

Comparison of Eating Disorders During COVID-19 Pandemic and Pre-Pandemic Period in Clinic for Pediatric Psychiatry of Children's Clinical University Hospital of Latvia

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Background. Since the start of COVID-19 pandemic, new challenges arise from its detrimental effects on mental health, including eating disorders, that have seen substantial increase in the number and severity of new and pre-existing cases amongst young people compared to the previous years. Assessment of eating disorder prevalence and risk factors is necessary to identify and seek the best preventive and treatment options.

Aim. The aim of the current study was to compare hospitalization dynamics of patients with eating disorders in the Clinic for Pediatric Psychiatry during and before COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods. The total of 123 patients with eating disorders were included in a retrospective cross-sectional study, identified with the ICD-10 F50 group of diagnosis (F50.0, F50.1, F50.2, F50.8) from 07.20.2018 to 01.11.2021. Then the patients were divided into two groups (pre-pandemic and pandemic), each representing a 300-day period set by the midpoint of 11.03.2020 when World Health Organization declared the start of COVID-19 pandemic. SPSS 23 was used for statistical analysis, including the Chi-Square test.

Results. Comparing the hospitalized patients with eating disorders between both groups, 83 (58%) of them were hospitalized during pandemic ($p=0.001$). The pre-pandemic group of 60 patients included 5 (8.3%) boys and 55 (91.7%) girls with the mean age of 14.47 years ($SD=1.631$, $p<0.05$), the mean hospitalization length of 18.33 days ($SD=11.444$, $p<0.05$), and 49 (81.7%) of these patients were hospitalized emergently ($p<0.05$). The pandemic group of 83 patients included 16 (19.3%) boys and 67 (80.7%) girls with the mean age of 13.55 years ($SD=3.113$, $p<0.05$), the mean hospitalization length of 17.02 days ($SD=12.308$, $p<0.05$) and 56 (67.5%) of which were hospitalized emergently ($p<0.05$). Significantly more cases of 55 (60.4%) patients with anorexia nervosa were prevalent in pandemic group ($p=0.002$) of which 36 (65.5%) were adolescents, 19 (34.5%) pre-pubescent children, in contrast, there was no excess of patients with bulimia nervosa in each group ($p=0.716$).

Conclusion. Trends of more hospitalized patients with eating disorders are clearly observed during pandemic ($p=0.001$). Predominance of hospitalized girls is observed, but we observe more hospitalized boys in pandemic than in pre-pandemic group, respectively, 19.3% and 8.3%. Also, the mean age of hospitalized patients has decreased during the pandemic – 13.55 years of age ($SD=3.113$, $p<0.05$) compared with pre-pandemic group patients with 14.47 years of age ($SD=1.631$, $p<0.05$). Also, predominantly 55 (60.4%) patients with anorexia nervosa were hospitalized ($p=0.002$) during the pandemic.

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