

PP 24: The effects of personal protective equipment on the mental wellbeing of health care workers

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Introduction: Personal protective equipment (PPE) has become the key method to prevent the spread of the current SARS-CoV-2 virus pandemic among health care workers (HCWs). PPE varies from the face mask to complete overall suit with a hood.

Objectives: To determine the effects of PPE on the mental wellbeing of HCWs.

Methods: A descriptive study was conducted at Colombo North Teaching Hospital and, three private hospitals around Ragama. Data were collected from the medical, nursing, laboratory, and supporting staff using a self-administered questionnaire.

Results: Out of 263 HCWs, 82% were females. The average age was 35 years. 71% were nursing officers. 60.8% of the participants wore either a face mask or a complete overall suit with a hood for 8-16 hours and, 35 % did not change the PPE during that period. 66.5% had difficulty in concentrating on routine work. 50% behaved at least with mild arrogance. Claustrophobia was seen in 15.8% and 21.7% had anxiety. 44.9% wanted to remove PPE as soon as possible. Following their shift, increased tiredness, low mood, and short temper were reported in 61%, 34.7% and 36.4% respectively. In 89.8% these effects lasted 2-6 hours.

Conclusions: Wearing PPE has adversely affected the mental well-being of the HCWs during the shift and thereafter. The main mental effects were difficulty in concentration, arrogance, increased tiredness, low mood and, a short temper. Designing user-friendly PPE and reduction of the working shift may help to uplift the mental wellbeing of the HCWs

Keywords: Healthcare workers, COVID-19, personal protective equipment, mental wellbeing