



EMCDDA DOCUMENTATION CENTRE INFORMATION BULLETIN

CORONAVIRUS, 27 November 2020

GREY LITERATURE

Addictions in France during lockdown (March 17–May 11, 2020)

French Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction
Paris: 2020

This issue of Tendances provides an overview of the first effects of the health crisis and lockdown on the supply and use of psychoactive substances in France (mainly alcohol, tobacco and cannabis). The available data show that alcohol and tobacco accessibility remained strong, while the increase in consumption was restricted. However, the most regular users of tobacco and alcohol appear to have maintained or intensified their use.

According to the initial results of an online survey conducted by the OFDT, an increase among the most frequent cannabis users has also been noticed. While a lower availability of resin supply was reported, the pattern of cannabis use was concentrated on the most regular users: the share of daily users increased by 11 points, from 20% to 31%.

This analysis also reports on the organisational adaptation of health care institutions and the harm reduction carried out, in real time, during this critical period. The continuity of medico-social services' activities was quickly secured by the public authorities at the beginning of the lockdown. Meanwhile they continued to provide access to harm reduction equipment and opioid substitution medications. The lockdown has also contributed to the growth of the online poker especially among young people. This development is giving rise to public health concerns and the issue of protecting them from the risk of excessive poker gambling.

<http://en.ofdt.fr/BDD/publications/docs/eftaof2a9.pdf>

The impact of substance use disorder on the mental health among COVID-19 patients: A protocol for systematic review and meta-analysis

Kim Y.J., Qian L., Aslam M.S.

Medicine

99, 46, e23203, 2020

Substance use disorder (SUD) is associated with a high risk of physical and mental illness such as anxiety, depression, personality disorders, eating disorders, and abnormal mood changes. During the pandemic, SUD, a significant problem related to Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), is affecting adolescents. The recent available literature also emphasizes understanding the relationship between mental illness and SUD. Hence, it is essential to evaluate the scientific approach and examine the presented findings of articles published on SUD during the COVID-19 pandemic. A systematic review will be conducted using PubMed, PubMed Central, and Scopus bibliographic databases. The grey literature on the impact of SUD on mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic among adolescents will be identified using scholar google. The dependability and credibility of the findings will be examined using the ConQual approach. The methodologies of the included studies will be compared using ROBIS (risk of bias in systematic reviews tool), a measurement tool to assess systematic reviews (AMSTAR), and the JBI critical appraisal tool. The systematic review will be carried out on published articles, so it is exempt from ethics approval. The Center for Open Science (OSF) will be used as a data repository during the preparation of the protocol and completion of the systematic review. The research findings will be published in a related peer-reviewed journal.

Adapting a low-threshold buprenorphine program for vulnerable populations during the COVID-19 pandemic

Nordeck C.D., Buresh M., Krawczyk N., et al

Journal of Addiction Medicine

20 November 2020

DOI: 10.1097/ADM.0000000000000774

Objectives:

To examine patient characteristics and outcomes among opioid use disorder patients enrolled in low-threshold buprenorphine treatment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods:

This paper describes the adaptation of the Project Connections (PC) program, a low-threshold buprenorphine program in Baltimore, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper examines patient characteristics and initial outcomes of patients served during a rapid protocol shift to telehealth that allowed buprenorphine initiation without an in-person encounter following a state-mandated stay-at-home order. Patient characteristics were compared to a subsample of patients enrolled in the program before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Results:

In March 2020, there was a sharp increase in new enrollments to the PC program. A total of 143 patients completed an intake assessment between March and May 2020 and 140 began treatment with buprenorphine/naloxone. Those who completed an intake assessment were primarily male (68.5%), Black (83.2%), had a mean age of 43.2 years (SD=11.7), and reported a mean of 17.0 years of opioid use (SD=12.9). The majority of patients were unemployed (72.7%) and reported previous criminal justice involvement (69.2%). Of those who completed an intake assessment, 96.5% returned for a second visit. Among those for whom 30-day retention data was available (n=113), 63.7% were engaged for 30 days or longer.

Conclusions:

The PC program illustrates that offering on-demand, flexible treatment is an opportunity to increase opioid use disorder treatment access, even during a public health emergency that disrupted access to services. Relaxation of buprenorphine telehealth regulations allowed for flexibility in treatment and benefits vulnerable populations.

