

The true toll of the coronavirus pandemic

Bryan Dyne
7 April 2021

The official death toll of the coronavirus pandemic continues to spiral to staggering heights. In the United States, more than 570,000 lives have been lost to the disease. Worldwide, the number exceeds 2,890,000. Daily case and death counts are rising internationally as the continued spread of new and more infectious variants threatens to exceed last year's fall surge.

Moreover, the actual number of deaths attributed to the disease and its consequences is in reality far higher. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently revealed that the number of "excess deaths" in 2020, those deaths above what was expected based on averages from previous years, exceeded 503,000, 42 percent more than the officially recorded coronavirus deaths from last year.

But even this massive death toll is only one reflection of the reality of the pandemic. Just as millions of people have died, tens of millions more have and continue to suffer from what, in a rational society, would be a preventable disease.

Among them are the many children who have lost a parent to the coronavirus. An article in *JAMA Pediatrics* written by Rachel Kidman and her colleagues published Monday reveals that "an estimated 37,300 to 43,000" children in the US now suffer from parental bereavement as a result of the pandemic, three-quarters of whom are adolescents. In contrast, about 20,000 American children lost a parent as a result of the Vietnam War.

And as Kidman notes, these are only children who have lost a parent, not another relative or person who is their primary caregiver, nor did they look at the impact of the many thousands of parents who have lost children, or the broader circle of friends, co-workers and family that knew those who died.

Kidman and her coauthors also note the dangers of failing to contain the disease. If left unchecked, her team estimated that there will be a total of 1.5 million

pandemic-related deaths in the US, leaving behind "116,900 parentally bereaved children." In other words, if society is to "live with the disease," as is now being promoted by the political, corporate and media officialdom, at least 75,000 to 80,000 more youth must grow up having lost at least one parent to the coronavirus.

It is this arithmetic, however, that is being pushed by the Biden administration as it calls for the full reopening of in-person learning at schools, while at the same time steadily abandoning safety guidelines. Schools have been shown to be among the chief way the pandemic spreads, through both teachers and students, and are especially dangerous now that, according to CDC Director Rochelle Walensky, "the [more contagious and deadly] B.1.1.7 variant is now the most common lineage circulating in the United States."

Moreover, whatever the cynical claims by the Biden administration of the costs on the childrens' education and mental health, that cost is already enormous. New findings published in *The Lancet Psychiatry* journal found that, among more than 236,000 COVID-19 patients in the US, 34 percent were diagnosed with a neurological or psychiatric condition within six months of their initial infection. Common symptoms included anxiety and mood disorders, while seven percent had a stroke and another seven percent developed substance abuse disorders. For thirteen percent of those in the study, this was their first recorded neurological or psychiatric diagnosis.

Generalizing to all those who had the coronavirus, these results suggest that more than 45 million people have or will acquire a neurological or mental health problem as a result of COVID-19.

Research has also documented further long-term effects caused by the coronavirus well after patients have "recovered." Physicians at Danderyd Hospital and

Karolinska Institutet in Sweden recently published in the Journal of the American Medical Association that 11 percent of people who had just mild cases of COVID-19 still suffer from loss of smell, loss of taste or fatigue eight months after contracting the disease, significantly impairing their ongoing health and quality of life.

Other reports have documented different aspects of what is being termed post-viral or Long COVID syndrome. Last summer, more than 87 percent of patients released from hospitals in Italy reported having at least one of the following—fatigue, shortness of breath, joint pain and chest pain—more than two months after symptoms of the coronavirus itself began. A study in China found similar conditions for at least six months after COVID-19 patients were discharged. Even those who contracted the disease but were asymptomatic have developed these health problems.

Such studies paint a grim picture beyond the 133 million people that have contracted a potentially deadly illness. They reveal tens of millions of survivors that live daily with the possibility of chronic and extraordinary health problems for months, and tens of millions more wonder if they were unknowingly exposed and will contract, or perhaps have already contracted a debilitating symptom that will be with them for months.

It is also unclear when, or even if, such long-term symptoms will end. This virus is at best estimates only 18 months old, which means no one knows what the long-term effects will be after 10, 20 or 30 years. The physical and mental health of millions have been potentially permanently ruined, with devastating and limitless costs.

In the calculation of the financial oligarchy and the government that serves it, such considerations are of no consequence. The deaths and long-term illnesses are just statistics. But these were in fact hundreds of thousands of living, breathing human beings, murdered by criminal policies of Republican and Democratic administrations, and millions more are now forced to languish.

The argument put forward by every capitalist government in Europe and the United States—that society must “live with” the virus—comes at an unacceptable cost in lives, in health, and in heartache. No, humanity cannot “live with” this virus, and it

cannot “live with” the capitalist social order that refuses to contain it.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact