



STUDY ON EFFECTS OF COPING STRATEGIES ON MANAGEMENT OF STRESS AMONG HEALTH PROFESSIONALS IN KERALA DURING COVID -19

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Abstract: The present study emphasizes the impact of coping strategies on management of stress among health professionals in Kerala during COVID 19. The Kerala health departments have proven their quick and efficient responses in handling the Nipah virus outbreak and the COVID 19 pandemic. Health professionals from Kerala are working all around the globe, and many of these countries have openly acknowledged the contribution of these health professionals to their countries. At the same time, this group faces a lot of challenges in their occupational as well as their family life. They are forced to work beyond their working hours, in several shifts, thus managing their children and family are also affected. This directly or indirectly affects their patients, colleagues, family, friends and every other person related or depended on them. It will negatively reflect on the health system of the nation. Healthy population which is the pillar of a nations strength, is in the hands of health professionals. So it is necessary to study the issues faced by the health professionals.

Index Terms – Stress, Anxieties, COVID 19 Pandemic, Coping strategies and health professionals.

1.1 Introduction

During the current COVID 19 pandemic, the health care workers face aggravated psychological pressure and even mental illness. It would be recommended to the policymakers and managers to adopt the supportive, encouragement & motivational, protective, and training & educational interventions, especially through information and communication platform. Major epidemic outbreaks pose an increasing demand for healthcare workers. Constant increasing of infected cases, a rise in the rate of deaths, lack of any specific medicine or vaccine, extensive media coverage, massive workload, lack of personal protective equipment, and feelings of inadequate support all can contribute to the mental burden of these health care staff. In these situations, it is expected of Health care workers to work long hours while they are under overwhelming pressure. They are at the risk of being infected when treating ill patients.

Reports indicated that several Health care workers became infected with corona virus when they were in close contact with infected patients. In the initial phase of the Covid-19 outbreak, 29% of all hospitalized patients were HCWs. Working in these situations develops the risk of various psychological and mental illnesses as well as physical and emotional distress among medical staff. Health care workers who are in

direct contact with the patients are exposed to highest levels of risk. A primary challenge in the COVID-19 pandemic has been to take care of infected patients, which defines a serious risk to the workers at intensive care units, because of the need for constant contact with infected patients for extended periods of time. Widespread infection and fatalities among the Health care workers have been reported previously for Nipha and currently for the COVID-19 disease, imposing considerable amounts of social and mental pressures on the workers.

1.2 Review of literature

“Psychological effects of the COVID 19 pandemic: perceived stress and coping strategies among healthcare professionals”- Lucia Lombardi(2020) For healthcare professionals, a positive attitude towards the stressful situation was the main protective factor, while female gender, seeking social support, avoidance strategies and working with covid 19 patients were risk factor. During a sudden and unprecedented event, such as current pandemic, healthcare workers may be inadequately prepared and supported to cope with stressors and this negatively affected working environment. This study, one of the first on this topic, highlighted the main coping strategies used by healthcare professionals in facing the highly stressful situation caused by the pandemic. According to Emanuele Maria (2020) The COVID-19 pandemic had a massive impact on health care systems, increasing the risks of psychological distress in health professionals. He aims at assessing the prevalence of burnout and psychopathological conditions in health professionals working in a health institution in the Northern Italy, and to identify socio-demographic, work-related and psychological predictors of burnout. “Burnout: A risk factor amongst mental health professionals during covid 19.” With the on-going pandemic, India is witnessing a significant rise in reported mental health cases, with an increasing number of people seeking telecounselling and online psychotherapy. The number and proportion of mental health professionals in India is substantially low as compared to the rising demand of these service givers. Given the limited resources and considering the situation amid covid-19, the surge in mental health services has augmented the risk for personal and professional burnout amongst practitioners. Emotional contagion, perceived stress, compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress, poor therapeutic effectiveness, and longer duration of therapy are the contributing factors which increase the risk of burnout amongst mental health practioners. It therefore becomes of paramount importance for health care providers to address their own psychological health so as to avoid deleterious aftershocks of this pandemic. Several stressors are identified among the population, during the COVID-19 lockdown period. Identifying the factors and adopting the appropriate tools to reduce stress will help an individual to manage stress.

