



The Covid Pandemic and Our Children's Future: A Panel Discussion of the Long-term Effects of Covid on Children and the Role of the Church

April 21, 2022

On April 113 an expert panel from a diverse group of international organizations discussed the long-term impact of the Covid pandemic on children. This document covers key points made by the speakers. This is a summary of key statements and not a transcript. You are encouraged to view the complete recording to hear the complete discussion and learn the various observations, lessons, and recommendations from our panel. The recording is available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sBi7cs3XeQ8>

The Covid pandemic will have long-term consequences for children around the world. As Covid evolves from pandemic to endemic our response needs to shift from vaccination to mitigating the long-term impacts on the most vulnerable among us. This forward-looking (the emphasis on the near future) webinar asked a diverse expert panel to speak to the following questions:

1. What is the current state of children in your context, and what are the long-term consequences and needs that will result from these impacts?

Phil Green World Without Orphans

Grandparents are caring for children orphaned by Covid. What happens if the grandparent also dies? How many children have lost a primary caregiver? CDC estimated 7.2 million children have lost a primary or secondary caregiver.

Two out of three children who lose a parent is an adolescent. Three out of four have a lost their father. These have specific risks for later poverty and adversity.

We know that we need to strengthen families and avoid institutionalization. Churches are well balanced to make that happen.

Lanre Williams-Ayedun, Senior Vice President, International Programs, World Relief

Covid is magnifying the challenges we have faced for years. It is reversing the progress already made. Extreme poverty has risen dramatically. There is less access to food, education, health services, etc. As a result, we will see an additional 10 million early marriages due to a lack of opportunity for girls. Domestic violence is spiking. Loss of services disproportionately impacts women and their ability to care for their children. There is already a 10% rise in children who cannot read due to schools being shut or a lack of support for education.

On a positive note, we have seen great resilience and adaptability by programs and services in responding to the crisis.

Dr. Rob Rienow, Founder, Visionary Family Ministries

Children around the world are facing spiritual issues. There is a need to equip parents to provide spiritual guidance to their children in their home. Spiritual guidance has been delegated to the church or school. Scripture calls parents to be the principal spiritual guides.

Church communities need to be brought together, back from isolation. Loss of church has meant a loss of moral and spiritual support. Young families have been the slowest to return to church. Parents are facing major decisions about their families and need guidance and support. There is a call for unity of the church to increase support. Need a bold declaration of the gospel, especially as we face unending war and destruction, the world seems to be falling apart.

Dr. Les Dornon, Tansen United Mission Hospital, Nepal, UMC Global Ministries

Children have lost two years of schooling. In poor communities' people lack online access, or only have it via phone. The gap between rich and poor is growing larger.

Medical care has been neglected. Lockdown has blocked people from medical access or they were afraid to come. Common conditions have become more severe because people could not access care.

Chronic medical conditions among children that require ongoing management were neglected, such as people with epilepsy. This will have long term consequences.

Nepal depends on migrant workers who were sent to camps when they could not return home. Nepal also depends on tourism, which was cut significantly. As the economy slowed many families were destitute.

Mental illness also increased due to isolation and sense of despair. Domestic violence increased as did suicide.

Our main task for the future is to make sure this does not happen again by making sure everyone gets vaccinated.

Dr. Nezer A. Soriano, MD, MDiv. Program Coordinator of the United Methodist Health Board in the Davao Episcopal Area, Philippines.

In the Philippines, 3.5% of 3.1 million cases are among children. The impact on children includes hospitalization, multi-system failure, long covid, and death.

There has been a major setup of health targets, such as the effort to reduce the number of stunted children. Now 1 of 3 children are small for their age. Only 60% of people with HIV have access to care, down from a goal of 90%.

Pediatric vaccination is very low. General vaccination is high, but below herd immunity. Overall, the health status of children has suffered. Increase in number of orphaned children, loss of education.

Church must come together and act as one, demonstrate caring for one another. Church needs to create personal, environmental, social, and health systems so vulnerable people can thrive.

Craig Stewart, Senior Advisor-Church Partnerships, World Vision International

An apocalypse is an “unveiling” rather than an end. Covid as an apocalypse has revealed the inequity child face around the world. Child face dramatic increases in poverty, health, mental health and other issues. These are community concerns and will increase if we do not address them.

