

Prevalence and Mitigation of Psychological Distress Among Healthcare Workers During Covid-19 Pandemic- A Literature Review

Sarra Fadali¹ and Asia Filatov^{2*}

¹Baruch College, The City University of New York

²Florida Atlantic University: Neurology Residency, Boca Raton Regional Hospital

*Corresponding author

Asia Filatov, Florida Atlantic University: Neurology Residency, Boca Raton Regional Hospital

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Abstract

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to spread exponentially across the globe, the severity of its impact on the mental health of healthcare providers (HCPs) begins to unfold. In this review, we investigate the prevalence of psychological distress and factors leading to mental health morbidity among frontline and healthcare providers, and we explore measures taken to provide psychological support to HCPs during the COVID-19 pandemic and to mitigate a response for future outbreaks.

Introduction

COVID-19 pandemic is the most serious global crisis of this generation. As of June 12th, 2020, there are 7,553,182 confirmed cases and 423,349 deaths due to the coronavirus worldwide [1]. Since the initial outbreak in Hubei, China, the virus has been spreading exponentially putting a strain on the global healthcare system. As hospitals across the globe become overwhelmed by the increasing number of cases, healthcare providers (HCPs) have been subjected to unparalleled physical and psychological pressure.

Albeit its importance, the mental health of HCPs during the COVID-19 pandemic remains an understudied area. We present a review of five articles dating from March 30th to May 28th, 2020, on the impact of the novel coronavirus pandemic on the mental health of frontline responders and HCPs.

The experience of healthcare providers during the COVID-19 crisis in China: A Qualitative Study [2]. During the early stages of the outbreaks of the novel coronavirus, many HCPs with no expertise in dealing with pandemic outbreaks, stepped up to help the overwhelmed infectious disease units in Wuhan. The study documents an insight into the lived experience of thirteen such providers. Nine nurses and four physicians from five COVID-19-designated hospitals in Hubei, China, participated in a semi-structural, in-depth phone interviews from Feb 10th to Feb 15th, 2020.

Results of the data analysis were categorized into three themes. The first is the conception of being fully responsible for the patients' health; healthcare providers were bound by their sense of duty to risk their safety and try their best in order to provide care for patients, at a time when very little information was known

about the novel coronavirus.

The second theme category engulfs the challenges faced by the healthcare workers while working on COVID-19 wards. In addition to working in an unfamiliar territory; HCPs were faced with a heavy workload, long hours, fear of becoming infected and infecting others, as well as feelings of guilt and helplessness about patients' suffering and the loss of lives.

The third category is themed by the resilience of HCPs in the face of various challenges. They used various support systems and self-adjustment skills to remain strong and focused on saving lives, despite the grievous conditions.

Mental Health Outcomes Among Frontline and Second-Line Health Care Workers During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Pandemic in Italy [3]. A cross-sectional study conducted on a total of 1379 healthcare workers in Italy. This study documents the first report on mental health outcomes and associated risk factors among healthcare workers in Italy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Of all the participants in the study, 49.38% experience post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSS), 27.73% had symptoms of depression, 19.80% symptoms of anxiety, 8.27% experienced insomnia, and 21.90% had high perceived stress.

While the prevalence and severity of each mental distress presented differently on each individual depending on personal experience and other socio-demographic factors, the results of this study remain in line with previous reports from China. Evidence

warrants the importance of close monitoring of mental health of HCPs and having an efficient mental support system to prevent long-term mental health problems and mitigate the response to the pandemic outbreak.

Prevalence of depression, anxiety and insomnia among healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic: A systematic review and meta-analysis [4]. A systematic search of literature databases conducted to assess the prevalence of anxiety, depression and insomnia amongst healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data analysis suggests that the prevalence rate of anxiety was 23.2% in 12 studies. Depression prevalence had a rate of 22.8% across 10 studies, and insomnia had a prevalence of 38.9% in 4 studies.

Evidence indicates that a significant proportion of healthcare workers are prone to experience anxiety, depression and insomnia with female healthcare workers and nurses having higher incidence rates than their counterparts.

