



EMCDDA DOCUMENTATION CENTRE INFORMATION BULLETIN

CORONAVIRUS, 18 June 2021

GREY LITERATURE

Illicit drug markets and supply in the Western Balkans: Impact of COVID-19

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EMCDDA

Lisbon: 2021

Since the beginning of 2020, the world has been experiencing an unprecedented public health emergency caused by the SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) pandemic. In response, a range of measures have been introduced to protect public health and reduce the risk of infection, including restrictions on social contact and travel.

The Western Balkans reported their first COVID-19 infection cases later than most of the EU Member States. Despite this, their containment strategies have generally been implemented in a similar way and at the same time as in other parts of Europe.

To improve understanding of the impact of the pandemic and associated measures on the drug market in the Western Balkans, the EMCDDA initiated a study using its trendspotter methodology (EMCDDA, 2018). The available information is rather limited. The conclusions reported here are primarily based on law enforcement experts' opinions and should be regarded as preliminary and will require confirmation as more information becomes available. Nonetheless, they do represent a first rapid assessment.

https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/ad-hoc-publication/impact-covid-19-drug-use-drug-services-western-balkans_en

Waging war against COVID-19: the securitisation of the health response in five Asian countries

Harm Reduction International

London: 2021

Since early 2020, countries have experienced an exponential rise in COVID-19 related infections and deaths.

In an attempt to respond to this unprecedented spread of a deadly disease, governments around the world have invoked emergency executive powers, and/or adopted exceptional measures. In many cases, these have resulted in an expansion of law enforcement powers, in some cases in parallel with the side-lining of public health authorities. The necessity and effectiveness of such strategies have been heavily criticised, particularly in light of reports of abuse of force, arbitrary arrests and detention, and targeting of already marginalised, vulnerable, or overpoliced communities (including ethnic minorities and migrant workers).

<https://dsdaily.us1.list-manage.com/track/click?u=4e3613c82d79446dce1623c51&id=c60d445104&e=c1c2df13f0>

Medicinal applications of cannabinoids extracted from *Cannabis sativa* (L.): A new route in the fight against COVID-19?

Khalid, S ; Almalki, F A ; Hadda, T B ; et al
Current Pharmaceutical Design
27, 13, p.1564-1578, 2021

Cannabis sativa is a well-known plant that has been recognized for its benefits since ancient times by several medicinal systems, including those of China, India, Greece, and Egypt. Although *C. sativa* is one of the most investigated medicinal plants in the world, it faces some of the greatest controversies surrounding its legalization and use as a medication. *C. sativa* contains several hundred phytoconstituents, including the infamous “cannabinoids”. It is necessary to properly understand the medicinal importance of these phytochemicals and spread awareness among the countries where cannabis is still facing legal obstacles. The current review focuses on the most recent literature pertaining to various applications of cannabinoids, with a special focus on the medicinal aspect of these phytochemicals. Peer-reviewed articles focusing on the importance of cannabis and cannabinoids are the target of this review. Articles were selected based on the relevance to the general scope of the work, i.e., application of cannabinoids. Cannabinoids can truly be regarded as wonder drugs, considering their immense diversity of usage. Unfortunately, however, many of the mares have never been researched biologically or pharmacologically due to their low yield in the plant. However, the approval of some cannabinoids by the FDA (along with other recognized national medical health systems) has opened the horizon for the use of these natural drugs in medicines such as Epidiolex® (cannabidiol, used for the treatment of severe forms of epilepsy) and Sativex®(δ9-tetrahydrocannabinol and cannabidiol, used for the treatment of spasticity caused by multiple sclerosis). Many pharmacological properties of *C. sativa* are attributed to cannabidiol (CBD), a non-psychoactive component, along with δ9-tetrahydrocannabinol (δ9-THC), a psychoactive component. This review addresses the most important applications or current utilization of cannabinoids in a variety of treatments such as chronic pain, cancer, emesis, anorexia, irritable bowel syndrome, communicable diseases, glaucoma, and central nervous system disorders. The biosynthetic pathway of cannabinoids is also discussed. In short, cannabis has a myriad of bioactive compounds that have the potential to increase the list of approved cannabinoids suitable for therapy.

