



A Study on Emotional and Behavioural Issues Emerged during Pandemic among Children of Child Care Institutions

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic along with the lockdown had globally affected not only the physiological health but also the mental health of people. It had a detrimental impact on the elderly as well as children across the world. The children living in institutionalized care had and are still going through emotional and behavioral implications. Vulnerable children in the child care institutions have constrained access to socialization, play, which would further hamper the child's psychological and emotional wellbeing. The online mode has prevented these children from access to learning and have restrained their interactions with their peer group further making them feel more isolated. The uncertainty regarding the pandemic, unavailability of family members has put these children at risk for developing emotional and behavioral problems as they may feel lost and confused which may lead to irritability, frustration, withdrawal, anxiety etc. Social distancing and limited recreational activities made it more difficult for these children to come at par with the pandemic situation. Hence, to gain an in depth understanding regarding the effects of pandemic on the vulnerable children of Child Care institutions was studied. The data is collected from the Child Care Institutes from the States of Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and from Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Chandigarh. As per the study, there is a significant effect of the pandemic on the emotional and behavioral issues among children.

Keywords: Emotional issues, Behavioral issues, COVID 19 Pandemic, Child Care Institutions

I. INTRODUCTION

A large number of children in need of care and protection and children in conflict with law access the services under Mission Vatsalaya Child Protection Scheme under the aegis of Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India through the Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) in terms of residential care and protection. The children are provided with long-term care, treatment, education, training, development and rehabilitation during the pendency of any inquiry. Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 empowers the State Government either by itself or in collaboration with Social Organizations to set up Children's Homes in each district or a group of districts for the residential care of such children. These homes provide comprehensive child care facilities to children for ensuring their all-round development. They work towards enhancing the capabilities and skills of children and work with their families with the view to facilitate their reintegration and rehabilitation into mainstream society. The activities at Children's Homes include specialized services for children affected by terminal or incurable disease to prevent neglect by providing family counselling, nutrition, health interventions, psycho-social interventions and sponsorship.

There is a struggle to stay buoyant during these extraordinary times to this challenge of Pandemic but not enough attention is being paid to the impact of COVID-19 outbreak on children. On the education front, even though schools are trying their best to bridge the gap by providing online education, not all of them have access

to the required equipment's or even the internet connection. Due to lack of regular classroom education, children spend most of their time using screen times. The children in Child Care Institutions (CCIs) are at double risk due to minimal supervision in the institutions which leads to access to websites which is not suitable for them or even fall prey to cyber bullying. During these difficult times, children in difficult situations, who are sheltered in Child Care Institutions may have to be taken care very differently. The National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has issued a guideline for children in need of care & protection however, the functionaries of CCIs are now coming across with challenges to ensure rigorous implementation of preventive measures with limited infrastructure and resources. In this regard, a series of programmes were organized by National Institute of Public Co-operation and Child Development, Regional Centre, Mohali for different stakeholders who are implementing the Child Protection Services. The trainings also highlighted issues like Psycho- Social difficulties, Emotional Wellbeing of children, Life Skill Education, learning gaps due to online schooling, home based interventions/ strategies for supporting children with Special Needs etc.

II.NEED OF THE STUDY

In the above mentioned context, children had constrained access to socialization, play, and even physical contact, critical for their psychosocial wellbeing and development. Children in Child Care Institutions, especially, Children in Need of Care and Protection (CNCP) suffer extreme psychological emotional instabilities and further possess poor coping skills. They are more vulnerable to emotional and behavioral problems as they are susceptible to being exploited, abuse, and are subject to neglect, deprived of love, affection and care of parents. Hence, they are more likely to be emotional unstable, insecure, need of love and affection. Moreover, most of the children are brought up in institutional homes either in CCIs or Observation Homes where individual care is inadequate. All these factors can socially and emotionally impair these children which are later on exhibited in their behaviors, academics and personality. Therefore, the present study on emotional and behavioural problems among children of CCIs was taken up with the objectives to find emotional problems during COVID-19 Pandemic among children of CCIs; to identify the behavioural problems during COVID-19 Pandemic among children of CCIs and to recommend effective measures to deal with emotional and behavioural problems in children of CCIs in new normal situation.

