

Increased Psychological Disorders among Pediatric Population during Covid

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Abstract

A review of the literature on psychological disorders among the pediatric population during the Covid 19 pandemic.

Key words: Covid 19, psychological disorders, paediatric population

Literature Review

Generally, the pediatric population is at a higher risk of developing psychological disorders during COVID-19 than other age groups. Educational status, developmental age, poor economic background, and existing mental health issues are among the vulnerability factors that cause the difference in psychological disorders prevalence between age groups (Singh et al., 2020). According to the authors, social distancing and lockdown practices have resulted in anxiety and fear, leading to long and short-term mental health and psychosocial impacts on school-age children. This literature review will focus on examining increased psychological disorders among adolescents and children during COVID-19 and the most effective practices to implement to promote early detection.

While most people often associate psychological disorders among the pediatric population with socioeconomic challenges and media influence, COVID-19 has resulted in different stressors in children's lives. For instance, different governments' orders to reduce the virus spread, such as quarantine have led to isolation and loneliness among adolescents, which are among the common risk factors that cause mental health problems (Rosen et al., 2021). Rosen et al. (2021) discuss how the pandemic affects children's wellbeing by examining how it disrupts their structure and routine. Lack of a structured setting limits innovation and increases boredom. Interaction levels have reduced because of limited outdoor activities and inadequate socialization. Empirical evidence shows a positive relationship between loneliness and depression

and anxiety among the pediatric population (Loades et al., 2020). The findings align with research by Sprang & Silman (2013) that focused on post-traumatic stress among youth following health-related disasters. However, the studies were cross-sectional, making it difficult to infer the association direction. Similarly, social loneliness or isolation and mental health dependent measures increased the risk of bias. Nonetheless, the literature review indicates that isolation and loneliness caused by COVID-19 mitigation measures are likely to result in psychological disorders among children and adolescents.

Most parents and caregivers experience mental health-related challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic period because of various factors. For example, there have been increased cases of job loss and increased expenses, reducing most households' income levels. Parents' poor mental health status can have an adverse impact on children's distress and long-term psychological disorders. Children experiencing poor parental mental health are at higher risk of becoming distressed in adulthood (Kamis, 2021). It implies that negative experiences during childhood lead to poor health in the child's life course. The outcome aligns with stress process literature that indicates a positive association between past stressors and current stress levels. However, research has shown that the association between stress during childhood and the development of psychological disorders in the future is not deterministic. Such stressors' effect is likely to wane throughout the life course (Kamis, 2021). Regardless of the availability of adequate information on parental mental health issues' influence on youth during their adolescence

and childhood stages, the primary concentration should be on how the stressors continue to affect their mental health in adulthood.

Poverty can cause an adverse impact on the pediatric population's psychological wellbeing through community and family-level factors. Children from poor backgrounds experience different stressors like poor housing and food insecurity (Hodgkinson et al., 2017). Such challenges can exacerbate the risk of parents to substance abuse and mental health issues, reducing their ability to adopt positive parenting practices. It increases the probability of neglect and child abuse. Some of the characteristics of parents and children from low-income communities include child abuse, increased violence, and inadequate resources. These factors have a positive relationship with adverse mental health outcomes. Thus, available evidence proves that low-income households are at a higher risk of developing psychological disorders and are unlikely to access the necessary mental health care than their counterparts from high-income families.

There are different evidence-based strategies to ensure the early detection of psychological disorders among the pediatric population in the primary care setting. Continuous mental health screening is one of the most effective ways of determining likely concerns in the initial development stages of a child (Hodgkinson et al., 2017). It will play a crucial role in addressing low sensitivity rates among pediatricians in detecting psychological disorders. Furthermore, screening is vital in reducing healthcare disparities since all children and adolescents will access the same assessment despite social or economic status. Hence, universal screening expansion to assess the adverse experiences during the pandemic and parents' mental health can help determine families that require additional support in dealing with psychological disorders. Weitzman & Wegner (2015) noted that despite the benefits of continuous mental health screening, a significant percentage of pediatricians are yet to implement it in their primary care setting fully. Some of the reasons the authors attribute to this slow adoption of routine screening include insufficient mental health resources, limited reimbursement, and insufficient time.

Moreover, integrating behavioral health care in various facilities can foster access to mental health care among the pediatric population. Such models of care are critical in decreasing stigma, promoting collaboration between behavioral health and medical providers, and eliminating the barriers that hinder children from low-income backgrounds from accessing care (Hodgkinson et al., 2017). Thus, the available evidence supports the effectiveness of continuous mental health screening and integrating behavioral health care in institutions in detecting psychological disorders.

Various researchers have focused on psychological disorders among the pediatric population during the pandemic. Available literature indicates that orders and practices implemented by governments to reduce COVID-

19 spread are among the novel stressors that negatively impact the pediatric population's lives. Similarly, the literature review shows increased mental health-related challenges among parents, causing children's distress. Thus, pediatric healthcare providers must conduct continuous mental health screening to detect psychological disorders. Additionally, it is vital to integrate behavioral health care in mental health facilities.

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