

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Mental Health of Black Adolescents in Underserved New York City Neighborhoods

Background: The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted adolescent mental health around the globe. Black youth with fewer financial resources may be particularly susceptible to mental health complications.

Objective: To evaluate the prevalence of depressive symptoms in an urban pediatric clinic, serving primarily under-resourced Black adolescents in Central Brooklyn before and during the pandemic.

Design/Methods: PHQ-9 was routinely administered to patients 11-21 years old at well-child visits. The cutoff for positive depression screen was ≥ 10 . We compared positive scores pre-pandemic (June 2019–February 2020) to during the pandemic (April–December 2020). Demographics (age, gender, race, ethnicity, and insurance) were obtained from EMR.

Results: The sample included 554 adolescents (50.9% Male, 98.4% Black, and 65.5% Medicaid), 312 before and 242 during the pandemic. The prevalence of positive screens increased from before (9.0%) to during (14.9%) the pandemic ($p=.031$). Furthermore, prevalence increased among girls ($p=.05$) and 11-13 year-olds ($p=.022$). Prior to the pandemic, multivariate logistic regression showed that the odds of positive screen were higher for females compared to males (OR=2.88; 95% CI 1.19, 6.98) and for 17+-year-olds compared to 11-13-year-olds (OR=4.08; 95% CI 1.25,13.35). No association with demographics was found. In a separate regression, including all samples across time periods, only during the intra-pandemic time period did the odds of positive depression screen increase (OR=1.79, 95% CI 1.05, 3.06).

Conclusion: Our study shows that the COVID-19 pandemic increased the odds of positive depression screening by 80%, in our predominantly low-income, Black population in New York City. This was particularly noteworthy in girls and younger adolescents. As the pandemic continues, our findings highlight the importance of allocating resources to improve mental health outcomes in these groups.