

POLICY OF TAKING CARE OF CHILDREN'S HEALTH BEFORE THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN VIETNAM

POLÍTICA DE CUIDAR DA SAÚDE DAS CRIANÇAS ANTES DO IMPACTO DA PANDEMIA DA COVIDA-19 NO VIETNÃ*

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Abstract: Children are the preschools, the future owners of the country, who are being greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of children infected with COVID-19 since the pandemic broke out in Vietnam in January 2020 is increasing and is evolving very complicatedly. Moreover, children are a weak force, unable to take care of themselves before the onslaught of the pandemic. Protecting children is about protecting the future of the country; especially in the current COVID-19 pandemic, there is no vaccine to prevent COVID-19 for children, so protecting children against the COVID-19 pandemic needs to be more proactive. Based on the actual study of children infected with COVID-19, analyzing the collected data, a total of 125 parents and carers of children from 1 to 12 years old have had telephone interviews with 65 parents and carers of children, stakeholders, and representatives of families from different walks of life were interviewed using semi-structured guidance and carers children and understand the causes, this study points out the need, and the difficulties and recommends solutions to protect children's health and lives in the face of the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Taking care. Children's health. COVID-19 pandemic. A short review. Vietnam.

Resumo: As crianças são as pré-escolas, os futuros proprietários do país, que estão sendo muito afetados pela pandemia da COVID-19. O número de crianças infectadas pela COVID-19 desde que a pandemia eclodiu no Vietnã em janeiro de 2020 está aumentando e está evoluindo de forma muito complicada. Além disso, as crianças são uma força fraca, incapaz de cuidar de si mesmas antes do ataque da pandemia. Proteger as crianças é proteger o futuro do país; especialmente na atual pandemia da COVID-19, não há vacina para prevenir a COVID-19 para crianças, portanto, proteger as crianças contra a pandemia da COVID-19 precisa ser mais pró-ativa. Com base no estudo real de crianças infectadas pela COVID-19, analisando os dados coletados, um total de 125 pais e cuidadores de crianças de 1 a 12 anos de idade foram entrevistados por telefone com 65 pais e cuidadores de crianças, partes interessadas e representantes de famílias de diferentes estilos de vida foram entrevistados usando orientação semi-estruturada e cuidadores de crianças e entenderam as causas, este estudo aponta a necessidade e as dificuldades e recomenda soluções para proteger a saúde e a vida das crianças em face da investida da pandemia COVID-19.

Palavras-chave: Cuidar. A saúde das crianças. Pandemia da COVID-19. Uma breve revisão. Vietnã.

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1. INTRODUCTION

According to the Vietnam Children's Fund, as of June 8, there were nearly 7,000 children in 26 provinces and cities directly affected by the epidemic. The number of children being treated for COVID-19 and children in isolation will continue to increase. The Department of Children under the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs. forecasts that the number of children affected by the COVID-19 epidemic from now until the end of 2021 may increase to about 42,000 children. In addition to affecting physical health, the COVID-19 epidemic also affects mental health, which can lead to many risks of mental illness in children. Especially young children who have to go to concentrated medical isolation, and not be near their parents, causing anxiety, fear, and stress to children. These are all very serious psychological traumas for children.

In children, especially young children from 6 months to 3 years old, the immune system is not yet fully developed, it is very susceptible to pathogens in the environment entering the child's body, including the SARS-CoV virus. Besides, even for older children with mature immune systems, an inadequate diet lacking in both quantity and quality can make the child's immune system weak and susceptible to disease.

According to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tran Minh Dien (2021), children are currently in the low-risk group for COVID-19, and symptoms are also milder than adults. Until now, scientists have not fully explained why the rate of children infected with COVID-19 is lower than other groups due to data related to children's environmental, immune, and family characteristics that are still being studied.

According to BS.CKI Nguyen Cat Phuong Vu - Department of Intensive Care Against Poisons, City Children's Hospital (2021), young children have weak resistance and are very susceptible to harmful agents in the environment entering the body. The weaker the child's resistance is the immune system is not fully developed. Although recent statistics show that the rate of children infected with COVID-19 is low, parents must not be subjective.

Objectives: Research the need and difficulties in health care for children before the COVID-19 pandemic; then propose solutions to enhance the protection of children's health and lives.

2. METHODOLOGY

Study Design: Simple review article.

