The Impact of Sars-CoV 2 (Covid-19) on the Acuity of Diagnosis at Admission for Young Adults with Anxiety and Depression: An Observational Study.

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BACKGROUND

- March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the coronavirus SARS-CoV 2 (COVID-19) outbreak as a pandemic. Restrictive measures were imposed across the country, which have had an immediate and unprecedented impact on psychological health (Glowacz & Schmits, 2020; Huang & Zhao, 2020; Hossain et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2020).
- Incidences of depression and anxiety, amongst other struggles like substance use, PTSD, eating disorders, and suicidality have increased as a result of the pandemic.
- Age and gender have been found to play a significant, predictive role on the impact COVID-19 stressors have had on individuals' mental health with young adults and female gender identification particularly at risk (Huang & Zhao, 2020; Liu et al., 2020).

RESEARCH QUESTION

- The current study sought to examine the prevalence and acuity levels of generalized anxiety and depression diagnoses in young adults upon admission to a long-term, intensive outpatient mental health program, throughout the first fifteen months of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Particular attention was paid to how gender identity was associated with acuity levels of anxiety and/or depression.

METHODS

Participants:

A total of 112 young adults (Mean age=22.3, SD=3.2), of which 53 (48%) identified themselves as females, were recruited for the study. All remaining demographic information can be found in Table 1.

Location:

The Dorm is an intensive outpatient program for young adults, ages 18-35, located in New York City and Washington DC. Program duration is approximately one year, on average. Treatment includes:

- Empirically supported behavioral psychosocial methodologies to serve variance of mental health illnesses and co-occurring disorders.
- Alternative and complementary modalities (i.e., exercise, yoga, reiki, horticulture, community service, meditation, mindfulness).
- Family programming including weekly parent coaching, parent groups and family groups.
- Clients work with both a therapist and a clinical coach.
- Participation in 3-30 hours a week of group therapy, depending on the treatment phase.

Procedure:

Data was collected through valid and reliable questionnaires (see above) administered at 3-month intervals throughout the measured time periods of the pandemic. Participants were consented through private meetings using Zoom virtual conference software or in-person, using standardized COVID protocols. Time to complete the survey did not exceed 40 minutes.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Table 1. Demographics of Admission Intakes

DEMOGRAPHICS	MEAN	PERCENTAGE	P-VALUE
Age (SD)	22.2 (3.2)		
Gender Identification			0.443
Male	53	46%	
Female	53	46%	
Transgender	1	1%	
Other	5	4%	
Marital Status			0.096
Single	110	96%	
Married	2	2%	
Highest Education			0.742
Some High School	4	4%	
High School Graduate/GED	44	39%	
Some College	46	40%	
Associates	2	2%	
Bachelors	18	16%	
Employment			0.468
Full Time Work	14	12%	
Student	47	41%	
Unemployed	51	45%	
Experienced Trauma in Life			0.46
Yes	67	59%	
No	45	39%	

Assessments:

The Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale – 7 (GAD-7) is a 7-item, self-report screening tool and severity indicator for GAD over the past 2 weeks.

The Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) is a 9-item, self-report scale that is used for screening, diagnosing, monitoring, and measuring the severity of depression.

Barratt Impulsivity Scale (BIS-11) is an 11-item scale to assess impulsivity.

Functional Assessment of Chronic Illness Therapy (FACIT) Measurement System is a 27-item questionnaire that focuses on the domains of physical well-being, social/family well-being, emotional well-being, and functional well-being.

PROMIS Ability to Participate in Social Roles and Activities is an 8-item self-report PROMIS questionnaire that assesses the perceived ability to perform one's usual social roles and activities.

PROMIS General Self-Efficacy is a 10-item measure used to assess a person's belief in their capacity to manage daily stressors and have control over meaningful events.

PROMIS Friendship (Ages 18+) Fixed Form is an 8-item scale evaluating the perceptions of the availability of friends or companions with whom to interact or affiliate within the past month.

PROMIS Perceived Rejection (Ages 18+) is an 8-item scale evaluating how often people perceive others to be arguing/yelling at them and perceived insensitivity over the past month.

