



Supporting Children and Adolescents' Mental Health in the Context of Pandemic and Confinement: A Scoping Review of Repercussions, Interventions and Ethical Challenges



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Synthesis Title

Supporting children and adolescents' mental health in the context of pandemic and confinement: A scoping review of repercussions, interventions and ethical challenges

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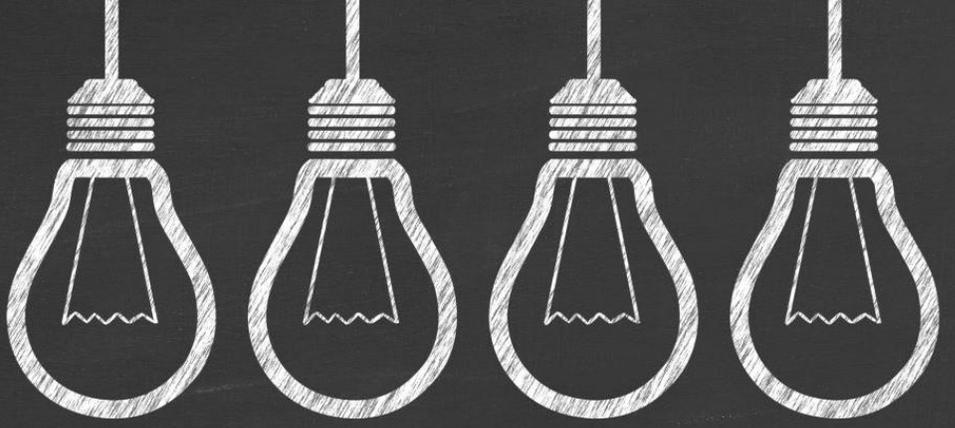
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Presentation Overview

Background and objectives

Methods

Results

Discussion

Conclusion

Background

- Children and adolescents (C&A) are considered as a vulnerable population, as such, they can be particularly affected by sanitary measures and pandemics (Chung et al., 2020)
- C&A are faced with many challenges, such as confinement, impacts of school closure and physical distancing, leading to reduced social support and psychosocial services (Fegert et al., 2020)
- Due to confinement and related sanitary measures in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, health inequities have been exacerbated, especially for C&A and their families
- Prior to the initiation of this review, there were no reviews synthesizing specific interventions and recommendations that could support children's and adolescents' mental health during COVID-19 pandemic, as well as and related ethical challenges

Objectives

To identify and synthesize the literature on relevant interventions to support C&A's mental health and their families, coupled with the identification of ethical challenges that may arise in this context.



Three review questions

- 1) Effects of the pandemic on children and adolescents' mental health
- 2) Interventions to support the mental health of children and adolescents
- 3) Ethical challenges faced by children and adolescents during the pandemic

Methods

Rapid scoping review methodology

- The Joanna Briggs Institute guideline for scoping review was adjusted in line with the Rapid Review Guidebook
- Difference to JBI guideline
 - Only three academic databases were searched
 - Peer-review of search strategies was not performed

(Dobbin, 2017; Peters et al., 2020)

Methods

Sources of information

- Academic databases
 - Medline
 - CINAHL
 - Psycinfo
- Grey literature
 - Google
 - Governmental websites
 - Professional Association websites
- Knowledge users
- Ancestry and offspring searches

Searches were performed on

- June 05, 2020
- July 20, 2020
- September 29, 2020



Methods

Data extraction and analysis

- Data extraction and analysis were conducted based on a pragmatic approach. Knowledge users were consulted twice during the review process
- Excel was used for data extraction and the quality appraisal tools of Joanna Briggs Institute were also used to examine the quality of the articles (Whiting et al., 2003)
- Each document was independently screened for inclusion by two research assistants using Rayyan, a web-based app for systematic reviews (Ouzzani et al., 2016). A third reviewer was consulted to settle any disagreement regarding inclusion or exclusion of a document.