III.RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Population and Sample

The universe of the study includes 307 number of CCIs where Children in Need of Care and Protection (CNCP) under JJ System from the States/ UTs of Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Jammu & Kashmir and Chandigarh. A total of 30 (10% of the universe) Child Care Institutions functionaries were reached out by adopting a stratified convenience sampling method for collecting the information using formats and checklists which are developed based on the mandatory standards under Juvenile Justice Act. The selection of respondents was made based on their participation in the orientation training conducted by the National Institute of Public Co-operation and Child Development, Regional Centre, Mohali (under the Ministry of Women and Child Development) and also their availability and convenience. The CCIs had children from the age group of 6-18 years and both boys and girls were included in the study.

3.2 Data and Source of Data

The data for the study was collected from primary and secondary source. The primary source of data was through questionnaire and interview schedule using face to face interview method from the caregivers like Superintendents, Counsellors & Social Workers. The first questionnaire encompasses the general information about the Child Care Institutions which included name of the CCIs, Establishment year, Number of children residing in CCIs, children's engagement while their stay in CCIs etc. The second and third interview schedule was to find the emotional and behavioral issues exhibited by children during pandemic respectively.

3.3 Research Design

The present study followed an explorative method with descriptive research design. The study used both quantitative and qualitative methods. In this study the emotional and behavioural issues among children of CCIs would be identified. The Independent Variable: Pandemic and the Dependent Variable: Age, Gender, Emotional & Behavioural Problems.

3.4 Theoretical Framework

The study conducted by Saurabh, K., Ranjan, S. (2020) on *Compliance and Psychological Impact of Quarantine in Children and Adolescents due to Covid-19 Pandemic* about one hundred twenty-one children and adolescents along with their parents were interviewed to find out their compliance and psychological distress during the quarantine period. The study also found that adolescents and quarantined children experienced greater psychological distress than children and adolescents who were non-quarantined. Worry, helplessness, and fear were the most common feelings experienced under quarantine.

In the study on *Behavioral and Emotional Disorders in Children during the COVID-19 Epidemic* by Jiao, W. Y., Wang, L. N., Liu, J., Fang, S. F., Jiao, F. Y., Pettoello-Mantovani, M., & Somekh, E. (2020) stated that the COVID – 19 outbreak led to children and teenagers getting mentally affected and are showing behavioral difficulties as a result. The children who are missing their school for an extended period of time instilled fears, unknown risks, and physical and social disconnection. They conducted a preliminary, which showed that the most common psychological and behavioral problems among 320 children and adolescents (168 girls and 142 boys) aged 3-18 were having fear of asking questions about the epidemic, irritability, clinginess, and distraction. In the conclusion they mentioned that the parents and caregivers should implement measures to combat the children's fears and concerns.

Gupta, S., & Jawanda, M. K. (2020) in their research article named *-The impacts of COVID-19 on children* highlighted the positive and negative impact of pandemic on children. They cited various researches in which they mentioned the effect of COVID -19 on education, the child's psychological and physiological health. They also mentioned how these changes are leading to behavioural issues among children. They further summarized it by stating that the COVID19 pandemic would have many long-term effects among children all over the world.

Yeasmin, S., Banik, R., Hossain, S., Hossain, M. N., Mahumud, R., Salma, N., & Hossain, M. (2020) in their study on *Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of children in Bangladesh: A cross-sectional, COVID-19's effect on Bangladeshi children's mental health was investigated*. They stated that depression, anxiety, and a sleeping disorder plagued the children. The study it was found that moderate and extreme mental disturbance was estimated to be 19.3 percent and 7.2 percent, respectively. They linked children's mental health problems to their parents' stress, as well as odd behaviours.

Imran N, Zeshan M, Pervaiz Z. in their review article on *Mental health considerations for children & adolescents in COVID-19 Pandemic* highlighted children's vulnerability, presented a summary of common anxiety symptoms across age ranges, and outlined the strategies and services available to improve children's mental health and wellbeing during COVID – 19 pandemic.

3.5 Statistical Tools

The responses of the Interview Schedules and Questionnaires were coded which was collated, analyzed and Interpretation were done both by using graphical presentations and descriptive illustrations. Simple statistical techniques like averages, percentages and graphical representations are used to analyze the data.

