

Healthcare Workers During Pandemic: Major Factors for Well-being



A new study looks into prevalent determinants of psychological well-being in healthcare workers based on survey data collected in three countries.

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Already a crisis in pre-pandemic times, burnout, anxiety and other threats to well-being in healthcare workers have been exacerbated by the unprecedentedly challenging circumstances of this past year. A new multinational study (Denning et al. 2021) looked into the relationship between psychological outcomes in healthcare staff and their personal traits and perception of safety.

In March-June 2020, healthcare workers in the UK, Poland and Singapore were invited to participate in a survey comprising the Safety Attitudes Questionnaire (SAQ), Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI) and Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS) to evaluate safety culture, burnout and anxiety/depression. Overall, 3,537 professionals responded.

The study found that 67% of participants were at high risk of burnout, 20% of anxiety and 11% of depression. Being in a clinical role, e.g. doctor or nurse, as well as being redeployed, experiencing anxiety and/or depression were significant predictors of burnout.

Mental health issues were also found to be associated with gender. Particularly, female healthcare professionals were at a higher risk of anxiety but, in contrast to previous research, at a lower risk of depression.

On the other hand, regular testing for COVID-19 unexpectedly demonstrated the inverse relationship with mental health. The authors suggested two possible explanations for this: regular testing policies reflected the generally high level of management and staff support in an organisation, and those seeking out to be tested were less likely to suffer from burnout, anxiety, or depression. It is noted that irrespective of the cause, consistent testing may be an important tool in maintaining mental health in healthcare workers.

Safety attitudes were found to significantly correlate with psychological outcomes in healthcare professional. Specifically, low SAQ scores indicated higher risk of burnout and vice versa. However, the authors highlight the impossibility to determine "whether safety attitude is a contributory factor for burnout, anxiety, and depression, or if these psychological states lead to poor safety attitudes". They nevertheless emphasise the need for initiatives promoting safety culture in an organisation.

Based on the findings, several preliminary recommendations are suggested aimed at improving both mental health of healthcare workers and patient safety. These include putting more focus on maintaining safety culture, expanding learning systems, proactively addressing burnout in staff and potential long-term psychological consequences of the pandemic.

Image credit: Denning et al. (2021)

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