Mental Health of Healthcare Workers

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SciLine Briefing
Healthcare: By The Numbers

• Includes: medical care in hospitals, clinics, nursing and residential care, and social assistance (family and childcare)

• In 2019 Census Bureau American Community Survey:
  • 22 million workers in the United States=14% of all workers
  • One of largest AND fastest growing industries
  • Female Dominated: Women account for 3 out of 4 full time, year round healthcare workers

Census.gov
## Number of U.S. Full-Time, Year-Round Workers in Selected Health Care Occupations: 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Men (in millions)</th>
<th>Women (in millions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Registered nurses</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing assistants</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal care aides</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical assistants</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other physicians</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home health aides</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmacy technicians</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dental assistants</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinical laboratory technicians</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurse practitioners</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmacists</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical therapists</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radiologic technologists and technicians</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech-language pathologists</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapists, all other</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dental hygienists</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other healthcare support workers</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PN/Physicians Assistants</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational therapists</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous health technicians</td>
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<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physician assistants</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surgical technologists</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respiratory therapists</td>
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<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnostic medical sonographers</td>
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<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical therapist assistants and aides</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other healthcare practitioners and technical occupations</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychiatric technicians</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency medical technicians</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dentists</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paramedics</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orderlies and psychiatric aides</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surgeons</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, visit [www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/technical-documentation/code-lists.html](http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/technical-documentation/code-lists.html).

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey. 1-year estimates.
Healthcare Worker Mental Health Worsened Long Before COVID-19

- **Depression**
  - 27.2% of medical students, 28.8% of resident doctors
  - Compared to around 7% of the general population

- **Burnout**
  - Definition: Emotional exhaustion AND Depersonalization AND a reduced sense of reduced personal accomplishment
  - Is not the same as depression, but is a risk factor for it
  - Around 50% in physicians

Rostenstein et al, 2016; Mata et al, 2015; West, Dyrbye, Shanafelt, 2018
Enter COVID-19: Impact on Healthcare Worker Mental Health

- Healthcare workers in NYC, April 2020 (N=657)
  - Survey of physicians, advanced practice providers, residents/fellows, and nurses
  - 57% with acute stress, 48% depressive symptoms, 33% anxiety
  - 75% reported at least moderate insomnia
  - 65% feeling lonely & isolated

- Significantly higher than numbers in the US pre-pandemic:
  - Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: 3.6%
  - Major Depressive Disorder: 6.8%
  - Generalized Anxiety Disorder: 2.7%

Schechter et al, 2020
Impact of COVID-19 on Mental Health: Healthcare Workers

- Healthcare workers in NYC, Spring 2020 (N=3,360)
  - 23.3% COVID-19-related PTSD symptoms, 26.6% MDD symptoms, 25.0% GAD symptoms.
  - Remains higher than prepandemic in the U.S.
  - Past-year burnout associated with the highest risk of developing symptoms for COVID-19-related Depression, PTSD, and Anxiety Disorder
  - Higher perceived support from hospital leadership associated with lowest risk of all outcomes

Feingold et al, 2021
A Few Key Things To Keep In Mind

• **Mental health outcomes are compounding:** Elevated baseline + COVID19 impact

• **Some groups are at higher risk:** Young adults, women, frontline workers/people who work with COVID-19 patients, racial/ethnic minorities, those with prior psychiatric history, those with a history of COVID-19

• **There are significant barriers to care:** Mental health care seeking is limited by stigma, access, and recognition of symptoms/distress

• **Trauma has no timeline:** In past pandemics, healthcare workers had mental health outcomes for up to 2 years after

Brooks et al, 2020
Potential Outcomes: Leaving the Field

- Employment in industry down by 450,000 since February 2020

- Nurses: Shortage will intensify
  - 2017 survey:
    - 31.5% of nurses who left their jobs listed burnout as a reason
    - 43.4% of those that considered leaving listed burnout as a reason

- Survey of faculty, staff, trainees at Utah Health, August 2020
  - 21% considered leaving the workforce
  - 30% considered reducing hours
  - Being female with children or having a clinical role associated

Potential Outcomes: Affects Healthcare Families

- Data set from crisis texting service, Crisis Text Line
- Children of healthcare workers, especially the youngest (13 years and under), females, and non-conforming youth had a higher risk of specific crisis events
- Elevated crisis events in frontline essential workers observed following peaks in local COVID-19 cases (7-28 days)

Sugg et al, 2021
Potential Outcomes: Affects Patients

- **Patient care**
  - Lower care quality
  - Medical errors
  - Longer recovery times
  - Lower patient satisfaction

- **Health care system**
  - Reduced physician productivity
  - Increased physician turnover
  - Less patient access
  - Increased costs

- **Physician health**
  - Substance abuse
  - Depression/suicidal ideation
  - Poor self-care
  - Motor vehicle crashes

Fig. 1 Consequences of physician burnout.
A Few Journalistic Angles To Consider

- The continued (and long-lasting) mental health impact on hcw
  - Broaden definition of healthcare worker
    - Include mental health- therapists, social workers, psychiatrists
    - Look for people with less of a voice-custodial staff, food service, greeters, chaplains, interpreters
  - Impact disproportionately on healthcare workers of color
  - Impact on providers not in the hospital- outpatient settings, primary care
  - Impact of policy changes/political climate in specific providers, e.g. abortion providers, working by natural disasters

- The stigma of mental health in healthcare workers

- Impact on families of healthcare workers

- Impact on the numbers in the workforce & how that will/is affecting patients
Dr. K8 PsyD @psych_k8 · 10h
Replying to @drjessigold
The potential exodus of mental health workers from the field similar to when nursing and teaching is seeing right now. The collective burnout seems to be reaching a critical mass.

Sarah, RN @shesinski1ubs · 9h
Stop talking about beds and start talking about nurses, CNAs & RTs 🙄

SciLine @RealSciLine · Dec 7
TUES. 12/14: @wschpero, @drjessigold, and Dr. John Hick @hennepinhc will brief reporters on how the pandemic has affected U.S. hospitals, big and small - including hospital finances, the mental health of frontline workers, and readiness for the next surge. sciline.org/covid-19/hosp...

Jared Rubenstein, MD @DrJRubenstein · 7h
Replying to @drjessigold
Maybe something about this? I feel like @AmmahStarr totally nailed it here. I think this dissonance is incredibly taxing on mental health.

Stella Safo, MD MPH @AmmahStarr · Dec 9
Half the people I encounter are living like Covid doesn’t exist. The other half is perpetually practicing risk mitigation like it’s their job. The cognitive dissonance is wild. Wild.

Dr. Jessica Jackson (she, her) @Original_Dr_J · 3h
Replying to @drjessigold
An interesting angle: Who do mental health workers go to when they feel burnout/compassion fatigue? We are the backbone of the mental health system & it can be difficult to add burden to a fellow therapist when you know how they are feeling, especially for therapist of color.

Hayley Harlock MSW, RSW @HayleyHarlock · 1h
Replying to @drjessigold
So many important suggestions have already been made. I’d like to add the list by offering one more- the impact on the families of HCWs continue to be missing from popular press. @drjessigold you know how strongly I feel about this topic!

Dena Wisner Hubbard @HubDeMD · 2h
Replying to @drjessigold
I would like to hear more about leading systems changes to improve health of our HCW (which would benefit our patients too.) So tired of only individual resources for burnout, when the system is failing us. While important to learn to cope, the problem is not with individuals.
“My mental health is fine as long as I don’t think about anything”
Sources without QR codes
(And a Few Extra)