Evaluation of risk mitigation measures for people with substance use disorders to address the dual public health crises of COVID-19 and overdose in British Columbia: a mixed-method study protocol

Nosyk, B, Slaunwhite, A, Urbanoski, K, et al
BMJ Open, 2021, 11, 6, e048353

Introduction:

The COVID-19 pandemic was preceded by an ongoing overdose crisis and linked to escalating drug overdose deaths in British Columbia (BC). At the outset of these dual public health emergencies, the BC government announced interim Risk Mitigation Guidance (RMG) that permitted prescribing medication alternatives to substances, including opioids, alcohol, stimulants and benzodiazepines, an intervention sometimes referred to as 'safe supply'. This protocol outlines the approach for a study of the implementation of RMG and its impacts on COVID-19 infection, drug-related and systemic harms, continuity of care for people with substance use disorder (SUD), as well as their behavioural, psychosocial and well-being outcomes.

Methods and analysis:

We conducted a parallel mixed-method study that involved both analysis of population-level administrative health data and primary data collection, including a 10-week longitudinal observational study (target n=200), a cross-sectional survey (target n=200) and qualitative interviews (target n=60). We implemented a participatory approach to this evaluation, partnering with people with lived or living expertise of drug use, and researchers and public health decision-makers across the province. Linked population-level administrative databases will analyse data from a cohort of BC residents with an indication of SUD between 1996 and 2020. We will execute high-dimensional propensity score matching and marginal structural modelling to construct a control group and to assess the impact of RMG dispensation receipt on a collaboratively determined set of primary and secondary outcomes.

Ethics and dissemination:

Study activities were developed to adhere to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, recommended COVID-19 research practices, and guided by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action for public health, data governance and research ethics related to Indigenous people. Results will be disseminated incrementally, on an ongoing basis, through the consortium established for this study, then published in peer-reviewed journals.

Insights in public health: methamphetamine use during COVID-19 in Hawai'i

Kiyokawa M ; Streltzer, J

Hawai'i Journal of Health & Social Welfare, 2021, 80, 5, p.117-118

COVID-19 and the opioid epidemic: two public health emergencies that intersect with chronic pain

Manchikanti, L ; Vanaparthi, R ; Atluri, S ; et al

Pain and Therapy

10, 1, p.269-286, 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the entire world and catapulted the United States into one of the deepest recessions in history. While this pandemic rages, the opioid crisis worsens. During this period, the pandemic has resulted in the decimation of most conventional medical services, including those of chronic pain management, with the exception of virtual care and telehealth. Many chronic pain patients have been impacted in numerous ways, with increases in cardiovascular disease, mental health problems, cognitive dysfunction, and early death. The epidemic has also resulted in severe economic and physiological consequences for providers. Drug deaths in America, which fell for the first time in 25 years in 2018, rose to record numbers in 2019 and are continuing to climb, worsened by the coronavirus pandemic. The opioid epidemic was already resurfacing with a 5% increase in overall deaths from 2018; however, the preliminary data show that prescription opioid deaths continued to decline, while at the same time deaths due to fentanyl, methamphetamine, and cocaine climbed, with some reductions in heroin deaths. The health tracker data also showed that along with an almost 88% decline in elective surgeries, pain-related prescriptions declined 15.1%. Despite increases in telehealth, outpatient services declined and only began returning towards normal at an extremely slow pace, accompanied by reduced productivity and increased practice costs. This review, therefore, emphasizes the devastating consequences of concurrent epidemics on chronic pain management and the need to develop best practice efforts to preserve access to treatment for chronic pain.

Apprentissage de l'élargissement des modalités de prescription de l'héroïne médicale avec le Covid-19

[Learning to expand medical heroin prescribing modalities with Covid-19].

Calzada G, Giustiniani J, Gois T, Kuntz A, Khazaal Y, Zullino D.

Revue Medicale Suisse

17, 742, p.1111-1114, 2021

L'offre des traitements assistés par opioïdes pour les personnes avec dépendance à l'héroïne est particulièrement diversifiée en Suisse. Les traitements basés sur la prescription de diacétylmorphine y sont ainsi proposés depuis 1994, dont les règles de prescription et de remise au patient régies par l'Office fédéral de la santé publique sont particulièrement strictes, imposant aux patients un passage au centre de soins plusieurs fois par jour. Grâce aux modifications législatives du Conseil fédéral, permettant aux patients d'emporter le traitement pour des durées plus longues pendant la pandémie de Covid-19, les passages à la consultation ont été réduits. Cela a eu pour effet indirect de libérer du temps, qui a pu être investi dans d'autres activités, notamment le recentrage des thérapies davantage autour des projets de vie des patients.