Methods

Inclusion Criteria

- Addressing mental health or mental well-being
- Related to SARS-Cov-2, SARS-Cov-1, or influenza disease outbreaks
- Targeting children and adolescents (aged below 18 years old)
- Applicable to the Canadian context
- Published between 1990-2020
- English or French
- Original articles
- Review (including grey literature)
- Guidelines from specific professional associations

Exclusion Criteria

- Commentaries
 - Editorial texts
 - Not peer reviewed original articles
- Reviews not meeting at least five of the criteria from the Joanna Briggs Institute's critical appraisal checklist for systematic reviews (Aromataris et al., 2015)

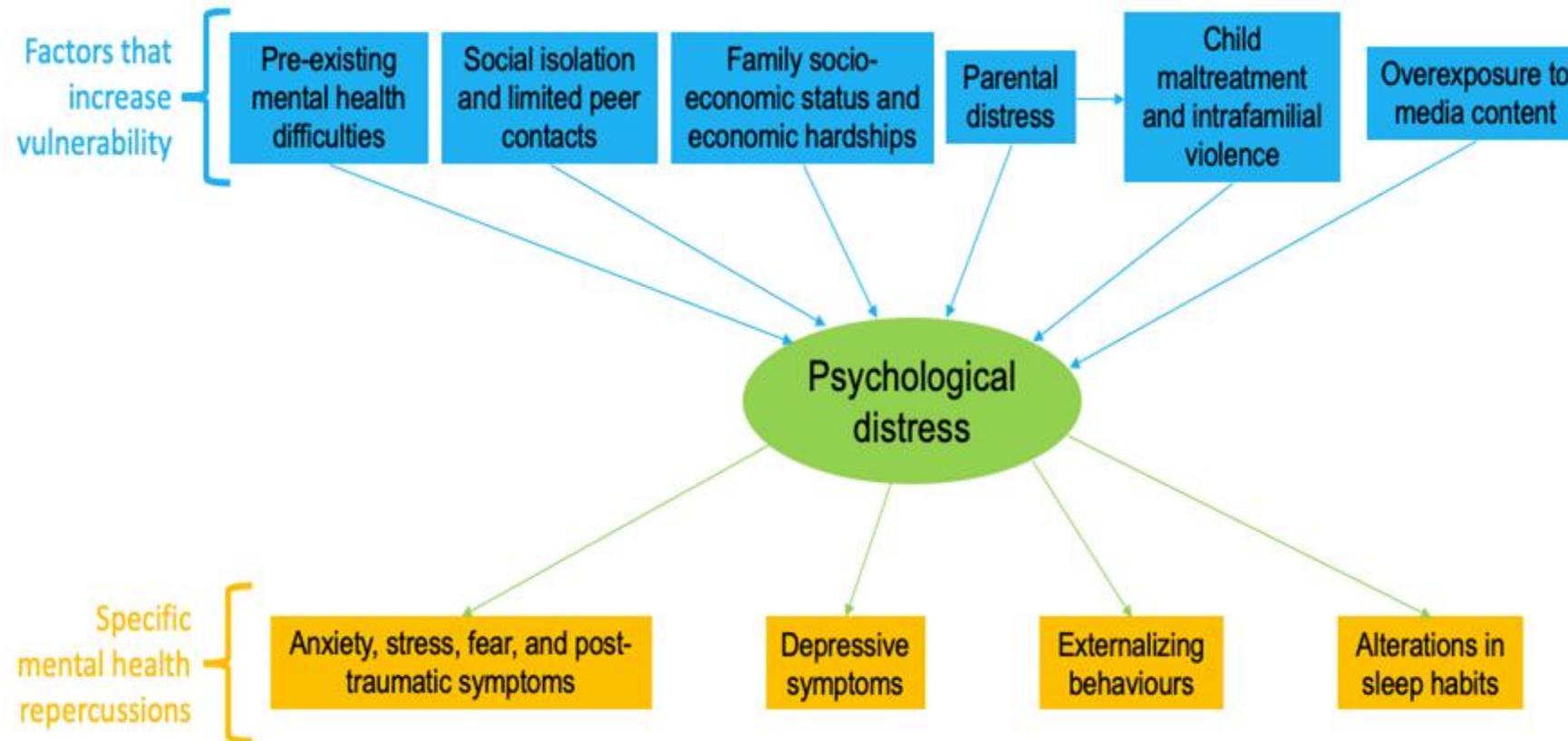
Results

- A total of 100 documents included in the review
- The majority (93%) were published in 2020
- Studies and reviews were mainly from Canada, China, and the United States (16% each)

Three sections related to the three research questions

- 1) Effects of the pandemic on children and adolescents' mental health
- 2) Interventions to support the mental health of children and adolescents
- 3) Ethical challenges faced by children and adolescents during the pandemic

