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Mental health status of health care workers during the COVID-19 outbreak: An International Study

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Background: The COVID-19 pandemic is a massive health crisis affecting our planet, with over 166,346,635 confirmed cases and 3,449,117 deaths globally till 24 May 2021. The COVID-19 pandemic is a massive health crisis which has brought enormous physical and psychological pressure. Mental health care for health care workers (HCWs), should receive serious consideration. The aim of this study was to determine mental health outcomes of HCWs and to examine known predictors of outcomes during the first pandemic wave.

Methods: 1,556 HCWs who participated in the COVID-19 IMPACT project, an international online survey examining the behavioral and psychological impacts of COVID-19 among 9,565 people from 78 countries/regions and 18 languages. Outcomes assessed were stress, depression symptoms and sleep changes. Predictors examined included sociodemographic factors, and perceived social support.

Results: Results demonstrated that, half of the HCWs had moderate levels of perceived stress and depression symptoms. Predictors associated with higher HCWs' stress and depression symptoms included female gender, not having children, living with parents, lower educational background and having lower social support. Half of the HCWs (n = 800, 51.4%) continued to sleep about the same and one in four slept more or slept less. Positive predictors of sleep changes were being older, widower, not working, living with parents, and having children. Surprisingly, HCWs had less perceived stress and depression and higher levels of perceived social support than the general population.

Conclusions: The need for establishing ways to mitigate mental health risks and adjust psychological intervention and support of HCWs, seems to be significant as the pandemic continues.

Keywords: health care workers, COVID – 19, pandemic, mental health, psychological problems