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# Psychiatric Symptoms and Clinical Diagnosis in High School Students Exposed to the Sewol Ferry Disaster

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Two hundred and fifty 11th grade students and teachers from Danwon High School drowned, during a school trip, in the Sewol Ferry Disaster. The goal of this study was to investigate the experiences of the psychiatrists who volunteered and provided psychiatric services to the students at Danwon High School.

**Methods:** From the second day to the 138th day after the disaster, pro bono psychiatrists provided post-disaster interventions to the 10th and 12th-grade Danwon High School students who did not attend the trip. Officially, 167 psychiatrists conducted outreach in approximately 550 encounters. The study questionnaires were distributed retrospectively to psychiatric volunteers who conducted outreach at Danwon High School. We surveyed the pro bono psychiatrists about their experiences, including the students' chief complaints, psychiatric problems, clinical diagnoses, and psychiatrists' treatment recommendations.

**Results:** We reached 72 (43.1%) of the 167 volunteers, and they reported on 212 (38.6%) of the 550 encounters. The common chief complaints were mental health problems, companion problems, and family problems. The most frequent psychiatric symptoms were anxiety (76.89%), depressive mood (51.42%), and concentration difficulty (50.94%). The most frequent clinical diagnoses of the students were normal reaction (41.04%), acute stress disorder (24.53%), adjustment disorder (17.92%), anxiety disorders (9.43%), and posttraumatic stress disorder (6.60%). More than half of the students needed "additional counseling/therapy" (41.04%) or "referral to psychiatric treatment" (14.15%).

**Conclusion:** During the acute aftermath of the Sewol Ferry Disaster, volunteer psychiatrists were able to provide services. These services included psychiatric assessments, crisis counseling, psychological first aid, and referrals for ongoing care. More than half of the students were perceived to have a psychiatric diagnosis,



















