plight of immigrants and refugees more difficult and hazardous.

Third, new information, communication, and social media technologies have an important role to play in in the pandemic such as offering new opportunities to create community, to learn and to find joy for children in underserved communities. But the same technologies offer inappropriate content to children, and are now the routine tools in the exploitation of minors. Scholarly research has outlined the uses of digital technologies, mobile devices, tablets, smart phones, and social networking sites for modern slavery. Increasingly, exploitation is taking place online and includes coercing or extorting children into producing indecent images of themselves or engaging in sexual activity via webcams, which can be captured and distributed by offenders. The mobile phone now is an instrument of torture all made more sinister and prevalent by the COVID pandemic.

The proposed Workshop will represent the first international, interdisciplinary and comparative effort to examine the effects of COVID-19 on children, youth and emerging adults, draw lessons-learned from best practices and make concrete suggestion to prepare for the next catastrophic disaster moving forward. In the PASS workshop on Children After COVID we shall examine new levers to make the family and the institutions of society tasked with the promoting the development of children more humane and equitable, more engaging and fulfilling, and more relevant to the disparate needs of children and youth around the world. We shall examine, *inter alia*, regional responses to COVID in the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Europe – with a focus on how various

nation-states responded to the pandemic, best practices and lessons learned, the role of the Church and communities of faith in mediating the pandemic's worse after-shocks. We shall address the effects of growing inequality and unchecked climate change on pandemics past and future as well as the tools to reverse the effects of both.

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