IV.RESULTS & DISCUSSION

In the Present study the data was collected from 30 CCIs from the states of Himachal Pradesh (07), Punjab (06), Haryana (08) and from UTs Jammu and Kashmir (5) and Chandigarh (4). The responses on Google Forms was collected from Superintendents, Counsellors and Social Workers of Child Care Institutions. After the receipt of the responses based on the observations of the functionaries of CCIs the emotional and behavioural issues were studied. The 30 CCIs had 1161 children residing with 418 boys and 673 girls in different age groups

Table 1: Age wise Distribution of Children in 30 CCIs taken for the study

Age Group of Children (years)	Number of Boys	Number of Girls	T Total No. of Children in 30 CCIs
6 - 10	67	117	154
11 - 13	98	156	314
14 - 15	112	153	295
16 – 18	141	247	398
Total	418	673	1161

4.1 Emotional Issues

Among the 30 CCIs studied regarding emotional issues among children in the institutions the functionaries reported that 42.3 percent of the children had a fear of COVID–19 transmission, 11.5 percent feared for academics, 9.2 percent feared going out of the CCIs and 26.9 percent reported other forms of fear like uncertainty about future, being trapped inside only due to virus and so on. It was reported that majority (65.4%) of children never felt guilty for any of their behaviors, actions, thoughts, feelings, words, whereas 19.2 per cent reported that children have shown more than usual guilt and about 15.5 per cent of them responded that the children have started feeling guilty. This could be because as when an individual starts feeling low, helpless, and hopeless or feel they don't have control over things it leads them to feeling of guilt. Further, it was also found that majority (73.1%) of the CCIs functionaries reported started that have noticed no self-esteem issues, 15.4 reported that the children at CCI have experienced low self-esteem and 11.5 reported children to have low self-esteem issues. The low self-esteem was assessed by the functionaries when children avoided a challenge/task given to them even without trying it. It has been seen that the children residing in CCIs tend to have self-esteem issues but during the pandemic situation these self-esteem issues might have increased owing to less control over things/situations and less social interaction. On the other side 73.1 percent of the respondents reported to have noticed lack of confidence and 26.9 percent reported to have noticed overconfidence in the children. The low confidence levels might be reasoned out due to the online schooling started during the pandemic. Online schooling has already impacted the learning of the children during the COVID-19 pandemic, but the children in CCIs have been impacted more as they had less accessibility and to smart phones in CCIs which led them to lag behind in academics, which further have dropped their confidence levels as they found it difficult to catch up with the classes and syllabus.

The functionaries were asked if the children feel inferior, or the pandemic has impacted theirself-concept. It was found that majority (37.2%) percent children thought that others opinion is more important than their own and have hard time asking for help which again impacted their self-esteem whereas, 27.3 per cent of children felt intimidated or inferior around certain people which can be due to dropped or low confidence levels. Again, about 12.6 per cent of the respondents mentioned that children were extremely critical of self and same per cent of responded mentioned that children had plenty of regrets. Again, 10.3 percent of children were found to be constantly worried about what they did or did not do and children felt that they aren't good enough and they became demanding. The respondents were also asked if the children felt demoralized/degraded especially

during the pandemic period to which majority (80.8%) responded no and 19.2 percent respondents reported that the children have felt demoralized and degraded. This can be reasoned out to lagging in academics, less opportunity to connect to outside world. It was also found from the respondents that 69.2 per cent children felt sad or low during the pandemic period and 30.8 percent responded never. The limitations to go out for leisure time, going to school, connecting with peers has certainly led to the feelings of sadness in children. The respondents were asked if the children at their CCIs feel loss of control over situations. The majority (34.6%) reported that children feel the things aren't in their control. This inability to control situation and uncertainty about future inculcates apprehensions which then leads to behavioral issues. Followed by this 22.8 percent of children reported no issues. It was also found that 19.2 percent of the respondents reported that during the lockdown and pandemic period the children feel stuck and 12 percent of children reported to have negative thoughts. These negative thoughts impacts their self-concept and self-esteem. Further, about 7.60 per cent children felt bored of controlled atmosphere and rest 3.8 per cent children have no expectations of improvement in future. The respondents were also asked if the children at their CCIs exhibited trust issues 7.7 percent of the children were observed to show trust issues whereas 76.9 percent didn't show any trust issues and 15.4 children have exhibited trust issues especially during the pandemic period. Again, respondents reported that only 7.7 children at their CCIs showcased emotional coldness or being indifferent whereas 69.2 reported to have no emotional coldness. Further, 23.1 percent reported that the children have felt emotionally distant and indifferent during the pandemic period.

