

Weathering the Storm: Psychological Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Clinical and Non-clinical Healthcare Workers in India

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Abstract

Background: Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has exposed healthcare workers (HCWs) to a unique set of challenges and stressors. Our frontline workers are under tremendous psychological pressure because of the ever-rising crisis. This study was done to assess the magnitude of the psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on clinical and non-clinical HCWs in India.

Materials and methods: It was a cross-sectional, online survey that was done from June 1, 2020, to July 4, 2020. A total of 313 clinical and non-clinical HCWs, who were directly or indirectly involved in patient care, participated in the study. The psychological impact was assessed in terms of four variables: insomnia, anxiety, depression, and stress. Insomnia was assessed by the Insomnia Severity Index (ISI). Anxiety and depression were assessed via the Patient Health Questionnaire-4 (PHQ-4), which included a 2-item anxiety scale and a 2-item depression scale (PHQ-2). Stress was assessed via the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). We also compared the psychological impact of this pandemic between clinical and non-clinical HCWs.

Results: 7.3% of HCWs were having moderate insomnia, 3.8% had severe insomnia, and 20.8% were having subthreshold insomnia. Severe anxiety and depression were found in 6.7% of respondents. 8.0 and 32.3% of the respondents had moderate and mild anxiety–depression, respectively. 6.4% had high perceived stress. 47.6 and 46.0% of the respondents had moderate and low stress, respectively. There was a statistically significant difference in severe insomnia between clinical and non-clinical HCWs, whereas no significant difference in anxiety, depression, and stress between clinical and non-clinical HCWs.

Conclusion: This study suggests that psychological morbidity is prevalent among both clinical and non-clinical HCWs and both males and females. Early intervention may be beneficial to prevent this issue.

Keywords: Anxiety, Coronavirus disease 2019, Depression, Healthcare workers, Insomnia, Pandemic, Stress.

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Introduction

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a pandemic¹ in which a coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) has been identified as the cause of respiratory illness. Initially detected at the end of December 2019, the pandemic has spread its tentacles from its epicenter in Wuhan province, China to affect various countries across the globe. India had recorded its first case of COVID-19 in Thrissur district, Kerala on January 30, 2020. Since then despite effective containment, isolation, treatment measures taken by the Government of India including the timely lockdown measures, there has been an ever-increasing trend in the number of cases, with the number of infected patients touching 2 lakh at the end of May 2020. The spread of the disease in India has strained the healthcare structure keeping the frontline healthcare workers (HCWs) on their toes. An everyday increasing number of confirmed and suspected cases, long and stressful working hours, rapidly depleting supply of personal protection equipment, day–night media coverage of COVID-19 mathematics, lack of specific treatment, and inadequate support by the society may all contribute to the added mental burden of these HCWs. There were similar concerns of mental health problems of HCWs noted during the swine flu pandemic in 2019² and during the outbreaks of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and the Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS).^{3,4} Psychological assistance, including help-line telephone numbers or application-based video-counseling, has been widely promoted by state and

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national mental health institutions in response to the pandemic. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), Government of India has issued guidelines toward mental health support for the HCWs during COVID-19 on July 15, 2020, emphasizing the