Study duration: Data was collected during the period from 01 May 2021 to – 30 May 2022.

Data collection: Medline, Google Scholar, EMBASE, and PubMed database searches were performed for articles about health care for children; written decisions of specialized agencies of Vietnam.

Overall assessment: Collecting information on Decree No. 136/2013/ND-CP (October 21, 2013) stipulating social assistance policies for beneficiaries of social protection; Decision No. 488/QĐ-TTg (April 14, 2017) on Approval of the Project on Renovation and Development of Social Assistance for the period 2017-2025 and vision to 2030 Information of provinces and cities in Vietnam: Ho Chi Minh City, Dong Nai province, Binh Duong province; using provinces administrative reports according to prepared research questions and guidelines and interviewing families with children infected with COVID-19 to assess the general situation of the local pandemic, policy protection of children in general and child health care programs in particular before the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data analysis: Based on the results of the obtained data, the study focuses on analyzing the difficulties, pointing out the need to take care of children's health and protect their lives against the Covid 19 pandemic. Specifically:

The study reviewed, cited, and categorized primary and secondary data on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children in Vietnam and their families.

A quantitative cross-sectional study was carried out in Ho Chi Minh City, Binh Duong province, and Dong Nai province. A total of 125 Parents and carers of children from 1 to 12 years old can telephone interview 65 parents and carers children, stakeholders, and representatives of families from different walks of life were interviewed using semi-structured guidance.

In-depth interviews were conducted by phone, Zalo, Zoom, and Meeting platforms to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children.

In addition, this study also conducted direct interviews with healthcare professionals in several hospitals in Ho Chi Minh City through direct calls, and discussions via Zalo, Zoom, Meetings, etc.

Due to its quick and simple implementation, the assessment still has some limitations including i) Lack of in-depth root cause analysis; ii) generalized findings in the study because the sample is purposefully taken; iii) Failed to interview informants in concentrated isolation areas by the Government in Ho Chi Minh City because the city is in

the period of social distancing under the Government's directives 16 and 16+; iv) There was no observation because interviews were conducted by telephone phone or online form.

Limitations of the Study: The study was conducted during the period of social distancing from April 2022 to May 2022. During this period, available evidence and literature were quite limited, therefore the study This study is mainly based on provincial rapid assessment reports and in-depth remote interviews with limited sample size. Therefore, the study only provides a general assessment of the initial impacts of the pandemic on children's health care. Information collected through phone interviews and some social networking platforms should not be used. avoid some quality restrictions. The main factors that can affect the interview are: (i) Interruptions in conducting the interview: Some interviews have to be done more than once to be completed due to external environmental factors or due to external factors. intermittent signal transmission; (ii) Inability to observe the interviewing environment, not grasping the body language and emotional expression of the interviewee may limit the effectiveness of the interview; (iii) The interview duration is short, no more than 20 minutes, so the information obtained is not really diverse and rich; (iii) During the implementation of activities, the sample preparation and coordination of activities still have certain limitations due to many objective and subjective reasons, leading to the interview sample having deviations from the selected sample. Initial selection (wrong subject, wrong phone number, unreachable phone number, etc.) has to be repeated many times, affecting the progress of the research.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Key Findings

Access to maternal and child health care: The pandemic and social distancing measures have prevented families with children from accessing regular maternal and child health services. Nearly half of the interviewees (44.8%) reported having encountered difficulties in accessing health care services for children. Most parents of children of vaccination age reported delaying vaccinations due to the COVID-19 pandemic due to concerns about contagion at health facilities. Meanwhile, people living in the blockaded area missed their vaccination schedule because the commune health station stopped vaccination activities to prevent the spread of the pandemic according to the guidance of the Ministry of Health. Nationwide, 100,000 mothers and infants and about 420,000 children under 1 year of age are at risk of not being immunized against DPT-Hepb-Hib.

Access to nutrition services: The nutrition of many households is seriously affected and the nutritional quality of each family also declines. Many mothers in the qualitative study shared about reducing the frequency of children's meals compared to before the school was closed. About 57.6% of study participants who live in urban areas have a good standard of living and said that their children eat fewer meals a day, while this percentage in poor families with economic difficulties is 41.6%. Besides, about 34.5% of interviewees also said that the quality of food has decreased significantly and they have to buy food at higher prices than usual while many parents have lost their jobs or reduced their previous capital income to only a small amount. enough to live.