Increase in drugs-of-abuse findings in post-mortem toxicology due to COVID-19 restrictions - first observations in Finland

Mariottini, C, Ojanperä, I, Kriikku, P

Drug Testing and Analysis

20 November 2020

doi: 10.1002/dta.2982

A lot has been published on the anticipated effects of the current COVID-19 pandemic on users of illegal drugs. In this study we present evidence-based data on such effects, namely the increased number of drug findings in post-mortem investigations. All post-mortem toxicology cases positive for at least one of the following: buprenorphine, amphetamine, or cannabis, were investigated in the first 8 months of the year 2020 and the monthly numbers were compared to those in the previous 5 years from 2015-2019. These substances served as indicator analytes that could reveal changes in the drug using population. Right after the government restrictions came into force in March 2020, the numbers of buprenorphine, amphetamine and cannabis findings increased. The increase was most noticeable for amphetamine and was evident in all age groups. Our findings indicate that the assumptions on the increased risk of drug-related harm (including death) have become reality. Reduced access to harm-reduction services seems to have increased the mortality among individuals that use buprenorphine, amphetamine, or cannabis. Significant and prompt actions need to be taken in order to find new ways in helping this vulnerable group of people.

Organization of mental healthcare in Bosnia and Herzegovina during coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic

Pajević I, Hasanović M, Avdibegović E, et al
Indian Journal of Psychiatry
62, Suppl 3, S479-S491, 2020

Background:

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), like any other pandemic, has imposed an unprecedented threat to physical and mental health to all nations, worldwide. There is not enough evidence in the literature in this area. The present study has been done to explore the organization of psychiatric services in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BH) to meet mental health needs of BH citizens during the particular restrictive measures caused by COVID-19 pandemic.

Materials

This online survey has been done for BH psychiatric institutions. Data were collected from psychiatric institutions in the mental health network of BH. A total of 38 complete responses have been received.

Results:

Of 38 study participants, three were the departments of psychiatry in university clinical centers, two were psychiatric hospitals, four were psychiatric wards in general hospitals, 27 were community mental health centers, and two were institutes for alcoholism and drug addiction. During the pandemic, all services functioned on a reduced scale, adhering to measures to protect and self-protect both staff and service users. Protective equipment was provided to staff in some institutions in a timely and complete manner and in some in an untimely and incomplete manner. Consultative psychiatric examinations were mainly performed through telephone and online, where it exists as a standard patient monitoring protocol. The application of long-acting antipsychotics was continuous with adherence to restricted and protective measures. In opiate addiction replacement therapy services, substitution therapy was provided for a longer period to reduce frequent contacts between staff and patients. Individual and group psychotherapy continued in reduced number using online technologies, although this type of service was not administratively regulated. An initiative has been given to regulate and administratively recognize telepsychiatry by health insurance funds in the country. A number of psychological problems associated with restrictive measures and fear of illness have been reported by patients as well as by the professionals in mental healthcare teams. There were no COVID-19-positive patients seeking help from institutions that responded to the questionnaire. In one center, infected people with COVID-19 from abroad sought help through the phone. Only one involuntary hospitalization was reported. The involvement of mental health professionals in the work of crisis headquarters during the design of the COVID-19 pandemic control measures varies from satisfactory to insufficient. Education of staff, patients, and citizens was regular with direct instructions through meetings, press, and electronic media.

Conclusions:

During the COVID-19 pandemic in BH, all psychiatric services functioned on a reduced scale, adhering to measures to protect and self-protect staff and service users. All patients who asked for help have been adequately treated in direct inpatient or outpatient mental healthcare or online, despite telepsychiatric services not being recognized in health system in BH. There were neither infected patients nor staff with COVID-19 in the psychiatric institutions who responded in this research. A large-scale, multicenter study needs to be performed to get a broader picture and to guide us for future better service planning and delivery.

