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COVID – 19, Mental Health and Health Worker – A Review

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 is a highly contagious disease. The human to human transmission, has caused much anxiety across the globe. Health workers are on the front lines of this pandemic. Due to the perceived danger, uncertainty, physical discomfort being covered with PPE throughout the duty periods, fear disease transmission to family, and negative consequences of the infection, health workers may experience anger, anxiety, depression, insomnia, and which could negatively affect individuals' social and occupational functioning, as well as quality of life. The WHO advises health workers to take care of themselves, eat healthy, stay active, and rest sufficiently. This literature review is an attempt to address the possible underline factors, manifestations of impaired mental health and its possible solutions to cope with the situation that has arisen due to COVID-19.

Keywords: Covid – 19, Mental Health, Health Worker

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INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 is a highly contagious respiratory disease. It transmits through human-to-human contact via droplet, feco-oral, and direct contact. It has an incubation period ranging from 2-14 days¹. Till date, there is no antiviral treatment has been explicitly recommended for COVID-19, all are under pilot trial. Therefore, prevention is the only option left. Health workers are at greater risk to get the infection. Since the pandemic has started, many studies have been conducted and revealed that health workers are undergoing various degree of mental stress since they are working in the pandemic and it affects tremendously to their social and occupational functioning.²⁻¹²

Factors impairing the mental health of the health workers: ^{14-26, 28}

- Work overload
- Witnessing frequent loss of life
- Disruption of work-life balance
- Personality traits (i.e., self-criticism, delayed gratification, perfectionism, and compulsiveness)
- Insufficient social support (i.e. stigma, discrimination)
- Lack of adequate supply of PPE
- Lack of mental health support
- Lack of specific COVID-19 training
- Pushed beyond training
- Feelings of vulnerability and loss of control
- Fear of stigma
- The uncertainty around infection risk
- Perception of personal danger due to the high mortality rate that is associated with COVID-19
- Work impacting household activities
- Loneliness and isolation due to social distancing

- Staying away from home
- Worries about child care
- Fear of transmission of infection to family

Manifestations of impaired mental health: ^{13-22, 27}

- Physical outcomes (i.e. body aches, headache and pains, upset stomach and indigestion, decreased or increased appetite, cardiovascular diseases, fatigue, paraesthesia, sleep disturbances, paraesthesia)
- Psychosocial outcomes (i.e. exhaustion, mood swings, irritability, anxiety, depression, hallucination, nervousness, feeling emotionally detached, sensitive to criticism, finding difficulty in routine decision making)
- Reduced professional efficacy

Recommended solution: ²⁸

Health workers are on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic. They need to manage patients care, their own families and themselves. Here are some recommended solutions to help manage stress during this challenging time.

- Discuss the concerns with colleagues, clinical team members, family and friends to identify coping steps.
- Monitor self for disrupted sleep, excessive fatigue, irritability, poor focus and marked anxiety.
- Practice mindful breathing several times a day. A moment of low and slow breaths before entering the work area helps to calm down and improves concentration.
- Get 7 to 8 hours sleep, prioritize aerobic exercise and get some sunlight. Walking, biking, running, throwing a ball as well as exercise and yoga can help to a large extent.
- Reach out to family, friends, colleagues for social contact through instant messaging and video calling to reduce isolation.
- Take short breaks at work and home. A 10-minutes' walk during the break helps in calming and improving vital energy and concentration.
- Plan some leisure at home. Exercise, a good book, movie, games with family help refuel physically and emotionally.
- Establish a consistent workspace for the family members working from home, so that they can work with focus and productivity. Plan breaks as well.
- Watching funny movies or listening soothing musics can help elevate mood.

CONCLUSION

Occupational stress can be prevented by proper awareness about the possible risk factors and preparedness and also increase resilience among the workers. Increased demand for care, social distancing and other unique stressors are testing the flexibility and adaptability of every individual and forcing all to practice outside of the box therefore. Adequate training and supervision may help the health workers coping with emotional and psychological responses.

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