Mental health and psychosocial well-being: Interview results and references to articles and reviews on social forums show an increase in stress, anxiety, and depression among Vietnamese children. The teenagers interviewed were concerned about the risk of a pandemic outbreak and feared that they would be infected. Children living in isolated areas with COVID-19 (children in direct contact with the sick person), and children with their families in concentrated isolation centers also have symptoms of anxiety and more serious fear. In addition, children of primary school age and older also face more mental health and psychological challenges than preschool children, because they are already aware of the crisis.

3.2. The Need And Difficulties In Child Health Care

Taking care of, educating, and protecting children is to carry out the cause of growing people for the long-term benefit of the country. For many years, children in our country have been enjoying attentive care "giving children the best". At the 9th session of the VIII National Assembly, the Law on Child Protection, Care, and Education was passed. Our Party and State soon committed to the international community to implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Therefore, in any circumstances, our children still enjoy the development of education and medical care. In the economy, the attention to improving the quality of life, and material and spiritual life has been increasingly enhanced. Entertainment and recreation facilities have been upgraded, newly built, and developed at many points in the community. Orphans, disabled, and wandering children, especially those affected by Agent Orange, are cared for and helped to create favorable conditions.

The educational environment (family, school, society) all upholds the responsibility to care for, educate and protect children. The generation of young bamboo shoots of the country is a class of people with intellectual potential, appearing more and more talented to

overcome difficulties, and know how to live with compassion and loyalty. However, the issue of child protection and care is currently facing many inadequacies, because many children are struggling to earn a living, there are still children who drop out of school and children who are malnourished.

The situation of children being abused, exploited for labor, dragged into negative issues, social evils, and dishonest violence becoming crimes is complicated. To reduce difficulties and create conditions for children to excel in learning, all levels, departments, and organizations have adopted many guidelines and policies to strengthen the protection, care, and education of children.

There is no denying the fact that today, the whole community has more and more activities to care for and care for the children. But sometimes, some ripples make us think to make adjustments and take more drastic actions, to stop the "injustices" that are happening and will come to children's lives. Especially, for the children who are wandering, orphaned, and without a caregiver. In the current context, these vulnerable cases are facing difficulties in taking care of themselves. According to incomplete statistics from the Ho Chi Minh City Children's Sponsor Association, the number of mid-sized children in Ho Chi Minh City is now more than 500. In the context of the current pandemic, this subject needs special care.

These days, public opinion is confused and worried about the incident related to vaccination for children. This is the case of "eating less" of the vaccine of the medical staff of the Preventive Medicine Center of Hanoi, and the case of vaccination with the expiration date of the Preventive Medicine Center of Tuy Hoa City, Phu Yen province, etc. causing unsightly pictures for humanity.

This work directly affects the health of the children - The owners of the future, the preschools need to be nurtured and cared for in the best conditions. There are also statistics on the increase in depression, as well as neurological diseases among young people in modern life. All of this makes us constantly worry about the complete development of a young generation who will stand up to master the country's destiny in the future.

As analyzed above, in the context that there is no vaccine to prevent COVID-19 for children, comprehensive measures according to the "5K" recommendation (masks, disinfection, distance, do not gather, declare health) together with a healthy diet and lifestyle is the solution to help protect young children against the risk of COVID-19.

Accordingly, children can be infected with COVID-19 through droplets, through pathogens that exist in the environment, on surfaces that children accidentally come into

contact with, and then enter the body due to habits or habits. sucking, rubbing eyes and nose. For children of preschool age, if they are still going to school, there needs to be coordination between the family and the school to ensure compliance with regulations on epidemic prevention and control. Building good habits for children such as: not crawling on the floor, not touching your eyes, nose, and mouth, etc. are measures that contribute to protecting children against the risk of disease.

3.3. Care And Protection Of Children

Movement trends and social activities in Vietnam have changed dramatically and impacted child care and social connections. Nationally, rates of people going to retail and entertainment venues plummeted, going to bus and train stations fell by 50%, to grocery stores and pharmacies by a third, and to work. one-fifth reduction. More than half of the Vietnamese population spends a lot of time online 82 % of parents said they spend more time with their children with their new routine. Parents and caregivers have tried to use information, guidance, and care to protect their children from the risks of COVID-19.

