

Mental Health of Health Care Workers during COVID-19: A Review

Riwanka Khlem

Assistant Professor, College of nursing, NEMCARE Foundation, Shantipur, Mirza, Kamrup, Assam-781125, India

Abstract: *Good mental health is related to mental and psychological well-being of an individual or a group. Before the covid-19 pandemic came up, working in health care set up was stressful to the healthcare workers. Various studies reveals that health care workers are more likely to suffer from psychological distress as they are in direct contact with the patient, it is higher in non-medical than medical personnel. There are many factors which contribute to psychological distress whereby the health care workers experience some common stressors during their daily working hours. Mental health services for the health care workers play a major role in minimizing the distress.*

Keywords: Non-medical, Medical personnel, Stressors.

1. Introduction

Good mental health is related to mental and psychological well-being of an individual or a group. Before the covid-19 pandemic came up, working in health care set up was stressful to the healthcare workers. Numerous studies have shown that healthcare professionals are exposed to psychological distress. Health care workers are more likely to suffer from psychological distress as they are in direct contact with the patient, compared with others who are working in different set up. Research on psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on health care workers shown that anxiety was more among nonmedical health care workers (allied health professionals, pharmacists, technicians, administrators, clerical staff, and maintenance workers) than medical personnel (doctors, nurses). It also highlight that nonmedical health care workers are at highest risk for developing psychological distress during the COVID-19 outbreak¹. Another study shown that frontline health care workers caring directly for patients with COVID-19 shows more symptoms of severe mental health symptoms than those in secondary roles, also women were significantly more likely than men to report severe symptoms of depression, anxiety, and psychological distress².

Factors contributing psychological distress on healthcare workers

- **Emotional strain and physical exhaustion:** when caring for a large numbers of acutely ill patients in all ages, where their health status can also deteriorate².
- **Caring for colleagues:** he/she may become critically ill and sometimes die from COVID-19².
- **Insufficient of PPE:** the biggest fears of corona exposures at work among health care workers which may lead to serious illness².
- **Insufficient of ventilators** and other medical supplies in COVID-19 hot spots that are rapidly becoming affected by critically ill patients².
- **Concerns about infecting family members and their loved one** with coronavirus from workplace exposures, especially family members who are older, immune-compromised, or chronically ill².
- **Anxiety:** assuming about their new roles and also their workload when caring for patients with COVID-19².

- **Mental health services:** limited of these mental health services for managing psychological distress among the health care workers².
- **Working hours:** long duration working hours can affect both mental and physical stress in the health care workers³.

Common stressors faced by the healthcare workers

Longer duration of workload are also associated with negative effects on both the health care workers and patients. Mental and physical exhaustion usually arises due to extended shifts, higher workloads in the set up and also the nature they faced in the working place. During the current COVID-19 pandemic, healthcare workers may experience some stressors in their daily routine⁴.

Risk of infection: The health care workers who are in direct contact with the ill person or the patient are at a risk of being infected by the virus due to their regular exposure and also at a risk of spreading the virus towards their families, friends, colleagues and their loved ones^{5,6}.

Sense of helplessness: Insufficient of beds or equipment for the patients, medical supplies, kit test, ventilators, PPE to protect themselves. Major lacking of resources are the new stressors for majority of health care workers^{5,7}.

Moral injury: Health care workers are being forced to take a medical choices which usually the families used to decide, due to the strict rules imposed by the hospital or organization as the family members are forbidden from entering into the hospital.^{5,7} With these events the health care workers may experience mental injuries and they may have harmful effects towards their mood and self-esteem^{5,8}.

Lack of support: Stress is common to all healthcare workers. Support are also lacking due to different policies imposed by the higher authorities towards COVID-19. Working in the healthcare not only creating a risk of contracting the virus enhance the likelihood of suffering posttraumatic stress symptoms, but social isolation too.^{5,9} And also another added stress imposed due to difficulty obtaining of daily essentials, including food, school closures too^{5,7}.

Volume 9 Issue 5, May 2020

www.ijsr.net

Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution CC BY

Data shows the nature of psychological distress on health care workers

Jianbo Lai on the study COVID-19 frontline healthcare workers at risk of mental health problems had examined the mental health of nearly 1,300 healthcare workers in China who dealt with COVID-19 patients. Lai and team had collected the data about 1,257 healthcare workers in 34 hospitals, only with COVID-19 wards and fever clinics. The overall study shown that **52.0%** among the health workers are more prone to have symptoms of depression, **57.0%** of the health workers are more likely to have symptoms of anxiety, **60.0%** are more likely to experience distress, and almost three times of the health workers as likely to have insomnia comparing with the non-frontline. Those who are working in Wuhan, China, specially "Nurses, women, frontline healthcare workers, reported more severe degrees of all measurements of mental health symptoms than other healthcare workers."¹⁰.

