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Self-harm conduct in young population during the covid-19 pandemic: a comparative analysis pre and post lockdown

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COVID-19 pandemic has meant an unprecedented increase on the Spanish health system. The measures adopted by the government to decrease the spread of the disease, have probably taken a toll on the mental health of the population [1], and especially on young people, resulting on an increase in self-harm conducts.

The term self-harm is used to explain a range of behaviors, and there is much debate within the literature as to what constitutes self-harm. For the purpose of this paper, we defined it as cutting, burning, biting, or hitting done directly to the body with the intention to regulate or express emotional distress, without a suicidal purpose. Self-injurious behavior has been considered symptomatic of more complex disorders, however in the more recent years we’ve witnessed a rapid increase and the normalization of the conduct on younger generations [2].

Even though there is no universal criteria recognised for deliberate self-harm, the increasing tendency has led changes in the way mental health workers understand it. The last edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM 5), for example, now includes self-harm on section 3 as a new diagnostic entity that needs further research [3].

On our daily clinical practice and to be precise, after the lockdown imposed by the government, we’ve too have seen an important surge on the numbers of young patients presenting with self-harm conducts.

Considering the above, we propose 2 main objectives. On a general level, we want to verify if the increasing trend observed in the clinical practice is really founded and if it is in what percentage has it increased. On the other hand, in a more specific level we want to determine if there is a significant increase in the number of patients seen for the first time in our ambulatory practice presenting self-harm as part of their symptoms.

We plan a retrospective comparative study, with a study period of 6 months prior to the lockdown (September 2019 to March 2020) and 6 months after the lockdown (September 2020 to March 2021) with a total of 629 new patients between the ages of 6 to 18 years, sent to our child and adolescent mental health ambulatory service.

As preliminary conclusions we can highlight that it has been an increase of 50% in the number of first visits during the 6 months after the lockdown, in relation to the 6 months prior to lockdown. To our understanding this number strongly suggests the potential influence that COVID-19 pandemic has in the mental stability of young population. Furthermore, on the search for self-harm symptoms, we have noted that other symptoms generally associated to it like anxiety, depression, eating disorders, school absences among others, have spiked significantly, a finding that will need further analysis.

No conflict of interest

References

[1] Hawton, K., Casey, D., Bale, E., Brand, F., Ness, J., Waters, K., 2020. Self-Harm during the early period of the COVID-19 pandemic in England: Comparative trend analysis of hospital presentations. Journal of Affective Disorders 282, 991-995.

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Exposure to prenatal stress induces sex-specific vulnerability in adolescent rats

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The prenatal period is extremely important and sensitive for the individual’s life since the organism is rapidly evolving and can undergo the influence of positive and negative stimuli from the womb environment [1]. Moreover, exposure to prenatal stress (PNS) can lead to long-lasting neurobiological and behaviour consequences for the offspring, which may enhance the susceptibility for the onset of mental disorders [2]. However, there is considerable individual variation in the outcome of PNS. Indeed, some individuals exposed to adverse experiences are vulnerable and develop a pathological condition, while others appear to be resilient [3]. Here, we aimed to investigate the effects of a PNS protocol on a battery of behavioural tests in the adolescent offspring, and further identify vulnerable and resilient animals. Wistar rats were acquired from the Center.