

Attention Deficits, Learning Difficulties, and the  
Emotional Impact of a Post-COVID World: The  
Aftermath of Distant Learning

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# Abstract

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The impact of emotional, attentional, and learning difficulties in children who've been distant learning is seen by parents and teachers alike. These symptoms have been said to increase for a myriad of reasons (economic recession, social isolation, public health crises, lack of physical activity) and should be acknowledged (Golberstein et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2021). While attention diversion by means of familial interruption can disrupt the studying environment (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020), the normative restlessness of children disallows continued focus for long periods regardless (Kumar & Nayar, 2020). This paper will explore the aftermath of home-schooling due to COVID-19.

# Neuropsychological Impact of Contracting Covid-19

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- Individuals who have contracted Covid-19 have been shown to have developed several neurological symptoms. Some symptoms include headache, altered consciousness, attention deficits, dysexecutive symptoms, cerebrovascular incidents, impaired memory, convulsions, amnesia, ataxia, paraesthesia, and steroid-induced mania or psychosis.
- According to some research, autopsies have also revealed “brain tissue oedema and partial neurodegeneration” (Kumar, Veldhuis, and Malhotra, 2021).



# Educational Disruptions

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- Educational disruptions come in many forms: lack of daily routine and structure, lack of recreational activities that can be completed at home, social isolation, lack of compatibility with assistive technology (Patel, 2020) are some examples.
- Familial interruptions, especially in homes with multiple children or where there is little privacy, are also said to be common and can disrupt the studying environment by disallowing children to remain attentive by creating frequent distractions (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020).

# Educational Disruptions

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- How impactful were the disruptions?
  - One particular study found that many students made little or no progress while learning remotely from home (Engzell, Frey, and Verhagen, 2021). This study examined 350,000 students in the Netherlands who were given national examination before and after switching to remote learning for merely 8 weeks. Researchers observed that students experienced learning loss of about 3 percentile points which is equivalent to one-fifth of a school year (Engzell, Frey, and Verhagen, 2021).
- Who is impacted the most?
  - Students of color, students with disabilities, English learners, and students from low-income households appear to be the most negatively impacted (Colvin, Reesman, & Glen, 2021).



# Mental Health Implications

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- Some of the most common symptoms that have been linked to both contracting Covid-19 and remote learning in and of itself, have been said to include anxiety, depression, stress, and social isolation.
- PTSD has also been commonly observed in both individuals who contracted the life-threatening virus, as well as individuals who lost friends and family due to Covid-19 (Pefferbaum & North, 2020).

# Socioeconomic Difficulty as a Further Contributor to Poorer Mental Health Outcomes

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- Families of low-socioeconomic status have been found to struggle more than those who are financially secure. Covid-19 has created an environment that puts people at a disadvantage due to job insecurity, housing instability, discrimination, and food insecurity (Goldmann & Galea, 2014). While this is a struggle that adults endure more so than children and adolescents, it is important to acknowledge the impact that it has on the family unit and the individuals that comprise it.
- For some students who were in high school, they reported additional stressors of being unable to work which prevented them from going to college due to financial hardships. The opposite is also true, and others reported being unable to attend college due to needing to work to help support their families who had been financially burdened as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic (Holzer, 2021).



# Attentional Deficits

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While some individuals with ADHD have said to have had worsened symptoms, others with more severe forms of ADHD have had positive experiences due to limited distractions (Melegari et al., 2020). Research by Melgari and colleagues has also implied that undiagnosed children and adolescents within the normative population have had negative impacts and important fluctuations on “six emotional and mood states (sadness, boredom, little enjoyment/interest, irritability, temper tantrums, anxiety) and five disrupted behaviors (verbal and physical aggression, argument, opposition, restlessness).”



# Other Impairments

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- While children with ADHD have been greatly impacted by the pandemic, research has also found that those with Learning Disabilities have had a hard time learning remotely. While the rate of learning disorders has increased on its own, those with previous diagnoses have struggled to keep up, further worsening academic functioning.
- Additionally, children within the Autism Spectrum have also been greatly impacted by further reducing and minimizing opportunities to improve their communication and social skills (Baweja et al., 2021)

# Building Resilience

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- Research suggests that increasing age-appropriate communication to reduce and address fears and concerns, increasing routine activities and physical exercise engagement, building coping strategies, and working towards reducing loneliness and social isolation (Imran, Zeshan, and Pervaiz, 2020).
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offered valuable advice for individuals in order to reduce stress reactions in 2020. Cullen, Gulati, and Kelly summarized the document and stated that the CDC suggested increasing awareness of mental health symptoms and “taking breaks from work, engaging in self-care, taking breaks from media coverage and asking for help.”