



MENTAL HEALTH AMONG UNINSURED PRIMARY CARE PATIENTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an influence on the mental health of millions of individuals, resulting in an increase in stress and anxiety in our society as a result of lockdowns, social limitations, financial concerns, and the loss of family members or close friends. Low-income individuals, however, are more vulnerable during a pandemic due to financial insecurity and poor health. The availability of health care has a substantial impact on one's overall physical and mental health, as well as one's overall quality of life (DPHP, 2018). Many individuals and families in the United States continue to lack health insurance, whether they cannot afford it or are unemployed. The most significant barrier to adequate health care for low-income families in the United States is the difficulty in obtaining health insurance (Lazer & Devenport, 2020). As a result, low-income communities avoid healthcare providers and annual exams, resulting in poor health. **The purpose of this study is to evaluate mental health among uninsured primary care patients during the COVID-19 pandemic.** Identifying these mental health issues among underserved populations during the pandemic has the potential to have substantial policy and practical implications in the post-pandemic period to improve psychological well-being among the community.

Methods

A self-administered survey is provided to uninsured patients as part of a collaboration with the Maliheh Free Clinic, which serves people with household incomes that are 150 percent below the federal poverty line. The Maliheh Free Clinic provides low-income, uninsured individuals the opportunity to consult with certified physicians about their health issues. The surveys will be collected beginning in October 2021 and will be completed in May 2022. Paper and online versions of the survey and consent form are provided in English and Spanish. The survey contains demographic questions (age, birthplace, gender, educational attainment) as well as questions regarding how the pandemic has affected their happiness, anxiety, parental stress, and dental care.

Results

Participant Demographics:

There were 65 participants in total. Sixty percent of the participants were Spanish speakers. Over 90% of participants were foreign born. Nearly 60% of the participants were women. Forty percent of the participants were married. The percentage of the participants who had a full-time job was 35.4%. The average age of the participants was 43.84 (range 18-74, SD=16.11). Approximately 30% of the participants had been patients of the clinic for two years or longer.

COVID-19 Related Health Issues:

Seventeen percent of the participants reported their health became worse since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Over 30% of the participants had tested COVID-19 positive. Only one of them was hospitalized.

Anxiety:

The average GAD-7 Anxiety score was 4.55 (SD=4.95) which indicates minimal to mild anxiety levels. The participants who had been tested COVID-19 positive reported significantly higher levels of anxiety than those who had not ($p<0.05$). Women reported higher anxiety levels than men ($p<0.01$).

Conclusions

This study uncovers a concern for those who are uninsured and experiencing mental health issues as a result of the pandemic. More emphasis and effort should be directed toward building resources for uninsured people and their mental health in order to ensure that they receive the best available care. The study has the potential to provide practical recommendations for increasing psychological well-being in the post-pandemic period to uninsured individuals.

References

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