IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT

OLIVIA HAMRAH, MD
CHILD AND ADOLESCENT PSYCHIATRIST
MEDSTAR GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL
JULY 2022

DISCLOSURES

I have no relevant financial relationships with the manufacturers of any commercial products and/or providers of commercial services discussed in this presentation.
SETTING THE STAGE

Current research on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth is ongoing and data is limited. Much of what is reported is based on modeling and “best guesses” on what the future may hold for our youth.

PRE-PANDEMIC

• Before the pandemic, youth were already in a mental health crisis
PRE-PANDEMIC

- 37-39% of children have a behavioral or emotional disorder diagnosed by age 16

PRE-PANDEMIC

- 17.8% developmental disability
- 9.5% with ADHD
- 7.4% with a behavior problem
- 7.1% with anxiety
- 2.5% with ASD
PRE-PANDEMIC

• Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death among US youth and young adults

• There was a 41% increase in suicide rates among youth and young adults from 2000-2017

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

Nearly 1 in 7 children lived in poverty

71% are children of color
THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: FACTORS TO CONSIDER

- Grief/loss
- Delay in academic progress
- Decreased access to health care
- Food insecurity
- Financial insecurity
- Housing insecurity
- Isolation
  - Decreased physical activity
  - Increased screen time

A recent modeling study extrapolates that, globally, between March 1, 2020, and April 30, 2021, more than 1.1 million children experienced the death of a primary caregiver
- In the US, 40,000 children have lost a parent to COVID-19
- Disproportionately impacts African American children
Children who have lost a parent are more than twice as likely to show impairments in functioning at school and at home, even 7 years later.

During the pandemic, 1-3 million children never enrolled in school, showed up, or logged in for at least 1 year.
Most students are falling behind, but students of color are faring worse.

Grade failure is associated with:
- Dropping out of school
- Substance use
- Suicidal ideation
- Risky sexual behaviors
- Violent behaviors
Grade failure negatively impacts:
- Self-esteem
- Attitudes towards school
- Social adjustment

- Loss of health insurance
- Delayed routine medical visits
- Drop in vaccination rates
ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

- Delay in screening and identification of developmental disorders and other medical conditions
- Delay in referral to early intervention services (speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, etc.)

FOOD INSECURITY

- Nearly 18% of households with children reported food insecurity at the beginning of the pandemic, rising to 28% by October 2020
“Household food insecurity has insidious effects on the health and development of young children, including increased hospitalizations, poor health, iron deficiency, developmental risk and behavior problems, primarily aggression, anxiety, depression, and attention deficit disorder.”

(Cook & Frank, 2008; Whitaker, Phillips, & Orzol, 2006).

The pandemic places youth at increased risk of homelessness
- Financial strain during economic recession
- Unable to “couch surf” due to pandemic/quarantine precautions
- Decreased access to resources due to school and office closures
Over 1 in 5 Renters Living With Children Were Not Caught Up on Rent
Share of adult renters who said household is not caught up on last month’s rent, October 2021

- With children in household: 23%
- No children: 12%

Note: Chart excludes renters who did not respond to question.
Source: CBPP analysis of Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey tables for September 29–October 11, 2021

Housing Insecurity

- There was a 50–70% increase in internet use during the COVID-19 pandemic
  - 50% of the time was spent engaging on social media in 2020
- Social media engagement increased 61% during the first wave of the pandemic.
SCREEN TIME

- Lower physical activity levels
- Less outdoor time
- Sleep disturbance
- Anxiety
- Trouble with concentration
- Depressive symptoms
- Loneliness

TRAUMA IS A PERSON’S EMOTIONAL RESPONSE TO A DISTRESSING EXPERIENCE.
January 1, 2020, through March 8, 2021:

- 20.5% of children reported anxiety
- 25.2% of children reported depression
• In 2021, 37% of high school students reported they experienced poor mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

• 44% reported they persistently felt sad or hopeless during the past year.

• More than half (55%) reported they experienced emotional abuse by a parent or other adult in the home, including swearing at, insulting, or putting down the student.

• 11% experienced physical abuse by a parent or other adult in the home, including hitting, beating, kicking, or physically hurting the student.
MENTAL HEALTH

31% increase in the proportion of mental health-related ED visits among adolescents 12-17 years old in 2020

HOW DO DEPRESSION, ANXIETY, AND TRAUMA DISORDERS PRESENT IN YOUTH?

- Irritability
- Withdrawal
- Oppositional behaviors
- Somatic complaints
- Insomnia
- Low motivation
- Low energy
MENTAL HEALTH AND THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

- 70% of justice-involved youth have a diagnosable mental health disorder
- Entering juvenile carceral facilities can exacerbate mental health disorders
- During the pandemic, many youth detention facilities significantly reduced mental health care

STRESS AND THE BRAIN

Toxic stress
- Strong, frequent, or prolonged adversity without adequate adult support
- Disrupts development of brain architecture
- Increases risk for stress-related disease and cognitive impairment
CHILDREN ARE RESILIENT

With appropriate support, children are expected to recover and meet developmental expectations cognitively, socially, and emotionally.

RESOURCES


11. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJU3kKdQsP4

