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2019 SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) Pandemic and Mental Health: Challenges to Homeless Children and Youths

Dear Editor,

The 2019 coronavirus pandemic has caused an austere impact on the health and wellbeing, especially of the homeless children and youths. During the pandemic, many have experienced innumerable mental health problems such as panic, anxiety, and depression. Furthermore, there are reports of psychotic disorders, including schizophrenia and bipolar, eating and trauma-related, obsessive-compulsive, paranoia and dissociation as a result of the pandemic.^[1]

Approximately 2.5 million children and youths annually experience homelessness.^[2] Homeless children and youths are part of the wider cohort of disadvantaged and vulnerable individuals, perhaps due to their exposure to one or more shocks in their lives, which influences their reaction to either a pandemic, terror attacks, or disease outbreaks.

The 2019 coronavirus disease is a threat to their safety and wellbeing, as a majority of them depend on well-wishers for their survival.^[3] Unfortunately, several governments and states globally implemented total and partial lockdowns to limit the spread, and as a result, their livelihoods were affected, leaving them with no coping mechanisms.

Signs of psychosomatic trauma among homeless children and youths include the feeling of terror, relapses in health conditions, loss of concentration, and assertiveness. In addition, they experience petulance, group retractions, hallucinations, and dreadful lifestyles.^[4] Comparably, psychological trauma may manifest in the form of cognitive, behavioral, physical, and psychological.^[5] These conditions may cause severe emotional and physical reactions that can persist, leading to depression, anxiety, adjustment disorders, and posttraumatic stress disorders (PTSD).

Homelessness has been reported as a result of civil unrest, loss of family members, physical, sexual and/or psychological abuse, and neglect by parents and guardians. Further, family challenges, both social and economic, may lead to homelessness. As a result, homeless children and youths significantly suffers from social isolations, loneliness, and insecurity, which often leads to crimes such as drugs and substance abuse, rape, unprotected sexual activities, and suicidal thoughts.

Globally, governments should be reminded that this is a critical mass that should not be ignored when planning for COVID-19 public health interventions. The success of curbing the spread of the current pandemic will be achieved if all stakeholders are involved. Certainly, the homeless children and youths must be included in the contingency plans.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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