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## Mental Health Of Children Orphaned By COVID-19 In India

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### ABSTRACT

In the past 14 months, the COVID-19 epidemic has disproportionately affected children. Due to COVID-19, up to 1.19 lakh children in India lost their primary caregiver (parent or grandparent with custody). Because of COVID-19, as many as 1.19 lakh Indian children have lost their primary caregiver (parent or custodial grandparent). India comes in third place in terms of total numbers, and its primary caregiver loss rate per 1,000 children was much lower at 0.3 than in other nations. Globally, from March 1, 2020, and April 30, 2021, this number was 11.34 lakh. Since then, studies have shown that orphan children are more likely to experience psychological problems such attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety, melancholy, loneliness, mood disorders, and behavioural issues. Consequently, this article's goal was to examine the realities of orphans' mental health conditions during a pandemic and how they are attempting to overcome it with the support of governmental agencies and other groups.

**Keywords:** Corona virus, COVID-19, Pandemic, Orphans and Orphanages.

### Introduction

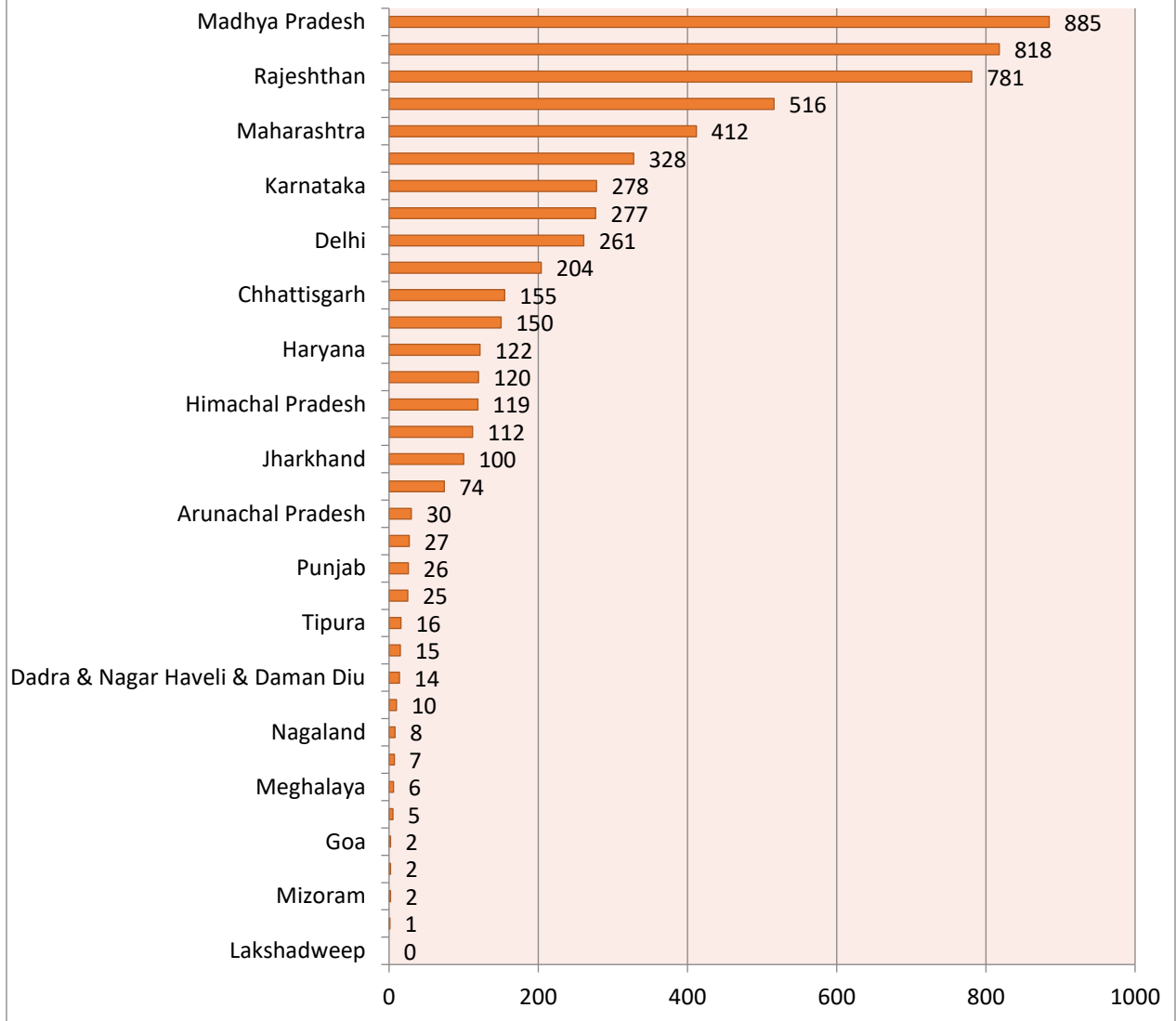
One of the largest pandemics in history, the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has affected a number of nations. The world has been completely upended by COVID-19. Every aspect of our people's life has been impacted. No one was aware of this new virus or sickness before to the outbreak in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. The COVID-19 virus is very contagious and spreads quickly from one person to the next. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that each infected person will spread the disease to 2 to 3 other people. In March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the Corona Virus Disease (COVID19) pandemic. As a result of the pandemic, at least 143 million people have contracted the virus, 77.9 million have recovered, and more than 3.047 million have passed away (World Health Organization, 2021). The majority of publications said that the COVID-19 pandemic might have a negative impact on millions of children. According to estimates in a recent study published in The Lancet, as many as 1.19 lakh children in India lost their primary caregiver (parent or custodial grandmother) as a result of COVID-19.

