

Burnout Syndrome Among Critical Care Clinicians



COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) in March 2020. Since then, nearly 100 million patients have been infected worldwide, and millions of deaths have been reported.

While healthcare systems overall have been under immense pressure around the world, critical care teams, in particular, have shouldered significant psychological and moral burdens. Increased workload, risk of exposure, risk of infecting loved ones, limited resources, and staffing shortages have all added to their mental burden. In short, COVID-19 has generated a mental health crisis among critical care clinicians.

Burnout syndrome, resulting from occupational stress, has three defining symptoms: high emotional exhaustion, high depersonalisation, and a low sense of personal accomplishment from work. Before COVID-19, the prevalence of burnout syndrome among critical care professionals ranged between 28 to 61%.

A longitudinal, cross-sectional survey was conducted to determine the impact of COVID-19 on burnout syndrome in the ICU team and to identify factors associated with this burnout. Survey participants included critical care nurses, advanced practice providers, physicians, respiratory therapists, pharmacists, social workers, and spiritual health workers. Burnout syndrome and contributing factors were measured using the Maslach Burnout Inventory of Health and Human Service and Areas of Worklife Survey.

Results of the survey show that burnout increased from 59% to 69%. Nurses showed the highest increase of burnout during the pandemic with increases in emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation and decreases in personal achievement. Physicians had the lowest rate of burnout at 51% pre-pandemic and 58% post-pandemic. No difference in burnout was observed between clinicians working in ICUs who treated COVID-19 and those who did not. Burnout increased quite significantly in females compared to males during the pandemic.

Survey findings show that burnout syndrome was common in all multi professional ICU team members before the pandemic but increased substantially during it, whether the team members treated COVID-19 patients or not. Nurses had the highest prevalence of burnout and the highest increase in burnout from the pre-pandemic era. Females critical care workers were more impacted by burnout than males.

Source: [Critical Care Medicine](#)

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Published on : Tue, 8 Mar 2022