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LOCKDOWN AND ONLINE SCHOOL EDUCATION- A SURVEY AMONG URBAN MOTHERS OF SECONDARY SCHOOL CHILDREN IN CHENNAI

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ABSTRACT:

When Coronavirus, COVID 19 was announced as a pandemic by WHO, the regular activities all over the world got struck. From the lessons learnt from similar infection spreads and also with mathematical modelling, supports the closure of schools as an effective way to decrease the spread of infection. Board exams for twelfth and tenth standard students were first postponed and later cancelled. Since the schools were closed, parents were deeply worried about their children's education. Online classes had a good welcome and response among the urban parents, but still the children and most of the educational institutions from rural areas were not able to shift to online education. Most of the urban parents were concerned not only on the education but also about their children's daily routines (Bao, 2020). When the children are left without work, especially the secondary school children, their total habits get disturbed. The aim of this survey is to analyse the opinion of urban mothers on the online education provided by their children's school. This was a questionnaire-based study using an online survey portal called "survey planet." An e-form was circulated among 202 urban mothers from Chennai, who had kids who went for secondary school education. The data were collected during July 2020. All the responses obtained were tabulated and reliability of the data was checked. The data was statistically analysed. When asked about how they felt due to the closure of their children's school, about 83.3% of the participants felt anxious and depressed, they were clueless on how their children's education is going to be. When the question on how they felt when their school announced online education, the participants had mixed opinions. 50% of them felt happy and relieved since their anxiety has been put to an end. But the other 50% of the participants were still worried since they were still not

convinced with online education. 50% of the participants feel that their children find the online classes as monotonous and unlively and another 50% of the participants think that their children don't like the online classes due to the lack of peers. It is the teamwork of teachers, students and their parents which will make this online education a success.

INTRODUCTION:

When Coronavirus, COVID 19 was announced as a pandemic by WHO, the regular activities all over the world got struck. First in China and followed by the rest of the world (Zhang et al., 2020), there was total or partial lockdown followed. When it comes for lockdown, all the countries start focusing or much care is usually given to the children of the country. Schools, Colleges and Universities were the first among all to enter lockdown. India is a large Country with a huge teenage population. (Lau et al., 2020) India announced lockdown at the end of March. All schools and educational institutions were closed without any further announcement (Husain et al., n.d.). From the lessons learnt from similar infection spreads and also with mathematical modelling, supports the closure of schools as an effective way to decrease the spread of infection. Board exams for twelfth and tenth standard students were first postponed and later cancelled. Since the schools were closed, parents were deeply worried about their children's education. (Sardar et al., 2020) Most of the schools from urban areas came out with online classes. Online classes had a good welcome and response among the urban parents, but still the children and most of the educational institutions from rural areas were not able to shift to online education. (Wadhwa and Khatak, 2020) The reason can be lack of gadgets and internet facilities. Again, the students who were preparing for their entrance examinations to be conducted for medical and engineering colleges were also dependent on online classes. Now, in these pandemic situations, though there are lots of shortcomings with respect to the online classes, the children and parents don't have any other options but to take and manage with it. (Sharma, 2015)

Most of the urban parents were concerned not only on the education but also about their children's daily routines (Bao, 2020). When the children are left without work, especially the secondary school children, their total habits get disturbed. They lose their responsibility and keep loitering without any work and proper directions. (Habibi et al., 2018) This situation not only affects their education but also their total mental and physical health. Parents especially urban mothers are more concerned about their children's mental and physical health. It is the major factor which has driven both the parents and schools to opt for online education (Thakur et al., 2020).

Again, when it comes to online education, there are too many modes or platforms which can be opted. Though it looks easy for the urban society, there is always a setback with the rural community. (Roberts and Green, 2013) Only a handful of private schools were ready to come forward for an online mode of education. With the facilities available with government run schools and rural based schools, education has become a dream for the kids. (Bayrakdar and Guveli, 2020)

Urban parents are usually much concerned about the studies of their children and take immense care to make them learn every day (Zimmerman and Weible, 2017). Most of the students from urban backgrounds in India usually fix an

aim to target medical or engineering exams after the boards. Parents, especially mothers are found to be more concerned about the studies and other extra curricular activities of their children (Sharma, 2015). When the government announced lockdown, there was a huge debate, whether to implement online education to school children. Even at the initial stages of discussion, urban parents were prepared to get online education for their children for two reasons, one is they don't prefer sending their children to school and getting them exposed to COVID and the other reason is they don't prefer missing education even for a single day. (Hasebrink et al., 2009) Unlike urban situations, online classes were not so welcoming in the rural areas as there was lack of network coverage, gadgets and moreover the schools there were also not prepared for the one.