PROMIS Sleep-Related Impairment Questionnaire is an 8-item questionnaire that measures self-reported alertness, sleepiness, tiredness, and functional impairments associated with sleep problems during waking hours within the past seven days.

RESULTS

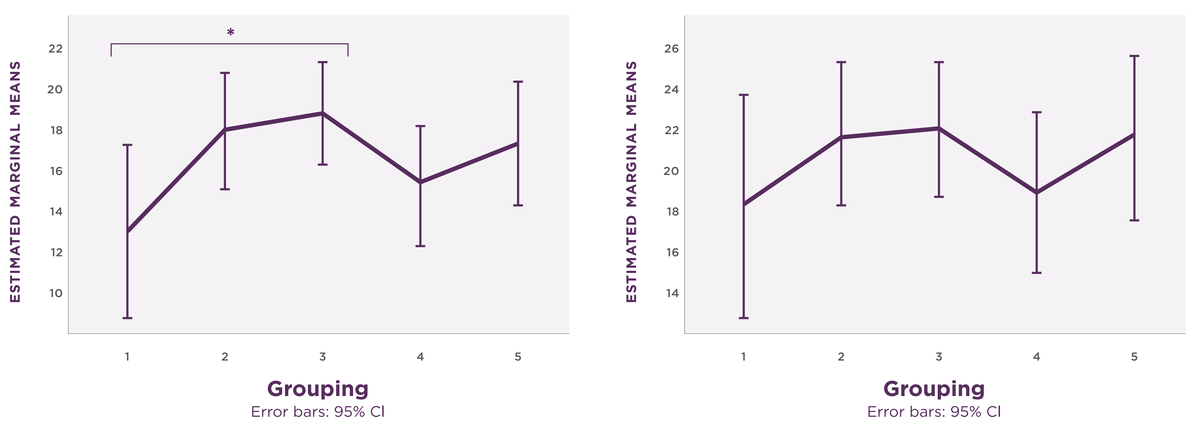
Table 2. Correlational Table of Psychometrics at Admission

	GAD Total	PHQ	FACIT Physical	FACIT Well being	Ability to Participate	Impulsivity	Friendship	Rejection	Self-efficacy
GAD Total									
PHQ	.740**								
FACIT Physical	.643**	.749**							
FACIT Well being	-.421**	-.579**	-.398**						
Ability to participate	.594**	.650**	.575**	-.523**					
Impulsivity	0.077	0.036	0.129	.525**	-0.029				
Friendship	-0.131	-290**	-0.084	.551**	-.320**	.345**			
Rejection	.381**	.395**	.356**	-.196*	.417**	.189*	-.228*		
Self-efficacy	-.306**	-.395**	-.251**	.618**	-.356**	.454**	.544**	-0.121	
Sleep	-0.110	-0.080	-0.080	.237*	-0.109	0.149	.193*	0.000	.316**

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Figure 1



* significance at the .05 level

Note: Grouping 1= March 2020 through May, 2020; 2= June, 2020 through August, 2020; 3= September, 2020 through November, 2020; 4= December, 2020 through February, 2021; 5= March, 2021 through May, 2021

DISCUSSION

Findings and Clinical Implications:

- The results indicated a significant increase in anxiety in young adults seeking mental health services at an outpatient program during the measured time periods of the COVID-19 pandemic (see Figure 1).
- The psychometric properties of the admission assessments were uniformly highly statistically significant (see Table 2).
- Female-identified clients scored lower than male identified counterparts on quality of life and ability to participate in daily activities.
- Special attention to the effects of heightened anxiety in young adults because of COVID-19 associated stressors is vital to ensure the critical need for mental health preparedness from a global perspective.

LIMITATIONS

- Cross-sectional research design limits generalizability due to not having a repeated measurement.
- Lack of racial and socioeconomic diversity within the sample. A majority of the sample were white individuals from affluent backgrounds.
- Treatment was conducted virtually due to COVID-19 regulations. All attempts were made to make virtual sessions as equally representative as face-to-face interaction.

REFERENCES UPON REQUEST