UNICEF notes that 23 million children under age 1 are missing basic vaccinations. 60 million will be suffering from increases in preventable disease, such as wasting disease, which has life-long consequences. 60 million will be suffering malnutrition and wasting disease.

Children who are refugees or living in conflict zones suffer the greatest impacts.

At the same time, we have seen significant activity from churches. Some who have opposed vaccines have changed after education and become advocates for vaccines.

The longer we take to address vaccine inequity the greater the suffering of our children.

Imad Aoun, Advocacy Specialist, COVID-19 Vaccines. UNICEF

Two priority areas for UNICEF are vaccination and education. Pandemic has taken focus away from other vaccination efforts. As a result, seeing a resurgence of other childhood diseases. Number of children with no vaccination has increased dramatically. A lot of work on behalf of children has been undermined by the pandemic.

Number of children out of school has also risen. UNICEF is working on getting children backed to school. Schools have not been a major source of virus spread.

People are overwhelmed with information and need a trusted source. That is a key role for the church. The church can be a bridge and link people to trusted sources.

Glenn Roy V. Paraso, MD, MPH, Executive Director/CEO Mary Johnston Hospital Inc. Philippines.

Our hospital is in a very depressed area of the Philippines. Seeing both immediate and long-term health consequences for children. Mental health is one area of long-term consequences. Essential services are interrupted. Online access is not practical where many people lack access to internet. Child labor has increased along with poverty, one impact being poor nutrition for children.

Need to increase family education and counseling regarding managing covid impacts. Create covid support fund to assist families. Create a pool of physicians, a public-private partnership, to help manage covid impacts.

The church has a key role in creating local solutions, encouraging participation, help people deal with mortality and coping with loss.

David Boan, Facilitator

Four overarching themes emerge from the panel's presentations:

First, the greatest impact on youth come from the loss of resources that are important for normal, healthy development. This includes resources related to health, family, faith, mental health, education, and more.

Second, the impact of major resource loss is both immediate and long term, largely due to the cascading nature of the effects of resource loss. For example, family loss at an early age impacts health, education, mental health, and more that unfold over time.

Third, if estimates of the impact on children focus primarily on infection and mortality then the full scale and scope of the impact on youth will be greatly underestimated.

And fourth, mitigation and recovery from these resources losses requires a whole community response, using multiple community systems (health, faith, education, etc), and for a long time.

The panel's responses to our second question address these themes.

2. What do we, as the church, need to do to help children and their parents and families with these impacts?

Phil Green

Faith leaders may feel overwhelmed by the demands of the pandemic. Many churches around the world have stepped up to demonstrate Good News. Church has three kinds of capital that are important to the community: access capital, social capital, and spiritual capital. For example, faith rituals, issues of meaning, and bridging to others are examples of spiritual capital.

Lanre Williams-Ayedun

Church positioned to identify those most in need, advance vaccine equity, responding to the economic impact of the pandemic. For example, World Relief builds networks of churches and provides technical assistance to rebuilt livelihoods. Church can also provide support to children, for example, providing children's organizations to build social support, emphasize whole family and whole community approaches to recovery.

Important to work with churches and government for child protection and prevent early child marriage.

Dr. Nezer A. Soriano, MD, MDiv

Some examples of church action include promoting vaccination through education and awareness, can operate food pantries to increase access to nutritional food, increase access to health services, work with others to build stronger health systems.

Glenn Roy V. Paraso, MD, MPH,

In Manila the community pantries were hit hard. Churches stepped up to improve food distribution. In addition to public education, provided educational programs for pastors to help overcome misinformation about the pandemic and vaccines. Also a key time for church and government to communicate and work together.

Dr. Rob Rienow

Other examples are to identify a small group of families that can be “lighthouse families” for ministry. Homes can become a place of ministry to others. Also recognize what children have lost. Some children need other families to step in and help compensate for loss of caregiver. Need to increase cross-generational ministry so relationships are built across generations, increasing resources for families.

Craig Stewart

Three ways for church to have impact: Be active in your community so you can see children in need and support the most vulnerable. Second, come alongside agencies working with children. Be involved in the “long work”. Third, get involved in advocacy in your community. Give voice to the vulnerable. Contact your government representative.