The aim of this survey is to analyse the opinion of urban mothers on the online education provided by their children's school.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Design

This was a questionnaire-based study using an online survey portal called "survey planet." An e-form was circulated among 202 urban mothers from Chennai, who had kids who went for secondary school education. The data were collected during July 2020. The Questionnaire was prepared which included questions to assess their knowledge, awareness and perception towards online education. The Questions were framed in such a way to create awareness on the pros and cons of online education. Results were obtained using proper statistical methods, and thus, the opinion on the online education was studied.

The study subjects were recruited on a voluntary basis. The inclusion criteria required participants to be active, well spoken and mother of a secondary school going kid. The exclusion criteria included physical deformities, without a child in school and chronic diseases.

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument which was a questionnaire was prepared after extensive review of the existing literature. The questionnaire was reviewed and amendments were made to improve clarity of the questions to eliminate ambiguous responses. The questionnaire consisted a total of 14 questions. The questionnaire was shared to the participants using online survey platform.

Data Analysis

Only completed surveys were taken for analysis and the incomplete ones were eliminated. The statistical test used is descriptive statistics. All the responses obtained were tabulated and reliability of the data was checked. The data was statistically analysed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

After the announcement of lockdown, the entire country was shocked and most of the people were affected by losing their livelihood. Many have got stranded in various places and were unable to reach their destination due to lack of transport. All the industries and workplaces were shut. All schools and colleges were closed indefinitely. Due to the indefinite shut of educational institutions, parents especially, urban mothers were deeply worried and concerned about their ward's education. When asked about how they felt due to the closure of their children's school, about 83.3% of the participants felt anxious and depressed, they were clueless on how their children's education is

going to be. When the question on how they felt when their school announced online education, the participants had mixed opinions. 50% of them felt happy and relieved since their anxiety has been put to an end. But the other 50% of the participants were still worried since they were still not convinced with online education. According to them, they strongly believe that a secondary school kid will definitely miss out on the actual classroom education and online education can never be equal to that. When asked about the average online classes provided by the schools, 30% of the participants told that their school provided 3 classes a day and the remaining 70% of the participants have told that their school provides 4 classes per day on an average. When asked about the active participation of their children in these online classes only 13% of the participants have actively accepted that their children get involved, whereas 16% of the participants were not satisfied and have confessed that their children never listen to these online classes. The remaining 66% of them have told that their children's interest towards online classes are not consistent and it depends on the type and the nature of the class taught (Figure 3). 83% of the participants feel that online classes are new both the teacher and the children and feel that both the teacher and the children need to be trained in that aspect (Figure 2). Without proper training online classes may be a boredom for both. When asked for what aspect in online education needs improvement, (Mkrttchian et al., 2014) 100% of the participants think that both the children and the teacher need to work on this new aspect of online education. Most of the participants after analysing have found that if the teacher is not comfortable with her online session, then the entire class goes to waste. Though the mothers are anxious about their children's education, when asked whether they accompany their kids for online classes, most of the participants said they don't prefer. About 83.3% of the participants have told that they accompany their kids only sometimes when the class was not interesting or when their child felt tough to understand the concept. A majority of 66.7% of the participants accepted that they put in extra effort to teach their children, (Figure 1) as they feel that they may lag in their studies due to the loss of proper schooling. This is the place where an urban parent differs from the rest. Their prime concern is always studies and they are ready to go to any extent for it. Moreover, since there is lockdown announced, most of the working parents also tend to stay home, leading to an increased monitoring of studies (Burgess and Sievertsen, 2020). Writing skills and real learning atmosphere are very much essential for the kids to study. Online classes cannot give a real learning and competitive atmosphere, when a question is asked, a child has multiple options to tackle the same but in school, the child has no option other than to think. Thus 50% of the participants think that there is no learning atmosphere in online classes and other 50% of the participants think that there is a great lack in their writing skills. Writing is a skill which can be inculcated only through schools and especially for secondary children. 50% of the participants feel that their children find the online classes as monotonous and unlively and another 50% of the participants think that their children don't like the online classes due to the lack of peers. (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2015) When asked about the increased screen time due to online classes, again participants gave a mixed response as 50% of them were really concerned about the increased screen time, but where as another 50% were really not bothered as their kids already have an extra

screen time and these online classes doesn't have a role in increasing their screen hours. (Panovska-Griffiths et al., 2020) When asked about their opinion of reopening the schools 33% of the participants strictly told that they are not willing to send their kids back to school until the condition normalizes and another 66% of them has told that if the SOP are followed properly by the schools, then they are willing to send back their kids. (Figure 4)

For any country, it is the children population which is important and considered to be a most important asset. In India, especially among urban regions, each and every child prepares for either NEET or JEE or any other equivalent exams to get into top universities. It is the entire dream of the family. The studies of the growing children are taken care especially by the mothers. Most of the families in urban parts of the country spend a huge amount of money in the name of education. (Crozier et al., 2008) They spend not only in school but also put their children in various coaching classes to ensure that they are more competent. In this scenario, the unexpected lockdown has created a lot of pressure among the studying community. Though most of the urban schools suddenly go into online classes, there is ultimate lack of coherence between the kids and the teachers, especially if the teachers are more aged, they take a lot of time to get accustomed. Children are not able to take their online classes as their regular school, as they lack their friends, peer companionship and periods like physical training etc.