Approaches may help in minimizing the psychological distress

Different studies have shown that, most of the health care workers are experiencing different psychological distress like depression, anxiety, insomnia, different mood disorders and low self-esteem too. Based on the data from previous observations during COVID-19, some approaches may help in reducing the psychological distress on the health care workers.

Support: Supporting measures like developing and implementing infection-control measures, reducing work load by offering more medical staff, adequate supplies of PPE, ventilators, medical supplies, equipments and providing practical guidance. Healthcare workers believe that specific means of support played a protective role in mental health¹¹.

Identify the suffering: Research on those who endured the SARS outbreak suggests that it is important to identify those who are at high risk for enduring psychological distress, monitor them, and provide support if they do not recover psychologically¹².

Developing evidence-based prevention and treatment tools: Some experts suggest that greater investment in tools for mental health are necessary to help ensure that medical workers recover psychologically from acutely stressful situations¹³.

2. Conclusion

Numerous studies shown that psychological distress are very common among the healthcare workers specially during the pandemic. Distress occurs due to many factors. Mental health services play a major role in minimizing the psychological distress.

3. Suggestions

Psychological support like counselling services and development of support systems among colleagues. Early psychological interventions targeting the vulnerable groups may be needed.

Mental health services can be provide through tele-health services, including video visits with mental health professionals, mobile apps, online resources, virtual peer support, and phone calls. Health care organizations and researchers will need to monitor the mental health outcomes of all the health care workers from time to time and prioritize the mental and physical health needs and recovery of individuals caring for patients with COVID-19.

4. Acknowledgment

The author of this review would like to thank College of Nursing, NEMCARE Foundation for their help and support.

5. Conflict of Interest

The author report no conflict of interest.

References

- [1] Benjamin Y.Q. Tan, MD, Nicholas W.S. Chew, MD, Grace K.H. Lee, MD, Mingxue Jing, MD. Psychological Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Health Care Workers in Singapore. ACP journal, annals of internal medicine. 2020.
- [2] John Z. Ayanian, MD, MPP. Mental Health Needs of Health Care Workers Providing Frontline COVID-19 Care. JAMA Network. April 1 2020.
- [3] Betty Pfefferbaum, M.D., J.D., and Carol S. North, M.D., M.P.E. Mental Health and the Covid-19 Pandemic. The new England journal of medicine. April 13 2020
- [4] Stimpfel AW, Sloane DM, Aiken LH. The longer the shifts for hospital nurses, the higher the levels of burnout and patient dissatisfaction. Health Aff (Millwood). 2012;31(11):2501-2509.
- [5] Nisha Cooch PhD. COVID-19: Impact on Frontline Workers' Mental Health. Practice update. May 7 2020.
- [6] Gregory J, de Lepinau J, de Buyer A, et al. The impact of the Paris terrorist attacks on the mental health of resident physicians. BMC Psychiatry. 2019;19(1):79..
- [7] Santarone K, McKenney M, Elkbuli A. Preserving mental health and resilience in frontline healthcare workers during COVID-19. Am J Emerg Med. April 2020. doi:10.1016/j.ajem.2020.04.030.
- [8] The Lancet. COVID-19: protecting health-care workers. Lancet. 2020;395(10228):922.
- [9] Wu P, Fang Y, Guan Z, et al. The psychological impact of the SARS epidemic on hospital employees in China: exposure, risk perception, and altruistic acceptance of risk. Can J Psychiatry. 2009;54(5):302-311.
- [10] Jianbo Lai. COVID-19 frontline healthcare workers at risk of mental health problems. Medical news today. March 2020.
- [11] Khalid I, Khalid TJ, Qabajah MR, et al. Healthcare Workers Emotions, Perceived Stressors and Coping Strategies During a MERS-CoV Outbreak. Clin Med Res. 2016;14(1):7-14.
- [12] Maunder RG, Lancee WJ, Balderson KE, et al. Long-term psychological and occupational effects of

providing hospital healthcare during SARS outbreak.
Emerg Infect Dis. 2006;12(12):1924-1932.

- [13] Kang L, Ma S, Chen M, et al. 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. Brain Behav Immun. March 2020. doi: 10.1016/j.bbi.2020.03.028.