1.3 Statement of the problem

Kerala, the southernmost state of India is famous for its natural scenic beauty, culture, hospitality, health services etc. Quality health sector is a very prominent achievement of our state. High rate of life expectancy and low infant mortality rate are the two milestones of health efficiency. Kerala has attracted international attention for its outstanding achievements in the field of health welfare activities during various disease outbreaks like Nipha, bird flu, dengue fever, rat fever and even the covid-19 pandemic. Kerala is witnessing

an increasing burden of communicable and non-communicable diseases.

Health professionals include doctors, pharmacists, therapists, midwives and nurses. They have direct contact with the diseased persons. As a consequence, their perceived feelings of uncertainty, helplessness, isolation, depression, anxiety and difficulty in managing the workload. It results in several psychological, emotional issues and problems related with stress. Stress related problems are affecting the health workers across the world, mainly due to the COVID-19 disease outbreak. Keeping in view of the objectives, the present study undertakes to examine the stress level in health professionals on the basis of factors of stress. An effective stress management practices would help to reduce the stress levels in workers during the pandemic. This study is carried out to analyze the level of stress in health workers as a result of COVID-19. This research sought to study how much stress health workers in both government and private hospitals are suffering and to identify the most common source of stress within the sample group. It also analyzed the various coping strategies adopted by health workers to relieve stress and in what frequency.

Stress has many adverse effects on medical practice, including prescribing errors, lack of teamwork, more patients' complaint, and sickness absence. Stress and coping are widely researched psychological constructs, yet there is a paucity of research on stress among the health professionals in Kerala. Hence in this study an attempt is made to study the effects of coping strategies on management of stress among health professionals with special reference to Thrissur District in Kerala.

1.4 Objectives

- 1.4.1 To identify the factors causing stress among health professionals in Kerala.
- 1.4.2 To examine the effect of job related factors and inter personal relations on stress among health professionals in Kerala.
- 1.4.3 To analyse the effect of coping strategies on management of stress among health professionals in Kerala.

1.5 Hypothesis

- 1.5.1 H₁: Job related factors have a significant effect on stress among health professionals
- 1.5.2 H₁: Interpersonal relations have a significant effect on Stress among health professionals
- 1.5.3 H₁: Coping strategies have a significant effect on management of stress among health professionals

1.6 Research Methodology

The researcher used both quantitative and qualitative data to study the perception of stakeholders based on the management of stress and coping strategies of health professionals during the covid pandemic period.

1.7 Population and sample

This study is delimited to Thrissur District in Kerala state. Purposive non-probability sampling method used for selection of sample units. This particular study includes sample from 5 government hospitals and 5 private hospitals in Thrissur district in the state of Kerala. The Government hospitals include Thrissur medical college, Government Hospital Cherpu, Government Hospital puthukkad, Irinjalakuda Co-operative Hospital, Thrissur District Hospital. The private hospitals include Jubilee Mission Hospital, Lal Memorial Hospital, Elite Mission Hospital, Holy Family Hospital, Aswini Hospital. Due to this pandemic situation the survey was conducted by distributing an online questionnaire (Google form) to health professionals Whatsapp groups. Here the completed 101 questionnaire constitute the sample size for the execution of data analysis. Thus the total of 101 health professionals participated as a sample in the survey to assess the effect of stress management and coping strategies during the covid 19 pandemic. Data gathered from the survey was analyzed with statistical software SPSS.