The choice of opioid-assisted treatments for patients with heroin dependence is particularly diverse in Switzerland. Since 1994, diacetylmorphine assisted treatments are available. The rules for prescribing and dispensing diacetylmorphine, as laid down by the FOPH, are particularly strict, requiring patients to attend the treatment center several times a day. Thanks to a legislative amendment by the Federal Council, it became possible to extend the dispensing of diacetylmorphine during the Covid-19 epidemic, allowing patients to take the treatment with them for longer periods and thus reducing the number of visits to the clinic. The time freed up could then be invested in other activities, allowing therapies to be refocused more on the patients' life project.

COVID-19 pandemic and drug use disorder

Mungmunpantipantip, R., & Wiwanitkit, V

Addicta: The Turkish Journal on Addictions,

8, 1, p.92-93, 2021

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

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.

Cannabis withdrawal induced brief psychotic disorder: a case study during the national lockdown secondary to the COVID-19 pandemic

Marin, J; Perez de Mendiola, X; Fernandez, S; et al

Journal of Addictive Diseases

10 June 2021

DOI: 10.1080/10550887.2021.1910473

Background:

Cannabis Withdrawal Syndrome (CWS) is a key feature of Cannabis Use Disorder (CUD). The CWS causes significant distress and disability. While the relationship between CUD and psychosis has been extensively studied, the potential connection between CWS and psychosis has not received as much attention.

Case presentation:

The CARE guideline's methodology is followed in the presentation of this case report. During the national lockdown decreed by the Spanish government for the containment of the CoronaVirus Disease 19 (COVID-19) pandemic, a 29-year-old man suffers a CWS and a subsequent psychotic episode. He is admitted to a psychiatric unit, obtaining a rapid and complete response to treatment.

Discussion:

Clinical and pathophysiological data that support the hypothesis of CWS-induced psychosis are discussed. Due to the increasing use of cannabis worldwide, we believe that more research is needed on the mental disturbances associated with CUD, including CWS and psychosis. On the other hand, the confinement and social distancing measures adopted in the face of the current COVID-19 pandemic could have restricted the availability and consumption of certain drugs, precipitating the emergence of withdrawal syndromes such as CWS.

Alcohol and substance use in pregnancy during the COVID-19 pandemic

Kar, P; Tomfohr-Madsen, L; Giesbrecht, G; et al

Drug and Alcohol Dependence, 2021, 225, 108760

Background:

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on alcohol and substance use has been a topic of concern. Pregnant women are currently experiencing elevated anxiety and depression symptoms, which may increase risk of substance use, and potentially result in poor perinatal and neurodevelopmental outcomes for children.

Methods:

Survey results were analyzed from an ongoing study of 7470 pregnant individuals in Canada: Pregnancy during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Participants were asked about current use of alcohol and substances, symptoms of depression and anxiety, and COVID-19 concerns: how much they worry about COVID-19 threatening their baby's life, threatening their own life, care for themselves or the baby, feelings of social isolation, and financial difficulties.

Results:

The percentage of participants who reported use during pregnancy was 6.7 % for alcohol, 4.3 % for cannabis, 4.9 % for tobacco, and 0.3 % for illicit drugs; 2.6 % were using multiple substances. Higher

depression symptoms and financial difficulties were associated with more cannabis and/or tobacco use as well as the co-use of substances. There were no associations between alcohol use and mental health or COVID-19 concerns.

Conclusions:

Self-reported rates of use and co-use were lower or comparable to previous research, perhaps reflecting pandemic-related circumstances or the demographics of this sample. Depression symptoms and pandemic-related financial difficulties were associated with more tobacco use, cannabis use, and substance co-use. It remains important to maintain access to perinatal, mental health, and financial supports during the pandemic to mitigate prenatal alcohol and substance use and prevent poor perinatal and long-term neurodevelopmental outcomes for children.

Use of an electronic pillbox to increase number of methadone take-home doses during the COVID-19 pandemic

Kidorf M, Brooner RK, Dunn KE, Peirce JM.

Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment, 2021, 126, 108328

This study describes use of the commercially available Medminder electronic pillbox at a community substance use disorder treatment program to safely increase the number of methadone take-home doses administered during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pillbox contains 28 cells that lock independently and can be opened only during preprogrammed time windows. This study provided patients (n = 42) deemed vulnerable to take-home mismanagement or more severe symptoms from COVID-19 infection the pillbox and observed them for 11 weeks. A telephone support line was staffed daily to manage technical issues. Overall, patients received about 14 more take-home doses per month after receiving the pillbox. Most medication was dispensed within scheduled windows. The study observed few incidents of suspected tampering, though five patients had their pillbox rescinded to allow more intensive on-site clinical monitoring. The study supports use of an electronic pillbox with a telephone support line to help vulnerable patients to better observe stay-at-home guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pillbox may offer public health and clinical benefits that extend beyond the pandemic by increasing program treatment capacity and patient satisfaction.

“You know, we can change the services to suit the circumstances of what is happening in the world”: a rapid case study of the COVID-19 response across city centre homelessness and health services in Edinburgh, Scotland

Parkes, T, Carver, H, Masterton, W, et al.

Harm Reduction Journal, 2021, 18, 64

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated unprecedented changes in the way that health, social, and housing services are delivered to individuals experiencing homelessness and problem substance use. Protecting those at high risk of infection/transmission, whilst addressing the multiple health and social needs of this group, is of utmost importance. This study aimed to document the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on individuals who were experiencing homelessness in one city centre in Scotland, and how services adapted in response.

Methods

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals with lived/living experience of homelessness (n = 10), staff within onethird sector service (n = 5), and external professionals (n = 5), during April-August 2020, using a rapid case study design. These were audio-recorded, fully transcribed, and analysed using Framework. Analysis was informed by inclusion health and equity-orientated approaches to meeting the needs of people with multiple and complex needs, and emerging literature on providing harm reduction in the context of COVID-19.

Results

Those with lived/living experience of homelessness and problem substance use faced a range of additional challenges during the pandemic. Mental health and use of substances were affected, influenced by social isolation and access to services. A range of supports were provided which flexed over the lockdown period, including housing, health and social care, substance use treatment, and harm reduction. As well as documenting the additional risks encountered, findings describe COVID-19 as a ‘path-breaking’ event that created opportunities to get evidence into action, increase partnership working and communication, to proactively address risks.

Conclusions

This rapid case study has described the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on a group of people experiencing homelessness and problem substance use within one city centre in Scotland and provides a unique lens on service/professional responses. It concludes with lessons that can inform the international and ongoing response to this pandemic. It is vital to recognise the vision and leadership that has adapted organisational responses in order to reduce harms. We must learn from

such successes that were motivated both by compassion and care for those vulnerable to harms and the desire to provide high-quality, evidence-based, harm reduction services.

Traumatic distress, alexithymia, dissociation, and risk of addiction during the first wave of COVID-19 in Italy: results from a cross-sectional online survey on a non-clinical adult sample

La Rosa, V L, Gori, A, Faraci, P, et al.

International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction

10 June 2021

DOI : 10.1007/s11469-021-00569

This study aimed to explore the prevalence of post-traumatic distress, alexithymia, dissociation, and addictive behaviors during the stressful situation of the COVID-19 pandemic. It also aimed to determine whether trauma, alexithymia, and dissociation can effectively predict the risk of addiction in non-clinical subjects during the COVID-19 pandemic. Two hundred nineteen subjects completed a web survey during the first COVID-19 lockdown in Italy, including the Impact of Event Scale-Revised (IES-R), the Dissociative Experience Scale-II (DES-II), and the Addictive Behavior Questionnaire (ABQ). Females reported higher levels of COVID-19-related traumatic stress than males ($p = 0.009$). A greater fear of getting COVID-19 was associated with significantly high IES-R scores ($p < 0.0005$). IES-R total score was significantly lower in the “not internet-addicted” group than that in the “internet-addicted” group ($p < 0.0005$). Furthermore, DES-II total score was significantly higher in the “internet-addicted” group than that in the “non internet-addicted” group ($p < 0.0005$). No statistically significant score differences were highlighted in the “alcohol” group. Future research with longitudinal studies and larger samples will have to clarify whether trauma, alexithymia, and dissociation can effectively predict the risk of addiction in non-clinical subjects during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recovery homes coping with COVID-19

