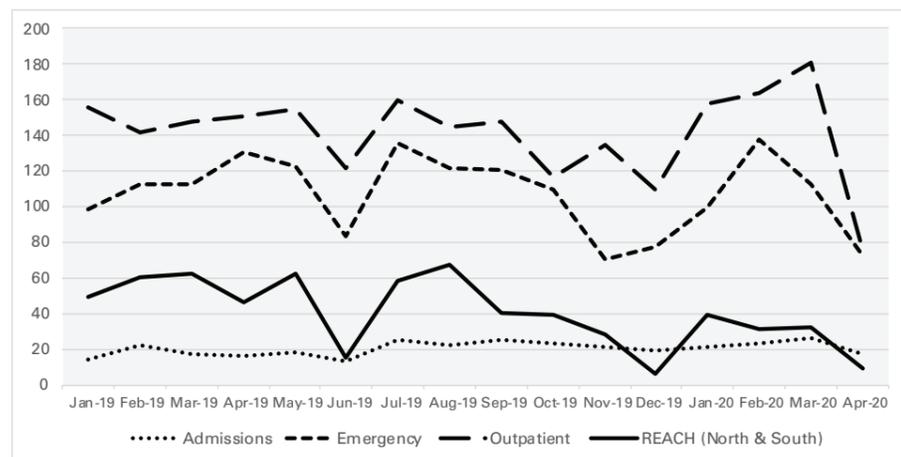


COVID-19 to the Under 19

The 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic poses many challenges globally on economic, sociopolitical, and healthcare fronts. COVID-19 has greatly impacted the mental health of many individuals worldwide, including children and adolescents. The COVID-19 pandemic poses many disruptions and challenges to the usual operations of Singapore's schools and REACH services due to safe management measures imposed. This article seeks to describe the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Singapore's schools and the response and adaption of the school community mental health services. The Response, Early Intervention and Assessment in Community Mental Health (REACH) was conceived in 2017 to support students with mental health issues.

For REACH, the pandemic meant adapting to the evolving situation promptly to ensure continued services and support to students. Initially, face-to-face community and home visits were postponed to minimise exposure to COVID-19 for both clients and clinicians.



Note: The figure shows new referrals increased across services in February 2020 (the height of the pandemic) and declined when the stay-at-home order/circuit-breaker period was instated in April 2020.

Then, majority of face-to-face services moved to telehealth means. Teams then continued to work in split-team mode and a two-week rotation basis between working from home and the hospital. Figure 1 shows an increase in new referrals at the height of the pandemic and decline when 'circuit-breaker' began. Following the easing of national level restrictions and with schools back in session, an increased number of students reported to have coping and adjustment difficulties. At REACH, an increase in consultations and referrals was seen, thus resulting in increased waitlist for interventions. Other child and adolescent mental health providers and social welfare agencies also report similar concerns. In view of the impact of the pandemic, promotion and prevention efforts to increase the capacity of the school and youth mental health services needs to be afforded. Telehealth may continue to be beneficial beyond the pandemic.

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Photos of the REACH teams (North & South)

Being a caregiver of an individual with hoarding behavior



The prevalence of hoarding behavior was established at 2% in the Singapore Mental Health Study conducted in 2010. While not a highly common phenomenon, it has significant impact on not just the person with hoarding behavior, but also the care providers who are often living with them. In a collaboration with Agency for Integrated Care, Housing and Development Board and Ministry of National Development, a qualitative study was conducted among caregivers to bridge the gap in understanding hoarding behavior in Singapore. A total of 10 caregivers were interviewed and they provided narrative accounts of their lived experiences in providing care to family member who hoards.

Caregivers' lived experiences could be understood through the four themes identified in the study. The first theme related to caregivers' understanding

of hoarding behavior where many displayed observable strain in trying to comprehend the situation. The second and third theme centered around conflicts with the family member and the impact on caregivers themselves. Conflicts stemming from disagreement in ceasing acquisition of items, clearing of clutter and treatment seeking resulted in negative reactions and resistance from the family member and that rendered caregivers helpless and uncertain. The impact on personal life was felt by caregivers in terms of disrupted daily functioning, loss of social life, and an encroached living space that was unsanitary. The last theme pertained to help that caregivers had received to manage the hoarding behavior at home. Many caregivers sought both informal and formal sources of help to relieve the burden they were experiencing, though some reported feeling that they had received insufficient support.

The focus of hoarding issue is usually on the person exhibiting the behavior, and the challenges caregivers encountered are at times neglected. This study provided a deeper understanding to the strains that caregivers faced when caring for a family member with hoarding behavior. It also informed service providers who manage hoarding behaviors in the community of the type of needs and support that could be valuable to individuals with hoarding behavior and their caregivers.

Study Reference: Samari E, Chang S, Vaingankar J, Chong SA, Jeyagurunathan A, Siva Kumar FD, Goveas RR, Ng K, Tan WM, Chong R, Ye P, Lim LL, Babjee R, Subramaniam M. A Qualitative Study on Perspectives and Lived Experiences of Caregivers of Individuals With Hoarding Behaviour in an Asian Population. *Ann Acad Med Singap.* 2020 Jan;49(1):41-45. PMID: 32200396.

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