1) Effects of the pandemic on children and adolescents' mental health*



*Results: Total of 66 documents included for this question

Negative repercussions of the pandemic on children and adolescents' mental health



1

General psychological distress

2

Anxiety, stress, and post-traumatic symptoms

3

Depressive symptoms

4

Externalizing behaviours

5

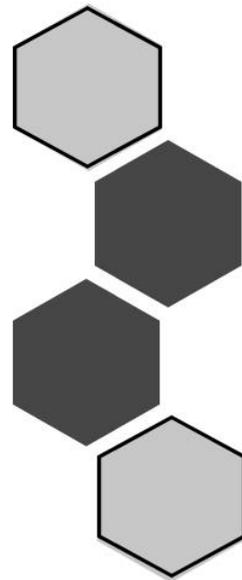
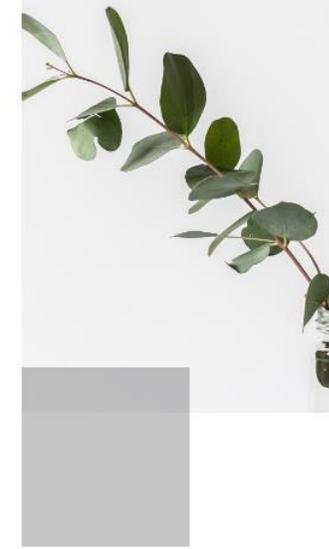
Alteration in sleep habits

6

Other mental health concerns

General psychological distress

Pandemic and sanitary measures are associated with psychological distress and a decrease in well-being. This distress is often linked to school closures (i.e., important disruption in routines) and limited peer contacts



Many authors specified that the psychological distress experienced by children and adolescents associated with the COVID-19 pandemic may last for several years

Several studies reported that **adolescents** are experiencing **greater distress** than **younger children**

(Duan et al., 2020; Dubey et al., 2020; Gautam et al., 2020; Hawke et al., 2020; Idoiaga et al., 2020; INESSS, 2020a; INESSS, 2020b; Loades et al., 2020; Oliveira et al., 2020; Patrick et al., 2020; Racine et al., 2020; Saurabh and Ranjan, 2020; Yeasmin et al., 2020; Zhao et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2020b)

Anxiety and Stress

Most of the original studies and reviews have showed that pandemics and health measures were correlated with greater stress, anxiety and fear **in children and adolescents**

Children are more nervous and fearful during pandemics than when there is no pandemic

In **younger children**, symptoms of anxiety and fear may present in the form of clinginess, feeling overwhelmed, and speech difficulties

Studies also associate the pandemic context with anxiety, stress and intrusive thoughts in **adolescents**



Post-traumatic Stress Disorder and Symptoms



According to original articles, **children and adolescents** are at risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and symptoms due to pandemics and sanitary measures

Depressive Symptoms



- Sadness
- Listlessness
- Mood changes
- Self-harm
- Suicidal ideas
- Suicide attempts

In studies specific to **adolescents**, an increase in depressive symptoms during the COVID-19 pandemic was identified when compared to depressive symptoms prior to the pandemic in this same population

(Duan et al., 2020; Guessoum et al., 2020; Hawke et al., 2020; Hou et al., 2020; Idoiaga Mondragon et al., 2020; Idoiaga et al., 2020; Imran et al., 2020; INESSS, 2020b; Koller et al., 2006; O'Reilly et al., 2020; Orgilés et al., 2020; Racine et al., 2020 ; Saurabh and Ranjan, 2020 ; Zhou et al., 2020b)



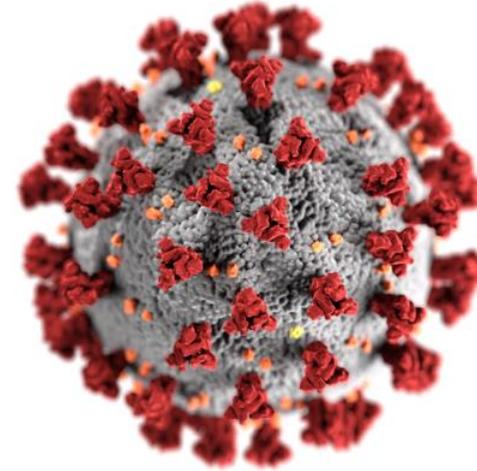
Externalizing Behaviours

Children and adolescents of all ages demonstrated greater:

- Irritability
- Annoyance
- Restlessness
- Expressions of anger
- Aggression

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, **school-aged children** have also been reported to show :

- Conduct and emotional problems
- Anger
- Inattention
- Agitation or hyperactivity





Some articles indicate that adolescents may be particularly vulnerable to demonstrate externalizing behaviours, such as increased risk-taking behaviours, notably drug, alcohol, or sexual relationships

In one study of both a clinical and community sample of youth, although substance use was found to have declined during the COVID-19 pandemic, “a subset of youth reported using substances to cope” (Hawke et al., 2020, p.7), suggesting that some adolescents may be more vulnerable

(Dumas et al., 2020; Guessoum et al., 2020; Hawke et al., 2020; INESSS, 2020b)



Alterations in Sleep Habits

Examples

- Disrupted sleep cycles
- Difficulty falling asleep
- Agitation
- Frequent waking up
- Greater sleep durations
- Nightmares
- Insomnia
- Fatigue



Younger children have more challenging bedtime routines and lower sleep quality in certain studies (Dellagiulia et al., 2020; Camden et al., 2020), although Liu et al., (2021) found that younger children were experiencing fewer sleep disturbances than during the year prior to the pandemic.

Other Mental Health Symptoms

Other symptoms include

- Somatic complaints
- Headaches
- Stomach aches
- Trouble breathing



Children and adolescents reported greater inattention and distractibility, particularly for those with prior diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder



Factors that increase the vulnerability of children and adolescents

- Pre-existing mental health difficulties
- Parental distress or parents with pre-existing mental illness
- Family's socio-economic status
- Increased child maltreatment and intrafamilial violence
- Social isolation
- Overexposure to media content
- Other factors:
 - Having a parent who is at high risk of exposure
 - Illness and death of family members and friends during the pandemic
 - Not having the possibility to engage in one's usual coping mechanisms due to confinement measures

Positive effects on the mental health of children and adolescents

- The children were calmer, wiser, more thoughtful and more mature
- Children developed prosocial behaviors, positive coping skills, and better self-care and self-care routines



2) Interventions to support the mental health of children and adolescents*

- Term “intervention” as a specific program or practice implemented to support children and adolescents’ mental health in relation to pandemics
- Term “recommendation” as suggestions made by authors as to what they consider as the best course of action to support children and adolescents’ mental health during pandemics
- Results divided
 - Interventions
 - Recommendations

*Results: Interventions were present in 13 articles and recommendations in 55

Interventions

- All the articles in this category, except for one, were published in 2020 and related to COVID-19
- Telehealth interventions
 - Telepractice
 - Online programs



Telehealth Interventions

Telepractice

- Leading solution to compensate for the lack of face-to-face mental health services brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., online and telephone support) (Marques de Miranda et al., 2020)

Online Programs

- Online cognitive-behavioral therapy programs (Schwartz et al., 2020)
- Online parenting pro-tips (James Riegler et al., 2020)

Recommendations

- Using technology for learning and socializing (DeLuca et al., 2020; Haig-Ferguson et al., 2020; Li & Leung, 2020; J. McGrath, 2020; Oliver, 2020)
- Establishing a daily routine that promotes a healthy lifestyle (Cohen, 2020; Imran, Zeshan et al., 2020)
- Promoting stimulating activities, including physical activities (Jiao et al., 2020; Moore et al., 2020)
- Adapting schooling to the pandemic context (Davis et al., 2020)
- Being attentive to the needs of children and comforting them (Bahn, 2020; Ghosh et al., 2020; W. Tang et al., 2020).
- Being attentive to the needs of caregivers (Cui et al., 2020, Spinelli et al., 2020)

3) Ethical Challenges Faced by Children and Adolescents During the Pandemic*

Ethical challenges including

- Issues families could face that raise conflicting values or morally difficult decisions to make
- Challenges specifically related to the interventions to support children and adolescents' mental health during the pandemic (such as the ones related to telehealth)

Results

- Social inequities
- Mental health and social service access and quality



*Results: Total of 33 documents included for this question

Results – Social Inequities

- Children and adolescents from populations considered as disadvantaged have an increased risk of experiencing adverse repercussions (Schwartz et al., 2020)
- School closures
 - Lost of peer interaction and psychological support from their peers (Patrick et al., 2020)
 - Remote learning not necessarily available to children living in low income families, leading to delay and disruption in their educational trajectory
 - Economic hardship