Jason, L A; Bobak, T J; O'Brien, J; Mejer, J

Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community

11 June 2021

DOI: 10.1080/10852352.2021.1934941

Recovery homes are a widespread community resource that might be utilized by some individuals with substance use disorders (SUD) and COVID-19. A growing collection of empirical literature suggests that housing can act as a low-cost recovery support system which could be effective in helping those with SUD sustain their recovery. Such settings could be already housing many residents affected by COVID-19. Many of these residents are at high risk for COVID-19 given their histories of SUD, homelessness, criminal justice involvement, and psychiatric comorbidity. Stable housing after treatment may decrease the risk of relapse to active addiction, and these types of settings may have important implications for those with housing insecurity who are at risk for being infected with COVID-19. Given the extensive network of community-based recovery homes, there is a need to better understand individual- and organizational-level responses to the COVID-19 pandemic among people in recovery homes as well as those managing and making referrals to the houses. At the present time, it is unclear what the effects of COVID-19 are on recovery home membership retention or dropout rates. This article attempts to provide a better understanding of the possible impact of COVID-19 on the infected and on recovery resources in general.

Program adaptations to provide harm reduction services during the COVID-19 pandemic: a qualitative study of syringe services programs in the U.S.

Frost, M C, Sweek, E W, Austin, E J, et al

AIDS and Behavior

10 June 2021

DOI: 10.1007/s10461-021-03332-7

Syringe services programs (SSPs) are essential to preventing injection drug use-related infections and overdose death among people who use drugs (PWUD). The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic initially impeded SSPs' operations. To effectively support these programs, information is needed regarding SSPs' experiences adapting their services and the challenges posed by COVID-19. We conducted qualitative interviews with leadership and staff from a sample of 31 U.S. SSPs. Respondents discussed urgent concerns including reduced reach of services, suspended HIV/hepatitis C testing, high COVID-19 risk among PWUD, and negative impacts of isolation on overdose and mental health. They also noted opportunities to improve future services for PWUD, including shifting to evidence-based distribution practices and maintaining regulatory changes that increased access to opioid use disorder medications post-pandemic. Findings can inform efforts to

support SSPs in restoring and expanding services, and provide insight into SSPs' role in engaging PWUD during the COVID-19 response and future emergencies.

Use of buprenorphine for those with employer-sponsored insurance during the initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic

Cantor, J; Dick, A W; Haffajee, R; et al

Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment, 2021, 129, 108384

Objective:

To quantify weekly rates of use of buprenorphine for those with employer-based insurance and whether the rate differs based on county-level measures of race, historical fatal drug overdose rate, and COVID-19 case rate.

Methods:

We used 2020 pharmaceutical claims for 4.8 million adults from a privately insured population to examine changes in the use of buprenorphine to treat opioid use disorder in 2020 during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. We quantified variation by examining changes in use rates across counties based on their fatal drug overdose rate in 2018, number of COVID-19 cases per capita, and percent nonwhite.

Results:

Weekly use of buprenorphine was relatively stable between the first week of January (0.6 per 10,000 enrollees, 95%CI = 0.2 to 1.1) and the last week of August (0.8 per 10,000 enrollees, 95%CI = 0.4 to 1.3). We did not find evidence of any consistent change in use of buprenorphine by county-level terciles for COVID-19 rate as of August 31, 2020, age-adjusted fatal drug overdose rate, and percent nonwhite. Use was consistently higher for counties in the highest tercile of county age-adjusted fatal drug overdose rate when compared to counties in the lowest tercile of county age-adjusted fatal drug overdose rate.

Discussion:

Our results provide early evidence that new federal- and state-level policies may have steadied the rate of using buprenorphine for those with employer-based insurance during the pandemic.

Changing patterns of substance use during the coronavirus pandemic: self-reported use of tobacco, alcohol, cannabis, and other drugs

Benschop A, van Bakkum F, Noijen J.

