



Research and News Worth Repeating

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Substance Use Research & COVID

Substance Use Begins to Take Spotlight in Major Brain Development Study

Psychiatry & Behavioral Health Learning Network, 04/27/2020

The Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development (ABCD) Project is following a cohort of 12,000 children who entered the study at ages 9 and 10 for a period of about 10 years. As the cohort has reached the 12-14 age range, substance use will be a central focus of the project's next few years. This study offers a unique opportunity to study a large cohort of individuals before and after they use substances. The study will have special interest in trends such as vaping and its impact given its recent growth. The project is examining all variables known to influence brain development and one goal is to better understand factors contributing to substance use initiation and progression from use to a disorder in some people.

<https://www.psychcongress.com/article/substance-use-begins-take-spotlight-major-brain-development-study>

Holistic approach best for tackling nonmedical drug use, study finds

Science Daily, 04/24/2020

A new study, published in the journal *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*, found that a multidimensional approach, addressing mental health, social, environmental, and biological obstacles worked best for those wishing to stop using drugs. Results also showed that those with alcohol addiction do best with simple interventions that focus solely on their alcohol use.

Researcher and professor of psychology at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Dolores Albarracín analyzed 69 studies that measured outcomes from single or multi-recommendation approaches to determine the optimal number of interventions for the best results.

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/04/200424132531.htm>

Drinking Spirits to Lift Spirits May Hold Appeal Amid COVID-19 Stress, but Don't Overdo Cautions Baylor University Expert on Substance Abuse

Baylor University, 03/31/2020

Drinking alcoholic beverages may be a way to cope with stress from COVID-19 related to shelter-at-home orders, economic fears and boredom. With bars and restaurants closing, other than for options such as pickup delivery or drive-through, many liquor stores have ironically seen a surge in business, according to news reports. **Sara Dolan**, Ph.D., associate professor of psychology and neuroscience at Baylor University, has done extensive research on substance use and misuse and suggests that people drink for many reasons, often amplified by self-isolation, but she highly encourages people not to overdo it with binge drinking.

<https://www.baylor.edu/mediacommunications/news.php?action=story&story=218253>

How the coronavirus is hurting drug and alcohol recovery

CBS News, 04/03/2020

The COVID-19 crisis has brought new challenges to substance abuse patients and health care workers fighting the opioid epidemic. Expanding access to medically assisted treatments has reduced mortality from opioid overdoses but the COVID-19 crisis has limited access.

Many programs have been forced to close. Director of SOS Recovery Centers in New Hampshire, John Burns, was forced to close his doors in early March. Many have nowhere to go during this time and are stuck homeless without any support from a community center or local shelter.

The coronavirus has become a real concern for detox patients, as many centers have stopped accepting new patients. The closure of residential programs is particularly difficult for recovering addicts faced with the elements of recovery and nowhere else to go, Burns points out.

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/how-the-coronavirus-is-hurting-drug-and-alcohol-recovery/>

Mental Health and COVID

The implications of COVID-19 for Mental Health and Substance Use

Kaiser Family Foundation, 04/21/2020

A recent Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) poll conducted March 25-30, 2020 found that 45% of adults in the U.S. reported negative mental health effects resulting from worry or stress related to coronavirus. Public health measures put in place to fight COVID-19 such as shelter-in-place, social distancing, and business and school closures, have led to some poor mental health outcomes such as isolation and job loss. Stress and burnout among front-line workers are a concern as well as increased anxiety and mental illness among others. Need for mental health and substance use services is increasing at a time when the pandemic has led to increasing barriers to accessing services.

<https://www.kff.org/health-reform/issue-brief/the-implications-of-covid-19-for-mental-health-and-substance-use/>

The coronavirus pandemic is pushing America into a mental health crisis

Washington Post, 05/04/2020

Federal agencies are warning that the COVID-19 pandemic may lead to a mental health crisis including depression, substance abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder and suicide.

Because of the mental health effects, Susan Borja, who leads the National Institute of Mental Health's (NIMH) traumatic stress research, worries for the many people who need services that the healthcare system needs to reach but just won't be able to.

Nearly half of Americans reported that the coronavirus pandemic was harming their mental health, according to a recent Kaiser Family Foundation poll. A federal emergency hotline for people in emergency distress had a 1,000% increase in calls in April compared to a year ago, and online therapy company Talkspace reported a 65 percent jump in clients since mid-February. The company collected anonymous text messages and transcribed therapy sessions which show that coronavirus-related anxiety dominates patients' concerns.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/05/04/mental-health-coronavirus/>

Coronavirus pandemic may lead to 75,000 “deaths of despair” from suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, study says

CBS News, 05/08/2020

A study by the Well Being Trust suggests that COVID-19 could lead to as many as 75,000 deaths from drug or alcohol abuse and suicide. So-called “deaths of despair” such as these are linked to many factors including loneliness, isolation, a lack of belonging, limited access to affordable health care, systemic racism, trauma and financial concerns, like a lack of housing and food, which may be exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Even before the pandemic, the Well Being Trust reported that more lives had been lost in 2017 to deaths of despair than ever before, and their estimates show that an additional 28,000 to 150,000 deaths of despair could be the result of COVID-19.

