Impact of Secondary Traumatic Stress from COVID-19 on Nurses

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Introduction

- The SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) pandemic presses unreliantly on healthcare systems as nearly 80 million people worldwide have become infected (World Health Organization, 2020).
- Psychiatric professionals warn about the potential impact of the pandemic on healthcare providers’ mental health (Reger et al., 2020).
- Nurses witness patient suffering and increased deaths, while visitors, including family, are restricted.
- Nurses are affected by the scarcity of resources while coping with the risk of contracting COVID-19 or transmitting the disease to their families.

Secondary traumatic stress (STS) is a potentially impairing response on providers working with patients who have exposure to traumatic stressors (Sprang, Ford, Kerg, & Bride, 2019).

Methods

- An online, anonymous cross-sectional survey was distributed in July 2020 and November 2020 and included demographics, mental health screening questions, a functional impairment measure, and an open-ended question.
- After obtaining approval from the University IRB, the survey used snowball sampling via social media and posting a survey link to the American Association of Critical Care Nurses Participate in Research studies webpage.
- The Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale (STSS) (Bride et al., 2004) was used to measure STS; the STSS is valid and reliable (Kellogg et al., 2018; Ting et al., 2005).
- The Brief Inventory of Psychosocial Functioning (B-IPF) was used to measure functional impairment; the B-IPF is valid and reliable (Kleinman et al., 2020; Marx et al., 2019).
- The Distracted Practice Scale (DPS) was used to measure distracted practice; the DPS is valid and reliable (L. D’Esmonde, May 17, 2020).
- Quantitative data were analyzed using hierarchical regression for each of the outcome measures (DPS and B-IPF scores).
- The first step in the regressions included gender, education, the average number of hours worked per week, number of years as a nurse, and if the respondent cared for patients with confirmed COVID-19. The second step added STSS scores.
- Qualitative data were collected in response to the question: “Please share a personal experience with a COVID patient, including the circumstances surrounding the event.”
- Responses were evaluated using content analysis; triangulation was used to enhance validity.

Purpose

We aimed to: (1) determine preliminary evidence of prevalence and severity of STS of nurses working during the pandemic, (2) compare the relationship between STS and functional impairment between nurses caring for patients with COVID-19 and those who did not, and (3) qualitatively explore the experience of nurses working with patients with COVID-19.

Objectives

- To determine preliminary evidence of prevalence and severity of STS of nurses working during the pandemic.
- To compare the relationship between STS and functional impairment between nurses caring for patients with COVID-19 and those who did not.
- To qualitatively explore the experience of nurses working with patients with COVID-19.

Summary and Conclusions

- This study demonstrates challenges facing nurses during the pandemic.
- Moderate, high, or severe STS affects 75% of the nurses surveyed.
- STS may explain the relationship between treating patients with COVID-19 and impairment across multiple domains of life.
- Caring for patients with COVID-19 may distract the nurse and impact their work, relationships, friendships, socializing, parenting, education, and self-care.
- Qualitative findings reiterate challenges faced by nurses treating COVID-19 patients.
- There is a need for adequate personal and institutional support for nurses to prevent and treat distress associated with working with patients with COVID-19.
- Caring for patients with COVID-19 involves a direct risk to the nurse; thus, nurses may be experiencing symptoms of PTSD not STS.
- Overall, nurses working in the pandemic are experiencing symptoms of trauma, which may be worse for those providing direct care to COVID-19 patients.
- The results should be interpreted within the context of the following limitations.
- Qualitative data were gathered using an online method where nurses wrote their responses to an open-ended question.
- Nurses who were more impacted by COVID-19 may be more likely to complete the survey.
- The sample was overwhelmingly White and female.

- Addressing the mental health of nurses is vital to the health of patients and the community.

Quantitative Results

- The model accounted for 45% of the variance in DPS scores (F(6,212)=28.34, p<.001).
- The model accounted for 39% of the variance in B-IPF scores (F(6,212)=28.34, p<.001).
- STSS scores accounted for a significant amount of variance in both DP and Functional Impairment scores. In fact, adding STSS to the models resulted in treating patients with COVID-19 to be non-significant in the final model, suggesting that STSS might explain the relationship between treating patients with COVID-19 and functional outcomes.

References

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