

COVID-19 in Iran: How is this pandemic impacting Iranian children?

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This article offers an overview of the qualitative study “Children, media and COVID-19” for which n=10 children in Iran were interviewed via WhatsApp and Skype in addition to the online survey with n=83 Iranian children.

In April 2020, via an online questionnaire, n=83 children 9 to 13 years old were asked on their everyday life, media use and knowledge about the coronavirus (see also Götz et al. in this issue). During April 27th to May 17th 2020, the qualitative interviews with n=10 children of the same age-group were conducted via WhatsApp and Skype. Iran closed down schools on March 5th to prevent a further spread of the virus. Some children can adapt themselves to this restriction and they are at some point happier at home. Roshana, (9 years) states:

“I don’t waste my time at home. My parents give me a daily schedule and I always follow them. I attend my online classes, read books, play piano, bake cakes, draw, and play with my cat;” and Rayan (11 years) says: “I am ok with this situation. My only concern is not being with my friends.”

But Hanieh (10 years) feels different:

“One day I opened the window and saw summer is coming. I felt so sad that I cannot run in the park and have an ice cream. I am missing those days before corona. I’m worried those days will never come back.”

All children have one concern in common: They miss their friends and grandparents. Like in other countries the children feel locked down:

“I feel I am a prisoner at home. One day I went out with my dad, I felt the world is getting bigger. I am bored. I don’t want to play with my little brother anymore. I’m fed up with all online classes. I want the real world,” says Hanieh (10 years).

Children use media for different purposes: WhatsApp, Telegram, and Skype to communicate mostly with their friends and grandparents; television for entertainment, information, and education; video games, mobile games, and social media like Instagram for entertainment.

The country adopted distance-learning using a national TV channel, messaging applications like Telegram and WhatsApp, and a Learning Management System (LMS) by the Ministry of Education. It helps students to follow their classes but at the same time led to major challenges for students, parents and teachers due to unfair technology coverage across the country. In this regard, some charities are asking for donations to buy smartphones for kids living in poverty. Arnoosh (11 years) feels lucky that her mother has a smartphone and internet which she can use for her online classes. She misses school but prefers to stay home and not being at risk of getting sick: “I can manage my study time, watching TV, and playing.”

Some children cannot get much positive out of the situation like Asal (11 years): “I hate corona. It stopped us from partying and visiting my grandparents for New Year.” In contrary, some believe they should learn from corona, like Roshana (9 years): “Corona gave me an opportunity to think more, discover more, and create more in my life.”

Most of the children in the study do not trust in the official news and try to avoid them, like Koroush (13 years): “All news are fake. Whenever my father is listening to news, I go to my bedroom not to hear anything.”

Most of the children (72% in the online questionnaire) do not want to hear more about coronavirus. They believe that wherever they go and to whomever they talk, the topic is coronavirus. Children blame corona to ban them from being happy. Sogol (9 years) says: “I am bored. Sometimes an hour passed and I just sit on the sofa and look around.”

Since April 11th, the government began lifting restrictions and many citizens go to work due to financial needs and no efficient support by the government. Asal (11 years) mentions her worries: “At first, my father didn’t go to work. Now he is going. I have a friend who lost her father because of corona that’s why I’m very worried that it might happen to my father too.”; some children have no worries like Tarlan (10 years). She says: “I am not afraid of corona anymore because it is a long time corona is here.” Most children have good knowledge about the virus including its symptoms, origin, and prevention measures and they all believe they learn from corona about the importance of taking care of self health and helping each other like Rayan (11 years): “I learnt from this crisis that human beings are members of a whole and we must help each other.” ■

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