Frontiers in Psychiatry, 2021, 12, 633551

As in many other countries worldwide, the coronavirus pandemic prompted the implementation of an "intelligent lockdown" in the spring of 2020 in the Netherlands, including the closure of nightlife venues and cancellation of festivals. Such restrictions and social distancing could particularly affect people who use alcohol or other drugs in recreational settings and give rise to new challenges and additional needs in the field of addiction prevention and care. To monitor changes in substance use and provide services with practical directions for tailored prevention, an anonymous web survey was set up, targeting a convenience sample aged 16 years or older through various social media and other online channels. Between May and October 2020, a total of 6,070 participants completed the survey, mainly adolescents and young adults (16-24 years old). These data were used to explore and describe changing patterns in substance use. Overall results showed declined current use compared to "pre-corona," but mask underlying variation in changing patterns, including discontinued (tobacco 10.4%, alcohol 11.3%, cannabis 16.3%, other drugs 30.4%), decreased (tobacco 23.0%, alcohol 29.1%, cannabis 17.4%, other drugs 20.7%), unchanged (tobacco 30.3%, alcohol 21.2%, cannabis 22.3%, other drugs 17.3%), increased (tobacco 29.6%, alcohol 32.1%, cannabis 32.9%, other drugs 25.3%), and (re)commenced use (tobacco 6.7%, alcohol 6.3%, cannabis 11.1%, other drugs 6.2%). Especially the use of drugs like ecstasy and nitrous oxide was discontinued or decreased due to the lack of social occasions for use. Increased use was associated with coping motives for all substance types. As measures combatting the coronavirus may need to be practiced for some time to come, possibly leading to prolonged changes in substance use with lingering "post-corona" consequences, timely and ongoing monitoring of changing patterns of substance use is vital for informing prevention services within this field.

The differential impact of lockdown measures upon migrant and female psychiatric patients - a cross-sectional survey in a psychiatric hospital in Berlin, Germany

Moran J K, Bretz J, Winkler J, et al

Frontiers in Psychiatry, 2021, 12, 642784

The COVID-19 pandemic could have major effects on already vulnerable individuals with psychiatric disorders. It is important to assess how different patient groups respond to stress related to the

pandemic, and what additional factors influence it, including family-related stress, migration background, and sex. We conducted a survey in a sample of 294 psychiatric patients in a large outpatient clinic in Berlin, measuring level of distress in relation to COVID-19 lockdown as well as family-related distress. We also measured potential influencing factors such as media consumption and medical support. In the migration background group, we found that women had more lockdown related psychological distress than men. This was not apparent in those patients with a German background. We found that females were more strongly affected by family-related distress, particularly those with a migration background. People with PTSD were most strongly affected by family-related distress, whereas people with psychotic disorders and addiction reported the least distress. There were no effects of media consumption. There were no differences in ability to abide by the lockdown related restrictions across diagnoses. Our results support earlier findings on differential vulnerability of diagnostic groups to these stressors. Thus, clinicians can optimize treatment by taking family-related stressors into account particularly for females and people with a migrant background.

A novel transition: Lessons learned during rapid implementation and evolution of telehealth group based opioid treatment (t-GBOT) during the COVID-19 pandemic

Sokol, R ; Mintzer, E

Healthcare, 2021, 9, 3, 100559

Media exposure and substance use increase during COVID-19

Amram, O; Borah, P; Kubsad, D; McPherson, S M

International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 2021, 18, 12, 6318

Background:

Lockdown measures because of COVID-19 are likely to result in deteriorating physical and mental health. In this study, our aim was to assess the impact of media exposure on increases in substance use during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods:

A nationally representative online survey of 1264 adults was collected during the pandemic in the United States. Logistic regression was used to explore the association between an increase in substance use since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and exposure to cable news or social media together with COVID-19 knowledge, while controlling for covariates.

Results:

In the multivariable-adjusted models, participants with the highest exposure to social media (at least daily) and low knowledge of COVID-19 were 9.9 times more likely to experience an increase in substance use since the pandemic began (OR = 9.90, 95% CI = 4.27–23.06). Participants with the highest exposure to cable news and low knowledge of COVID-19 were over 11 times more likely to experience an increase in substance use (OR = 11.64, 95% CI = 4.01–24.45).

Conclusion:

Based on our findings, we recommend that media organizations should aim to reduce uncertainty and also provide positive coverage to counter the negative information associated with pandemics.

