

PP 14: Psychological distress and factors associated with psychological distress among preventive health care workers involved in COVID-19 prevention work in selected districts of Sri Lanka

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Introduction: The COVID-19 pandemic has gravely affected the mental health of preventive healthcare workers (HCW) in Sri Lanka.

Objectives: The study aimed to describe psychological distress, its associated factors and coping mechanisms among preventive HCW involved in COVID-19 prevention in Sri Lanka.

Methods: A descriptive cross sectional study was conducted among 158 preventive HCW [Medical Officers of Health (MOH), Assistant MOH, Public Health Inspector(PHI) and Supervising PHI] at MOH offices in Colombo, Gampaha, Kalutara, Matara and Badulla districts from November 2020 to March 2021. Data collection utilized convenience sampling. Psychological distress level was determined by Kessler's Psychological Distress Scale 10.

Results: Among the respondents 57.6% were psychologically distressed. The significant associations were, age above 40 years ($p=0.019$), having pregnant women at home ($p=0.032$), work experience less than 15 years ($p = 0.007$), unavailability of sufficient PPE ($p=0.024$), stressful work environment ($p=0.013$), dissatisfaction on control and prevention strategies ($p = 0.029$). Distress between PHIs (Mean= 22.0) and Medical Officers (Mean= 21.2) was not significant ($t=0.580$, $p=0.563$). Commonest coping mechanism of distress was maintaining a positive attitude (77.7%). Negative coping mechanisms included resorting to alcohol (8.2%), smoking (5.1%) and drugs (0.6%).

Conclusions: Over half of the participants were psychologically distressed. Participant's age, presence of children and pregnant women at home, work experience, unavailability of sufficient PPE, dissatisfaction on current prevention and control strategies and stress at workstation were reported to have a significant association with psychological stress. Commonest positive coping strategy of stress was maintaining a positive attitude towards the pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19, healthcare workers, psychological distress, coping mechanisms