However, parents (mostly mothers) are forced to take time off work, have their pay cut, or even quit their jobs to take care of their children. Some parents have asked grandparents, relatives, or older children to look after their young children at home or even send them home to reduce care costs. The Vietnam Women's Union has reported that the number of new arrivals to Peace House, a shelter for victims of domestic violence and abuse, has doubled since the outbreak. Some parents have admitted to mistreating their children, in addition, the personal information of some children whose family members are infected with COVID-19 or are under strict isolation has been revealed on websites. social networking site.

According to Dr. Truong Huu Khanh - Head of the Department of Infection - Neurology, Children's Hospital No. 1, Ho Chi Minh City, Senior Advisor of the VNVC System of Immunization Center (2021) said: "If coronavirus is transmitted mainly in children, would be a real disaster. Currently, the low rate of children infected with the Covid-19 virus is a good thing, because children are not self-aware such as washing their hands, covering their mouths, or touching others or actions that can spread the virus. Therefore, we should not be subjective and comfortable letting children go out without protective and preventive measures. Prevention is necessary, everyone must be prevented and take the same precautions." Doctor Truong Huu Khanh also hypothesized: "Although there are no exact conclusions, it is recorded that antibodies generated from measles

vaccine can help children have cross-immunity with Coronavirus, limit prevent the spread of disease to children”.

Responding to the call of the Party and State to "fight the epidemic like fighting the enemy", on the occasion of the month of Action for Children in Vietnam, on May 29, Minister of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs, Vice Chairman of the Council Sponsoring the Vietnam Children's Fund has decided to support all meals for F0 and F1 children from April 27 to December 31 who are being treated and isolated at centers as decided by the agency. competent authority. The norm is 80,000 VND/day for 21 days (as prescribed) by the fund's mobilization and accumulation in 2021.

3.4. Solutions That Need To Be Done Right Away

Wearing a mask: Parents need to follow and guide their children to follow the correct wearing of masks. In cases of young children or children with respiratory problems or medical conditions that lead to the inability to wear masks, the surrounding relatives need to comply with the wearing of masks.

Attention to hygiene: Parents need to keep their children's hygiene. Wash your hands often under running water with soap or an antiseptic solution for at least 20 seconds; Rinse your mouth and throat with mouthwash, and avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth to prevent infection.

Limiting crowded contact: Parents and families also need to limit children's exposure to crowded places, and limit direct contact with people with signs of respiratory infection (fever, cough, difficulty breathing). . In the case of having to go to crowded places, it is necessary to pay attention to the regulations on prevention and control of the COVID-19 epidemic.

Parents and families should instruct children to cover their mouths and nose when they cough or sneeze to reduce the spread of respiratory secretions. Do not spit indiscriminately in public.

Increase ventilation in living areas by opening doors and windows, and limiting the use of air conditioners. Regularly clean floors, doorknobs, and surfaces of household objects with soap and other common disinfectant solutions.

When a child has symptoms of fever, cough, difficulty breathing, etc. the family should immediately notify the health authority when having the above symptoms. Also, information on symptoms and schedules has moved in recent times to get the right support measures in place.

Disinfect, and sanitize hands and objects around the baby, avoid the baby often holding, putting toys in the mouth accidentally spreading the virus into the body.

Exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months is also one of the very valuable measures in strengthening the infant's immune system.

Vaccination is also an active way to activate the body's immune system. Children should be vaccinated against infectious and dangerous diseases at an early age such as viral hepatitis, measles, cholera, encephalitis, influenza, pneumococcal, etc.

In the context of the current epidemic, many parents are concerned and want to delay their baby's vaccination schedule, according to MSc. Dr. Bui Ngoc An Pha - Medical Director of VNVC Immunization Center System (2021) said: For children of the right age to be vaccinated, vaccination at the right time and on the right schedule is very important for timely disease prevention. especially in the current pandemic situation.

The first is to help prevent infection with other diseases (besides COVID-19 so as not to confuse symptoms and not cause concern for the community). For example, some diseases have symptoms very similar to COVID-19 infection such as flu, respiratory diseases, etc. If we have a cough or fever at this time, we will be very confused as to whether this symptom is caused by COVID-19 or another disease.

Second, vaccination will prevent the right disease, avoiding the unfortunate case of being infected with both diseases at the same time, which will be very dangerous and difficult to treat.