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/coronavirus-deaths-suicides-drugs-alcohol-pandemic-75000/>

The Opioid epidemic was already a national crisis. Covid-19 could be making things worse

KVIA, 05/07/2020

More than 2 million Americans struggle with opioid use disorder, and about 130 Americans on average die every day from an opioid overdose. Opioids account for a majority of drug overdose deaths, the leading cause of accidental death in the US. It's a crisis that's been a priority for the federal, state and local level officials for years.

The COVID-19 crisis has disrupted efforts to combat the opioid crisis. Many walk-in clinics and syringe exchange programs have closed, public health services are disrupted, support groups

meet virtually rather than in person. People who struggle with substance abuse and are homelessness or incarcerated can't often comply with social distancing guidelines, are left to their own defenses and frequently isolated. COVID-19 related stress can be a trigger for relapse.

As a result, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) is temporarily allowing treatment programs to provide patients with two to four weeks' worth of methadone doses to take home, as medication-assisted treatment (MAT) in-person visits could expose both patients and health care workers to COVID-19, and telehealth restrictions around prescriptions for buprenorphine have been relaxed.

<https://kvia.com/health/2020/05/07/the-opioid-epidemic-was-already-a-national-crisis-covid-19-could-be-making-things-worse/>

Substance Use Treatment

Virus drives new demand for Talkspace's online therapy

ABC News, 05/10/2020

Mental health effects of COVID-19 are real. As a result, Dr. Neil Leibowitz, chief medical officer of Talkspace, an online therapy platform, spoke with The Associated Press about what the coronavirus may mean for the present and future of teletherapy, online therapy:

“We've seen an increase in demand for teletherapy of 65%. For a lot of people going through something, what they need is a brief intervention to help them adjust: they'll need help acclimating with some issues that they're maybe having with their families. So, there's going to be a subset of people who cycle through therapy and a couple weeks or two months is really what meets their needs.”

<https://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2020/05/10/business/ap-us-insider-qa-teletherapy.html>

Why Your Shrink Wasn't Offering Virtual Therapy Until Now

The Atlantic, 05/12/2020

A 2018 survey found that less than half of psychologists reported that they delivered some therapy digitally, and the most common technology used was the phone and email, not videoconferencing. Two major reasons for the low rates of telepsychiatry use were that therapists weren't paid enough to do it, and two, the government was worried about patient privacy.

But in March, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Service, the main government insurer, said it would begin paying for telehealth visits on a much broader and consistent basis throughout COVID-19. Medicare and Medicaid, which together cover about one-third of all Americans, would consider these virtual visits to be on par with traditional doctor's appointments, and would reimburse doctors accordingly.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2020/05/virtual-therapy-pandemic/611551/>

Quarantine fatigue and stress is real. Virtual therapy can help

TODAY, 05/05/2020

Quarantine fatigue is a real phenomenon. With many at home either surrounded by family or isolated, fatigue happens with the onset of something so massive and potentially draining as a pandemic. People frequently feel some degree of loss of control or uncertainty and people who typically do not experience mental health issues are struggling.

To help, Beth Barnall, associate professor and psychologist at Stanford University School of Medicine, says that you shouldn't think of therapists solely in terms of treating mental health problems and psychiatric disorders. Therapists can also help optimize our wellness and functioning, prevent long-term issues from even occurring in the first place. This mindset is helpful because it removes the feeling that there must be some threshold as to when you can finally see the therapist.

You may be able to search your insurance company's database for mental health professionals, but with virtual therapy, you don't need to limit yourself to your immediate area. Some examples of resources include:

- [The American Psychology Association](#)
- [Psychology Today](#)
- [The psychological association for your state](#)
- [GoodTherapy](#)
- [Open Path Collective](#)

<https://www.today.com/health/quarantine-stress-fatigue-can-online-therapy-help-t180688>

As anxiety rises, cities adapt mental health services on the fly

SMART Cities Dive, 05/11/2020

In addition to the impact of COVID-19 on direct public health, there has been a growing impact on mental health. Even prior to the pandemic, cities have invested in new resources for substance use and mental health care including new hotlines, substance use treatment plans, and funding for community care. However, the COVID-19 crisis has overwhelmed even these increased services. Cities and agencies have had to quickly adapt to changing needs, and according to Benjamin Miller of the Well Being Trust, foundation, local governments are best situated to know how to respond in their cities.

New York City's ThriveNYC has seen a significant increase in calls, texts and online chats for crisis support. Many services have shifted to online and phone-only support. Susan Garnett, CEO of My Health My Resources of Tarrant County (MHMR) in Texas, said her organization not only had to purchase laptops and tablets for staff, but also had to figure out how to reach patients who don't have a stable phone line or internet connection. MHMR, the second-largest behavioral health care provider in the state, also had to coordinate with the City of Fort Worth, TX to create new care options for the city's homeless population.

<https://www.smartcitiesdive.com/news/city-mental-health-services-programs-coronavirus-pandemic/577540/>