School closures during COVID lockdown impacting student MH

School closures as part of broader social lockdown measures during the COVID-19 pandemic may be associated with a decline in the health and well-being of children and adolescents, according to new research published in JAMA Pediatrics. Researchers found that the pandemic caused significant damage to children’s mental health.

In the study, “School Closures During Social Lockdown and Mental Health, Health Behaviors, and Well-being Among Children and Adolescents During the First COVID-19 Wave: A Systematic Review,” researchers acknowledged the need for further study regarding the relationship between mental health and well-being associated with school closures.

Researchers reviewed published reports on the association of school closures during broader social lockdown with mental health, health behaviors and well-being in children and adolescents ages 0 to 19, excluding associations with transmission of infection.

They reviewed 11 databases that were searched from inception to September 2020, and machine learning was applied for screening articles. A total of 16,817 records were screened, 151 were reviewed in full text and 36 studies were included. Quality assessment was tailored to study organizations and data-sharing capabilities,” the report’s authors wrote.

Importance of provider involvement

Counties that housed Whole Person Care pilots are already experiencing the transition to the new program under the CalAIM initiative. The new program will roll out in other California counties in 2022, Pourat said.

She believes it will be important for the Whole Person Care pilots to remain involved in Medi-Cal improvement efforts as a service provider, under a system that now will be more controlled by managed care plans that have less direct experience in service provision.

The report for 2020 concluded, “The pandemic’s limited impact on the utilization of primary care and specialty services is likely due to the rapid increase in the provision of care using telehealth under emergency Medicaid waivers that allowed for the reimbursement of such visits on par with in-person visits. These findings further support the need to address digital access barriers to telehealth for Whole Person Care enrollees and other Medi-Cal beneficiaries.”

Findings

The 36 studies, which occurred during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic (February to July 2020), were from 11 countries and involved a total of 79,781 children and adolescents and 18,028 parents. All evaluated school closure as part of broader social lockdown during the first COVID-19 wave, and the duration of school closure ranged from one week to three months, the study stated.

Of those, nine (25%) were longitudinal pre-post studies, five (14%) were cohort, 21 (58%) were cross-sectional and one (3%) was a modeling study. Thirteen studies (36%) were high quality, 17 (47%) were medium quality and six (17%) were low quality.

Twenty-three studies (64%) were published, eight (22%) were online reports and five (14%) were preprints. Twenty-five studies (69%) concerning mental health identified associations across emotional, behavioral and restlessness/inattention problems; 18% to 60% of children and adolescents scored above risk thresholds for distress, particularly anxiety and depressive symptoms, and two studies reported no significant association with suicide.

Three studies reported that child protection referrals were lower than the expected number of referrals originating in schools. Three studies suggested higher screen time usage, two studies reported greater social media use and six studies reported lower physical activity. Studies on sleep (10 studies) and diet (five studies) provided inconclusive evidence on harms.

According to the study, in this narrative synthesis of reports from the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, studies of short-term school closures as part of social lockdown measures reported adverse mental health symptoms and health behaviors among children and adolescents. Associations between school closure and health outcomes and behaviors could not be separated from broader lockdown measures, the researchers stated.

The researchers noted that online schooling does provide a level of social interaction and may act to mitigate some harms resulting from the reduction of social mixing. However, evidence that online learning does little to mitigate the learning losses associated with school closures even in high-income countries suggests further study is required of its relationship with mental health.
As a result, quick and efficient access states that have enacted the compact. It does so by allowing psychologists to travel with and provide services to a specialist who is not available in Wisconsin to receive needed mental health help. Does so by allowing psychologists to practice either in person or other than in person across state lines in states that have enacted the compact. As a result, quick and efficient access to mental health resources will be greatly increased. "The mental health needs in Wisconsin are great, and the COVID situation has increased the number of people in need of psychological services," said Rep. Tittl. "This bill makes it easier for them to receive help." The benefits of joining PSYPACT increases access to rural Wisconsinites served by psychologists out of state, provides treatment to patients needing care by a specialist who is not available in Wisconsin, enables sports psychologists to travel with and provide services to a team and allows a Wisconsinite temporarily moving out of state to continue to receive care from a psychologist in Wisconsin. Currently, 27 states have enacted PSYPACT, including Illinois and Minnesota. As more states enact PSYPACT, it will become even more effective in alleviating mental health care shortages and improving access to mental health services. The bill received bipartisan support and passed during the Assembly floor session. It now awaits scheduling in the Senate.

