

CHANGES IN ACUITY OF MENTAL ILLNESS IN A RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL IN SOUTH INDIA IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19

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Background: Shanti Bhavan (SB), a residential school near Bangalore, India, provides primary and secondary education, with ongoing support for tertiary education, to children from impoverished families in the region. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the adult psychiatry residency training program at Zucker Hillside Hospital (ZHH), in collaboration with Northwell Health's Center for Global Health, established a partnership with SB to expand access to mental health screening and supports services for students. Following India's nationwide lockdown in March 2020, there have been marked changes to campus life at SB (e.g. loss of volunteer staff, requirements for staff and students to remain onsite during summer vacation, reduced access to local in-person health care services, etc.) This state of crisis has been associated with an increase in trauma-related psychiatric illness. The pre-existing relationship with the psychiatry residency training program has provided an opportunity to assess for changes in mental illness acuity among adolescents, as well as emerging challenges in treating this acuity, following the onset of the pandemic. We hypothesize that the overall acuity of mental illness manifestations among SB students has increased when compared to before the implementation of India's nationwide lockdown.

We compare mental illness acuity among SB students from before the implementation of India's nationwide lockdown to after.

Mental health clinicians and trainees at ZHH who have assisted in conducting psychiatric assessments of students at SB reviewed documented chief complaints with particular attention drawn to incidence of suicidal ideation and self-injurious behavior.

Clinicians and trainees reported a significant increase in self-injurious behaviors and suicidal ideation following the implementation of India's nationwide lockdown.

The rise in acuity of mental illness among adolescent students at SB following the nationwide and local campus lockdowns warrants further study of the psychological impacts resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Full List of Authors

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Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of this presentation, participants will be able to:

1. Recognize potential adverse impact of pandemic-related family separation on adolescents.

2. Interpret increases in overall mental illness acuity as potential indicator of societal trauma.

References

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