How are families coping with childcare during the pandemic?

What emotional effect does isolation have on boys and girls?

Do families struggling with poverty during Covid-19 have special needs, and does social equality play a role in addressing those needs?

Nearly 300 people in Latin America and the U.S. participated in the ARCOR Foundation’s and Equity for Children’s 2nd webinar about Covid-19 and its effects, “Childcare, Health and Equity”, to stimulate debate about policies guaranteeing the rights of children. The event was broadcast live on Equity for Children’s YouTube channel, which can be accessed here.

Participants, who included Raul Mercer of Buenos Aires, Argentina (Latin America Faculty of Social Science -- FLACSO), Joyce Goldstein of Porto Alegre, Brazil (Commission for Children/Adolescents of the Psychoanalytic Institution of Latin America), and María Edith Pacheo Gomez Muñoz of Mexico City, Mexico (The College of Mexico), discussed the need for comprehensive, holistic and systemic approaches to caring for children and adolescents during the pandemic.

Recommended action to improve children’s physical, mental and social wellbeing included shining a light on the following:

- Youth are often glossed over in attitudes about and during the pandemic, yet they represent a large sector of the population whose lives are greatly affected.

- The greatest pandemic affecting the world is inequality, which has been heightened by Covid-19. Those seriously affected by the virus, and its consequences such as the lockdown and loss of income, are people living on the street, refugees, migrants, women and children at risk of domestic abuse, the disabled and those with mental health problems. Discrimination based on race and gender continues during the pandemic.

- Our societies tend to focus on the immediate effects of Covid-19 as a disease, especially in caring for critical cases. Other health problems, meanwhile, have increased due to Covid-19 such as lower vaccination rates, less care for people experiencing chronic disease, less preventative medicine offered and increased teen pregnancy due to a drastic decrease in access to sex education.

- Because of social distancing requirements, children are unable to play with friends, and parks and playgrounds remain closed. This robs children of an essential part of their childhood and can leave a lasting imprint on children’s formative experiences.
With nearly every aspect of daily life affected, children’s sense of normalcy and structure is greatly reduced, often with severe consequences. School disruption represents the loss of an indispensable space for cognitive, emotional and nutritional development. Many children are indefinitely confined now, with no escape, to homes where sexual and domestic abuse occur.

In many households, family dynamics are changing dramatically due to the permanent presence of the whole family. In some cases, this change has resulted in parents taking on caretaker roles that they normally do not occupy and, in some cases, are ill-prepared for.

Throughout the world, women most frequently occupy the caretaker role. Due to national lockdowns, the domestic burden of such caretakers has increased. In Latin America’s poorer households, women spend an average of six hours daily on domestic tasks, compared with four hours daily in less poor households.

We often think of children as dependents only. In many poorer households, however, female children often care for their siblings. This increased role in child rearing and social development necessitates a new look at the role of unpaid child and adolescent labor at home.

Alberto Minujín, Executive Director of Equity for Children, and event coordinator Javier Rodríguez, Social investment Coordinator of the ARCOR Foundation, Argentina highlighted these topics to address child and adolescent inequality during the time of Covid-19.

More resources:
- Access the complete webinar here
- Equity for children http://equidadparalainfancia.org/
- Arcor Foundation https://www.fundacionarcor.org/es