

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on the Mental Health of Children and Adolescents: Analysis of a Consultation-Liaison Psychiatry Service

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Introduction

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and risk mitigation measures have contributed to a co-occurring psychiatric epidemic [1]. Children and adolescents have been particularly impacted, with disruptions in continuity of learning and health care [2]. Psychological stressors such as fear of infection, boredom, decreased socialization, supply shortages and incomplete information can contribute to low mood, irritability, insomnia, and emotional exhaustion [3]. The Loyola University Medical Center (LUMC) Consultation-Liaison Psychiatry Service [CLPS] (Maywood, IL) has anecdotally observed an increase in pediatric hospitalizations during the COVID-19 pandemic for psychiatric conditions. Therefore, we designed a study to identify and analyze data regarding the total number of CLP consult requests, patient presentations to the emergency room (ER), and admissions to the Pediatrics floor and Intensive Care Unit (PICU) for psychiatric-related conditions.

Objectives

Quantify the impact of the COVID-19 on pediatric mental health in the consult-liaison setting at a large academic medical center.

Methods

This study was approved by the Loyola University Medical Center Institutional Review Board.

A retrospective chart review was completed for all Pediatric (0-18 years) Emergency Room (ER) visits, Pediatric Floor admissions, and Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU) admissions related to mental health at Loyola University Medical Center. These encounters were identified using ICD-9 diagnostic coding for the dates of March 2019-February 2020 (pre-pandemic) and March 2020-February 2021 (pandemic).

The total number of encounters prior to the pandemic and during the pandemic were then compared. Specifically, we analyzed the impact of the COVID-19 on PICU admission rates related to psychiatric conditions.

Results

Table 1: Total Pediatric (0-18 years) Encounters Prior to (March 2019-February 2020) and during COVID-19 Pandemic (March 2020-February 2021)

Date	Total Encounters	Total Inpatient	Total Inpatient PICU	Total Inpatient ED	Total Observations	Total Observations ICU	Total Observations ED	Total ED Only
March 2019	3679	223	33	51	2464	10	44	992
April 2019	3394	275	59	69	2238	11	56	881
May 2019	3398	247	49	55	2292	8	63	859
June 2019	2982	233	48	63	1984	4	63	765
July 2019	2904	257	36	73	1968	5	56	679
August 2019	3239	283	40	79	2057	10	41	899
September 2019	3250	219	45	53	1889	14	67	1142
October 2019	2766	248	53	53	1682	23	61	836
November 2019	3070	227	49	61	1958	6	47	885
December 2019	3744	293	77	77	2238	5	65	1213
January 2020	3487	283	58	61	2122	9	60	1082
February 2020	3391	255	50	70	2180	18	71	956
March 2020	2103	242	42	51	1196	17	47	665
April 2020	717	189	35	25	334	18	20	194
May 2020	1009	233	47	38	475	38	30	301
June 2020	1122	198	42	28	572	24	24	352
July 2020	1777	226	40	54	1127	19	31	424
August 2020	1619	250	40	56	917	27	40	452
September 2020	1424	234	43	53	774	4	37	416
October 2020	1575	227	51	57	928	6	31	420
November 2020	1372	207	43	48	772	15	24	393
December 2020	1000	185	46	45	481	28	29	334
January 2021	1049	197	37	28	500	8	30	352
February 2021	1012	190	43	41	494	5	28	328

- Total number of pediatric ED visits significantly declined from March to June 2020 (outset of COVID-19 Pandemic).
- At the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the percent of total encounters resulting in inpatient and PICU admissions were higher than pre-pandemic percentages.

Table 2: PICU Admissions for Psychiatric Conditions Prior to and during COVID-19 Pandemic

PICU Admissions Prior COVID-19 Pandemic (March 2019-February 2020):	
Admissions for patients with psychiatric history, hospitalized for non-psych conditions (i.e. DKA, infection, accidental trauma etc):	108
Admissions for intentional ingestion:	25
Admissions for intentional gun violence:	0
Admissions for hanging:	1
Admissions for NMS/catatonia:	1
Admissions for abuse:	0

PICU Admissions During COVID-19 Pandemic (March 2020-February 2021):	
Admissions for patients with psychiatric history, hospitalized for non-psych conditions (i.e. DKA, infection, accidental trauma etc):	110
Admissions for intentional ingestion:	44
Admissions for intentional gun violence:	2
Admissions for hanging:	1
Admissions for NMS/catatonia:	3
Admissions for abuse:	6

- Rates of intentional ingestions leading to PICU admission and consult-liaison requests nearly doubled from the time prior to the pandemic to the time during the pandemic.

Conclusion

During the COVID-19 pandemic, routine ER visits for mild to moderate mental health crises declined, but in a sub-group of patients, there appears to be a pandemic related psychiatric decompensation leading to higher number of intentional ingestions and related PICU admissions.

References

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