

COVID -19 and the Vulnerability of Children (0-5 years): A Question to Medical Practitioners?

Sr. Ednella Muchingamwa, HLMC.

What future generation will be there since the outbreak of COVID-19? Will those growing today be physically fit as nature without COVID-19 had intended it? How are we nurturing the young ones to make sure that as they silently fight the Corona virus disease no damage is done to their development? Will their cognitive development and memory be built up as it should be without COVID-19? What measures has there been to look at this?

These are some of the questions that have been going through my mind as we sail in the world of COVID-19. The Gestalt psychology that human attention is captured by all those phenomena known to human consciousness than those stimuli that are constant has been a reality for me today.¹ However, I do not intend to discard research on COVID-19 concerning children and babies that have been done so far. There is vast information from (UNICEF 2020), (WHO 2019 -2020) and other stakeholders who are dwelling mostly on secondary effects of COVID-19 upon children. In addition, recently the health researchers are saying “children are not currently eligible to receive the vaccine.”² Perhaps, one would ask a question whether the babies and children will not be affected in the near future. A minority have looked at how children are falling behind in their psychological and social development necessitated by the COVID-19 environment in which they are developing. My article is not meant to imply that the effect of COVID-19 can affect the health of uninfected babies and young ones nor is it meant to imply that the pandemic cannot be looked at by examining its current effects and infections as has been ably and tremendously done. I seek to present a pro-responsive perspective on the pandemic looking at children who are a vulnerable group in any circumstance. Consequently, this article seeks to raise an alarm to the readers to pay attention to this constant reality which is a fruit of my experience I had since March 2020. Possibly, it is focused in Zimbabwe, and probably Africa. I am concerned about children, especially the very young ones aged 0-5 years.

As I walk in the streets and in the country from March 24, 2020 to date, I see mothers carrying children on their backs, the child's mouth open, the nose not protected and the little one is innocently fast asleep. Fathers also walk around holding babies in their hands. Yes, babies should not put on masks. So far medical science is still researching and has so far with statistics proved that COVID-19 affects children and babies but to a lesser degree than it does to adults. Hence, as Gestalt puts it, can it not be that the medical practitioners and concerned stakeholders are relaxing a bit as we see mothers move around with babies at their back.³ I would like to give reference to the 1918 – 1919 Spanish flu. It was in three waves. The infant mortality rate was different and increasing at each wave. If the COVID-19 is also coming in waves, are we waiting for it to affect children so that quick measures can be taken?

In addition, COVID-19 is a respiratory viral disease. Could there be any impact on the development and growth of the lung capacity and lung flexibility of these under-fives who are exposed to the COVID-19 environment and are constantly fighting this virus and remain negative. At present one can safely say probably their lungs are more resistant to COVID-19 than adults. Consequently, they are in the environment where at first the virus did not infect the under-fives. Now because of the increase in the number of adults infected, the children and babies are more exposed and prone to the virus hence the probability that the rate of them being infected may rise. Those infected are not of much concern to me but those who remain negative though they are in the environment of COVID-19. I am of the assumption that when the young ones are in an environment of COVID -19, they breathe it, but their developing system fights it in one way or another. My question and worry are, in this process of continuously fighting the virus is there no “damage or lagging behind” that may come as after effects to the natural development of the child?

Though lock down measures have been put in place, both at national and international levels, there are also circumstances in which the under-fives have to move with their mothers. What further measures can be put to protect them? Moreover, the development of the Coronavirus Vaccine research also presumes that since children and the young ones “have low rates of severe disease and deaths they will not be prioritized for

the vaccination during the early vaccine deployment.”⁴ I also recalled Gelstat here when he alluded to the fact that our attention is captured by something moving rather than what is relatively still and that to all those phenomena that in this way attract our attention we attribute a higher degree of reality than the ones we do not know only because for the moment they are more important to us. I would like to imagine a ship’s radar scanner. It is a directional scanner used to scan objects in the space of the ship. However, the ship radar scanner is not able to see vast areas where there are no rocks. Hence with regards to COVID -19 and babies one can probably say human consciousness is prone to this myopic way of looking at things and temporarily screen away anything that is not immediately important to our scanning system based on sensing danger. In addition, a ship radar scanner does not see the state of the object whether it is empty or damaged. What it scans is that the route is not safe and can lead to collision. In reference to COVID – 19 and babies, is the Gestalt idea that human consciousness ignores constant stimuli and concentrates on troublesome things not an eye opener to the probability of setting up quick preventive measures for children and babies against COVID -19?

In conclusion, my experience of hearing the after effects of Covid 19 from those who have recovered is that there is loss of memory for some time and bodily weakness. If these are some of the after effects How assured are we as nations that the young ones WHOSE IMMUNE SYSTEM IS FIGHTING THE VIRUS HERE AND NOW AND REMAIN NEGATIVE, HAVE NO DAMAGE THAT IS DONE TO THEIR PHYSICAL FITNESS AS WELL AS TO THE GROWTH OF THEIR BRAIN ESPECIALLY THEIR MEMORY? WHAT GENERATION IS TO COME OUT OF THIS COVID-19 ERA?

¹ [healthline.com/health-news](https://www.healthline.com/health-news)

² [healthline.com/health-news](https://www.healthline.com/health-news)

³ Mads Soegaard, Gestalt principles of form perception, <https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/book/the-glossary-of-human-computer-interaction/gestalt-principles-of-form-perception> (accessed 8 February 2021).

⁴ adc.bmj.com/content/early/2021/01/04/archdischild.2020-321225