

The impacts of COVID-19 on eating disorders and disordered eating behaviours: Carer Perspective

What we already know

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has negatively impacted the mental health of many around the world, but particularly those with pre-existing mental health issues such as eating disorders. Changes to living situations, social distancing mandates, and increased stress and uncertainty associated with the pandemic are thought to be a trigger for eating disorders and disordered eating behaviours.

What we did

In this study, we were interested in assessing the collective impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on eating disorders and disordered eating behaviours. We conducted a literature search for studies on the topic, revealing a total of 72 studies whose results were collated.

What we found

We found an increase in eating disorders and disordered eating behaviours, like binge eating and food restriction, associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, two groups were most negatively impacted: those with a diagnosed eating disorder and children and adolescents.

We found people used eating disorder behaviours to self-manage heightened psychological distress associated with the pandemic. Two studies provided findings from interviews with carers of people with an eating disorder.

What this means for carers

Results from our study show the COVID-19 pandemic has created additional demands for carers of individuals with an eating disorder. For example, having to organise and manage a new daily routine and creating distractions for your loved one.

At times caregiving can be exhausting, but we also know that well supported carers are best equipped to provide better care. It is important that you seek support during this time, whether this is informal support from your family and friends or formal support through a mental health professional. If you have found yourself being more depleted during this time, please:

- contact your GP to discuss your support options including a Mental Health Treatment Plan,
- reach out to the [Butterfly Helpline](#) to explore options for support,
- find a [support group near you](#), whether in-person or online,
- do your best to create time in your day to engage in activities that nourish and rejuvenate you.

Our study also showed you may have concerns around the progression of your loved one's treatment during lockdown periods. This may be because of changes to outpatient monitoring and increased use of telehealth or feeling uninformed in your loved one's treatment. It is important that you continue to encourage and support your loved one with treatment during this time, particularly as you may play a pivotal role in their eating disorder treatment.

Reference

McLean, C. P., Utpala, R., & Sharp, G. (2021, November 13). The impacts of COVID-19 on eating disorders and disordered eating: A mixed studies systematic review and implications for healthcare professionals, carers, and self. Retrieved from psyarxiv.com/f27y8.

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