Assessing and addressing collider bias in addiction research: the curious case of smoking and COVID-19

Tattan-Birch, H, Marsden, J, West, R, Gage, S H
Addiction

Domestic violence and substance abuse during COVID19: A systematic review

Abdo C, Miranda EP, Santos CS, Júnior JB, Bernardo WM.
Indian Journal of Psychiatry
62, Suppl 3, S337-S342, 2020

Introduction:

As COVID-19 develops around the world, numerous publications have described the psychiatric consequences of this pandemic. Although clinicians and healthcare systems are mainly focused on managing critically ill patients in an attempt to limit the number of casualties, psychiatric disease burden is increasing significantly. In this scenario, increased domestic violence and substance abuse have been recently reported.

Objective:

The objective of this study is to perform a systematic review of the literature regarding the consequences of severe acute respiratory syndrome-CoV-2 infection in terms of domestic violence and substance abuse, and compare incidences found.

Materials and methods:

We conducted a literature search using the preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses guidelines. The keywords included "domestic violence," "substance abuse" AND "COVID-19," including multiple variants from December 2019 through June 2020. An extensive bibliographic search was carried out in different medical databases: Pubmed, EMBASE, LILACS, medRxiv, and bioRxiv. Titles and abstracts were reviewed according to the eligibility criteria. The risk of bias in the retrieved articles was assessed by the Joanna Briggs Institute's critical assessment instrument.

Results:

A total of 1505 papers were initially retrieved after consulting the selected databases. After browsing through titles and abstracts, 94 articles were initially included considering the predefined eligibility criteria. After a more detailed analysis, only six scientific articles remained in our selection. Of these, three were evaluating domestic violence against children, while the other three were about substance abuse.

Conclusion:

There is not enough evidence to support the concept that COVID-19 has led to an increase in the rates of domestic violence and substance abuse. The initial decrease in violence reports might not translate into a real reduction in incidence but in accessibility. Apparently, there has been a slight increase in alcohol and tobacco abuse, especially by regular users, which also requires confirmatory studies. The inconsistency between expert opinion articles and the actual published data could be a result of the limited time since the beginning of the crisis, the fact that psychiatric patients have been chronically exposed to stressful situations, and a possible stimulated increase in demand for psychiatric consultations.

The impact of COVID-19 on service provision for emergency department patients post-opioid overdose: a field report

Cillins, A B; Beaudoin, F L; Samuels, E A; et al
Journal of Addiction Medicine
24 November 2020
DOI : 10.1097/ADM.0000000000000779

Background:

To minimize the spread of COVID-19, health and ancillary care providers altered service delivery patterns. These changes included an increase in reliance on telemedicine modalities, a reduction in services or hours of operation, and prohibiting guests and nonessential personnel from healthcare settings. We describe a rapid environmental assessment with senior emergency department (ED) practitioners in Rhode Island to understand how COVID-related procedural changes impact the provision of post-overdose care in ED.

Methods:

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 senior healthcare practitioners in EDs across Rhode Island from June to July 2020. Interviews were part of a larger, ongoing study examining the implementation and effectiveness of post-opioid overdose care in EDs and sought to understand how COVID-19 had impacted the provision of services for people who use drugs (PWUD).

Results:

COVID-related policy changes challenged the provision of services to PWUD in the ED, and extended challenges in connecting people with OUD to services in the community. Specifically, challenges

included transitions to telehealth modalities, required COVID tests for treatment services, and gaps in community resources.

Conclusions:

This study underscores opportunities to improve the delivery of services amid overlapping public health crises for PWUD, including bolstering the use of telemedicine in EDs and across the care continuum.

Addiction in the times of pandemic

Cherkasova M.
Canadian Journal of Addiction
11, 2, p.9-12, 2020

A commentary on opium dependence and COVID-19 in the north of Iran

Nateghi, S; Effatpanah, H
Iranian Journal of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences
14, 3, e105609, 2020

COVID-19 and mental health/substance use disorders on Reddit: a longitudinal study

