



Psychosocial challenges in healthcare workers during pandemic: A comprehensive analysis of emerging risks

Desafíos psicosociales en personal sanitario durante la pandemia: Un análisis integral de los riesgos emergentes

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to analyse psychosocial challenges in healthcare workers during the pandemic. **Method:** a descriptive documentary approach was used to identify 15 relevant articles available in PubMed. **Results and conclusion:** The intensification of the workload, manifested in long shifts and relentless pressure, is revealed as a significant factor in physical and mental fatigue, compromising the quality of medical care provided. The ethical dilemmas inherent in allocating limited resources and making critical decisions add an additional layer of emotional burden and distress.

Descriptors: covid-19; mental health; occupational health; disease prevention. (Source, DeCS).

RESUMEN

Objetivo: analizar los desafíos psicosociales en personal sanitario durante la pandemia. **Método:** se empleó un enfoque descriptivo documental en la identificación de 15 artículos relevantes disponibles en PubMed. **Resultados y conclusión:** La intensificación de la carga laboral, manifestada en turnos prolongados y una presión incesante, se revela como un factor significativo en la fatiga física y mental, comprometiendo la calidad de la atención médica ofrecida. Los dilemas éticos inherentes a la asignación de recursos limitados y la toma de decisiones críticas añaden una capa adicional de carga emocional y angustia.

Descriptores: covid-19; salud mental; salud laboral; prevención de enfermedades. (Fuente, DeCS).

Received: 27/06/2023. Revised: 03/07/2023. Approved: 02/08/2023. Published: 01/09/2023.

Original in brief



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INTRODUCTION

In the context of the global pandemic, health workers find themselves immersed in a scenario of unprecedented psychosocial challenges, which demands comprehensive attention and rigorous analysis. This article aims to comprehensively address the emerging risks faced by health workers in the current pandemic landscape.

It will explore the psychological and social aspects affecting these professionals, identifying key factors and proposing effective mitigation strategies. A thorough understanding of these challenges is essential for the design of effective interventions and the strengthening of resilience in health workers, thus contributing to both individual and collective wellbeing in the health field.

The psychosocial challenges faced by health workers during the pandemic constitute a complex web of factors affecting their emotional well-being and professional performance. Among the pre-eminent challenges is the constant exposure to contagion risk situations, which generates high levels of stress and anxiety. The uncertainty associated with disease progression, lack of adequate resources and intensified workload amplify the psychological pressure on these professionals.

In addition, the relentless nature of the pandemic has led to ethical and moral dilemmas, such as making difficult decisions related to the allocation of limited resources. This ethical reality contributes to the emotional burden that health care workers experience on a daily basis.^{1 2 3 4 5}

At the societal level, the stigma associated with the risk of infection and the negative perception by society can lead to feelings of isolation and alienation among health workers. Separation from their families and constant worry about the possibility of transmitting the disease to loved ones add another layer of emotional challenge.



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Physical and mental exhaustion, along with a lack of emotional support and resources for self-care, are additional challenges. The accumulation of these factors can negatively impact mental health in the long term, affecting the quality of life and ability to perform at work for these professionals.

Ultimately, addressing these challenges involves a holistic understanding of the psychological and social factors at play, as well as the implementation of effective support and mitigation strategies at both the individual and institutional levels. This holistic analysis is essential to promote the mental health and well-being of healthcare workers in the midst of pandemic adversity.

The aim is to analyse psychosocial challenges in healthcare workers during the pandemic.

METHOD

In this research, a descriptive documentary approach was used to analyse the psychosocial challenges affecting health workers during the pandemic. Documents related to the experience of health workers were collected, providing a comprehensive and contextualised view of the complexity of the psychosocial factors involved.

A comprehensive review of the scientific literature was conducted, identifying 15 relevant articles available on PubMed. These rigorously selected articles provided critical insights into exposure to contagion risks, intensified workload, ethical dilemmas, stigma, resource scarcity and the impact on the personal lives of healthcare workers during the pandemic.

