



Commentary

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Occupational Stress and Its Management among Various Professionals

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Occupational stress refers to a condition in which, factors related with the occupation leads to changes in psychological and physiological conditions of an individual and cause the person to diverge from normal functioning. Nursing profession hosts a number of stress factors that result from the unique conditions of this profession and may have negative effects on patients and health institutions. Especially, intensive care unit (ICU) nurses are under stress due to end-of-life care, complex life-support units, post-mortem care and painful procedures during care delivery. They suffer from various problems, including, stress, anxiety, depression and burnout syndrome due to their working conditions.

Stress levels vary between professions and population groups. Some workers are at a higher risk of stress than others. Studies reveal that younger workers, women, and those in lower-skilled jobs are at most risk of experiencing work-related stress and its attendant complications.

Casual full-time workers, who are likely to have the lowest job control and high job demands are most at risk of job strain. World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 as a global pandemic on 11 March 2020 (WHO, 2020). The pandemic resulted with serious economic losses, breakdowns in global supply chains, political problems, delays in travel plans, temporary closure of the education institutions and uncertainties about the future. These events caused a global atmosphere of psychological stress. Additionally, health professionals, who play crucial roles in the struggle against the virus, are more likely to suffer from trauma, burnout syndrome and stress during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recent acceleration in the speed of COVID-19's spread caused heavy workload, physical burnout, insufficient protective equipment, high infection risk and ethical conflicts regarding the decisions on the patients to be

prioritized, which, in turn, resulted with serious psychological stress in health professionals. Compared to other health professionals, nurses are disproportionately affected by the pandemic since they spend more time with the COVID-19 patients. Given that the pandemics, such as the COVID-19, may continue for months, it is natural for nurses to suffer from psychological stress. ICU nurses, who play crucial roles in care of critical patients, experience higher workload, prolonged fatigue, infection threat, frustration with death of the patient that they cared, and anxiety and misunderstanding among patients and their relatives. Besides, they are at higher risk of infection with COVID-19 since they work with severely ill patients under mechanical ventilation and perform invasive procedures, such as aspiration, which increase the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Consequently, during the pandemic, ICU nurses are the health professionals that suffer from occupational stress the most. This, in turn, brings the need for evaluating the stress levels of the ICU nurses.

Determining the level of occupational stress in ICU nurses and the factors of perceived stress is necessary since occupational stress may weaken the immune system of these nurses, which, in turn, may not only increase the risk of COVID-19 infection but also reduce the quality and safety of medical healthcare and result with worsening patient outcomes and higher healthcare costs.

Stress isn't always bad. A little bit of stress can help you stay focused, energetic, and able to meet new challenges in the workplace. It's what keeps you on your toes during a presentation or alert to prevent accidents or costly mistakes. But in today's hectic world, the workplace too often seems like an emotional roller coaster.

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Long hours, tight deadlines, and ever-increasing demands can leave you feeling worried, drained, and overwhelmed. And when stress exceeds your ability to cope, it stops being helpful and starts causing damage to your mind and body—as well as to your job satisfaction.

You can't control everything in your work environment, but that doesn't mean you're powerless, even when you're stuck in a difficult situation. If stress on the job is interfering with your work performance, health, or personal life, it's time to take action. No matter what you do for a living, what your ambitions are, or how stressful your job is, there are plenty of things you can do to reduce your overall stress levels and regain a sense of control at work.

Common Causes of Workplace Stress Include

- Fear of being laid off
- More overtime due to staff cutbacks
- Pressure to perform to meet rising expectations but with no increase in job satisfaction
- Pressure to work at optimum levels—all the time!
- Lack of control over how you do your work

Stress at Work Warning Signs

When you feel overwhelmed at work, you lose confidence and may become angry, irritable, or

withdrawn. Other signs and symptoms of excessive stress at work include:

- Feeling anxious, irritable, or depressed
- Apathy, loss of interest in work
- Problems sleeping
- Fatigue
- Trouble concentrating
- Muscle tension or headaches
- Stomach problems
- Social withdrawal
- Loss of sex drive
- Using alcohol or drugs to cope

Employees who are suffering from work-related stress can lead to lower productivity, lost workdays, and a higher turnover of staff. As a manager, supervisor, or employer, though, you can help lower workplace stress. The first step is to act as a positive role model. If you can remain calm in stressful situations, it's much easier for your employees to follow suit.

Workplace stress is a silent, and oft-neglected, factor which impairs employee health and productivity. It not only affects the workers but also contributes significantly to a decline in a company's overall success. Employers should begin to tackle this worrisome concern to create a healthier, safer, and more productive work atmosphere.