Results - Mental health and social service access and quality

Sanitary measures have led to greater difficulty to attend mental health appointment (Collizzi et al., 2020)

Reduction, disruption or absence of adequate resources for mental health and social services for children and adolescents (Davis et al., 2020)

Telehealth is considered as the ideal solution, but raises ethical challenges

- Access to telehealth
- Confidentiality/privacy
- Quality of remote mental health services

Results – Access to Telehealth



- Issue of equitable service access
 - Indigenous communities in Canada still lack access to the Internet (Schwartz et al., 2020)
 - Families mainly with low-income and/or rural families do not have access to internet or internet-enabled device (INESSS, 2020; MacEvelly & Bronan, 2020)
 - School closures can disrupt access to mental health services offered through school settings, more specifically families with low socio-economic status (Singh et al., 2020)

Results – Confidentiality/Privacy



- Parents may be wary of technology (INESSS, 2020)
- Access to a private settings (Barney et al, 2020; Sharma et al, 2020)
- Some children and adolescents living with developmental or psychotic problems may not feel comfortable to use a phone, a tablet computer, or a computer (OPQ, 2020).

Results – Quality of Remote Services

- C&As' perspectives remains sparse regarding ethical care, thus raising question about their engagement in their own care (Koller et al., 2010)
- Sustainability of telehealth remains unclear (Stewart et al., 2020)
- Quality of the services provided by telehealth remains unclear (Barney et al., 2020; INESSS, 2020)



Discussion

Access to Telehealth

- It is crucial to address issues related to internet and technology access for communities and families who do not currently have access or do not have the skills to use these technologies (Prime et al., 2020)

Confidentiality/Privacy

- Even if it is impossible to fully ensure confidentiality, some authors suggest that confidentiality of videoconferencing applications should be ensured by health organizations (J. McGrath, 2020)
- To discuss the risk of using technology on confidentiality and privacy, and how it is protected (OPQ, 2020)

Discussion

Recommandations for Practice

- Ensure **health care providers** are aware of the possible detrimental repercussions of the pandemic and sanitary measures on children and adolescents' mental health
- Assess for any changes on the conditions of **children and adolescents' with pre-existing mental health conditions**
- Important to consider the disruption of in-person mental health services and its rapid transition to online, teleconsultation services
- Additional research should be conducted
- Diversity of types of mental health services and delivery format be available for different audiences to better support
- Explore first-hand experiences of children and adolescents with and without prior mental health issues during the pandemic

Discussion

Quality of Remote Services

- Studies should be conducted on the outcomes and effectiveness of remote means to provide child and adolescents' mental health care

Benefits of telehealth

- Access for rural patients (Knusten et al., 2016)
- Reduction of wait lists (Knusten et al., 2016)
- Improve access for all patients receiving care (Knusten et al., 2016)
- Reduction of time allotted to travel (i.e., go to the meeting) (Barney et al., 2020; Stewart et al., 2020)

Limitations

- Limited the literature searches to three databases
- Included documents published until the end of September 2020
- Many of the included studies used a broad definition of general psychological distress, encompassing and lumping many different mental health symptoms into one general category, without considering specific mental health symptoms
- Some symptoms were reported by the parents and not the children themselves
- Some studies did not use individual baseline comparison levels for their evaluation of increased or decreased levels of certain mental health problems
- Most documents grouped together vast age ranges, overlapping both children and adolescents, or did not specify ages but rather labels such as “children” or “adolescents”

Conclusion

- The COVID-19 pandemic and sanitary measures resulted in increased use of telehealth. Our findings revealed mixed satisfaction as well as benefits and challenges with telehealth services.
- It is crucial that future research targets quality improvement in the provision of mental health services via telehealth and explore alternatives to adequately support children and adolescents during this pandemic.





References

See the full report for more details and reference

<https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/52070.html>

A photograph of a white spray bottle with a black nozzle and several light blue surgical masks scattered on a dark wooden surface. The scene is lit from above, creating soft shadows. A semi-transparent dark grey rectangle is overlaid on the center of the image, containing white text.

Thank you!

Questions / Comments?

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