India comes in third in terms of absolute numbers, but its primary caregiver loss rate per 1,000 children was far lower at 0.3 than that of other nations like South Africa (5.1), Mexico (3.5), Brazil (2.4), Colombia (2.3), Iran (1.7), the United States (1.5), Argentina (1.1), and Russia (1.0). From March 1, 2020, to April 30, 2021, this number was 11.34 lakh globally.

Children with deceased fathers outnumbered moms by up to five times. In India, it is thought that 25,500 children lost their mother, 90,751 children lost their father, and 12 children lost both parents. 11, 34,000 youngsters worldwide lost a parent or grandparent as a result of COVID-10. 10, 42,000 of these children lost one or both of their parents. Most people only lost one of their parents, rarely both (India Today, July 22, 2021). The Ministry of Women and Child Development reported that 577 children nationwide have been left orphaned by the second wave in the past 55 days as of April 1, 2021, at 2:00 PM.

In a recent report to the Supreme Court, the National Commission for the Protection of Children's Rights (NCPCR) stated that 6,855 children had both of their parents die as a result of the pandemic in India. Children who were orphaned by COVID-19 and lost both parents are depicted district-by-district in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**  
**Children Orphaned by COVID-19 In India**



**Mental health of COVID-19 orphan children**

Children were affected by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in a variety of psychological, emotional, physical, social, and cultural ways (Dalton, Rapa, & Stein, 2020). The demands of India's youth, who make up 41% of the population under 18, cannot be disregarded both during and after the pandemic. These effects extend beyond health and wellness to a variety of areas of children's lives, including as their education, safety, and poverty (UNICEF, 2020). Children who have experienced the loss of one or both parents due to the epidemic are undoubtedly particularly vulnerable. Concerns about the wellbeing and financial security of their loved ones can have an emotional impact on children (Priyadarshini & Rathnasabapathy, 2021).

Such youngsters frequently experience anxiety, depression, sleeplessness, and loss of appetite. Additionally, isolation, traumatic bereavement, and quarantine can all contribute to posttraumatic stress disorder (Jacob et al., 2020). Adversities faced by children include the separation of COVID-positive patients, the isolation of COVID-positive children from their COVID-positive parents, the loss of one or both parents due to the infection, and the isolation or quarantine of children due to the general lockdown. The study's research showed that some children may develop severe and disruptive psychopathology as a result of the pandemic lead in the current environment. Such youngsters have been noted to have mood issues, behavioural disorders, substance misuse, anxiety disorders, and suicidal ideation (Danese et al., 2020, Priyadarshini & Rathnasabapathy, 2021).

Among children Orphans by COVID-19 predominated by conduct problems (34.90 percent), followed by peer problems (15.80 percent), emotional problems (14.70 percent), hyperactivity (8.60 percent), and poor prosocial behaviour (3.40 percent) (Kaur & Vinnakota, 2018). Additionally, generalised anxiety, behavioural problems, and peer connection problems are highly linked to other orphans who are affected by AIDS (Kumar, Srinivas & Dandona, 2016). Another study found a substantial relationship between self-esteem and childhood depression. They also discovered that among orphan boys and girls, self-esteem predicts childhood depression (Safdar et al., 2018, Priyadarshini & Rathnasabapathy, 2021).

Children who already have psychiatric conditions including ADHD, anxiety, depression, mood disorders, or behavioural problems may experience harmful impacts in this stressful pandemic situation, according to Saloni Verma (2021).