**Wisconsin assembly passes Psychology Interjurisdictional Compact bill**

The Wisconsin assembly on Jan. 20 passed State Rep. Paul Tittl’s (R-Manitowoc) Assembly Bill 537 to provide greater opportunity for people in Wisconsin to receive needed mental health help, Wispolitics.com reported. The Psychology Interjurisdictional Compact (PSYPACT) provides greater opportunity for people in Wisconsin to receive needed mental health help. It does so by allowing psychologists to practice either in person or otherwise than in person across state lines in states that have enacted the compact. As a result, quick and efficient access to mental health resources will be greatly increased. "The mental health needs in Wisconsin are great, and the COVID situation has increased the number of people in need of psychological services," said Rep. Tittl. "This bill makes it easier for them to receive help." The benefits of joining PSYPACT increases access to rural Wisconsinites served by psychologists out of state, provides treatment to patients needing care by a specialist who is not available in Wisconsin, enables sports psychologists to travel with and provide services to a team and allows a Wisconsinite temporarily moving out of state to continue to receive care from a psychologist in Wisconsin. Currently, 27 states have enacted PSYPACT, including Illinois and Minnesota. As more states enact PSYPACT, it will become even more effective in alleviating mental health care shortages and improving access to mental health services. The bill received bipartisan support and passed during the Assembly floor session. It now awaits scheduling in the Senate.

**In case you haven’t heard…**

A new survey has found increased interest in peer mental health counseling. Experts say it can help alleviate overburdened campus services, but they stress the importance of proper training, Inside Higher Ed reported Jan. 24. One in five undergraduates uses peer counseling for mental health support, according to a new survey of more than 2,000 U.S. college students. Two-thirds say they have faced a mental health challenge in the past year. The survey, “Peer Counseling in College Mental Health,” was conducted by the Mary Christie Institute and the Born This Way Foundation, two organizations that focus on the mental health of young people. Nearly half of all students reported that disruptions caused by the pandemic make them more likely to seek out peer counseling, including 20% who say they are “much more likely.” That number was even higher for certain demographic groups — 58% of Black students, 54% of Latinx students, 61% of transgender students and 54% of first-generation college students said they were likely to seek out peer counseling.

**Coming up…**

The National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors is holding its 2022 Annual Legislative and Policy Conference virtually Feb. 14–16. For more information, visit https://www.nachhdd.org.

The Anxiety & Depression Association of America is holding its national conference, “Common Psychopathology: What Can the Past Tell Us About the Future?” March 17–20 at the Sheraton Denver Downtown Hotel in Denver. For more information, visit https://adaa.org.

The National Council for Mental Wellbeing will host NatCon22, “Redefined,” April 11–13 at the Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center in National Harbor, Maryland. Visit https://eventscribe.net/2022/NatCon22 for more information.

Mental Health America is hosting its annual conference, “Forward Together: Recovery, Health, Hope,” June 9–11 in Washington, D.C. For more information, visit https://www.mhanational.org/2022/annual-conference.

**Call for proposals**

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is seeking proposals for its NASW national conference, “The Time Is Right for Social Work,” on June 22–25 (virtual and in-person) in Washington, D.C. The conference will focus on best practices, policies and research findings that incorporate leading change and collaboration. Abstracts are encouraged in all social work practice areas, and at all levels of practice (micro, mezzo and macro). The proposal submission deadline is Feb. 14. For more information, visit https://www.socialworkers.org/Events/NASW-Conferences.

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