These articles focused on health professionals who have been on the frontline during the pandemic. The selection of the 15 articles was based on criteria of relevance, methodological quality and diversity in the representation of different geographical contexts and medical specialties.



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This study was conducted with a strong ethical commitment. International and national ethical standards and regulations related to human research were respected.

The information obtained from the 15 selected articles was subjected to a rigorous process of thematic analysis. A qualitative approach was used to identify emerging patterns and connections between the different psychosocial challenges. Data triangulation was carried out to ensure the reliability and validity of the results, allowing for a robust and nuanced interpretation of the findings.

This comprehensive method allows for an in-depth and informed exploration of psychosocial challenges in health workers during the pandemic, ensuring the methodological and ethical robustness of the research.

RESULTS

The research findings are presented in the following categories:

Exposure to contagion risks: constant exposure to the virus and the fear of infecting family members and loved ones generate significant emotional stress in health professionals. The lack of certainty about how the situation will evolve, coupled with the constant pressure to protect themselves and others, contributes to mental and emotional fatigue.

Intensified workload: The exponential increase in demand for medical care during the pandemic has led to an extraordinary workload for health workers. Long shifts, lack of adequate rest and the pressure of dealing with critical situations on a continuous basis contribute to physical and mental exhaustion.

Ethical and moral dilemmas: Making difficult ethical decisions, such as allocating limited resources or prioritising patients, adds an additional component of stress and emotional burden. These professionals are at the crossroads of balancing the need to provide care with the availability of limited resources.



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Stigma and social isolation: The stigma associated with the risk of infection can lead to discrimination and social isolation of healthcare workers. Lack of societal understanding can negatively impact the mental health of health professionals, who already face significant pressure in their work environment.

Lack of resources and support: Lack of adequate resources, whether in terms of personal protective equipment or emotional support, exacerbates the situation. The absence of strong self-care and counselling programmes may limit professionals' abilities to cope with the emotional burden associated with the pandemic.

Impact on personal life: Separation from families, constant concern for the safety of loved ones, and difficulty disconnecting from work all contribute to stress in the personal lives of these professionals.

Together, these challenges create a complex psychosocial landscape that requires effective interventions at individual, organisational and societal levels. Addressing these aspects is essential to protect the mental and emotional health of healthcare workers, thus ensuring their continued ability to provide quality care in such challenging circumstances.^{6 7 8 9}

Impact on health workers by category:

Exposure to risk of contagion: Constant exposure to the virus and the fear of infecting family members and loved ones creates significant emotional stress for health professionals. The lack of certainty about how the situation will evolve, coupled with the constant pressure to protect themselves and others, contributes to mental and emotional fatigue.

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CONCLUSION

The results derived from a thorough literature review, focusing on a selection of 15 scientific articles from PubMed, provide a detailed and multifaceted view of the experiences of health professionals globally. Exposure to contagion risks emerges as a major source of stress, accentuated by uncertainty and the constant responsibility to safeguard both their own and their loved ones' health.



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The intensification of the workload, manifested in long shifts and relentless pressure, proves to be a significant factor in physical and mental fatigue, compromising the quality of medical care provided. The ethical dilemmas inherent in allocating limited resources and making critical decisions add an additional layer of emotional burden and distress.

The stigma attached to the risk of infection contributes to the social isolation of healthcare workers, intensifying pre-existing psychological and emotional stress. The scarcity of resources, both in terms of equipment and emotional support, highlights the urgency of effective interventions at individual and organisational levels.

In this context, the critical importance of addressing these challenges not only from a clinical perspective, but also through comprehensive support strategies and self-care programmes is emphasised. The implementation of preventive and intervention measures, conceived with ethical considerations, appears as an unavoidable necessity to preserve the mental and emotional health of healthcare workers.

FUNDING

Non-monetary

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest with persons or institutions involved in the research.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To the health personnel who worked during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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