
Advancing Well-being in Women Healthcare Professionals: Insights and Recommendations



Since the early 2000s, women have been major drivers of the significant growth in the healthcare sector, making up three-quarters of the workforce. However, this rise has brought concerns about their well-being due to the pressures they face both at work and at home. Studies show that female healthcare professionals are more susceptible to mental health issues like burnout, depression, and anxiety compared to their male counterparts.

George Washington University aims to measure key factors for women well-being in healthcare

Mental health issues can impact healthcare professionals' performance, patient care quality, and overall healthcare system effectiveness. To address this, the George Washington University (GW) School of Medicine and Health Sciences (SMHS) established the Resiliency & Well-being Centre (R&WC), aiming to support the holistic health of its community members, including faculty, staff, and medical trainees. The R&WC focuses on measuring well-being using a comprehensive approach that integrates mental and physical health, along with life satisfaction, purpose, and stress management. A scoping review was recently published in *Global Advances in Integrative Medicine and Health* to identify the key factors influencing the well-being of women in healthcare professions and to develop evidence-based metrics for assessing their well-being annually within the GW. The literature review explored the broad concept of well-being and uncovered information pertaining to related topics including job satisfaction, burnout, stress, resilience, psychological health, quality of life, and work-life balance. Findings were organized according to how these factors influenced the well-being of women working in healthcare professions. A total of 71 studies published in 26 countries between 1979-2022 were extracted from PubMed. Studies enrolled adult women healthcare professionals including nurses, physicians, clinical social workers, and mental health providers. Well-being related phenomena such as quality of life (QOL), stress, burnout, resiliency, and wellness were investigated. In this review, women are broadly defined to include any individual who primarily identifies as a woman regardless of their sex assigned at birth.

Well-being must be measured holistically

The review highlighted a prevailing focus on assessing negative aspects of well-being, such as burnout, rather than embracing its holistic presence. Notably, only a minority of assessment tools consider positive attributes like hope, resilience, and meaningful social support. Moreover, the literature illuminated the detrimental impact of poor work-life integration, deficient working conditions, and implicit gender bias on the well-being of women in healthcare. It was evident that women often face challenges balancing professional responsibilities with personal obligations, leading to stress and dissatisfaction. However, amidst these challenges, certain factors emerged as potential sources of resilience and support. Supportive work environments, characterised by flexibility, recognition, and opportunities for growth, were noted to positively influence well-being. Additionally, personal relationships, both within and outside the workplace, were highlighted as significant contributors to emotional support and overall well-being. Furthermore, lifestyle interventions such as mindfulness, nutrition, exercise, and adequate sleep were recognised as effective strategies for mitigating stress and burnout. Lastly, opportunities for professional development and mentoring were found to enhance job satisfaction and foster a sense of belonging and fulfilment. These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of well-being in the healthcare sector, emphasising the need for comprehensive approaches that address both systemic challenges and individual needs to support the well-being of women in healthcare.

Gender-specific factors affect well-being

This comprehensive review is the first to examine multiple study designs related to the well-being of women working in the healthcare profession across various countries and social contexts. The findings offer insights into the prevailing definitions and factors influencing their well-being. While most studies frame well-being in terms of the absence of disease or workplace dissatisfaction, it's argued that true well-being encompasses broader elements such as security, comfort, and happiness. A recommended definition from the Centre of Disease Control (CDC) emphasising holistic well-being is proposed for standardisation in research efforts. Despite significant insights gained, limitations such as lack of longitudinal data and homogeneity in participant groups may affect the robustness and generalizability of findings. The review identifies gender-specific factors affecting well-being and calls for future research to adopt a comprehensive approach, considering neurological, psychological, and musculoskeletal outcomes alongside elements like supportive work environments, professional mentoring, and lifestyle factors. This holistic framework aims to enhance understanding and measurement of well-being, informing strategies for disease prevention, health promotion, and

overall life satisfaction.

The literature highlights significant factors contributing to job dissatisfaction, emotional distress, and poor work-life integration among healthcare professionals, impacting both their well-being and patient care quality. Building on these findings, further research will explore the role of a positive wellness culture in promoting overall well-being among women in healthcare. Actions for gender-sensitive interventions, at both individual and organizational levels, can address structural determinants of gender inequality and enhancing awareness of gender bias and related challenges in healthcare settings. Fostering a positive wellness culture and implementing holistic well-being practices will synergistically improve outcomes for women in healthcare. Further study should investigate the efficacy of prophylactic measures such as mindfulness, education, institutional policies, and peer support in enhancing the well-being of women in healthcare.

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