Teachers also feel that they are unable to control the kids during classes. As it is online classes, children tend to overrule their teachers and most of them don't obey. It is here the team work really gains success. Usually, urban mothers monitor their children's activity and don't leave them to overrule the classes. Thus a team work between the teacher, student and the parents helps in closing the circle and often results in success. Again, to break the monotonous nature of the classes, teachers should come forward to give small activities which can be done as a group at the end of every session for few minutes. Such activities will encourage the child and will keep them along with their peers. They will look forward for classes and will be willing to learn. Schools also should encourage teachers and help them reconstruct their classes to break the monotony.

In case of rural areas, schools can think of recorded video or audio classes for their children. Teachers should come forward to record at least an audio class, so that their children will be benefitted. Lockdown for schools can be extended for months together, until then children cannot be put aside from education. In case of urban region, parents along with schools are very active to provide an online education, care must be taken for the rural children. If children from rural sector are not taken care, then it will lead to an inequality in education, which cannot be equalized in the near future. All educationist and government should think about this aspect to avoid inequality in education.

Over all, from the survey it is understood that urban mothers are too anxious about their children's education and spend a lot of time towards the same. Urban schools also try to put in extra effort to take care of their student's education. Small modifications in the online classes can make the classes more interesting for the students as well as the teachers. Care must be taken to educate rural children so that the gap between the urban and rural children will be minimised.

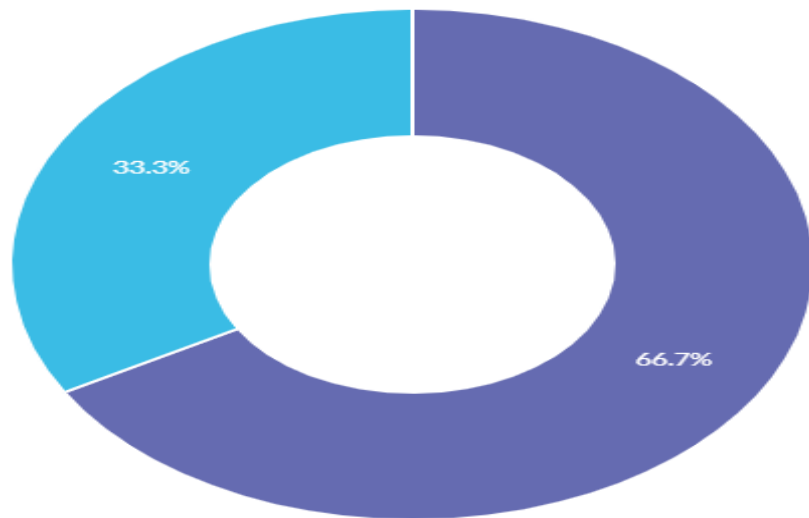


Figure 1: Pie chart represents the distribution of participants based on their opinion to put in extra effort to teach their children, as they lack proper schooling where, 66.7% (Navy blue) of the urban mothers accept that they put in extra effort to teach their children and 33.7% (Light blue) of the participants do not do so.

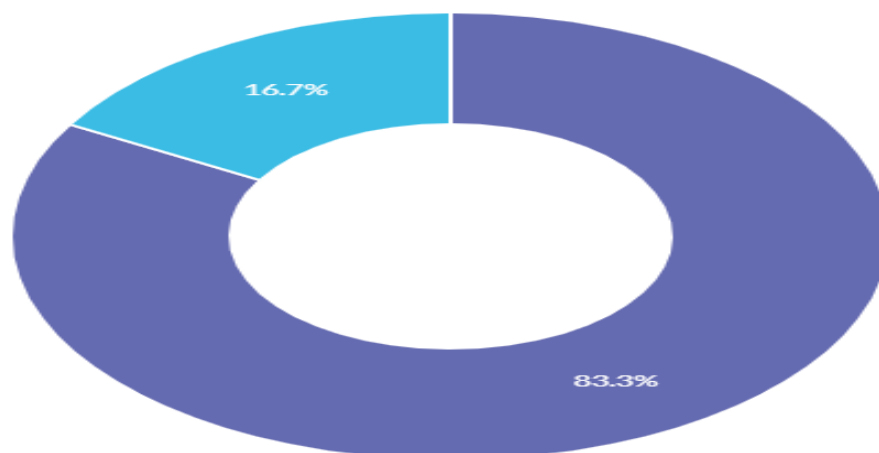


Figure 2: Pie Chart represents the distribution of participants based on their opinion on whether the child and teacher needs to be trained for online classes, where 83.3% (Navy blue) of the participants feel that both the child and the teacher need proper training for online education and 16.7% (Light blue) of them have no idea on the same.