The data also pointed out that the children in CCIs did not display feelings of hostility and jealousy. The majority (69.2%) of the respondents reported that the children didn't display increased feelings of hostility and jealousy during pandemic period. 19.2 percent reported that the children have felt jealous and hostile whereas 11.6 percent of functionaries reported the children to have showcased increased jealousy and hostility. It was also found that 84.6 percent of the respondents reported that the children didn't feel aloof. 11.6 percent children reported that the children felt aloof and 3.8 per cent responded that the children felt aloof during the pandemic.

The study also found that children started losing their interest in various activities during the pandemic. Majority (46.2%) children of CCIs lost their interest in academics, 15.4 percent of the respondents reported that the children lost interest in leisure activities, 15.4 percent children lost interest in group activities and equal 11.5 per cent lost interest during tasks and decline in interest in hobbies respectively. In another question, the respondents reported that 65.4 percent of children didn't showcase any overly emotional response to a situation during pandemic period, whereas 19.2 percent children were reported to have displayed exaggerated emotional responses. 15.4 percent respondents reported that the children might have shown an exaggerated emotional response. In the study the respondents were asked if the children at their CCIs became over-sensitive and became easily affected by small things during the pandemic. The respondents reported that 57.7 percent of children didn't showcase oversensitivity, whereas 26.9 percent reported that the children have become over sensitive and 15.4 percent respondents reported the over sensitivity of children is during pandemic response to a situation during pandemic period.

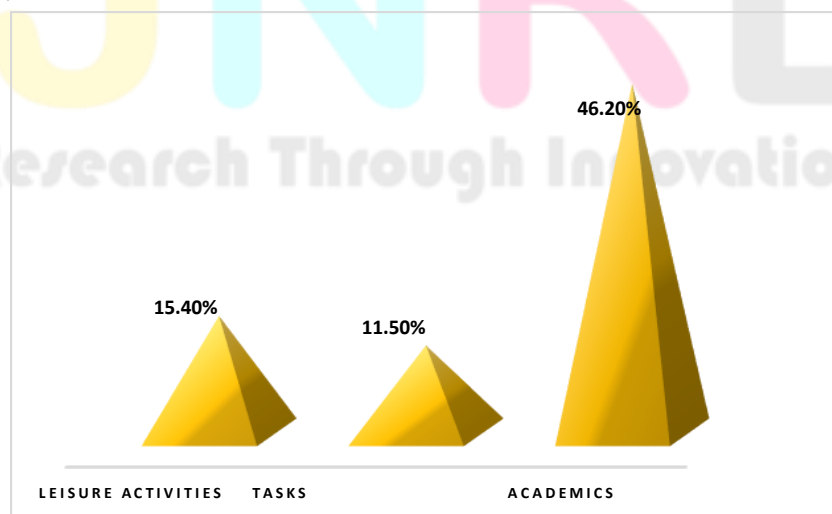


Fig.1.1 Domains in which the children residing in CCIs lost their interest during pandemic

4.2 Behavioural Issues

The pandemic has restricted the children from outdoor play and other social activities which might have led them to frustration. The frustration and anger is often exhibited by children through their overt behaviors. The study found certain behaviors which points out that majority (56.67%) of children residing in CCIs did not exhibit violent and aggressive behavior while on the other hand, 43.33 percent of the population did exhibit violent and aggressive behaviors in the institutions with inmates and staff members. Following the aggression and violence, it was found that the fights among children staying in CCIs were more. The data showed that 46.67 percent of children didn't engage in fights but 40 percent did get involved in fights with other children/peers. This could be due to inability to contain their apprehensions, emotions or unable to comprehend their feelings/anger. While 13.33 percent weren't sure about the fights. Further, 56.67 per cent of children were reported to have good concentration and focus during the lockdown while 43.33 per cent of children faced difficulties in attention and concentration which were reasoned out to be because of lack of counsellors/professional counselling for the vulnerable group of children (8-18 years), suspension of academic and vocational classes, no parents-teacher meet, changed and difficulty coping with the change/restrictions on social/peer interactions, no work to focus or concentrate, inconsistent routine, apprehensive about future and misconceptions about COVID-19 outside about the virus. All these led to poor or difficulty concentrating in academics & other activities.