3.5. Recommendations

Children's participation: During the pandemic, many children in Vietnam have the opportunity to contribute ideas and participate in family decision-making. Nearly half of the parents interviewed look to their children's opinions to make decisions and share their views. Our qualitative data suggest that adolescents act as agents of change in the response to COVID-19. In some areas with restricted movement, youth have been trained in protective gear to participate in virus prevention activities in the area.

COVID-19 has had a great impact on the lives of many Vietnamese, especially vulnerable groups, and presents some structural weaknesses in the economy and social services. The Government is recommended to carry out further comprehensive analyzes of the impact of COVID-19 at the macro and micro levels to make medium and long-term recommendations for the Vietnamese economy and social sectors. association in planning and 5-year strategy. In addition, the Government also needs to pay attention to vulnerable areas where people have to bear the double burden of COVID-19 and natural disasters

such as the Mekong Delta, which is facing a shortage of food, and water as a systemic problem (Phong, 2012, Vu, 2021).

Ensuring children are at the heart of the socio-economic development planning and budgeting process through cross-sectoral strategies and plans for the period 2021-2030 [9] and focusing on maintaining development goals. sustainable development under the leadership of the government and related partners. Strategies and plans should be aligned with children's rights and human rights-based principles, with a focus on the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people, including children. come from the families hardest hit by COVID-19 (Phong, 2012, Vinh, 2022).

Strengthen the institutions and capacities of key stakeholders and local authorities, including the capacity to facilitate the development of new forms of service delivery (distance learning and e-learning, consulting telemedicine, and electronic health services).

Strengthen sectoral and inter-sectoral monitoring and evaluation systems through equity and gender lenses to regularly monitor children's well-being across education, health, nutrition, sanitation, and hygiene. clean water and sanitation, child protection, and social protection, especially before, during, and after the epidemic provide information for policymaking.

Ensure the continuity and adequacy of health care services, especially the deployment of mobile medical care teams, and household access to quickly provide essential child health care services such as prenatal and postnatal care, routine immunization, and addressing declines in health-seeking behavior. Access to nutrition services.

Support vulnerable groups in accessing nutritious food in both urban and rural areas through social and community protection programs, especially for households without conditions to buy nutritious food due to loss of job or livelihood.

Ensure regular supplementation of micronutrients for pregnant and lactating mothers as well as vitamin A and multi-micronutrient tablets for children.

Provide accurate information about maintaining a healthy diet for all people, especially children, and pregnant and lactating women.

Ensure nutritional standards and maintain school meals for children.

Make nutrition a component of disaster and health emergency response and action plans.

The above evidence and analysis show that although the current social security system has had some success, the response to the pandemic is still inadequate and

ineffective to deal with the stress caused by the crisis. approximately, and there are many additional aspects that can be added to better protect children, keeping them from falling into poverty and vulnerability due to the pandemic. Economists predict that this dual crisis of epidemiology and economic recession will be prolonged and take some time to recover. For children, the urgent issue is to address the deprivation they are experiencing. For better recovery, the Government will need to make long-term investments and have clear education access and catch-up plan, for example, a plan to operate for several years after the pandemic. The difficult economic situation places the need to strengthen the social security system and modernize it, to be able to respond to pandemics and other shocks, to ensure the safety of children's lives and health. children, protect them from falling into poverty and vulnerability.

4. CONCLUSION

In the context that there is no vaccine for COVID-19 for children, parents need to build children's nutrition, healthy living habits, play, and study appropriately to protect children against the pandemic. COVID-19, specifically:

Governments and business owners need to develop a program to promote child care and protection to support parents, especially parents who are frontline service providers, to prepare for future crises. future.

Review relevant regulations to ensure children's privacy, protect children's information and safety online, as well as raise awareness of the stigma against people at risk or infected. viruses and discrimination against vulnerable groups (including those living in isolation centers, restricted/lockdown areas, or healthcare workers and their children).

Further improve the National Child Support line's capacity to receive, send and respond to services through the local child protection system to protect children and women from violence and exploitation, and abuse, including protecting those living in isolation centers.

Strengthen the case management system through the establishment of a system of child protection officers at the provincial and district levels as well as training of child protection officers on the detection of and providing child protective services in the context of COVID-19 and public health emergency relief services.

Parents, caregivers, and families need to be aware and trained to detect stress early in their children and ensure their safety through open communication, support, and encouragement, and help them learn how to keep personal information private.

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