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GREY LITERATURE

“Shit happens, now we just have to adapt and survive”: Perceptions of residential drug rehabilitation workers on Covid-19 challenges

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Gavle: 2021

The aim of this thesis was to explore what challenges the Covid-19 pandemic has posed on residential drug rehabilitation practices in Sweden from the perceptions of the workers and how these challenges are managed. This was studied through three semi-structured qualitative interviews with directors and a manager. The data collected from these interviews was analysed through thematic analysis and the theory of functionalism. The results found that recommendations such as social distancing could not be perfectly upheld within the residential familiar environments, but workers have found a way to adapt these recommendations to suit their clients and still minimize the spread of Covid-19 without risking the quality of the rehabilitative practices. This in addition to accepting the situation for what it is, helped to also minimize any fear of infection one may have had. The workers emphasised that the ways they manage challenges is more important than the challenges themselves.

“I’m pretty sure it’s either food poisoning or Covid-19”: Lived experience versus medical knowledge in diagnosing substance use problems

Frank, D

International Journal of Drug Policy, 2021, 103348

People who use drugs, or who have in the past, often report that doctors and/or treatment providers devalue, or are unwilling to believe their claims in regards to substance use issues, in particular the presence and severity of withdrawal. In the case of benzodiazepine withdrawal this can not only lead to significant discomfort, frustration, and trauma for patients, but can lead to serious medical problems. This commentary uses the authors’ recent first-person experience with a disbelieving doctor in order to illustrate the lack of value often given to the claims and narratives of people with lived substance use experience. I outline some of the potential problems with this approach, including the effects on patients themselves and the loss of an important source of evidence-based knowledge. It also discusses potential risks associated with the recent increase in benzodiazepine prescription due to Covid-19 and offers suggestions for improving treatment outcomes.

Converging impact of the ongoing conflict and COVID-19 pandemic on mental health and substance use disorders in Ukraine

Patel, S S; Sukhovii, O; Zvinchuk, O; et al

Journal of Emergency Management

19, 9, p.63-68, 2021

Since the Russian annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the subsequent occupation of parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, Ukraine has been facing increasing security and healthcare challenges. The seven-year war in East Ukraine has led to a rise in substance and alcohol use and increasing addiction rates among veterans, internally displaced persons, and civilian survivors. This article examines the combined impact of the ongoing Russo–Ukrainian conflict and COVID-19 pandemic on substance use in Ukraine. It also gives an overview of the institutions in place to monitor and improve mental health in the country. The article highlights the urgent need for further funding and research on substance and alcohol addiction, with vulnerable populations affected by the conflict during the COVID-19 pandemic. Frontline healthcare workers in this region should anticipate an increased burden of patients suffering from substance use disorders who are in need of emergency management intervention and proper behavioral health referrals.

COVID-19 related substance use services policy changes: Policymaker perspectives on policy development & implementation.

Henry, B F, Campbell, A, Hunt, T, et al

Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment, 2021, 108550

Introduction:

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, regulations for substance use services changed to accommodate stay-at-home orders and physical distancing guidelines.

Methods:

Using in-depth interviews (N = 14) and framework analysis, we describe how policymakers developed, adopted, and implemented regulations governing services for substance use disorders during COVID-19, and how policymakers’ perceived the impacts of these regulations in New York State.

Results:

During the COVID-19 pandemic, policymakers shifted to more inclusive approaches of knowledge generation and co-production of recommendations. Barriers to adoption and implementation of new regulations included medication/services supply, lack of integration, stigma, and overcriminalization.

Conclusion:

Findings from this study highlight the potential feasibility and benefits of co-produced policies for substance use services and the need for consistent service supply, better integration with health care services, reduced stigma, improved funding structures, best practice guidelines, criminal justice reform, and harm reduction support. These considerations should inform future policy maintenance and modifications to substance use services related to COVID-19.

