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Re-wilding our Children:

Using nature to cope with post-pandemic anxiety and depression.



Presenters

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Learning Objectives

1. Explore the role of Covid-19 pandemic on anxiety and depression in children and adults.
2. Discuss the loss of external out-of-home movement as a contributing factor.
3. Examine the benefits of using nature as a post-pandemic intervention.
4. Review strategies for 're-wilding' children and expanding their desire for being outdoors.

Objective 1

The role of Covid-19 pandemic on anxiety and depression in children and adults

- Increased depression and anxiety symptoms following the pandemic were related to increased alcohol and illicit substance use among both adults without children and parents, and this relation was stronger among parents.
- Whether increased substance use led to or was caused by increases in depression and anxiety symptoms is not clear, but their co-occurrence suggests reverberating impacts of the pandemic on adults' lives.

The role of Covid-19 pandemic on anxiety and depression in children and adults

- These patterns are similar to the recent phenomenon of “diseases of despair” (Shanahan et al. 2019) in response to stressful contemporary cultural conditions.

The Extent of Impact

The nature and extent of impact on this age group depends on many vulnerability factors such as:

- Developmental age
- Current educational status
- Having special needs
- Pre-existing mental health condition
- Being economically under privileged
- Child/parent being quarantined due to infection or fear of infection

Vulnerability factors

Children with special needs [autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, cerebral palsy, learning disability, developmental delays, and other behavioral and emotional difficulties] encounter challenges during the current pandemic and lockdown (CDC, 2019).

They exhibited intolerance for uncertainty and there is an aggravation in the symptoms due to the enforced restrictions and unfriendly environment which does not correspond with their regular routine.

Security at Home

A home represents a source of security and safety in most families. However, for the poor and the underprivileged, the opposite occurs.

With the restriction of movement due to lockdown, these children have increased risk of being exploited and becoming victims of violence and abuse (Cooper, 2020; United Nations, 2020)

Relieves Stress

In the times of paramount stress and uncertainty, a secure family environment which the parents can provide is a strong protective factor (Schofield et al., 2013)

There was evidence to show that parental practices and coping measures affect the children's post disaster mental health (Cobham et al., 2016)

Objective 2

The loss of external out of home movement as a contributing factor

Younger children (3-6 years old) were more likely to manifest symptoms of clinginess and the fear of family members being infected than older children (6-18 years old).

Whereas, the older children were more likely to experience inattention and were persistently inquiring regarding COVID-19

Confinement and the Internet

Further, due to prolonged confinement at home children's increased use of internet and social media predisposes them to use internet compulsively, access objectionable content and also increases their vulnerability for getting bullied or abused (Cooper, 2020; UNICEF, 2020b)

High Risk Population

- Children working on farms, fields in rural areas, children of migrants, and street children (Dalton et al., 2020; Rosenthal et al., 2020), had cultural impact of reduced neighbor association making rurality even more isolating.
- An increasing number of families with poor and street children had no source of income, making them a high-risk population to face abuse and mental health issues with greater vulnerability and exposure to unfavorable economic, social and environmental circumstances (Birla, 2019)



Recommendations

- Community-wide policy levers should also be prioritized, including ways to reduce stressful household disruption and increase attention to mental health needs



Recommendations

- Communities should limit ready access to alcohol, other substances, and prescription drugs (including opioids) that can be used for non-prescription purposes, especially for older adolescents and young adults.



Recommendations

- Policy leaders should be aware that mandates to re-open unfettered opportunities for substance use (e.g., bars, liquor stores) could exacerbate increases in substance misuse.



Re-wilding: What, why and how?

Objective 3

The benefits of using nature as a post-pandemic intervention:

- Calmness, joy, creativity, improve/facilitate concentration
- Multi-sensory experience(s)
- Sustained intellectual development
- Boosted mood



Other Benefits

- Improved motor skills, lower obesity rates, lower myopia (near sightedness) rates
- Improved sleep
- Improved academic outcomes
- Bonding within families
- Reduction in aggression
- Improved sleep

Objective 4

Strategies for 're-wilding' children and expanding their desire for being outdoors.

- Join forces with the community
 - Forming relationships with nature and community members
 - Battling digital isolation

It isn't all work!

Make it fun

- Treasure hunts, outdoor performances, start a collection
- Use tech to our advantage

Make art

- Sculptures, collages, suncatchers, windchimes, portraits



Nature is everywhere

- Embrace nature when/where you are
 - “Wildlife thrives at the edges”
 - Most people in urban settings live approx. 10 walking minutes of a park of some kind
- Embrace technology (if necessary)
 - “Do it for the gram” (safely)
 - Check out the newest Nature Challenge
- Lead by example
 - Get outdoors yourself
 - Play outdoors with your children

Blue, not lost.



Thank you

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