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Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the health situation of the Brazilian population

Introduction

The analysis of COVID-19 mortality revealed that the Brazilian population was critically impacted by the pandemic. This study aims to examine COVID-19-related morbidity and lifestyle changes two years after the onset of the pandemic.

Methods

A survey was conducted using an electronic questionnaire between 2022 and 2023. The sampling method used was virtual Respondent Driven Sampling (RDS). The proportion of individuals who tested positive for COVID-19 was estimated. Among these cases, we analyzed self-reported health status, COVID-19-related sequelae lasting three months or more (Long COVID), sleep disorders, and depressive symptoms based on the PHQ-9 scale. Lifestyle changes were also assessed.

Results

The sample included 4,193 individuals. Prevalence of confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection was 36.8%. Among those infected, 5.3% required hospitalization; 31.8% reported Long COVID; and 21.3% reported a COVID-19-related illness. Additionally, 33.7% were unable to perform their usual activities for one month or more. Long COVID was associated with worsening self-rated health, sleep disorders, and severe feelings of depression. Regarding unhealthy behaviors, 10.8% increased cigarette consumption and 10.1% increased alcohol intake, both of which persisted in the post-pandemic period. Over 20% reported consuming three or more processed foods the day before the interview, and 13.4% reported a decrease in physical activity along with an increase in sedentary behaviors, particularly screen time.

Conclusions

In terms of morbidity, the health situation in Brazil was greatly affected by the pandemic, with worsening health perception and persistence of some COVID-19-related health problems. Furthermore, the rise in unhealthy behaviors is of concern for the control of noncommunicable diseases, which are responsible for a substantial part of premature deaths, functional limitations, and loss of quality of life.

Keywords: COVID-19, survey, morbidity, self-rated health, Long COVID, Brazil.

Biography

Graduated in Mathematics at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, has a Master of Science in Statistics and Mathematics at the University of Rochester, USA, a PhD in Public Health at the National School of Public Health, Brazil, and post-doctoral training in statistical spatial analysis at the Southern Methodist University, USA. Her research is in the area of Public Health, with an emphasis on Epidemiology, working mainly on the following topics: HIV/AIDS, COVID-19, vital statistics, development of probabilistic and web surveys, and health inequality. She currently coordinates the trachoma elimination validation survey in Brazil. Celia has more than 300 published papers in scientific journals.