

MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE AMONG YOUTH DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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BACKGROUND

- COVID-19 pandemic conditions are giving rise to social isolation, fear, unemployment, financial stress, and a **collective degradation of mental health globally**
- Disproportionate burden on **youth mental health**
- **Strong association** between mental health and alcohol/substance abuse
- Alcohol use among Caribbean youth is already high

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the mental health status of youth in the Caribbean during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What are the alcohol and substance use patterns among youth during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. What support strategies would benefit youth during COVID-19 to promote mental health and prevent alcohol use?

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH DURING COVID-19

- UNICEF Survey in Latin America and the Caribbean
 - 8,444 adolescents and young people ages 13-29
 - **27%** reported feeling anxiety
 - **15%** reported feeling depression
 - **50%** reported less motivation to do activities they normally enjoy
 - **43%** of young women and **31%** of young men reported pessimism about the future
 - **73%** reported feeling a need for help with their mental wellbeing

SUBSTANCE USE AMONG YOUTH DURING COVID-19

Literature search strategy

- Inclusion criteria:
 - No country restriction
 - A research objective that sought to highlight the prevalence of alcohol use specifically among youth during the COVID-19 pandemic
 - Quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods
 - English
 - Publication in a peer reviewed journal

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Study Characteristics

- 4 articles selected
- Settings: Canada (2), China (1), Italy (1)
- Study designs: cross-sectional surveys administered online (3); retrospective analysis of emergency department records (1); quantitative data analysis
- Study Samples: ranged from n=622 to n=1074; ages 14-28

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Study Purposes

- To assess the mental health status and associated health risk behaviours, disaggregated by age and gender (Ahmed, Ahmed, Aibao et al, 2020- China)
- To provide information about how substance use has changed among youth since the COVID-19 pandemic in the context of the 3 weeks before and after social distancing took effect (Dumas, Ellis & Litt, 2020- Canada)
- To understand the health effect of lockdown release on adolescents from the perspective of an emergency department (Grigoletto, Cognigni, Agostino Occhipinti et al, 2020-Italy)
- To investigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth mental health and substance use and to investigate from the youth perspective, what strategies would be best to support youth needs (Hawke, Barbic, Voineskos et al, 2020- Canada)

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Key Study Findings: (Ahmed, Ahmed, Aibao et al, 2020)

- Younger age groups reported higher levels of anxiety and depression
- Age groups 18-30 and 30-40 reported the highest rates of anxiety, depression and alcohol use, compared to older age groups.

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Key Study Findings: (Dumas, Ellis & Litt, 2020)

- Frequency of alcohol use among youth increased between the weeks before and after social distancing took effect.
- Many youth reported using substances with friends virtually and 1/3 of respondents reported sharing posts
- Most youth reported solitary substance use
- Many youth engaged in substance use with parents
- High self-reported popularity and concerns with reputation predicted substance use
- Adolescents with greater fears of COVID-19 and more depressive symptomology were more likely to engage in substance use

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Key Study Findings: (Grigoletto, Cognigni, Agostino Occhipinti et al, 2020)

- The number of ED admissions for alcohol abuse among patients aged 13-24 rose from 0.88% during lockdown to 11.31% in the months following lockdown release
- There was a greater proportion of ED visits were related to alcohol abuse in the year 2020 compared to the same time period in 2019 (11.31% in 2020 and 2.97% in 2019)
- More than half of the patients admitted with alcohol intoxication after the end of lockdown had a past history of substance abuse and/or mental health issues

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Key Study Findings: (Hawke, Barbic, Voineskos et al, 2020- Canada)

- Mental health symptoms among youth sample increased after the lockdown conditions of COVID-19
- Substance use was higher in the youth sample than in the community sample, but average substance use during the COVID-19 lockdown was lower than before COVID-19 lockdown
- 23% of youth respondents met the threshold for a high likelihood of substance use disorders.
- More than half of youth respondents reported health service disruptions, social and recreational service disruptions, many youth reported needing mental health and substance use support services that they were not receiving at the time

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- Across all studies, youth reported more depression and anxiety symptomology during the COVID-19 pandemic compared to before the pandemic and/or reported more mental health issues compared to other age groups
- 2 studies reported higher substance use among youth associated with the COVID-19 pandemic compared to prior to the pandemic, but all studies found a significant prevalence of substance use disorders among youth in the study cohorts
- 2 studies reported an association between substance use and depressive symptomology or a history of mental health issues.
- 1 study found that youth felt that their mental health and substance use needs were not being met during the COVID-19 pandemic

THE WAY FORWARD

- Support economic needs of youth
- Improve accessibility of activities and resources to help youth stay in contact with peers in a healthy way
- Support hobby development
- Leverage the internet and mobile technology to improve accessibility of mental health support- telehealth, online counselling and online support groups
- Engage youth in participatory research
- Strictly regulate the marketing of alcohol to youth, especially in the context of CSR

SOURCES

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