Appendix A: Participants

Facilitator:

David Boan, PhD
WEA Permanent Representative to WHO
President, Humanitarian Advocacy, Inc
Campaign Chair, Love Beyond Borders:” The Interfaith Movement to end the Pandemic

Panelists:

Phil Green
Global Partnerships Lead
World Without Orphans

Lanre Williams-Ayedun
Senior Vice President, International Programs
World Relief

Dr. Rob Rienow
Founder
Visionary Family Ministries

Dr. Les Dornon
Tansen United Mission Hospital, Nepal
UMC Global Ministries

Dr. Nezer A. Soriano, MD, MDiv
Program Coordinator of the United Methodist Health Board in the Davao Episcopal Area,
Philippines.

Craig Stewart
Senior Advisor-Church Partnerships
World Vision International

Imad Aoun
Advocacy Specialist, COVID-19 Vaccines.
UNICEF

Glenn Roy V. Paraso, MD, MPH,
Executive Director/CEO Mary Johnston Hospital Inc.
Philippines.

Appendix B: Webinar Resources Posted to Chat

Interfaith Movement to End the Pandemic web page:
<https://www.unicefusa.org/interfaithmovement>

UMC Advance Page: <https://umcmmission.org/advance-project/unicef/>

Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/LBBUMC>

Find out more about how many children in your country has lost a parent or grandparent caregiver as a result of COVID-19.. <https://worldwithoutorphans.org/covid-19>

World Relief published a report detailing the immense impact of COVID-19 on the world's poor, and actions that churches and communities can take to respond: <https://worldrelief.org/covid-report>

A free resource to equip and train parents and grandparents how to spiritual lead and shepherd their kids/grandkids. Available at www.VisionaryFam.com/Grace

00:43:17 Rob Rienow: A free resource for church leaders on the need to partner with families / equip families for the spiritual care of the next generation. Access this free e-book at: <https://visionaryfam.com/shop/why-every-church-needs-family-ministry-ebook/>

See the following helpful report on the role of church and faith leaders in COVID as it relates to children: <https://www.wvi.org/publications/report/coronavirus-health-crisis/faith-action-power-faith-leaders-fight-pandemic>

This is a short article which highlights Faith, Fragility and C19 as it relates to children: <https://www.wvi.org/opinion/view/faith-fragility-and-covid-19>

For more information on the impact of COVID-19 on children, including the most vulnerable – see the resources on World Vision's website: https://www.wvi.org/publications/coronavirus-health-crisis-?sort_bef_combine=created_DESC&sort_by=created&sort_order=DESC&page=1

To read more about UNICEF's routine vaccination work please visit the following website: <https://www.unicef.org/immunization/vaccines-for-all> World Immunization Week start on April 24th!

As Craig said - we are seeing a dramatic increase on Child Marriage and teenage pregnancy: <https://www.wvi.org/publications/report/coronavirus-health-crisis/covid-19-and-child-marriage>

Here are specific reports re Psycho-social Support impact:
<https://www.wvi.org/publications/policy-paper/coronavirus-health-crisis/shattered-lives-understanding-mental-health-and> on Financial Impacts of C19 - <https://www.wvi.org/publications/report/coronavirus-health-crisis/price-shocks>

For a report on World Visions work during COVID

<https://www.wvi.org/publications/report/coronavirus-health-crisis/covid-19-response-update-february-2022>

You can read more in UNICEF's website <https://www.unicef.org/immunization>

This Aftershocks reports summarise well what all the speakers raised:

<https://www.wvi.org/publications/report/coronavirus-health-crisis/covid-19-aftershocks-deadly-waves>

Very important point Imad; World Vision saw what a critical role of Faith Leaders played during C19 to provide correct information, combat misinformation and share appropriate faith messages, including bringing hope. We developed a Covid 19 Vaccine module to support faith leaders to play this role: <https://www.wvi.org/stories/zambia/channels-hope-covid-19-vaccines-model-elates-faith-traditional-leaders>

More information on how COVID-19 is causing backsliding on childhood vaccinations:

<https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/covid-19-pandemic-leads-major-backsliding-childhood-vaccinations-new-who-unicef-data>

One of the biggest problem of after COVID is trauma, children saw their parents dying any some are suffering because of that and I've seen children who are traumatized to the extent of hating themselves and the surrounding environment. As a church how should we help in such a situation?

You can access many resources on UNICEF USA's website

<https://www.unicefusa.org/interfaithmovement>

Appendix C: Other Resources and References

Boan and Ayers (2018) Creating Shared Resilience: The Role of the Church in a Hopeful Future. Includes a discussion of how the church builds community capital. [Available on Amazon](#)