The study also found that many a time's children exhibit their behavioral problems/issues by throwing tantrums, either to gain attention or gets their needs/want met. The more the attention paid to tantrums, the more is the number of tantrums likely to be thrown in future. Owing to this, the children residing in CCIs were reported to exhibit more tantrums in "others" category (50%) of children in comparison to disobedience (30%), stubbornness (20%) and breath holding (3.33%). Disobedience further leads to defiant behavior in children, especially who aren't emotionally strong and lack love & warmth. The Majority (63.33%) of children weren't reported of exhibiting defiant behavior where they disagree to follow instructions, defy rules and requests. Whilst 26.66 per cent of children did exhibit defiant behavior, yet 10 percent weren't sure about the defiance. This could be due to underlying temperamental challenges makes them short tempered and need more time to calm down putting them in vulnerable zone. Also, the children in CCI might have had a tough time getting separated from parents or may be a pattern of acting out in order to obtain more of this perceived extra attention. The behavioral issues in children can also be observed as a decline in self-care routine as the child psychologically withdraws from the routine/discipline in daily activities. The children of CCIs were reported to have a decline in self-care routine (26.66%) during the pandemic period but majority of children were reported of no decline in self-care routine (63.33%) and 13.33 per cent weren't sure.

The restrictions imposed by the government during the lockdown period made the children stay inside throughout which might have impacted their psychological well-being along with the apprehensions & fears attached to the virus. This might have made them avoid the tasks/activities, people and situations they might have encountered. The research data pointed out that 33.33 percent of the children residing in CCIs started avoiding tasks, 26.66 percent started avoiding people, 13.33 started avoiding situations, while 23.33 percent didn't avoid any of these, 3.33 percent avoided all these including academics and personal responsibility and also 3.33 percent started avoiding due to the inability to move out. Often when children/adolescents or adults get frustrated, they tend to become irritable and especially during the pandemic period due to numerous limitations, people started becoming irritable. The data collected pointed out that 48.31 percent of children became irritable during pandemic while 48.31 didn't feel irritable and 3.33 percent of children weren't falling in either category. This might be due to the adaptation to the lockdown situation, changed routine and lifestyle that with time the irritability reduced. Due to the limitations and restrictions of movement, the social interaction in person got limited but were able to connect online with their relatives/family/friends. The data of children from CCIs indicates that the 38.71 percent of children became disconnected or inactive socially (with relatives, friends) during lockdown, while 54.83 percent weren't disconnected socially and 6.45 percent weren't sure. The changed pattern/routine and lifestyle during the COVID-19 period has led to multiple changes which also included our sleep pattern as well as appetite. Focusing on sleep, as children weren't allowed to move out, physical activity was restricted, people were bound to face sleep difficulties as our bodies have a biological cycle which helps us follow a particular pattern. The data of institutionalized children reported that the majority of the children (93.54 percent) didn't face any sleeping difficulties during the pandemic period, 3.22 percent

3.22 weren't sure. No sleeping difficulties might be due to the consistent routine and discipline that is followed in the Child Care Institutions would have contributed to it. Focusing on the other dimension, that is, appetite, 58.06 percent of children were reported of not having any appetite changes, 25.8 percent of children were observed to have change in appetite and rest 16.12 percent was not sure to be in any of the category.

