

Adolescent girls were severely affected by pandemic stress, find researchers

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A new study led by researchers at Western and Lawson Health Research Institute has found that adolescent emergency department (ED) visits and hospitalizations for suicidal thoughts, self-harm and self-poisoning

increased across Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially among adolescent girls.

Researchers from Pediatric Emergency Research Canada (PERC), a network of 15 [pediatric hospitals](#) across Canada, looked at national data from the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) on ED visits and hospitalizations among adolescents between the ages of 10 and 18 from April 2015 to March 2022.

"Hospital admissions for suicidal ideation, self-poisoning and self-harm increased significantly in the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic," said Dr. Naveen Poonai, professor at Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry and scientist at Lawson Health Research Institute. "What came as a surprise to us is that the greatest increase was among adolescent females, a demographic that is often overlooked."

The study, published in the [Canadian Medical Association Journal](#) found that emergency department visits for [suicidal ideation](#), self-poisoning and [self-harm](#) rose during the pandemic (April 1, 2020 to March 31, 2022) compared to the average from the previous five years, while hospital admissions for these conditions increased significantly, rising 11%, particularly among females, with the largest increase seen among 10–14-year-olds.

The researchers point out that social isolation, education disruption, fears of contagion and financial hardship are among the reasons the pandemic may have had a greater impact on adolescents, as they are more susceptible to psychological impacts from isolation.

"Our findings underscore an urgent need for public health policies to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and future pandemics on the mental health of adolescents, including screening programs for suicide risk that include younger adolescents," said Poonai, lead author

on the study and pediatric emergency medicine physician at children's hospital at London Health Sciences Centre (LHSC).

More information: Naveen Poonai et al, Emergency department visits and hospital admissions for suicidal ideation, self-poisoning and self-harm among adolescents in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic, *Canadian Medical Association Journal* (2023). [DOI: 10.1503/cmaj.220507](https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.220507)

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