

Trends in Paediatric Psychiatric Inpatient Characteristics During COVID-19 Pandemic at Children's Clinical University Hospital, Riga, Latvia

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Background. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant negative changes in the overall daily life of many people. Rise of mental health related problems during COVID 19 pandemic is experienced in many countries. On 12 March 2020, a state of emergency was declared in Latvia for the first time to control the spread of the coronavirus COVID-19. Mental health of the child and adolescent population is particularly at risk because of abrupt changes in their routine, such as restrictions in social contacts, recreational activities, worsening economic states of their families, loss of close ones and overall uncertainty.

Aim. The objectives of this study were to identify major trends in psychiatric paediatric inpatient characteristics during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods. Altogether 1337 inpatient records were analysed, divided in two symmetrical study time periods – pre- and intra-pandemic. The inpatients in the pre-pandemic period (20.07.2018–11.03.2020) were statistically compared to the intra-pandemic period (12.03.2020–01.11.2021). Patient characteristics such as age, sex, place of residence, length of stay, type of admission was compared in these groups, as well as rates of diagnoses related to depression and self-harm.

Results. Statistically significant increase in female case proportions (46.1% to 63.1% ($p<0.001$)), increase in proportions of patients from rural regions (38.5% to 47.6% ($p<0.001$)), increase in urgent administration case proportions (38.9% to 56.9% ($p<0.001$)), increase in adolescent age group patient proportions (32.8% to 52.4% ($p<0.001$)), increase of length of stay (the mean of 10.86 days (SD 10.19) to the mean of 13.67 days (SD 12.24)), increase in proportions of patients with depression from 12.5% to 22.7% ($p<0.001$), increase in proportions of patients with intentional self-harm by poisoning from 0.9% to 1.9% ($p<0.05$) and intentional self-harm by sharp object from 4.0% to 6.2% ($p<0.001$) were found.

Conclusion. Major changes in psychiatric paediatric inpatient characteristics were found during the COVID-19 pandemic, with patients becoming older, being admitted more often in urgent mental states and staying in the psychiatric ward for longer, which may indicate a negative impact on children's quality of lives. These findings can help underline the importance and increasing demand of mental health in Latvia during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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