

PROSPECTIVE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON ADOLESCENTS: GUIDELINES FOR INTERVENTIONS

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Dear Editor,

The current situation produced by coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID 19) has exceptionally affected adolescents. A number of mental health consequences are associated with the existing pandemic and resultant restrictions due to the measures taken in the form of contact limitations, quarantine and sudden economic halt has taken a profound toll on the adolescent's life (Zhou et al. 2020). It is anticipated that the associated societal response with this pandemic will widely impact adolescents' development and mental health (Becker & Gregory 2020). Corona phobia, reduced occasions for stress regulations, lack of peer interaction, anxiety and domestic violence are some of the major apprehensions being faced by adolescent population. It would be a challenging time for those adolescents who had preexisting mental health problems, having disabilities, trauma experiences, low socioeconomic status and migrant backgrounds (Becker & Gregory 2020).

The most common behavioral and cognitive reactions in preadolescents and adolescents in response to COVID 19 pandemic would include a decline in academic performance. They may show a rebellious attitude at home or school or develop resistance to authority. Also, there is a possibility of getting involved in life-threatening acting out behaviors making them vulnerable to suicide, reckless driving, and unsafe sex (Norris et al. 2002). In addition, the increased period of isolation, fear of infections, frustration, monotony, lack of essential food supplies, deficient knowledge, stigma, and financial loss seem to aggravate the possibility of negative psychological consequences. Due to these mentioned factors, adolescents may exhibit a lack of involvement in community recovery activities. Besides, adolescents may perhaps mark physical problems, which include problems related to gastrointestinal problems, appetite, headaches, complaints of vague aches, skin eruptions, menstrual irregularity, pains sleep problems etc. Emotional and cognitive issues can involve a significant decrease of interest in hobbies, recreation, peer social activities, feelings of inadequacy and helplessness, depression or sadness, self-consciousness, preoccupation with self, and confusion, shame and guilt, etc (Rastegari & Ajami 2005).

Though social distancing does not essentially correspond with loneliness, initial evidences in the COVID-19 context highlight that more than one-third

of adolescents account for elevated levels of loneliness and among these nearly half of 18 to 24 year of age are lonely during lockdowns (Crawley et al. 2020). In a systematic review, it has been demonstrated that during quarantine the children and adolescents are perhaps more likely to encounter high rates of depression and probably anxiety (Crawley et al. 2020). In a study comprising Chinese high school students through the COVID-19 outbreak, the frequencies reported of anxiety, depression, and an amalgamation of both depressive and anxiety symptoms were almost 37%, 43%, and 31%, respectively. Female adolescents demonstrated high depressive and anxiety symptoms. Grades of education were positively associated with depressive and anxiety symptoms. The level of awareness of COVID-19 was negatively associated with depressive and anxiety symptoms (Zhou et al. 2020).

The purpose of this letter is to seek the attention of mental health professionals and policymakers on the psychosocial effects of COVID 19 on the emotional health of adolescents. On the basis of past literature, the following guidelines for the mental health professionals are suggested as: providing additional attention and consideration, temporarily relaxing the expectations of performance at home and school, supporting and encouraging discussions related to pandemic experiences among peers and significant adults, avoiding discussions related to feelings with parents, stimulate physical activities, support resumption of social activities that are based on outdoors such as athletics, clubs, rehearse family safety measures for future disasters and so on (Crawley et al. 2020). Psychological wellbeing and clinical research initiatives aimed at understanding and mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on adolescents is among the pivotal concerns right now. In view of these compelling outcomes it is vital to devise research questions encompassing the effects on mental health due to social distancing and emerging economic pressures, preventing long-term consequences by identifying risk as well as resilience factors. Furthermore it is recommended that the development and up gradation of tele-psychiatry along with tele-health services would be important for the emotional support of adolescents.

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