**Dr. Amit Sen, a child and adolescent psychiatrist in Delhi, claims that "This [the stress of losing both parents] impairs the children's normal growth." It affects a child's mental, social, and emotional growth. Even children experience anxiety and despair. He also used the example of a 14-year-old child who had lost a parent and the other was in an intensive care unit to illustrate how children who require special care experience worse traumas since they have lost their primary caretakers. The incident that required the child to remain in the ICU traumatised him. "The emotional scars may last a lifetime,"**

**Dr. Nisha Khanna, a psychotherapist in Delhi, acknowledges that abandoned and orphaned children experience severe emotional pain. She claims that because they weren't mentally ready for such losses, it was extremely hard for them. You can only image the**

**emotional toll this circumstance would take on the children since even adults experience mental turmoil with such a loss.**

Psychologists and counsellors think that such children have problems with their physical, emotional, and mental health. They should get counselling.

### **COVID-19's Helping Program for Orphan Children**

On May 28, the Supreme Court took note of the children who have become orphaned as a result of the Covid-19 outbreak and ordered the states to give them prompt relief. Several states have announced orphan compensation and relief plans. But would these reimbursements be sufficient to mitigate the pandemic's effects on children's lives? Experts disagree about this. According to Kumar of Centre Direct, the monthly aid of Rs 1,500 is insufficient for survival. He uses Bihar as an example. "There is a danger that the money won't get to these children. He asserts that we don't need the tried-and-true methods of child support. Benefits from many social assistance programmes, in his opinion, never get to the intended recipients. Due to their inability to handle the challenging processes and documents needed to get the aid or because they are unaware of their eligibility. The epidemic has altered how we live for the majority of us. It is more than that, though, for Covid orphans. For these youngsters, it is an existential crisis.

To assist children who have lost both parents, a parent who is still alive, a legal guardian, or adoptive parents as a result of the COVID-19 epidemic, the honourable PM has established the PM CARES for Children programme. When a child reaches the age of 18, the programme will build a corpus worth Rs. 10 lakh for each child, supporting their health and education. From the age of 18 for the following 5 years, this corpus will be used to provide a monthly financial support/stipend to cover his or her personal needs during the time of higher education. At the age of 23, the corpus amount will be given to the student as a lump sum for personal and professional use. Through the website [pmcaresforchildren.in](http://pmcaresforchildren.in), you can access the programme.

Senior officials claim that the Ministry started looking into the COVID orphan problem when adoption-related posts on social media started to proliferate. "We have communicated with all states and requested that they identify COVID-19 orphans from respective areas. We've determined that there are presently 577 of them based on the data we've received. According to an official, Delhi, for instance, had one Covid-19 orphan during this time. The officials did not disclose a breakdown by state but said that many did not report even one case.

According to Smriti Irani, the Union Minister for Women's and Children's Development, the government is "determined to support and protect every vulnerable kid due to loss of both parents to Covid-19." "Under the Integrated Child Protection Scheme, District Magistrates would disburse Rs 10 lakh each district as funding for the non-institutional care of these

orphans. Our goal is to ensure that no children fall between the gaps. However, keeping the children in their family and community structures and not removing them from them is our first objective, according to a senior official. The Ministry's count comes as numerous states have introduced welfare programmes for children who have lost both parents to the virus.

Some states, like Uttarakhand, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh, have announced various welfare programmes, while others, like Delhi, Punjab, and Madhya Pradesh, have pledged free education in addition to financial aid. According to officials, a variety of steps have been taken to find these children, from district-level welfare committees to Samvad, an integrated programme for child and adolescent psychosocial care developed in partnership with NIMHANS. The Ministry published a public notification on May 17 cautioning people against spreading advertisements for the adoption of these children on social media. It was feared that this would result in child trafficking. We have looked into many of these messages, and so far, all of them have turned out to be frauds. These have been given to the state police agencies, who will continue this investigation with the cyber cells, according to a representative. The Ministry has previously written to states, requesting that they keep an eye on such activity and make sure that these children appear before District Child Welfare Committees. The Central Adoption Resource Agency will handle the adoption procedure in cases where the CWC determines it to be appropriate. The Ministry stated in a public announcement that additional information may also be obtained by calling the child helpline at 1098.

However, advocates for children's rights think that the numbers are much greater. In addition to dealing with the psychological stress of losing both parents, these orphaned youngsters also face physical risks. Child marriage, child labour, trafficking, and sexual exploitation are all forms of violence. Children who are orphaned are more likely to be neglected and exploited. According to Sumanta Kar, secretary-general of SOS Youngsters's Villages of India, "These children could be pushed into child labour for survival or potentially fall prey to traffickers, drug dealers, paedophiles, or the begging mafia."

**Conclusion:** Orphan children around the world will be affected by the COVID-19 epidemic in the long run. The psychological effects will be detrimental and may negatively damage millions of orphan youngsters, according to research reports. To lessen the pandemic's effects on orphan children and orphanages in the post-COVID-19 era, children's welfare organisations such as the Orphan Life Foundation, UNICEF, Orphanage Support Services Organization (OSSO), National Child Rights Council (NCRC), and international healthcare organisations must cooperate.

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