

Forced self-isolation during the coronavirus fight is a challenge for both parents and children. Psychologists call on parents to show patience and develop a new tactics of relations with children in this period.

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*A teenager in depression. This photo is for illustrative purposes only and has nothing to do with the main character of the publication.
Photo: justsayyes.org*

Bokonbayevo is one of the villages in the southern coast of Lake Issyk Kul. Local residents are mainly engaged in travel business, run guesthouses and yurt camps. Just like in any other small town, news spreads fast among residents.

This time the news about the suicide of a teenager in the village was not neglected. A 16-year-old teenager was found hanging in the shed near the house in the afternoon of March 28. Doctors certified death.

The boy was living with his maternal aunt. He studied at the 8th class of a village school, where his aunt worked as teacher, too. According to villagers, the boy's father died and nothing was heard about his mother.

Since March 22, the emergency regime was introduced across Kyrgyzstan and on March 16 all pupils and students had to shift to remote learning in order to prevent coronavirus infection. From the beginning of the lockdown, 5 teenagers, including Azamat, committed suicide in Issyk Kul region.

“Teenagers aged 11 to 14 have committed suicide. Similar facts were registered in Balykchy, Issyk Kul, Ak Suu, Dzhetai Oguz and Ton districts. Children are under supervision of their parents 24/7. Now they need special attention. I call on parents to be more restrained and not to reprimand their children. It’s too bad we lose children,” Elmira Usenova, deputy plenipotentiary representative in Issyk Kul region, said on March 31 as [cited](#) by Radio Azattyk.



Elmira Usenova. Photo: Plenipotentiary representative office of the government in Issyk Kul region

According to the ministry of social development and labour, 32 teenagers committed suicides in the first quarter of 2020. During the lockdown, from March 25 to April 30, 13 teenager suicides were registered. In 2019, 62 suicides were reported among minors.

According to experts, the main reasons for such a fatal step are disagreement with parents, diseases, one-way love, disputes with friends.

“Teenagers commit suicides during the lockdown, when they are under constant supervision of parents. It manifests the crisis in relations between children and parents, lack of parental skills in responding to teenage problems properly. Moreover, the internet environment has had influence on the situation,” **Mira Sharapova**, specialist of the department of social services to families and children, said.

According to her, the ministry of social development together with other agencies develop a plan of prevention of suicides among children and young people every year. This task force contains ministry of social development, ministry of interior affairs, ministry of health, ministry of education, as well as local authorities. Trainings with schoolchildren are held with the help of local governments.

“The violence we don’t know about”

According to specialists, isolation of children and their constant staying at home have had a negative impact on children protection issues. Sometimes, it was school that identified many problems, when teachers or classmates would find changes in behaviour or signs of violence

in a child.



Dinara Davletbaeva. Photo: a screenshot of a video of UNICEF-Kyrgyzstan

According to **Dinara Davletbaeva**, head of the Children Assistance Centre of the Mayor's Office of Bishkek, parents who don't use violence against children will use the same form of parenting during the lockdown.

Moreover, in families where violence is used, children are more likely to be exposed to violence from relatives during the lockdown.

"Previously, a child was at school and wasn't at home for some time, and didn't cause much irritation among adults, and now they have to stay at home for 24 hours," Davletbaeva said.

Besides, the situation of children in families worsens by the social and economic status of the family. Unemployment, no income, food, and other factors can cause irritation.

"A parent cannot beat the coronavirus, reach the government or president and naturally would show aggression toward family members," she said. "Not only children, but also old parents, disabled relatives, who are taken in our society as a burden, will suffer here."

Adults call more to the Children Assistance Centre because of problems with relatives, partners, including children. According to Davletbaeva, isolation prevents many children from calling for help.

"The lockdown contributed to increasing violence we don't know about because these people cannot go out and complain. As any movement in the city was prohibited, they could not call for help by phone as they are under constant control of parents. If a child complains, it can be another reason for his parents to beat him. If we do not know, it does not mean there is no violence," Davletbaeva said.

Panic moods of people during the pandemic have negatively affected the willingness of parents to get consultation on children protection.

