

The Effects of the First Wave of the COVID 19 Pandemic on the Presentation of Adolescents to Acute Mental Health Services in NHS Lanarkshire

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Introduction

- ❖ The COVID 19 pandemic has been the biggest global crisis experienced by children and adolescents of the current generation.
- ❖ YoungMinds (UK mental health charity) surveys conducted throughout the pandemic found that:
 - 32% of respondents during the first wave described their mental health being “much worse” as a result of the pandemic⁽¹⁾.
 - 26% of young people were unable to access mental health support⁽¹⁾.
 - 69% suffered from poor mental health upon returning to school⁽²⁾.
- ❖ Factors cited as a trigger for mental health deterioration included:
 - worrying about their family’s health.
 - educational and future employment worries due to school and university closures.
 - loss of routine.
 - lack of social contact with friends.
 - extra pressure to perform well in school assessments in case end of year exams were cancelled again.
- ❖ The UK findings were reflected worldwide as adolescents in France, Spain and China were at risk of “increased psychiatric disorders such as post-traumatic stress, depressive, and anxiety disorders, as well as grief-related symptoms” due to COVID 19⁽³⁾.

Aim

This project aimed to assess the direct and indirect effects of COVID 19 on the mental health of children and adolescents, reflected through their presentations to A&E departments in NHS Lanarkshire.

Methods

The psychiatry liaison nurse service database was searched for referrals of 17 year olds and under between April to August 2020. All referrals to all three NHS Lanarkshire acute hospital sites received from any source were included. The relevant electronic sources were used to gather: the patient’s age, date of referral, source of referral, hospital site of assessment, reason for referral and outcome of assessment.

Conclusions & Discussion

- ❖ Between April and August 2020, the CAMHS referrals increased every month except in July. People may have initially been scared to come to hospital and catch COVID. As the cases decreased towards summer, people possibly felt that hospitals were safer. The general increase in referrals could also reflect the worsening of young people’s mental health the longer the pandemic extended.
- ❖ The two most common reasons for referrals were drug overdose and suicidal ideation.
- ❖ COVID 19 was a trigger for a young person’s presentation to A&E in 31% of cases, the most common cause being struggling with the lockdown/restrictions. This reflects UK findings as the first and second YoungMinds surveys revealed that 32%⁽¹⁾ and 41%⁽⁴⁾ of young people respectively stated that their mental health was “much worse” due to COVID 19.

Results

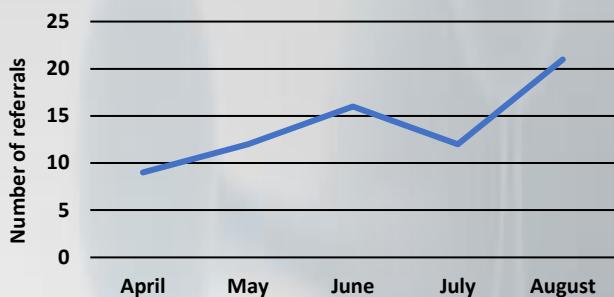


Figure 1: Number of Referrals

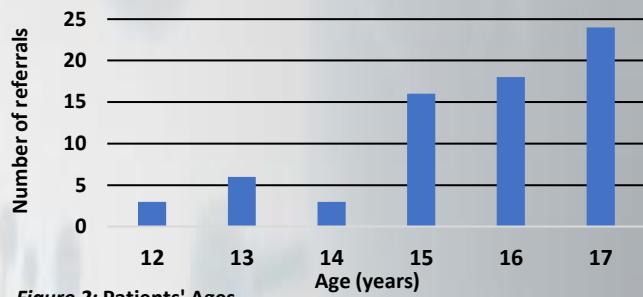


Figure 2: Patients' Ages

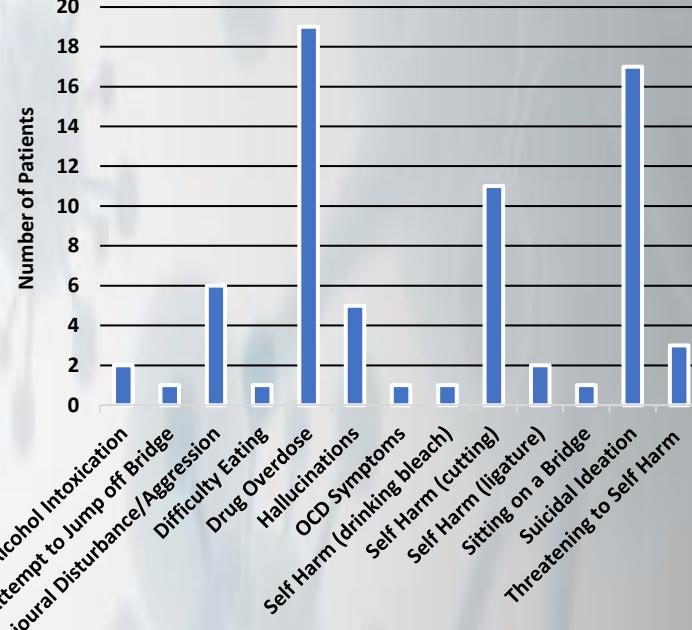


Figure 3: Reasons for Referral

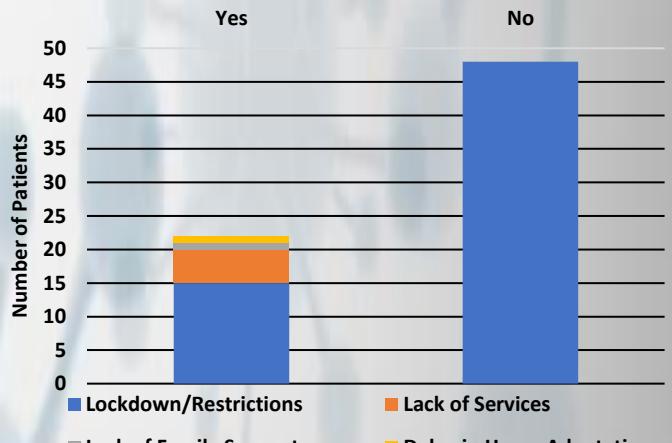


Figure 4: Did COVID 19 Contribute to the Patient's Presentation?

References

- (1) Young Minds: “Coronavirus: Impact on young people with mental health needs”, March 2020. Available at: https://youngminds.org.uk/media/3708/coronavirus-report_march2020.pdf. Accessed on 09/02/21....
- (2) Young Minds: “Coronavirus: Impact on young people with mental health needs, Survey 3: Autumn 2020 - return to school. Available at: <https://youngminds.org.uk/media/4119/youngminds-survey-with-young-people-returning-to-school-coronavirus-report-autumn-report.pdf> ... (3) Guessoum SB, Lachal J, Radjck R, et al. “Adolescent psychiatric disorders during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown.” *Psychiatry research* vol. 291 (2020): 113264. doi:10.1016/j.psychres.2020.113264. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7323662/>... (4) Young Minds: “Coronavirus: Impact on young people with mental health needs”, Survey 2: Summer 2020. Available at: <https://youngminds.org.uk/media/3904/coronavirus-report-summer-2020-final.pdf>. Accessed on 09/02/21