

Effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on stress, anxiety, and depressive disorders in German primary care: A cross-sectional study

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Psychiatric disorders

Aims

Several studies revealed that mental disorders' prevalence increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in young and female individuals. Such studies represent individuals' subjective perceptions and not the number of mental health cases treated in primary care. Thus, this study aimed to describe the changes in depression, anxiety, and stress disorder diagnoses in General Practitioner (GP) practices during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods

More than three million patients of 757 German GP practices were included in this cross-sectional analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to assess changes in the number of incident depression, anxiety disorders, and reaction to severe stress and adjustment disorders documented by GPs in 2020 compared to the average of the years 2017-2019.

Results

There was a tremendous decrease in mental health diagnoses during the first lockdown that was only slightly compensated later. Overall populations and the entire year 2020, there was no change in documented depression (0%) and stress disorders (1%), but anxiety disorders were more often documented (+19%), especially for the elderly population (>80 years; +24%). This population group also received more frequently new depression (+12%) and stress disorder diagnoses (23%). The younger population was diagnosed more

frequently at the end of 2020, nine months after the first lockdown.

Conclusion

Anxiety disorders but not depression and stress diagnoses were elevated, which is not in line with previously published studies. We speculate that the elderly population was affected most by the pandemic immediately after the first lockdown was announced. The younger population has probably become more and more affected the longer the pandemic lasts.

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If you would like to read any of the studies in its entirety, please, contact us to obtain the full version of a publication. Also, our research director is at your disposal if you have any further questions. Thank you for your interest!

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