Landscape of childhood and adolescent depression in Pakistan: experience from a tertiary care hospital in Karachi, Pakistan

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Aims. Depression is highly prevalent in children and adolescents in Pakistan, yet, factors affecting depression have not been widely studied. This study aims to assess the demographic and clinical characteristics of depression in children and adolescents and identify associations between parental marital status and confounding factors for depression.

Method. A descriptive retrospective study was undertaken at the Aga Khan University Hospital in Karachi, Pakistan. Patient records of children and adolescents (aged under 18 years), presenting to the psychiatry clinic with depression from 2015-2019 were reviewed. The diagnosis of clinical depression was made based on clinical assessment according to international guidelines. Patients whose medical records had missing information were excluded. Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, version 23.0 (IBM Corp., Armonk, N.Y., USA). Continuous data are presented as mean +/- standard deviation, whereas categorical data are presented as percentages (%). Pearson Chi-square test of association has been used to assess the association between parental factors and confounding factors.

Conclusion. More research obtaining the viewpoint of the child directly and observation of such children is required to properly understand the effects on children with a deployed parent, without the interference of parent or teacher reporting bias. Additionally, with only one study reporting on increased off-spring resilience there has been limited exploration of potential positive correlates, so further research regarding these is important.

Survey of remote consultations in psychiatry during the SARS-CoV-2 outbreak

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Aims. To compare the usage of remote consultations before and after the first wave of the SARS-CoV-2 outbreak and explore mental health workers’ views on the usage of telementicine.

Method. An online questionnaire survey was developed, and disseminated to mental healthcare professionals via e-mail and social media. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and qualitative data were analysed using Braun and Clarke’s six step procedure for thematic analysis.

Result. There were 40 responses from mental healthcare professionals of varying grades from different sub-specialties, predominantly from the UK. Compared to before the SARS-CoV-2 outbreak, there was an increase in usage of telephone (9(22.5%) to (29(72.5%)) and video consultations (4(10%) to 17(42.5%)). Respondents reported an increase in virtual MDTs (35(87.5%) during the pandemic, 9(22.5%) pre-pandemic).

Based on a 5-point Likert scale, the mean technical quality of telephone consultations was 3.56/5 (Range 2-5), with 75% rating telephone consultations as not being as good as face-to-face consultations. The mean technical quality of video consultations was 3.58/5 (Range 2-5), with 63% rating video consultations as not being as good as face-to-face consultations. 25 (62.5%) respondents felt comfortable using telephone consultations during the pandemic, 20(50%) felt comfortable using video consultations. Recurring themes identified from the qualitative data regarding reasons for the technical quality ratings were: connection issues, poor infrastructure and security concerns.

Nine (23%) respondents felt that using video conferencing consultations had a detrimental impact on the mental health of patients while 14(35%) felt that telephone consultations had a detrimental impact on patients’ mental health. Recurring themes for health practitioners’ perceived effect of the use of telementicine on patients’ mental health were the loss of personal touch and reduced patient engagement.

Conclusion. There was a substantial increase in usage of remote consultations during the first wave of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic among mental healthcare professionals. The results reported in the present study suggest there are numerous barriers to the use of telementicine in psychiatry, which require future exploration, ideally through interview or ethnographic studies.