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ABOUT COVER

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Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on healthcare workers' families

Mariana Helou, Nour El Osta, Rola Husni

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Abstract

The coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic had a significant effect on the mental health, social lives, and family relationships of healthcare workers. During the pandemic, these workers had to prioritize their work over parenting, spending time with their kids or partners, planning weddings, and childbearing plans. Therefore, special recognition should be given to the families of these employees.

Key Words: Healthcare; COVID-19; Relationship; Pandemic; Emergency; Mental health

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Core Tip: Coronavirus disease 2019 effect on relationships between healthcare workers and their families is of major importance and still not adequately discussed.

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TO THE EDITOR

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic had a major impact on societies, the healthcare system, and people's relationships. In particular, emergency physicians faced major challenges during the pandemic and are still facing these challenges. The first effect of the pandemic on healthcare workers was evident with the sudden cessation of social gatherings, live meetings, and learning activities, resulting in healthcare workers suffering from depression, anxiety, and insomnia[1]. Relationships with patients and their families also changed because of isolation rules and the restrictions placed on hospital visitations. The effects on the healthcare workers' lifestyles and relationships with their families have been hidden. These COVID-19 repercussions have not received the attention they deserve, and there have been a few studies on this topic.

We read with interest an observational study published in the *World Journal of Clinical Cases*[2]. We agree that COVID-19 has affected the relationships of nurses with their families. Nurses have had many stressful days and spent many extra hours at work, leaving no time for their families, children, or partners. Nurses have also reported having mental health issues and are finding it difficult to cope with this new situation[2]. A limitation of the study was that only 18 interviews were analyzed; therefore, the data were not reflective of the actual situation. However, other studies have reported the same results. One cross-sectional study on 3116 healthcare workers during COVID-19 found that it had delayed family-building plans, wedding plans, childbearing decisions, and had mental health repercussions because of the fear of getting pregnant, the risk of miscarriage, or the possibility of contracting COVID-19 while pregnant[3,4]. More than 40% of couples who had been planning to have children admitted postponing their plans because of the pandemic[4]. Therefore, the pandemic has had a major negative effect on family planning and reduced access to infertility treatments. Such delays in fertility cycles can have major psychological effects on couples trying to conceive[5]. A letter published in 2020 emphasized the childcare challenges being faced by healthcare workers who were experiencing difficulties raising their children during the pandemic. With schools and daycare centers closed and one parent in healthcare spending most time away from the home, many children were being raised by a single parent, and because 40% of healthcare workers are married to another healthcare worker, this exacerbated the issue[6]. Interviews conducted with the family members of healthcare workers revealed that family members had to do more domestic work during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns and had extra family responsibilities, such as preparing food and looking after and organizing activities for their children[7].

However, it is not only healthcare workers facing emotional distress during the pandemic. The nurses' families are also suffering from stress, a fear of becoming infected, and psychiatric complaints, especially depression. A study on 208 family members of Hajar hospital employees in Iran found that 71% of participants had moderate depression[8], and another study reported family members feeling fear and anxiety[7] because they were constantly worried about the family's health and were afraid that the healthcare worker would catch COVID-19[7]. Studies have found that healthcare workers in regular direct contact with patients and their families have an increased risk of contracting COVID-19[9,10].

Although a great deal of attention has been placed on healthcare workers and their mental and social struggles during the COVID-19 pandemic, special recognition should also be given to their children, spouses, and all other family members.

FOOTNOTES

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