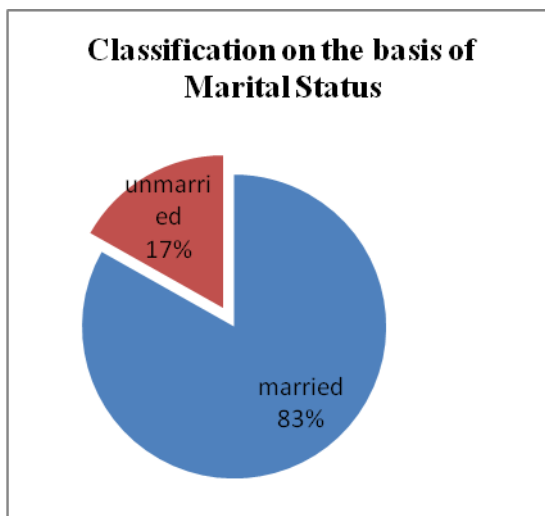
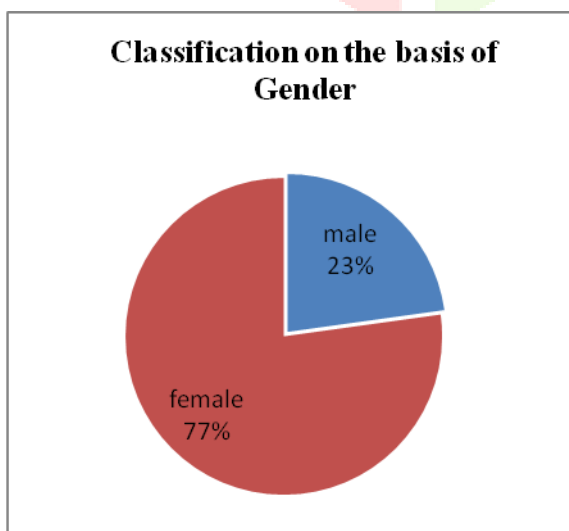
Part II

Data analysis and findings

Both descriptive and inferential statistical tools used for data analysis. Descriptive Statistics are used to describe the basic features of the data in a study. They provide simple summaries about the sample and the measures. To get the findings of objective one, researchers conducted a survey study in which percentage analyses have been done to reveal the level of stress and coping strategies

Fig 1

Fig 2



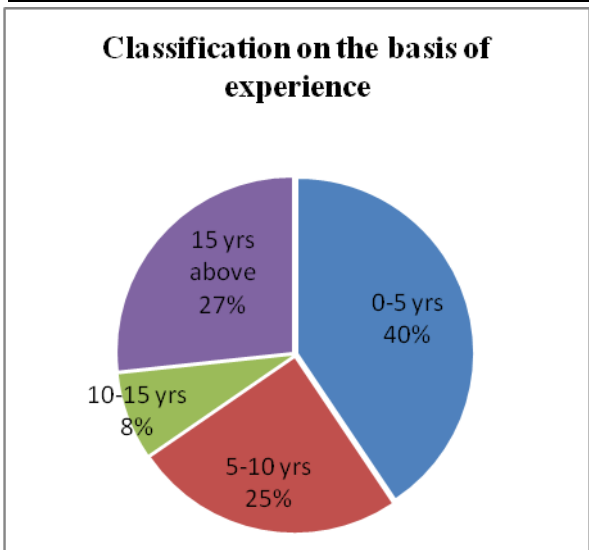


Fig 3

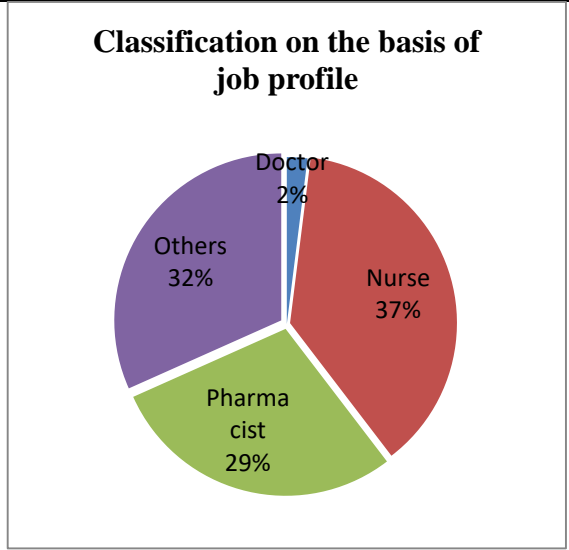


Fig 4

Here an attempt is made to study the level of stress and coping strategies among health professionals in Kerala. In order to study the stress level and coping strategies the researcher framed a hypothesis.