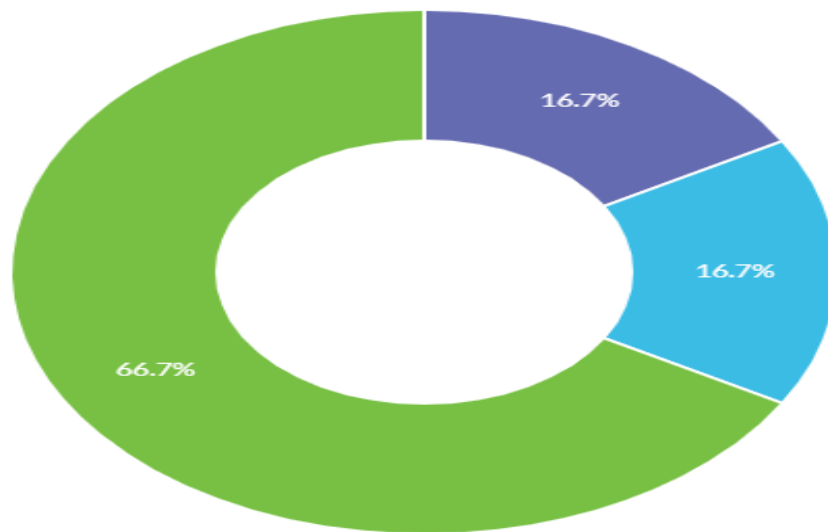


Figure 3: Pie Chart represents the distribution of participants based on their opinion on whether their children participate actively in online classes, where, 66.7%(green) of the urban mothers feel that their children actively participate only sometime which depends on the teacher who teaches , 16.7%(Light blue) of the participant were not happy as their child never participates actively in online classes and 16.7%(Navy blue) of the participants feel that their children participate actively in online classes.

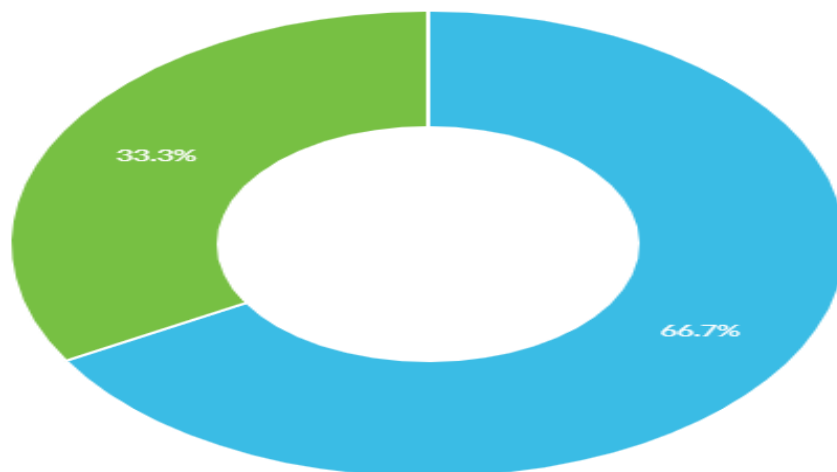


Figure 4: Pie Chart represents the distribution of participants based on their opinion on whether they be willing to send their children back to school after the lockdown, where a ,majority (66.7%) (Blue) of the participants were willing to send only if the SOP are strictly followed by the school and 33.3%(green) of the urban mothers were not willing to send their children to school if government announces opening of schools.

CONCLUSION

Online education is actually not an easy task as many would have imagined. It requires time management skills from both the students and teachers. It creates a sense of isolation, which is actually not encouraging, when children under 12 are learners. Children, especially secondary school goers, need a lot of interactions with their peers and teachers. It is not only from the classes they learn, they tend to learn as a group from what they see and hear. When there is an odd situation like COVID pandemic, we need to go for an alternative mode of teaching and there, these online classes come as an alternative. It is also the way we try to take and self discipline which most of the time determines the efficiency of learning. Urban parents, especially mothers, seem to be a lot more anxious about their children's studies. Parents also need to understand and analyse the situation as well as the well being of their children. It is the teamwork of teachers, students and their parents which will make this online education a success

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