Virtual care in an outpatient subspecialty substance use disorder treatment program

Levy S, Deister D, Fantegrossi J, et al

Journal of Addiction Medicine

14 June 2021

doi: 10.1097/ADM.0000000000000871

Objectives:

This article reports on the experience of an outpatient adolescent substance use disorder treatment program transitioning to virtual care during the COVID-19 pandemic. We describe the processes used to make the transition, including development of a safety protocol for patients seen virtually, present clinical volume data before and after the transition, and we describe a range of patient experiences through 3 clinical vignettes.

Methods:

Using data from the electronic health record, we generated counts of the total number of scheduled and completed appointments between December 2019 and June 2020. We used simple proportions to calculate the completed visit rate.

Results:

Both the absolute number of scheduled appointment and the percent of appointments completed increased with the initiation of virtual care, supporting the acceptability of this modality. Several patients experienced clinical improvements in conjunction with greater engagement, though challenges were also noted.

Conclusions:

Virtual visits are a practical mode of treatment for adolescent substance use disorders, and more evidence is needed to understand the risks and benefits of this treatment modality.

Changes in online psychoactive substance trade via telegram during the COVID-19 pandemic

Blankers M, van der Gouwe D, Stegemann L, Smit-Rigter L.

European Addiction Research

16 June 2021

doi: 10.1159/000516853

Background:

In this article, we present an evaluation of online psychoactive substance trade via Telegram, a free encrypted social media messenger service. The evaluation took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, which allowed us to monitor the effects of the spring 2020 lockdown in the Netherlands on substance trade via Telegram.

Objective:

The objective of this study was to evaluate whether changes in psychoactive substance trade on Telegram markets in the Netherlands can be observed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Results:

Between December 2, 2019, and June 29, 2020, a total of 70,226 posts appeared in two analyzed Telegram groups. A total of 5,643 posts were psychoactive substance related. Based on the analyzed posts, Telegram is mostly a "sellers" market as only a minority of the posts (6.3%) could be identified as a request for a substance. The proportion of posts related to specific substances varied between the periods before, during, and after the lockdown. The proportion of posts on the stimulants ecstasy, cocaine, and amphetamine was lower during the lockdown than before and after. For psychedelics - ketamine, lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), and 2,5-dimethoxy-4-bromophenethylamine (2C-B) - and other substances, there was a relative increase in the number of posts during the lockdown, which was maintained after the lockdown.

Conclusions:

Telegram analysis shows that in the Netherlands, online psychoactive substance trade may have been affected during the COVID-19 pandemic. The direction of this effect was different for different classes of substances.

Depressive symptoms, mental wellbeing, and substance use among adolescents before and during the COVID-19 pandemic in Iceland: a longitudinal, population-based study

Thorisdottir, I E; Asgeirsdottir, B B, Kristjansson, A L, et al

The Lancet Psychiatry

17 June 2021

DOI: 10.1016/S2215-0366(21)00156-5

Background:

Adolescence represents a crucial developmental period in shaping mental health trajectories. In this study, we investigated the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health and substance use during this sensitive developmental stage.

Methods:

In this longitudinal, population-based study, surveys were administered to a nationwide sample of 13-18-year-olds in Iceland in October or February in 2016 and 2018, and in October, 2020 (during the COVID-19 pandemic). The surveys assessed depressive symptoms with the Symptom Checklist-90, mental wellbeing with the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale, and the frequency of cigarette smoking, e-cigarette use, and alcohol intoxication. Demographic data were collected, which included language spoken at home although not ethnicity data. We used mixed effects models to study the effect of gender, age, and survey year on trends in mental health outcomes.

Findings:

59 701 survey responses were included; response rates ranged from 63% to 86%. An increase in depressive symptoms (β 0.57, 95% CI 0.53 to 0.60) and worsened mental wellbeing (β -0.46, 95% CI -0.49 to -0.42) were observed across all age groups during the pandemic compared with same-aged peers before COVID-19. These outcomes were significantly worse in adolescent girls compared with boys (β 4.16, 95% CI 4.05 to 4.28, and β -1.13, 95% CI -1.23 to -1.03, respectively). Cigarette smoking (OR 2.61, 95% CI 2.59 to 2.66), e-cigarette use (OR 2.61, 95% CI 2.59 to 2.64), and alcohol intoxication (OR 2.59, 95% CI 2.56 to 2.64) declined among 15-18-year-olds during COVID-19, with no similar gender differences.

