

Submission Id: 2742

Title

Cost of COVID-19: Using life course theory as a lens to understand the consequences of the pandemic

Priority 1 (Research Category)

Behavioral, psychosocial, and mental illness

Presenters

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Abstract

Context: The COVID-19 pandemic and associated countermeasures have had broad implications across society which will have implications for physical and mental health for years to come. Understanding these experiences through the lens of life course constructs may help communities, service providers including family doctors, and governments to recognize and respond more effectively to the lasting impacts. Objective: To use life course theory to explore the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated countermeasures on child and family mental, social, and emotional well-being. Study Design: Qualitative study including anonymous micro-narrative collection using Spryng.io software (n=210); in-depth interviews with health and social service providers (n=30). Directed content analysis was used to examine the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic as they relate to key constructs in life course theory. Setting or Dataset: Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox and Addington counties in South-Eastern Ontario (pop. 210,000). Population studied: Participants were recruited to the micronarrative collection through convenience sampling using the online data collection tool, as well as through intentional sampling targeting Indigenous people and people experiencing socio economic deprivation and homelessness. Participants for the in-depth interviews were intentionally recruited as key informants from local health and social service organizations. Results: All of the key constructs of life course theory were relevant when applied to our findings. Our data identified meaningful impacts on life course trajectory components including transitions, turning points, and social pathways, as well as using the principles of agency, life span development, linked lives, timing, and time and place. Conclusions: Our data illustrates the pervasive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on all aspects of the life course. While service providers and policy makers are attuned to the acute crises currently unfolding, the long term impacts of life course disruption will play out over years, or potentially over the entire lifespan of this cohort. Responses to the pandemic cannot limit themselves to crisis management in the next 12-18 months, but will need to integrate an understanding of life course theory to support long term healing of individuals and communities.