Review of: "Child maltreatment in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic: A proposed global framework on research, policy and practice"

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With countries being able to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide, primarily due to vaccine campaigns[1] and successful containment strategies globally, epiphenomena of the pandemic are getting more and more into the spotlight.[2]

This excellent paper represents the results of an informal get-together of a working group of researchers and child protection professionals from 8 countries highly varying in the cultural and socio-economic background as well as digital development in order to understand child maltreatment (CM) as an

unintended fallout of lockdown measures imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study primarily aimed to develop a framework for an assessment of the risk as well as protective factors against CM during the current pandemic, both while lockdown measures were active and during the post-lockdown period. In this study, the authors used a modified ecological model of the National Research Council, 1993.

The causes of CM have been extensively studied and it should come as no surprise that factors that contribute to CM get worse during a pandemic with lockdown regulations.[3] Those regulations have a huge impact on interpersonal and social relationships as well as on poverty, racism, gender inequality. Thus affecting the consequences in terms of access, among others, to education[4][5], health care, child care, housing, digital information sources such as the internet and mobile phones. There are variations between richer and poorer countries, but effects on children are comparable in economically underdeveloped areas of wealthy countries and large sections of poor countries. This offers a basis for comparison of CM between societies that widely differ in wealth and socio-cultural aspects.

The main emphasis focused on measures to prevent the spread of infection. In this scenario, children are considered as less at risk of infection on the one hand[6][7][8][9] and a neglectable vector for the disease on the other.[10][11] However unintendedly, these measures have a great impact on CM.[3] Previously implemented child protective measures fail to meet their stated goals during a pandemic like the current one. As a consequence, increased cases of CM have been documented.

While the impact of the pandemic on CM needs to be addressed urgently, underlying causes[12][13][14] such as poverty, racism, gender inequality etc. need to be within the scope.[12] As long as these causes remain unresolved, it is unlikely that CM can be successfully dealt with. With the neglect of these underlying causes, the great social divide together with socio-cultural differences might prove to be difficult to overcome in attempts to develop a unified approach to deal with during and the post-pandemic period.
To provide a swift and effective guideline on the identification of CM as well as precursors and triggers, the ecological framework is developed.
Assessing risk factors and early identification is facilitated by the project and can therefore reduce the further impact of the pandemic on CM. While the COVID-19 pandemic unveiled immense grievances, the presented paper does not only address those problems but offers fast and effective solutions integrated into an intuitive ecological framework.

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