Impact on mental health and perceptions of psychological care among medical and nursing staff in Wuhan during the 2019 novel coronavirus disease outbreak: A cross-sectional study [5]. A quantitative study conducted during the early outbreak of the novel coronavirus in Wuhan using epidemiological data to assess the impact of the outbreak on the mental health of 994 medical and nursing staff. The study aimed to analyze the prevalence and severity of psychological distress among frontline medical and nursing staff and the efficacy of connecting the psychological needs of such staff to receiving psychological care.

Among the participants, 36.9% had subthreshold mental health disturbances, 34.4% had mild disturbances, 22.4% had moderate disturbances, and 6.2% had severe disturbances. The study also presents data on the rates of access of medical and nursing staff to available psychological materials, resources and counseling or psychotherapy to cope with the amounting stress.

Evidence collected during the study emphasizes the importance of having an efficient mental support system ready and accessible to frontline and healthcare workers during times of widespread infections.

Mental health care for medical staff and affiliated healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic [6]. The paper highlights the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the degree of individual reactions to disasters on the mental health of healthcare workers. The paper also explores the factors leading to negative psychological effects such as burnout, compassion fatigue, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and moral injury during the outbreak.

Additionally, the paper presents organizational and individual support measures during pandemic crisis. These measures range from how organizations can support their staff to crisis leadership strategies and the importance of having strong compassionate leaders to ways of self-help during the pandemic.

Discussion

The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has had negative psycho-

logical effects on HCPs across the globe, such negative effects include, but are not limited to, anxiety, depression, insomnia, burnout, and post-traumatic stress syndrome [4-7].

Many a factor contributes to the mental morbidity of healthcare providers during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to being subjected to an increasing amount of stress due to the heavy workload and extended workhours, HCPs are dealing with an unprecedented situation of a fast spreading disease. Decisions have to be made fast, ranging from efficiently triaging and isolating suspected cases to deciding which patients need intensive care and invasive treatments to shutting down departments when a staff or patient tests positive [2,8]. The scarcity of personal protective equipment (PPE) and lack of training or expertise in dealing with infectious diseases put HCPs at a higher risk of contracting the disease and potentially spreading it to their family members and loved ones, many of whom have pre-existing conditions which may increase their risk of death [2,8]. Furthermore, caring for patients who are very sick and deteriorating and caring for colleagues who have contracted the virus at work can be mentally devastating for all the medical and nursing staff. All of these factors contribute greatly to the increasing prevalence of mental morbidity among healthcare providers due to the pandemic.

Recent studies from China, Italy, and Greece, have shown that HCPs are at higher risk of developing adverse psychiatric outcomes such as anxiety, depression, and insomnia due to the COVID-19 pandemic [3-5,8]. The collected results have shown that the rate of prevalence of mental morbidity among HCPs can be attributed to many socio-demographic variables, such as gender- with female staff having more incidence of anxiety and depression than males, age, years of experience, department of work, and job position- with nurses being more prone to anxiety and depression than physicians since they spend more time with patients [3,5,7,9]. The results can also be interpreted in terms of psychological variables, depending on the availability of social support and individual reactions to disaster [5,10].

While it is safe to say that due to the severity of the impact, the fast spread of COVID-19 and the number of patients requiring intensive care, this pandemic would have overwhelmed any existing resources, the data collected in this review warrants the eminence of having established organizational protocols in dealing with infectious outbreaks and crisis [2-6]. Measures should be taken to ensure provision of adequate resources and medical equipment such as PPEs and ventilators [6,11]. Establishing a psychological support system designed to track the progression of the staff and to regularity remind them to check in with a psychologist/psychiatrist to ensure mental wellbeing [12]. Assigning leadership positions to competent personnel that would harbor an environment of respect and appreciation and open and honest communication with the staff [6]. Implementing periodic training in infectious diseases outbreak that includes all HCPs from all departments and specialties to familiarize the staff with such situation and increase their confidence in dealing with infectious outbreaks [2,4,6].

The vast majority of the medical and nursing staff will value the human life and uphold the responsibilities that come with their position over their own wellbeing. As the devastating impact of the novel coronavirus unfolds across the globe, the role of health-

care providers becomes ever more prominent. It is imperative to provide support in all aspects to all healthcare workers to ensure their physical and mental health so that they may continue to take care of others.

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