Cross-sectional associations between lifetime use of psychedelic drugs and psychometric measures during the COVID-19 confinement: a transcultural study

Révész, D, Ona, G, Rossi, G N, et al

Frontiers in Psychiatry, 2021, 12, 687546

Background:

One of the main public health strategies adopted at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic consisted of implementing strict lockdowns to stop the transmission of the virus. Despite being an effective measure, the confinement and the associated social isolation create a stressful, potentially lengthy situations that has been proven to have several psychological consequences. Given the potential benefits that certain psychedelic drugs have shown for the treatment of psychological disorders, this study aimed to assess the impact of lifetime psychedelic drug use on mental health in relation to the first strict lockdown adopted by various countries (April-July 2020).

Methods:

Subjects completed an online survey that inquired about sociodemographic factors, activities, and lifestyle factors during confinement, as well as health and mental health related factors. Subjects were asked about their lifetime use of psychedelic drugs (MDMA, ayahuasca, psilocybin-containing mushrooms, LSD, peyote, San Pedro, Bufo alvarius or 5-MeO-DMT, and others), being classified as regular users (more than once per 6 months), occasional users, or non-users. The survey included psychometric tests used to assess psychological distress, peritraumatic stress, social support, psychopathological symptoms, and personality. Linear regressions were performed with psychedelic drug users as the independent variable and psychometric factors as the outcomes, while correcting for age, gender, language, religion, spirituality, and use of non-psychedelic drugs.

Results:

The study included 2,974 English, Portuguese, and Spanish speakers (497 regular users of psychedelic drugs, 606 occasional users, and 1,968 non-users). On average, respondents were 36 years old and 70% were female. Psychedelic drug users, especially regular ones, reported less psychological distress, less peritraumatic stress, and more social support. Regarding personality measures, psychedelic drug users scored higher on the novelty-seeking and self-transcendence scales, and lower on cooperativeness.

Conclusion:

Our findings showed that regular users of psychedelic drugs had less psychological stress and some personality differences when compared to occasional users and non-users. This suggests that either the use of psychedelics might be a protective factor itself or people with certain previous traits are more prone to frequently using psychedelic drugs. Future prospective longitudinal research should investigate the underlying processes observed in this study to develop consistent hypotheses.

COVID-19 and addiction: A comparison between substance use disorder patients and gamblers

Incerti, C C; Carenti, M L; Catalano, G; et al
Heroin Addiction and Related Clinical Problems 2021
23, 3, p.55-60, 2021

Background:

The lockdown Covid-19 pandemic determined lots of clinical and socio-economics consequences. The pre-sent study aims to investigating how the lockdown period may have influenced the treatment of patients with a diagnosis of dependence disorder(s).

Methods:

The study was conducted by collecting social and clinical data referring to patients treated in a Unit of the Addiction Service (SerD), within the Local Health Authority of Rome (ASL Rome 1). The sample consisted of 81 outpatients, divided into 38 patients affected by a Gambling Disorders (GD) and 43 patients suffering from a Substance Use Disorder (SUD), according to criteria set out in the Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder (DSM-5). Differences between these groups were calculated using the Chi-squared and Mann–Whitney U tests. The cut-off point for statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

Results:

The results revealed a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between SUD and GD patients, with respect to the following variables: age, educational level, frequency of treatment, dual disorder clinical picture and post-lockdown abstinence. Moreover, the post-lockdown abstinence proved to be significantly cor-related with the following variables: age, occupational condition, and abstinence during the lockdown.

Conclusions:

The study highlighted the fact that patients affected by SUD had greater difficulties in maintaining abstinence than those who suffered from a GD. In particular, from our sample it may be hypothesized that the maturative/cognitive tools linked to older age, employment status and a state of abstinence recorded during the lockdown period function as protective factors with respect to possible relapses.

Relationship of substance dependence and time to RT-PCR negative status in patients with COVID-19 infection

Mehra, A; Suri, V; Sahoo, S; et al
Asian Journal of Psychiatry, 2021, 57, 102562

Background:

To date, no study has evaluated the association of alcohol dependence with the outcome of the COVID-19 infection.