Often child exhibit their emotional problems through physical ailments or pains, as they are not able to directly communicate their feelings which they are unaware about. The data pointed out that majorly 80.64 percent of children didn't complain of any physical concerns, like stomach aches, body aches, or any other bodily complaints, during lockdown. Only 16.12 percent presented with such physical concerns during lockdown and rest 3.22 percent weren't sure about it. Frustration often leads to irritability, anger issues and crying spells where the children become overwhelmed or express exaggerated emotions. Exaggerated emotions can be shouting or crying frequently over peculiar issues. Majority of children (87.09) in CCIs didn't exhibited crying behavior, 6.45 percent of children did exhibit frequent crying spells and another 6.45 percent of children weren't sure of exhibiting such behavior during the lockdown period. Children often engage in some behaviors just in order to seek other person's attention towards them. The children residing in CCIs were reported to be non-indulgent in attention seeking behavior (48.38 percent), 35.48 percent were involved in behaviors that were attention seeking and 16.12 were of the opinion that might be they were seeking attention or not.

Bullying behavior during pandemic period was also studied among children residing in CCIs. The data revealed that 70.96 percent of children weren't involved in bullying other inmates, while 22.58 reported of bullying others and 6.45 percent of children were placed in the category where they may or may not be involved in bullying behavior. Emotional withdrawal, helplessness, hopelessness often leads to feelings of giving up or quitting. Similar feelings were a part of lockdown period as well. Children of CCIs were studied on this dimension as well, where the data yielded that majority of children 93.54 percent didn't have any sort of suicidal thoughts during the pandemic period while only 6.45 percent reported of children having suicidal thoughts. Substance abuse which often occurs due to emotional issues was also looked upon among the children residing in CCIs. The data revealed that 80.64 percent of children didn't engage in substance abuse behaviors, 12.9 percent of children did get involve in substance abuse behaviors and rest 6.45 percent didn't fall in either of the category. The last dimension studied was of sexual misconduct, where data showed that 100 percent of the population weren't involved in any sexual behaviors or misconduct.

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V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

It can be inferred that the children residing in CCIs encountered a number of emotional difficulties during the lockdown period such as developing fears regarding virus, uncertainty about future, dropping self-esteem and poor self-confidence issues, feeling degraded/demoralized, feeling guilty about their actions/behavior, feeling that they aren't valued, feeling sad/low, feeling that things aren't in their control and they are stuck, being emotionally cold and indifferent to situation/things around, being jealous/hostile, losing interest in academics, have become over sensitive where they exhibit exaggerated emotions. In regard to children residing in CCIs facing behavioral issues during the lockdown period they exhibited aggression and violence, getting involved in fights, defiant, difficulty concentrating, attention seeking behavior, poor self-care, behavioral tantrums (disobedience, stubbornness, etc), avoiding people, tasks, situations, responsibilities, declined social connectivity, decreased appetite and sleep problems, increased irritability and crying spells.

1. The study recommends a need for effective and consistent counselling services in the CCIs to deal with the emotional and behavioural issues among children of CCIs.
2. The children in CCIs have double challenge dealing with the institutionalization and also the pandemic situation, Therefore, the functionaries of CCIs need to constantly and consistently facilitate and prepare children to deal with challenges during pandemic situations. This can be done by scheduling a special time of the day where the functionaries connect with the children personally in a gadget free environment.
3. It is important to engage children in more constructive ways and channelize their energy in positive

direction. Life skill education should be imparted with group discussions and group activities and enhancing creativity which would help the children develop their self-concept and self-esteem. Constantly appreciating the efforts put in by the child and praising them regularly helps boost their morale and confidence levels.

4. It has come to light that the counselors in CCI need to recognize the feeling of children and should be able to communicate unconditional love and concern for them verbally as well as through actions. Children of CCIs should be valued, their opinions should be respected and considered as well for improving their self-esteem and confidence. Connecting with the children and clear communication helps to know their feelings and thoughts. Being a good listening ear to children helps their emotional wellbeing.

5. As all children need emotional and interpersonal guidance it is imperative to organize more training programmes for the functionaries of CCIs inclusive of Superintendent, Counsellors and Child Welfare Officers of CCIs to equip them regarding various techniques of guidance and counselling. The undesired behaviors have to be ignored in order to avoid reinforcing negative behaviors. Tantrums should never be encouraged or rewarded. Time out strategies help reducing the tantrums. If the child exhibit aggressive/violent behavior, provide separate space to vent out anger. Managing time span for attention problems, conducting attention enhancing activities in group or individually, connecting with friends/family through online mode, having a consistent routine/discipline.

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