

Gender differences in suicidality trends among parents with young children after COVID-19



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INTRODUCTION

- The COVID-19 pandemic increased caregiving demands of families with young children by restricting childcare, school closures, and stay-at-home orders.
- Women reported providing more childcare than men, suggesting the pandemic’s impact on parental mental health may differ by gender.
- **Objective:** Examine whether trends in suicidality differed by gender among parents of young children during the pandemic.

METHODS

- **Data source:** Deidentified national administrative healthcare data from Optum’s Clinformatics® Data Mart Database version 8.1 (2007-2021)
- **Study cohort:** Adults ages 26-64 with a dependent child younger than age 5 enrolled in the same employer-sponsored health insurance plan for ≥ 30 days between January 1, 2016-September 30, 2021
- **Outcome:** diagnosis of suicidal ideation and/or intentional self-harm, in any enrolled month from inpatient, outpatient, or emergency department data
- **Exposures:** gender (male or female); time (January 1, 2016-February 29, 2020 = pre-exposure period; March 1, 2020-September 30, 2021 = post-exposure period)
- **Statistical analysis and design:** Interrupted time series study to estimate changes in monthly diagnosed suicidality rates between mothers and fathers before and after March 2020, adjusting for age, race, ethnicity, and enrollment month

CONCLUSION

Among commercially insured parents ages 26-64 of children younger than age 5, we identified an increased trend of 0.3 [95% CI: 0.007, 0.59] suicidality diagnoses per 100,000 mothers, relative to fathers, every month after March 2020.

This observed disparity could be explained by exacerbated gender inequities in childcare and household responsibilities, and unemployment and financial insecurity during the pandemic.

RESULTS

- We included 1,188,529 (51.58) mothers and 1,115,722 (48.42) fathers during the pre-exposure period (January 1, 2016 to February 29, 2020) and 675,115 (51.59) mothers and 633,606 (48.41) fathers during the post-exposure period (March 1, 2020 to September 30, 2021).

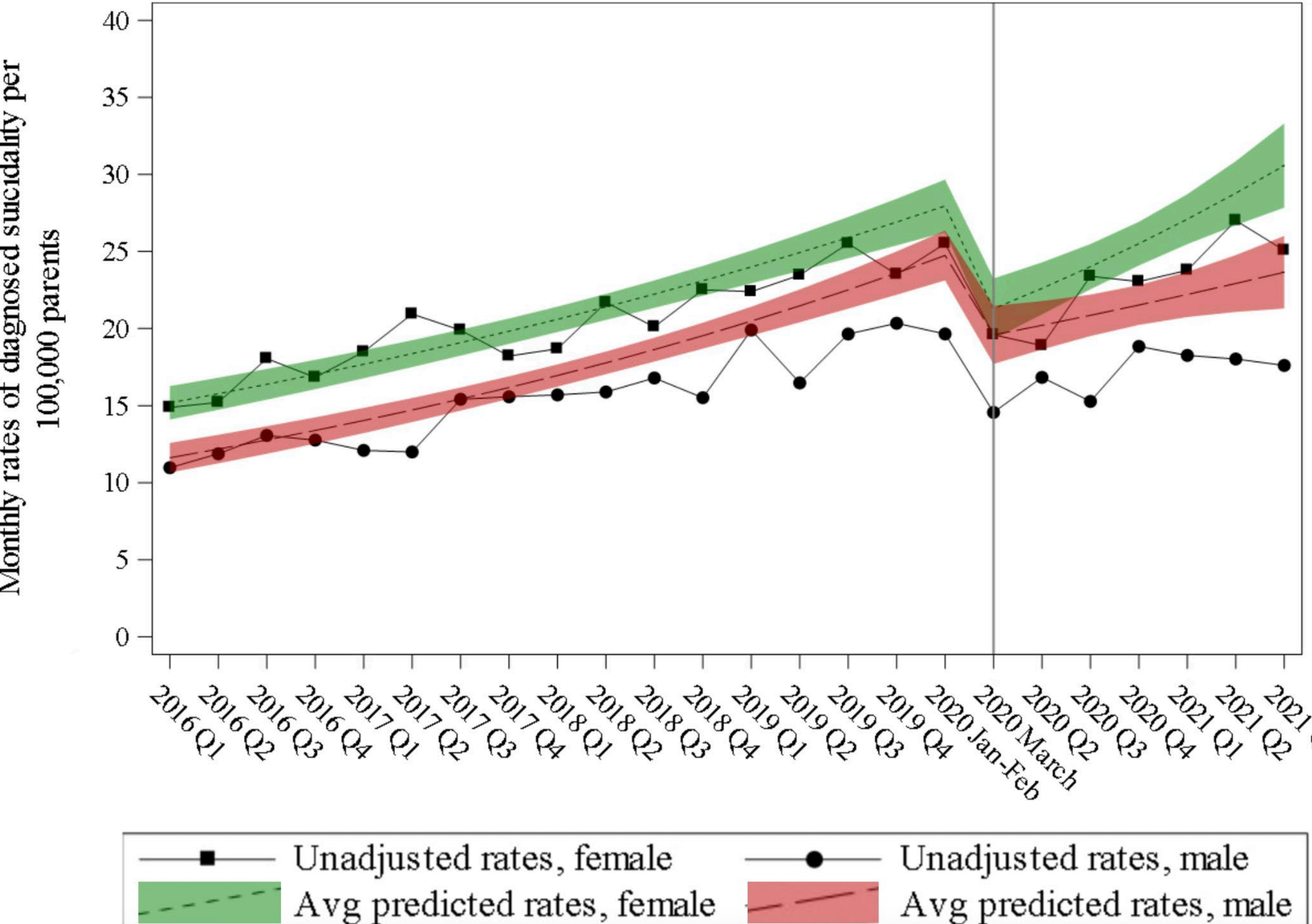


Figure 1: Unadjusted monthly rates and average predicted prevalence of diagnosed suicidality by parent gender with 95% confidence intervals

Table 1. Summary of average predicted monthly rates of change in diagnosed suicidality by parent gender before and after the COVID-19 pandemic

Parent gender	Average predicted monthly rate of change in diagnosed suicidality per 100,000 parents (95% CI)			
	9/1/2016-2/29/2020	3/1/2020-9/30/2021	Trend change	Difference in trend change
Men	0.28 (0.23, 0.32)	0.23 (0.04, 0.41)	-0.05 (-.02, 0.14)	0.3 (0.007, 0.59)
Women	0.27 (0.22, 0.32)	0.51 (0.31, 0.72)	0.25 (0.03, 0.46)	