“It was hard to communicate with parents and call on them to not beat their children. If parents are willing to get help in ordinary conditions, in this situation it was difficult to get their understanding. Parents did not listen to us when we tried to offer consultation to them. The situation has had its impact and people were in fear. On the one hand, they were afraid of getting infected, on the other hand, they had problems with children,” **Nazgul Turdubekova**, director of League of Children’s Rights Defenders, said.



Photo courtesy of Nazgul Turdubekova.

Restricted movement and the curfew complicated activities of public organisations that are engaged in children security issues. According to Nazgul Turdubekova, during the lockdown they faced problems when they wanted to help in crisis situations.

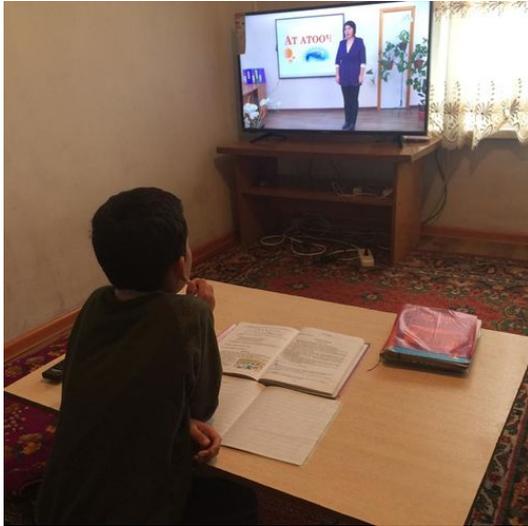
“Just like the rest, we were restricted in providing mobile help. Because of the curfew, we could not take the victims of domestic abuse from home and we could not visit their place. It was the number one problem,” Turdubekova said. Also, according to her, local authorities solved some movement issues.

“Thus, we could do our job due to the vehicles, which were provided by our partners from the office for social development of the mayor’s office of Bishkek,” Turdubekova said.

Distance education of children as one of the reasons of violence

According to human rights defender Turdubekova, one of the reasons of abuse of children were problems encountered during the distance education of children.

Thus, during the lockdown, 150 mothers, including 40 complaining about problems of children with distance learning, called the League of Children’s Rights Defenders.



A pupil watches the Kyrgyz language lesson on TV. Photo: press service of the ministry of education

Introduction of distance learning in Kyrgyzstan has revealed a range of social problems. Many families haven't even had a TV, not to speak of a smartphone, which children could use to watch video lessons. To solve this problem, local authorities started to provide families with TVs. Even so, many children are left without access to online education. Minister of education Kanybek Isakov answering the questions of the members of parliament on May 15 said there were 4,000 families with no TV, as well as 30 thousand children with no smartphones for a full participation in distance education.

Children could have difficulties with education due to a large volume of home assignments and shortage of time to do them, which was noted by education minister Isakov on April 14 during the online conference with the heads of city and district departments of education.

If this situation was at first, now teachers try to give more feedback by responding to pupils' questions related to subjects. A teacher of one of city schools, Gulzhamal Zhusupova, said that many pupils face hardships when connecting to online lessons, when it comes to practising the material.

"Not all children can connect to online classes for technical reasons on time and successfully. So, we are trying to understand their situation," Zhusupova said.

Even if children have access to internet and lessons, many of them encounter problems with doing assignments online.

"When children failed to cope with assignments, parents lost their rag and even beat them. In their appeals, parents said that children refused to study and could not stay focused. It was a problem for parents to make children study online. Parents also needed moral support. In this situation, quiet psychological atmosphere should be in priority rather than performed lessons," human rights defender Turdubekova said.

Community approving violence

In April, social media and WhatsApp messenger spread video when a man beat a 9-10-year-old child forcing him to do push ups. The video received widespread reaction of users who demanded to find and punish the perpetrator. The case was taken under control of the ombudsman and human rights defenders, who called for restricting his further contacts with the kid and other children.



Screenshots of a video where father beats his son

According to experts, some Kyrgyz families approve violence against children. Adults can often say such phrases as, “My parents used to beat me, but I was raised a good man”, or “they should be beaten for educational purposes”. Thus, violence against children in a family can be committed from generation to generation.

“Some parents think that children may be and should be beaten because they are disciplined thus and would be prevented from ill acts,” psychologist Dinara Davletbaeva said. “However, there is a reverse side of the coin. A child grows up with low self-esteem, he starts to show aggression towards those around him and stops trusting adults. He is forced to lie trying to avoid punishment. And then parents wonder why their children grow up deceitful and coward.”

