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Impact of Social Isolation During COVID-19 on Adolescents' Mental Health Issues

Xinyan Jiang[1,a,*]

[1]*College of Art and Science, Indiana University Bloomington, Bloomington, Indiana, 47405, United States*
a. keung0211@icloud.com
**corresponding author*

Abstract: The COVID-19 epidemic has significantly impacted adolescents' mental health due to the mandatory social isolation strategy enforced by the global government, which enforces indoor segregation. Since the disruption that has been caused in the present scenario in the daily life pattern, people had never faced such disruption earlier, which has caused significant mental stress among adolescents. The present study will investigate how social isolation affects the general mental health of adolescents following the 2019 coronavirus disease crises. Specifically, it examines the frequency of depression and anxiety disorders in adolescents aged 11 to 18. The presented case study research collates many of the underlying factors apparently contributing to poor mental health in young people. The findings suggest a strong correlation between social isolation and increased mental health issues, highlighting the need for effective intervention strategies, such as enhancing emotional regulation techniques.

Keywords: COVID-19, Social isolation, Adolescents, Mental health.

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is indeed a novel global crisis with far-reaching influence on all spheres of our human lives, with considerable effects on mental health. Previous research showed that adolescents were one of the disproportionately represented parts of the population [1]. Despite the world governments' strict policies to implement lockdowns and methods of social isolation to hold back the virus, it disrupted normal life patterns that the youth had gotten used to. The situation has compelled young people to switch from face-to-face interaction to virtual communication. Such sudden and prolonged transition has greatly minimized time adolescents used to spend in socialization and face-to-face communication, which is a very significant process for emotional and mentally appropriate development. The aim of this research paper is to explore how the absence of face-to-face communication during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to higher mental health issues among individuals aged 11-17 years, specifically touching on the aspects of anxiety and depression. The paper will also investigate what the root causes of such issues are and discuss if there exist any potential solutions and suggestions to reduce psychological distress. This case study research attempts at an in-depth review of factors that can lead to increased mental health challenges for adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings from this study will try to shed light on the relation between social isolation and increased adolescent mental health problems and put forward some suggestions for future mental health strategies and interventions. In doing so, this

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approach can be used to reduce the psychological impact of similar crises on vulnerable groups in the future.

2. Effect of COVID-19 on adolescents' mental health

According to sniadach, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused an upsurge in mental disorders among people from all walks of life across the world, especially those in their adolescent stages [2]. The policies of segregation and social isolation have driven this period of life into a new reality of changing the social lives of adolescents from face-to-face interactions into virtual ones via electronic devices. By doing so, it not only weakens their social connections but also heightens their feelings of isolation, which exposes them to negative emotions and, to a greater or lesser extent, affects the probability of mental illness among adolescents. This is because adolescences are at such a critical stage in their social connection and emotional development; hence, face-to-face social interactions are actually vital for them. Accordingly, when such a need is no longer satisfied enough, adolescents' feelings of loneliness and isolation are gradually enhanced, thereby causing various mental health problems [3].

Despite loneliness and isolation, health anxiety can be another psychological problem that has significantly increased during the pandemic era. Immediately following the outbreak, major leading media in almost all countries reported daily figures of new cases and deaths. The fact that adolescents have to worry about their health and be afraid that the probability of them being one of these figures someday has made health anxiety harder to remit [4]. Such health anxiety is also increased because young people are unable to distract themselves without in-person interactions. Such long-term anxiety develops a better ground for the development of Generalized Anxiety Disorder, often characterized by uncontrollable anxiety that interferes considerably with daily life. The possibility of depression and anxiety disorders among the youth was also attributed to severe changes that people's daily lives underwent. Ever since the coronavirus outbreak, the lockdown has changed the usual life patterns of youngsters in less than no time. Schools closed and all other offshore activities came to a close. The one-on-one interactions became highly reduced. All this made the young ones feel so out of control, resulting in emotions of helplessness and impotence. These negative thoughts can also act as a trigger towards mental illness, as uncertainty about the future may lead to dissatisfaction among youth and further damage their capabilities of finding meaning in life.