Interpretation:

Our results suggest that COVID-19 has significantly impaired adolescent mental health. However, the decrease observed in substance use during the pandemic might be an unintended benefit of isolation,

and might serve as a protective factor against future substance use disorders and dependence. Population-level prevention efforts, especially for girls, are warranted.

Kratom use for depression/anxiety self-management: challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic - A case report

Müller, E, Hillemacher, T, Müller, C P
Heliyon, 2021, 7, 5, e07039

Background:

Kratom is a psychoactive plant preparation originating from Southeast Asia. It has been used as a recreational and performance drug in Southeast Asia, and is now increasingly used in Europe and the U.S.

Case report:

We describe the case of a 63-year-old man who presented for treatment after his long-term Kratom use failed as a self-management for persistent major depression (ICD 10: F33.2) and a generalized anxiety disorder (ICD-10: F41.1). The failure coincided with emerging stress at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The patient suffered from childhood on from ruminative thinking and depressive mood, which was treated in several settings during his life. He started to use alcohol to control his depression, but developed an alcohol addiction. This was successfully treated and the patient remained abstinent for more than 25 years afterwards. About 7 years ago, he started to use Kratom 3-4 times daily on a regular, but constant rate. Kratom use worked efficiently as a self-management of his depression with no escalation of dosing. It was also very effective in reducing Morbus Menière symptoms of tinnitus and sudden hearing loss, which eventually allowed regular performance as a caregiver in a demanding job on shift-work. During recently increased stress load in the work environment and the COVID-19 pandemic, the established Kratom doses failed to control hyperarousal and mental nervousness. The patient was treatment seeking and subsequently detoxified from Kratom. Anxiety- and depression management was shifted to treatment attempts with Lorazepam, Venlafaxine, Opipramol, Mirtazapine and psychotherapy.

Conclusion:

Kratom instrumentalization for self-management of depression and anxiety may effectively work without causing escalation of drug use and addiction, but may be limited by a temporary increase in psychological stress load and a relapse into major depression and generalized anxiety disorder.

New study shows increase in overdose deaths during pandemic, more drugs laced with fentanyl

<https://baltimore.cbslocal.com/2021/06/08/new-study-shows-increase-in-overdose-deaths-during-pandemic-more-drugs-laced-with-fentanyl/>

Europe's drug habit proves immune to COVID-19

<https://www.economist.com/europe/2021/06/10/europes-drug-habit-proves-immune-to-covid-19>

Despite COVID-19, Asia's drug trade expands, diversifies

<https://thediplomat.com/2021/06/despite-covid-19-asias-drug-trade-expands-diversifies/>

Opioid overdose crisis has dramatically worsened during COVID-19 pandemic, report says

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/opioid-overdose-crisis-has-dramatically-worsened-during-covid-19-pandemic-report-says-1.6065241>

Opioid overdoses spiked during the COVID-19 pandemic, data from Pennsylvania show

<https://theconversation.com/opioid-overdoses-spiked-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-data-from-pennsylvania-show-161635>

Drug overdoses increase by 203%, Clinical Supervisor blames COVID-19 and fentanyl

<https://www.valleynewslive.com/2021/06/15/drug-overdoses-increase-by-203-clinical-supervisor-blames-covid-19-fentanyl/>

Women seeking addiction treatment in Boston fell into the pandemic and are now returning with acute needs

<https://dailybostonnews.com/women-seeking-addiction-treatment-in-boston-fell-into-the-pandemic-and-are-now-returning-with-acute-needs/>

Ecstasy use down during the pandemic, but as bars and clubs re-open, will Ecstasy abuse rebound to pre-pandemic levels?

[NB - news provided by Church of Scientology National Affairs Office. Vaughan]

https://www.einnews.com/pr_news/543993169/ecstasy-use-down-during-the-pandemic-but-as-bars-and-clubs-re-open-will-ecstasy-abuse-rebound-to-pre-pandemic-levels

COVID-19 stopped progress on the drug epidemic in its tracks

<https://www.thenation.com/article/society/opioid-epidemic-covid-policy/>

Opioids rip through U.S. workforce, with deaths at record level

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-06-17/opioids-rip-through-u-s-workforce-with-deaths-at-record-level>