Alambo A, Padhee S, Banerjee T, Thirunarayan K.
ArXiv, 2020, arXiv:2011.10518v1

COVID-19 pandemic has adversely and disproportionately impacted people suffering from mental health issues and substance use problems. This has been exacerbated by social isolation during the pandemic and the social stigma associated with mental health and substance use disorders, making people reluctant to share their struggles and seek help. Due to the anonymity and privacy they provide, social media emerged as a convenient medium for people to share their experiences about their day to day struggles. Reddit is a well-recognized social media platform that provides focused and structured forums called subreddits, that users subscribe to and discuss their experiences with others. Temporal assessment of the topical correlation between social media postings about mental health/substance use and postings about Coronavirus is crucial to better understand public sentiment on the pandemic and its evolving impact, especially related to vulnerable populations. In this study, we conduct a longitudinal topical analysis of postings between subreddits r/depression, r/Anxiety, r/SuicideWatch, and r/Coronavirus, and postings between subreddits r/opiates, r/OpiatesRecovery, r/addiction, and r/Coronavirus from January 2020 - October 2020. Our results show a high topical correlation between postings in r/depression and r/Coronavirus in September 2020. Further, the topical correlation between postings on substance use disorders and Coronavirus fluctuates, showing the highest correlation in August 2020. By monitoring these trends from platforms such as Reddit, epidemiologists, and mental health professionals can gain insights into the challenges faced by communities for targeted interventions.

Treatment for anxiety and substance use disorders during the COVID-19 pandemic: challenges and strategies

Satre DD, Iturralde E, Ghadiali M, Young-Wolff KC, Campbell CI, Leibowitz AS, Sterling SA.
Journal of Addiction Medicine
14, 6, e293-e296, 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to exacerbate existing anxiety and substance use disorders (SUDs) and increase vulnerability among individuals previously free of these conditions. Numerous pandemic-related stressors-coronavirus infection fears, social distancing and isolation, activity restrictions, financial insecurity and unemployment, caregiving or childcare responsibilities-place a substantial burden both on the general population and on many health care providers. Anxiety symptoms such as worry, tension, irritability, difficulty concentrating, and sleep disruption are increasingly prevalent. For individuals in SUD treatment, anxiety can complicate efforts to achieve treatment goals. In this commentary, we outline the potential impact of anxiety on substance use problems during the COVID-19 crisis and describe key behavioral, pharmacological, and digital health treatment considerations. We highlight populations of special concern due to heightened vulnerability and challenges accessing services, strategies to support health care providers, and directions for future research.

Investigation: Student drug culture in the age of COVID-19

Freshers has been anything but a normal for those starting university this year. When Libby*, a first-year student rolled up to her halls, she didn't expect to be locked in with people she hardly knew. What a sizeable proportion of the new cohort did expect, however, was to experiment with drugs | Volteface, UK

[I am not sure why this article leads with an image of York Crown Court, UK - Vaughan]

<https://volteface.me/opinion-student-drug-culture-age-covid-19/>

COVID-19 and substance use compound challenges

<https://www.pharmacytimes.com/publications/issue/2020/november2020/covid-19-and-substance-use-compound-challenges>

Caring for opioid drug users during Covid-19: the Irish experience

<https://hrb.newsweaver.ie/drugnet/1rydeeidltu1k8wpmgt6mz?email=true&lang=en&a=1&p=58269937&t=29019321>

Needle exchange provision during Covid-19 pandemic

<https://hrb.newsweaver.ie/drugnet/43ov1qao8l11k8wpmgt6mz?email=true&lang=en&a=1&p=58269937&t=29019321>

Addiction services see major increase in demand

One service, Coolmine Therapeutic Community, saw an 80% increase in calls after the first set of Covid-19 restrictions | RTE, Ireland

<https://www.rte.ie/news/coronavirus/2020/1124/1180248-addiction-services/>

What was lost when COVID forced addiction support groups online — and what was gained

In the roughly eight years since she left treatment for alcohol-use disorder, Amy Durham has been to countless recovery group meetings. At first, she went every day, before gradually scaling back to two or three times a week — a routine she stuck with until this past March, when the coronavirus pandemic shuttered many in-person meetings nationwide | Washington Post, USA

https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/wellness/addiction-support-groups-online-covid/2020/11/22/6b7a573a-2aa8-11eb-92b7-6ef17b3fe3b4_story.html

Novel cannabis plant extracts could protect against COVID-19

Researchers in Canada have conducted a study suggesting that novel Cannabis sativa extracts may decrease levels of the host cell receptor that severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) uses to gain viral entry to target tissues | News Medical, USA

<https://www.news-medical.net/news/20201126/Novel-cannabis-plant-extracts-could-protect-against-COVID-19.aspx>