H1: There is significant difference in the level of stress among male and female health professionals

		Table 1-Levene's Test for Equality of Variances					Decision	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)		
Level of Stress among male and female health professionals	Equal variances assumed	.608	.437	-.768	99	.444	Not significant	H0 accepted
	Equal variances not assumed			-.845	42.184	.403	Not significant	H0 accepted

The table shows the levene’s test for equality of variance among male and female respondents and level of stress. The equality of variance is checked through spss, the result of analysis shows variance is not significant in their stress level during covid 19 that means p values are greater than the significance level of 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Table-2 Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	

		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Decision	
Level of Stress among married and unmarried health professionals	Equal variances assumed	.271	.604	-.837	99	.405	Not significant	H0 accepted
	Equal variances not assumed			-.969	27.165	.341	Not significant	H0 accepted

H1: There is significant difference in the level of stress among married and unmarried health professionals

The table shows the levene's test for equality of variance among married and unmarried health professionals and level of stress. The equality of variance is checked through spss, the result of analysis shows variance is not significant in their stress level during covid 19 that means p values are greater than the significance level of 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis is accepted.

H1: There is significant difference in the level of stress among different categories of Health professionals

Table-3 ANOVA							
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Decision	
Between Groups	3.010	1	3.010	.072	.789	Not significant	H0 accepted
Within Groups	4128.218	99	41.699				
Total	4131.228	100					

The results of SPSS analysis shows that there is no significant variance in the level of stress among Govt. and private health professionals. It is clear that the p value of .789 which is greater than .05. So null hypothesis is accepted.

H1: There is significant difference in the level of stress and work experience among health professionals

Table-4 ANOVA							
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Decision	
Between Groups	352.173	3	117.391	3.013	.034	Significant	H1 Accepted
Within Groups	3779.055	97	38.959				
Total	4131.228	100					

The results of SPSS analysis shows that there is significant variance in the level of stress and work experience among health professionals. It is clear that the p value of .034 which is less than .05. So null hypothesis is rejected.

H1: The individual and institutional coping strategies have significant effect on reducing the level of stress (coping strategies and the level of stress are dependent)

	Individual Strategies	Institution Strategies	Level of Stress
Chi-Square	36.050 ^a	79.604 ^b	53.713 ^c
df	17	16	25
Asymp. Sig.	.005	.000	.001
Decision	Significant	Significant	Significant
	H1 Accepted	H1 Accepted	H1 Accepted

The results of SPSS analysis shows the coping strategies have a significant effect in reducing the level of stress among health professionals during Covid-19 in caring patients in hospitals.. It is clear from the p value shown in the table. P values are less than .05 significance level. So the researcher decided to reject H0 and accept H1.

Part III

Findings, Suggestions, Conclusion

This paper intended to study the stress level and coping strategies among health professionals during covid 19 pandemic.

- It is clear from this study that male and female health professionals faced the same level of stress in caring patients in hospitals during covid -19.
- It is proved that married and unmarried health professionals faced the same level of stress in caring patients in hospitals during covid -19.
- The study reveals that stress level of all health professionals are equal irrespective of their job sector during this pandemic situation in caring patients in hospitals.
- It is clear from this study that the stress level and work experience among health professionals are varied during this pandemic situation in caring patients in hospitals.

- The Chi- square test proved that the coping strategies adopted by health professionals and hospitals enable them to reduce their stress level. Therefore, the inference is that coping strategies and level of stress are dependent.

Suggestions

- Health professionals should be paid more in these days as their workload has been increased a lot.
- Health professionals experienced a medium to high amount of stress during the lockdown, coping competencies should also be trained by professional trainers.
- Authorities should provide protective equipments to health professionals such as PPT kit, mask etc. It will make a small amount of relief to them from the fear of spreading virus.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated a high burden of stress and depression among health care professionals in serving COVID-19 patients. Further, we found that moderate to severe depression and stress among health professionals negatively impacted their overall quality of life during COVID pandemic. Protecting the mental health of health care professionals is paramount to COVID-19 response and control efforts. Rapid development and implementation of interventions to prevent and treat mental health conditions are urgently needed to support the growing number of health professionals caring for COVID-19 patients in Kerala and worldwide.

Several stressors are identified among the population, during the COVID-19 lockdown period. Identifying the factors and adopting the appropriate tools to reduce stress will help an individual to manage stress. The major causes that increased the stress among health professionals are lack of face to face interaction, over time work, feelings insecurity etc. The health professionals can use some of the coping strategies like sharing emotions, listening music, prayer, meditation etc. Stress Management is an essential need of the hour, people can resort to various psychological and physiological stress relief measures in a collective manner.

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