

Psychological experiences of healthcare professionals in Sri Lanka during COVID-19

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Background: The upsurge of COVID-19 has caused numerous psycho-social challenges for healthcare professionals because of its ability to spread rapidly in the community and high mortality rate. The seriousness of the disease has led many healthcare professionals plagued by stigma as well as discrimination. In this study, depressive symptomatology, levels of anxiety, and related psychosocial and occupational factors experienced by healthcare professionals in Sri Lanka during COVID -19 were investigated.

Methods: A total of 512 healthcare professionals were surveyed using an online survey. The Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item scale, the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale-Revised-10, and psychosocial and occupational factors predictive of depression and anxiety were included in the survey questionnaire. Logistic regression determined the factors associated with the presence of depressive symptoms and anxiety.

Results: Results showed that elevated depressive symptoms and anxiety were experienced by 53.3% and 51.3%, respectively, of the participants. No differences in the prevalence of elevated depressive symptoms and anxiety were found between those who were exposed and non-exposed to COVID-19 confirmed or suspected patients. Having a fear of being infected with COVID-19 and spreading it among family members were associated with increased risk of depression. Among those exposed to COVID-19 confirmed or suspected patients, poor occupational safety (OR = 2.06, 95% CI 1.25–3.39), stigmatization (OR = 2.19, 95% CI 1.29–3.72), and heavy workload (OR = 2.45, 95% CI 1.53–3.92) were associated with increased risk of elevated depressive symptoms, whilst poor self-confidence (OR = 2.53, 95% CI 1.56–4.09) and heavy workload (OR = 1.94, 95% CI 1.22–3.12) were associated with increased risk of anxiety.

Conclusions: Fear of being infected and distress caused by fear of spreading it among family members, stigmatization, poor self-confidence, poor occupational safety and heavy workload are vital risk factors that need to be considered in future psychological support services designed for the healthcare professionals in unprecedented outbreaks like COVID-19.

Keywords: COVID-19, Healthcare professionals, Psychological health, Stigmatization, Self-confidence, Sri Lanka