Aim:

The current study aimed to evaluate the association of substance dependence (alcohol and tobacco) with the outcome (i.e., time to have two consecutive negative test reports) of the COVID-19 infection.

Results:

The mean age of the study participants (n = 95) was 37.2 yrs (SD-13.2). More than half of the participants were males. About one-fourth (N = 25; 26.3 %) were consuming various substances in a dependent pattern. Alcohol dependence was present in 21 participants (22.1 %), and Tobacco dependence was present in 10.5 % of participants. Even after using gender, age, and physical illness as covariates, patients with any kind of substance dependence had a significantly lower chance of having a negative report on RT-PCR on 14th day, 18th 23rd day.

Conclusion:

Persons with substance dependence takes a longer time to test negative on RT-PCR, once diagnosed with COVID-19 infection. Mental health professionals involved in the care of patients with COVID-19 should accordingly prepare these patients for a possible longer hospital stay to reduce the distress associated with prolongation of hospital stay.

Opioid epidemics during the pandemic: Further insights to the same story

Ayad, A E
Journal of Opioid Management 2021
17, 1, p.9-12, 2021

The limited access to opioids remains a reality in developing countries. Recent evidence suggests that opioid epidemics are getting worse with the COVID-19 crisis. The increase in opioid abuse could be attributed to the extended lockdowns and the social distancing recommendations, hindering chronic pain patients' access to regular office visits and monitoring in addition to limited access to behavioral services like group therapies and other pain management interventions. Use of telemedicine as an alternative to in-person follow-up visits has faced many limitations due to technological challenges and cost. Chronic pain patients living in developing countries face extra burden during the pandemic. Limited access to outpatient clinics and hesitance to visit hospitals due to COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to reduction in supply of opioids, are some of the limiting factors. Unfortunately, the low-income class with limited financial capabilities faces further barriers to access the chronic pain services and treatments like opioid prescriptions. Medical entities involved in care of chronic pain patients have adopted different strategies to overcome these challenges. In addition to expanding on educational programs to medical staff and patients, modifying the strict opioid prescribing and dispensing regulations has been successful. Another positive trend has been the growing use of opioid sparing interventions, such as multimodal analgesia, regional blocks, and interventional pain procedures.

The COVID-19 pandemic and opioid use disorder: Expanding treatment with buprenorphine, and combining safety precautions with telehealth

Cales, R H; Cales, S C; Shreffler, J; Huecker, M R
Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment, 2021, 108543

Background:

This study investigated the efficacy and safety of providing medication for opioid use disorder (MOUD) and individualized telehealth in Kentucky, a state severely impacted simultaneously by the opioid epidemic and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods:

The investigation analyzed pre- and post-COVID-19 characteristics in 191 opioid use disorder (OUD) buprenorphine outpatients who completed an 18-question survey in late 2020 related to COVID testing, OUD relapses, obstacles to maintaining abstinence, and treatment resources.

Results:

The study revealed no statistically significant changes in drug use before and after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic despite monthly volume increases. Results further demonstrated statistically significant barriers to treatment, including loss of housing and transportation, food insecurity, and onset of depression. No patients required hospitalization or succumbed to OUD or COVID-19.

Potentially effective resource utilization findings included clinic transportation and 24/7 crisis intervention. Respondents rated telehealth as helpful when used in an individualized hybrid model matching patient's need to available resources based on COVID-19 safety guidelines.

Conclusion:

This report yields key clinical insights into providing outpatient MOUD care during the COVID-19 pandemic, validating in-person care as both safe and effective. Patients' experiences proved helpful in identifying and quantifying obstacles to abstinence in conjunction with facilitating continued patient access to essential clinical resources. Notably, telehealth can supplement rather than replace in-person treatment.

Semper aliquid haeret

Kiefer, F; Goudriaan, A E
European Addiction Research
27, p.237–238, 2021

[Extract] Something always sticks: this will also apply to the general mental stress and social consequences of social distancing and quarantine during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. In particular, it will apply to consequences of increased intake of alcohol or other addictive substances.

