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**Abstract**

# Impact of COVID-19–related Isolation on Individuals in Treatment for Substance Use

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**Abstract**

**Background:** For individuals in treatment for substance use, supportive social networks are essential to protect against a return to use.

**Objective:** This study aimed to explore the impact of the swift and severe isolation brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically for individuals in treatment for substance use disorder, by exploring the relationships amongst social connectedness and isolation to treatment accessibility, mental health, and substance use.

**Methods:** A total of 24 semistructured interviews were conducted from May 2020 to August 2020 with participants engaged in substance use treatment asking about the impact of the pandemic on social networks, substance use, access to treatment, and mental health. Interviews were coded and analyzed using grounded theory.

**Results:** Results centered around two main themes: (1) access to support (eg, formal and informal networks) and (2) individual outcomes regarding substance use and worsened mental health.

**Conclusions:** This research suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly disrupted access to resources for individuals in treatment for substance use, and calls for treatment centers and governing bodies to put more resources into telehealth and alternative treatment plans in the event of major disruptions, such as national disasters and global pandemics.

**Conflicts of Interest:** None declared.

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**KEYWORDS**

substance use; COVID-19; treatment accessibility

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