Life Interrupted: Pandemic related life disruptions among young adults with mental illness in the U.S.

Kathryn Sabella, PhD1, Jessica A. Jonikas, MA2, Frances Aranda, PhD, MPH, MS2, Claudia Cortez, BA2, & Judith A. Cook, PhD2

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the lives young adults, affecting their relationships, health behaviors, academics, and professional lives.1 Young adults with serious mental illnesses are no exception, with research suggesting a relapse in symptoms among these youth during periods of lockdown.2 A large body of research prior to the pandemic demonstrated that many youth with long-term conditions, including mental illnesses, experience delays in reaching expected milestones and barriers in the transition to adulthood.3,4 This project is investigating the impact of the pandemic on young adults with serious mental illnesses during normative life transitions.

Methods

• Young adults, aged 18-25 years, living with serious mental illnesses (N=967) voluntarily participated in an online Qualtrics survey with a $10 incentive, from March 26 to June 4, 2021.
• Recruited from across the U.S. via social media, email, and web announcements.
• Measures included the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9), the Generalized Anxiety Disorder questionnaire-7 (GAD-7), aspects of well-being, and demographic information.
• Also assessed was the impact of COVID-19 on mental health, physical health, and daily lives, along with disruptions to normative life transitions.

Results

N=967

Most frequently reported mental health diagnoses: 21.9% experienced deferred post-secondary education, 24.3% experienced intimate partner disruption, 43.6% experienced work disruption, 26.1% experienced intimate partner disruption, 31.8% experienced residential disruption.

Conclusions & Implications

• More than a third of respondents reported work or social network disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
• Most frequently reported disruptions were in the areas of work, residential situation, intimate and social relationships, and school.
• Respondents in poorer physical health and poorer mental health were significantly more likely to experience multiple role disruptions, indicating they may be more at risk for long-term negative outcomes.
• Although causal effects cannot be ascertained, young adults with serious mental health conditions in the U.S. experienced several disruption across several domains. The long-term impact of these disruptions is yet to be determined.

The contents of this presentation were developed with funding from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (#90RTHF00004). NIDILRR is a Center within the Administration for Community Living (ACL), ACL is part of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The contents of this presentation do not necessarily represent the policy of NIDILRR, ACL, or HHS, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

References:

1 University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School, Transitions to Adulthood Center for Research
2 University of Illinois at Chicago, Center on Mental Health Services Research & Policy