Supervisor Name:  Romy Cho and Jennifer Smith

Project Title:  Child abuse consultations in Ontario during the time of COVID-19

Hospital/Research Institution:  The Hospital for Sick Children

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Field of Research (2 keywords):  Child Health, Child Abuse

Department:  Department of Paediatrics

School of Graduate Studies Appointment (IMS, LMP, IHPME etc)? Yes/No:  No
If YES, please name:
Brief Project Description (<300 words):

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented risk factors for increased family violence leading to concerns that child abuse cases are hidden or delayed in presentation. This is project is a multi-centre study involving three tertiary care level hospitals in Ontario with child abuse paediatric programs. The purpose of this study is to determine the trend over time of consultations referred to child abuse programs in Ontario.

Primary objective: Trend the number of child abuse consultations by type and ages to describe the variation before, during and after closures due to COVID-19.

Secondary objective: Explore variation in consultations between geographical sites and types of consultations being performed (indirect versus virtual/in-person direct).

The CREMS student will be involved in the collection and analysis of retrospectively available information from the Hospital for Sick Children through a combination of medical record review and existing program databases. An interrupted time series analysis is planned with a statistician to assess variations in numbers and types of consultations. Key time periods of analysis will include pre-pandemic lockdown, the multiple provincial lockdowns, and re-opening of communities, daycares and schools. Monthly numbers of cases will be trended over time to examine for changes during the lockdown and with daycare and school closures.

This study will provide insight into the number and types of child abuse consultations during a time of significant shift in usual social structures. This study will also add to gaps in our understanding of how times of financial and other stressors affect consultations to child abuse programs in Ontario. This will be impactful, as it will allow exploration of anecdotally reported shifts, which will lead to better planning for future emergency shutdowns. Identifying trends will assist with necessary preparations for potential service changes.