10 million children have lost parents or other caregivers to COVID-19, according to latest estimate

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A research letter published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) Pediatrics* Tuesday estimates that 10.5 million children worldwide have lost parents or other caregivers to the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the letter by a group of seven doctors from Britain and several African countries, "Consequences for children can be devastating, including institutionalization, abuse, traumatic grief, mental health problems, adolescent pregnancy, poor educational outcomes, and chronic and infectious diseases."

These findings are derived from new figures on excess deaths published by many countries and collected by the World Health Organization (WHO), the *Economist* magazine, and the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington in Seattle.

According to the WHO figures, described as the most conservative, the hardest-hit country is India, with an estimated 3.5 million children having lost one or more caregivers. Other Asian countries with large totals include Indonesia (660,000) and Pakistan (410,000). Some of the most populous countries in Africa also were severely affected, including Egypt (450,000) and Nigeria (430,000).

In the Western Hemisphere, the worst affected countries were Mexico, the United States and Brazil, which also have the largest number of total deaths for the region.

According to the summary of the report, "little is being done to care for children left behind," and no actual tabulation of orphaned or bereaved children is carried out by any national government.

One of the researchers, Juliette Unwin of Imperial College, London, explained the group's findings in a commentary published in *Scientific American* on Wednesday:

> As an epidemiologist, I am used to studying waves of infection and measuring the rise and fall of deaths. While the deaths of parents and grandparents from COVID crash and recede, the pattern of children affected by orphanhood resulting from the death of a caregiver is entirely different. In every country, the number of children affected inexorably rises, month after month. The death of a mother, father, caregiving grandparent or other relative is permanent and enduring. A child whose parent died at the start of the pandemic is still a child without that parent now.

Unwin noted that two out of three children whose parents died were between the ages of 10 and 17, and that three out of four children who lost a parent had lost their father rather than their mother. She continued: "Regardless of gender, however, in families where the primary breadwinner dies, death can be linked to sudden and lasting family economic hardship, whereas the loss of a primary socioemotional caregiver can decrease social connectedness."

These numbers provide an additional dimension for understanding the colossal impact that the coronavirus pandemic continues to have on the world's population. As Unwin says, the millions of children who have lost parents will always have lost their parents. The loss will be a permanent feature of their lives, inflicting emotional and psychological damage. And the number will continue to grow as the death toll from COVID-19 rises.

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And this does not include the millions more children whose parents have contracted Long COVID, which may make it impossible for them to carry out the critical tasks required of a primary caregiver.

In the face of these harrowing numbers, the Biden administration in the United States has said and done nothing. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published a report in late 2021 which placed the number of US COVID-19 orphans at 140,000. Since then, the number of orphans has skyrocketed, but the CDC has published nothing on the subject throughout 2022.

Instead, the same day that the report on orphans was published by JAMA, the White House held a COVID-19 briefing, featuring all its leading public health figures engaged in happy talk about the great progress supposedly being made under Biden in dealing with the pandemic. The teleconference included Dr. Ashish Jha, the White House COVID-19 coordinator; Dr. Anthony Fauci, Biden's principal adviser on COVID-19; Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the CDC; and Secretary of Health and Human Services Xavier Becerra.

None of them addressed the devastating impact of the pandemic, either on orphaned children or on the population as a whole. All were silent about the fact that more people have died of COVID-19 during Biden's tenure in the White House than during the administration of Donald Trump (650,000 compared to 400,000), even though vaccines have been available throughout Biden's presidency. Nor were they asked by the complacent press corps, which adheres religiously to the false propaganda that the pandemic is over, or at least reaching the "end game."

Dr. Jha, who never misses an opportunity to spread complacency about a virus that has already killed more than a million people in the United States and more than 20 million worldwide, claimed that the upcoming cold weather, which drives people indoors, would not be the occasion for the surges in COVID-19 that took place during the fall and winter of 2020 and 2021.

"We know how to manage fluctuations in COVID-19 and do so safely," he said. "If people step up and do what is necessary, we can get through this winter with far less suffering, far less death, far less disruption." The language is revealing: In the event of another massive surge in hospitalizations and deaths, the White House will blame it on the failure of the American people to "step up."

Fauci and Jha emphasized that COVID-19 had become a permanent feature of American life and that the population would need COVID-19 vaccines newly formulated each year to take into account mutations. "Barring any new variant curveball," said Dr. Jha, "for a large majority of Americans, we are moving to a point where a single annual COVID shot should provide a high degree of protection all year."

Dr. Fauci chimed in: "It is becoming increasingly clear that, looking forward with the COVID-19 pandemic, in the absence of a dramatically different variant, we likely are moving towards a path with a vaccination cadence similar to that of the annual influenza vaccine, with annual, updated COVID-19 shots matched to the currently circulating strains for most of the population."

This argument entirely distorts the nature of the pandemic threat. COVID-19 is far more lethal than the flu and has the ability to transform into increasingly infectious and vaccine-evading variants. What Dr. Jha dismisses as a "curveball" is actually an absolute certainty: SARS-CoV-2 is constantly driven by evolutionary pressures to develop new variants which evade vaccines and prophylactic drugs.

The environment that fosters these mutations is provided by the policy of "living with the virus" or declaring COVID-19 "endemic" or "permanent," because with billions of people being infected, the virus has ample opportunity to mutate. The only genuine protection against the pandemic is the elimination and eradication of SARS-CoV-2, which requires a systematic public health effort comprised of vaccinations, testing, isolation and quarantines and temporary lockdowns to deprive the virus of the hosts it needs.

On Wednesday, the Food and Drug Administration gave final approval to new vaccines formulated against a combination of BA.1, the original Omicron variant, and BA.5, the variant which is currently dominating. Biden scheduled a press statement for Thursday afternoon to hail that action and make another appeal for additional congressional funding for COVID-19 vaccine development and distribution, although it was cancelled after the death of Queen Elizabeth II in Britain.

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