Additionally, the financial stresses linked to the epidemic further deteriorated the mental health of adolescents [4]. Many family financial situations worsened because of the lockdown, where parents were either likely to lose jobs or have their incomes reduced. This implies that adolescents had to bear the family's financial burden while facing stress about their schooling. The interaction of such demands could heighten anxiety and sadness during adolescence. Thus, social isolation due to the epidemic has had a negative impact on the mental health status of adolescents that is difficult to reverse, especially the increased incidence of depression and anxiety.

3. Recommendations

Emotional regulation can play an important role in the psychological problems faced by adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic under the situation of social isolation. Emotion regulation is the process through which individuals influence their emotional responses to their experience and their emotional expressions [5]. Social isolation leads to a number of challenges that teens must go through, including health anxiety, loneliness, and loss of social support. Thus, effective emotion regulation can help them reduce these negative emotions' impact.

Minihan argues that adolescents, in contrast to other individuals, are more likely to use emotional suppression rather than cognitive reappraisal [6]. Even though emotional suppression and restring of

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emotional expression can help teenagers achieve a short-term reduction in the potential conflict with the outside world, it is most likely to further increase the risk of mental illness in the long run. On the other hand, cognitive reappraisal relies on the assumption that changes in emotional responses can be effected by changing how one thinks about situations. Maybe it may be considered a better strategy for improving mental health. Thus, fostering positive emotion regulation strategies like cognitive reappraisal in teenagers is of great significance in mitigating negative effects characterized by social isolation.

The following strategies are suggestions aimed at the prevention and minimization of problems related to mental health.

First of all, schools and communities should be in charge of providing mental health education to the youth to make them understand the importance of emotional regulation. Meanwhile, workshops and other relative programs should teach them how to use emotional regulation techniques effectively. Despite providing positive education, schools and communities can also organize regular events such as painting activities, meditation, and relaxation classes. These activities can greatly help young people to relieve their stress and rebuild inner order. For example, by joining painting activities regularly, adolescents can draw whatever they want according to the given theme. Such an event can be held in a big classroom, or even in a huge park surrounded by some natural views. Young people can express their thoughts freely during this event, which is good for their stress relief.

Therefore, creating a supportive social network community is another crucial effort. It is in this context that teenagers may feel lonely and may even make some negative comments on the Internet. Thus, the online support groups or the positive social activities can be provided in each social media to adolescents to reduce loneliness and social exclusion, and facilitate connection among peers. For example, we can create an internet forum. This forum would allow teenagers to express their feelings and experiences anonymously. Afterwards, the forum will have some professional counselors or peers to help the users solve their problems.

The last but not least government should provide them more access to the mental health resources the youth need. In this coronavirus epidemic period, one of the factors the teenagers feel serious about mentally arises from the fact that they have lost and even never had the opportunity to get professional mental support. Thus, governments need to offer online psychological counseling, or even a much more efficient 24-hour service hotline, so as to provide more timely support to adolescents. As the name suggests, the hotline allows people to call at any time of the day and is sure to connect. Each person is given 30 minutes to chat, during which time someone will listen and offer advice and support to the caller.

4. Conclusion

In this respect, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a severe strike on the mental health status of adolescents, where social isolation has been strongly contributing. However, this transition from face-to-face interaction to virtual networks caused the relationships to grow not only weaker but also catalyzed feelings of loneliness and health anxiety leading to a sharp rise in the psychological conditions of Generalized Anxiety Disorder and major depression. The particular vulnerability is not only because of age as such, but also because formative processes of emotional and social development as such are being tampered with. In case of disturbances in their daily routines and putting the families' finances under stress, this particular age group was hit harder. The rationale for using appropriate emotion regulation strategies, such as cognitive reappraisal, to help adolescents overcome such challenges is pretty solid. Advanced social isolation should be outweighed by promoting mental health education, creating online supportive networks, and developing access to mental health services. This result underlines how multi-dimensional approaches are urgently needed to cope with the crisis in adolescent mental health pressed for by the pandemic and shows how

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resilience can be developed under fully novel conditions. Schools and communities will focus on mental health education and involve the youth in de-stress activities such as painting and meditation. Online support groups and networks will be created so the youth interact with each other rather than feeling lonely. Lastly, the government will support adolescents in distress through an expanded range of mental health services: online counseling and 24-hour hotlines.

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