Sentiment analysis on substance use disorder (SUD) Tweets before and during COVID-19 pandemic

Singh A.K., Wu D.
In: Stephanidis C., Antona M., Ntoa S. (eds) HCI International 2021 - Posters. HCII 2021. Communications in Computer and Information Science, vol 1421.

This research aims to explore sentiment patterns on substance use disorder (SUD) before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has significantly challenged global healthcare systems and resulted in 2.78 million deaths based on CDC news as of March 2021. Because of social isolation, economic hardships, and fear caused by the lockdown orders, substance use has been strikingly increased including the youth. This is alarming because SUD causes long-lasting and permanent damages to human body and brains as significant health consequences. In this project, we extracted ten-month Tweet samples from May 2019 to December 2020 on Twitter related to SUD mentioning substance and consequences before and during the COVID-19, and then identified the sentiment patterns of the tweets mentioning the SUD. We found that the sentiment trends remained negative except in March and April of 2020, when the social restrictions were imposed, much more positive sentiment appeared in SUD-related tweets.

Medication for opioid use disorder service provision and telephone counseling: a concurrent mixed-methods approach

Martin, R, Kang, A W, DeBritz, AA, et al
International Journal of Environmental Research & Public Health, 2021, 18, 11, 6163

Using quantitative and qualitative evidence, this study triangulates counselors' perspectives on the use of telemedicine in the context of Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) treatment. A concurrent mixed-methods design examined counselors' experiences with telephone counseling during the COVID-19 pandemic. N = 42 counselors who provided OUD counseling services completed a close-ended, quantitative survey examining their experiences in addressing clients' anxiety, depression, anger, substance use, therapeutic relationship, and substance use recovery using telephone counseling. The survey also assessed comfort, convenience, and satisfaction with telephone counseling. Counselors also completed open-ended responses examining satisfaction, convenience, relationship with patients, substance use, and general feedback with telephone counseling. The synthesis of quantitative and qualitative evidence indicated that a majority of counselors had positive experiences with using telephone counseling to provide services to clients undergoing OUD treatment. Convenience, greater access to clients, and flexibility were among the reasons cited for their positive experience. However, counselors also expressed that the telephone counseling was impersonal, and that some clients may have difficulties accessing appropriate technology for telehealth adoption. Findings suggest that further research with counselors is needed to identify the key elements of an effective integration of telephone counseling with traditional in-person treatment approaches in the post-pandemic era.

Covid crisis induces new patterns of drug trafficking

<https://www.dailypioneer.com/2021/state-editions/covid-crisis-induces-new-patterns-of-drug-trafficking.html>

The pandemic was brutal for addicts. My cousin paid the ultimate price.

<https://www.indianapolismonthly.com/longform/the-pandemic-was-brutal-for-addicts-my-cousin-paid-price>

'I used drugs every day in lockdown, but now I'm drug-free'

<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/uk-57688961>

Violence, drugs and fast food: how Americans' risky behavior surged while under a covid lockdown

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/joewalsh/2021/07/06/violence-drugs-and-fast-food-how-americans-risky-behavior-surged-while-under-a-covid-lockdown/?sh=62fe132538d3>

Disruption to ecstasy and other drug use and markets in Australia after COVID-19 restrictions in 2020

After COVID-19-related restrictions were introduced in Australia in early 2020, use of ecstasy/MDMA, related stimulants, and other licit and illicit drugs appeared to mostly remain stable, or decrease.

<https://ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au/news/disruption-ecstasy-and-other-drug-use-and-markets-australia-after-covid-19-restrictions-2020>

What fighting COVID and fighting drug addiction have in common

In both cases, harm reduction is a better strategy than draconian rules that feel virtuous but don't actually work | Scientific American opinion, USA

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/what-fighting-covid-and-fighting-drug-addiction-have-in-common/>

San Diego saw sharp increase in fentanyl deaths throughout pandemic lockdowns

<https://www.kpbs.org/news/2021/jul/07/san-diego-saw-sharp-increase-fentanyl-deaths-throu/>