

Creating Healthy Work Environments VIRTUAL 2021

Impact of Secondary Traumatic Stress From COVID-19 on Nurses

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Background: Nurses and other healthcare workers involved in the diagnosis, treatment, and care of patients with COVID-19 are at risk of developing psychological distress (American Medical Association, 2020). Psychiatric professionals have issued warnings about the potential devastation of COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of healthcare providers (Reger, Stanley, & Joiner, 2020). Research examining the mental health sequelae of COVID-19 in China suggests that healthcare workers caring for patients with COVID-19 experienced elevated depression, anxiety, insomnia, and psychological distress, particularly among workers from hard-hit communities (Lai et al., 2020).

Nurses may be especially vulnerable to the effects of the pandemic. They are exposed to hazards that exacerbate their risk for COVID-19 infection, given close, frequent patient contact, and long work hours. While caring for COVID-19 patients, nurses must be cautious of any interventions that increase exposure to respiratory secretions (Jansson, Liao, & Rello, 2020). Additionally, nurses are witness to patient suffering and increased deaths, while visitors, including family, are restricted. Nurses across settings are affected by the scarcity of resources while coping with the risk of contracting COVID-19 or transmitting this highly contagious and potentially fatal disease to their families.

Secondary traumatic stress (STS) is a potentially impairing response on the part of providers working with patients who have exposure to traumatic stressors (Sprang, Ford, Kerig, & Bride, 2019). The condition encompasses intrusive thoughts, avoidance, and arousal symptoms resulting from witnessing and assisting others who are experiencing traumatic events as part of a professional relationship (Bride, Robinson, Yegidis, & Figley, 2004). Little is known about how STS impairs nurses. Researchers have documented that STS can interfere with nurses carrying out their work responsibilities and interferes with their family life (Günüşen et al., 2018).

Nurses working on the front lines of the COVID-19 response may be especially vulnerable to developing STS with potential effects on their work and other life domains. Before translating posttraumatic stress treatments or developing interventions that reduce the psychological and functional impact of STS on nurses, it is crucial to identify the unique features of STS and its implications for nurses.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to determine preliminary evidence of prevalence and severity of STS among a sample of nurses caring for patients during the COVID pandemic and to determine the relationship between STS and functional impairment.

Methods: A cross-sectional survey administered to a national sample of nurses during the COVID 19 pandemic will assess the prevalence and severity of STS and functional impairment using quantitative and qualitative measures.

Results: Data collection is ongoing.

Conclusion: This research gleans insight into the impact of the pandemic on the nursing workforce and will provide elucidate of the prevalence and impact of STS in nurses. This information will inform potential interventions to help mental health professionals support nurses.

Title:

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Keywords:

COVID-19, Functional Impairment and Secondary Traumatic Stress

Abstract Summary:

COVID-19 is a global disaster resulting in unprecedented stress on the healthcare system. An understanding of secondary traumatic stress, functional impairment, and wellbeing in nurses may elucidate potential intervention targets to help mental health professionals support nurses during these challenging times.

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