

The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Mental Health of Families Dealing with Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Authors : Alexis Winfield, Carly Sugar, Barbara Fenesi

Abstract : The COVID-19 pandemic uprooted regular routines forcing many children to learn from home, requiring many adults to work from home, and cutting families off from support outside the home. Public health restrictions associated with the pandemic caused widespread psychological distress, including depression and anxiety, increased fear, panic, and stress. These trends are particularly concerning for families raising neuroatypical children, such as those with Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), as these children are already more likely than their typically developing peers to experience comorbid mental health issues and to experience greater distress when required to stay indoors. Families with children who have ADHD are also at greater risk for experiencing heightened familial stress due to the challenges associated with managing ADHD behavioural symptoms, greater parental discord and divorce, and greater financial difficulties compared to other families. The current study engaged families comprised of at least one child diagnosed with ADHD to elucidate 1) the unique ways that the COVID-19 pandemic affected their mental health and 2) the specific barriers these families faced to maintaining optimal mental wellbeing. A total of 33 participants (15 parent-child dyads) engaged in virtual interviews. Content analysis revealed that the most frequently identified mental health effects for families were increased child anxiety and disconnectedness, as well as deteriorating parental mental health. The most frequently identified barriers to maintaining optimal mental well-being were lack of routine, lack of social interaction and social support, and uncertainty and fear. Findings underscore areas of need during times of large-scale social isolation, bring voice to the families of children with ADHD, and contribute to our understanding of the pandemic's impact on the wellbeing of vulnerable families. This work contributes to a growing body of research aimed at creating safeguards to support mental wellbeing for vulnerable families during times of crisis.

Keywords : attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, COVID-19, mental health, vulnerable families

Conference Title : ICPIMHS 2023 : International Conference on Pediatrics, Internal Medicine and Health Sciences

Conference Location : Toronto, Canada

Conference Dates : June 19-20, 2023