Police officers have identified the man who beat the child on the video. It was a 35-year-old Kyrgyzstani who lived in Moscow with his family. The Investigative Committee of Moscow initiated a criminal case on article 117 (Torture), 156 (Neglect of children) of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. The Kyrgyzstani was detained for 2 months during the investigation.

Psychologist Dinara Davletbaeva admitted that this person could have been raised the same way in childhood.

“We need to explain to citizens that now it leads to criminal prosecution. So parents should be taught to use non-violent methods of education. Now there is so much useful information on the internet regarding responses to child’s behaviour that irritates you. They need to understand why it happens. Maybe a child behaves so not to get you angry, but due to age-related changes,” Davletbaeva said.

Myths about large families and family planning issues

Specialists say it is a mistaken opinion that most often violence is seen in large and low-income families.

Human rights defender Turdubekova mentioned the practice of her fund and noted that many children in a family has nothing to do with violence against children.

“It depends on personal qualities of adults. In Kyrgyzstan, a family with 3-4 children is a standard family. Violence against children and families with many children are not interrelated. Such statements can only cause hate towards families with many children,” Turdubekova said.

Vice versa, according to the human rights defender, many large families have a supportive atmosphere where children take care of each other and become independent.



Large family in Kyrgyzstan. Photo is given for illustrative purpose only and is not related to the problem described. Photo: sputnik.kg

“There are many advantages in large families, if parents are not alcoholics and they do not lead an unconventional life. If this is an average family in a village, this family definitely rears cattle, maintains garden, has an average affluence. In such situations, we should raise the question of support to large families, not their disapproval. Poverty cannot be the reason of violence. Money is not needed to stop violence, we need to lose heart to contribute to it,”

human rights defender Turdubekova said.

Psychologist Dinara Davletbaeva also noted it is a widespread mistake to think that children are exposed to violence only in poor and large families.

“We can see that children are strictly punished in better off families, too, where they have only 1-2 kids. Such punishments can lead to mutilations and disability. It all depends on people, sometimes it’s very hard to understand such things,” Davletbaeva said.

Meanwhile, she noted that one of the factor of violence against children can be the unintended pregnancy.

Pregnancy planning cannot influence the methods of child raising, yet it can exclude the factor when the child is not loved.

“Some families use violence against a kid if they don’t love it. A family should plan pregnancy, which will help many families to avoid poverty, deprivations of children. But, unfortunately, people follow the principle when giving birth to children, “If there’s a child, there’s a prosperity. God will help.” I wouldn’t say Kyrgyzstan practises planning widely,” psychologist Davletbaeva said.

Information about pregnancy planning can be found on the internet, but the critical question is the sexual education of teenagers.

“This topic is a taboo here, at first parents think it is too early to let children know about it, and then it gets too late. When parents and school do not talk on this topic, the kid will find someone who will. It is a different matter what kind of information and where from they will get it. It is important to provide information properly,” Davletbaeva said.

How to help a child during the lockdown?

To help a child during the lockdown, UNICEF specialists in Kyrgyzstan recommend that parents take the following steps:

- Follow the daily routine familiar to the child;
- Parents should focus on attempts and efforts of children to study, not on their mistakes;
- Parents should not reprimand children for not understanding school topics;
- Make a graphic schedule of classes that will not only boost spirits of children, but also let them see who’s the teacher and when to contact them;

- Parents may tell their children they are not alone and that all schoolchildren in the world take part in it;
- Support creativity and imagination of kids without restricting them;
- If they see any failure related to the distance learning process, they should not spread negative emotions about such failure or speak of them loudly and irritatingly;
- At the end of every day, parents may analyse a day spent with their kids and identify positive moments.

If a kid was exposed to violence, they should call the crisis centre at 111, which provides 24/7 psychological aid to children. It works since 2015 at the ministry of social development; and the trust line for children 111 works since 2015.

According to the specialist of the agency, Mira Sharapova, they received 34 thousand phone calls in the first quarter of 2020, which is 39 per cent more than in the similar period. Also, the state agency said they hold events to prevent violence against children during the emergency.

According to psychologists, the consequences of violence can be that a kid learns the violence, becomes anxious, unassured, and uncertain that they are loved.

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