NEUROLOGY AND THERAPEUTICS

Have psychosocial stressors at work increased the prevalence of moral injury during the COVID-19 pandemic? A cross-sectional study in healthcare workers in Canada

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Statement of the Problem: Healthcare Workers (HCWs) on the frontline of the COVID-19 pandemic exhibit a high prevalence of depression and psychological distress. Moral Injury (MI) can lead to such mental health problems. MI occurs when perpetrating, failing to prevent, or bearing witness to acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations. Since the start of the pandemic, Psychosocial Stressors at Work (PSWs) might have been exacerbated, which might in turn have led to an increased risk of MI in HCWs. However, research examining the associations between PSWs and MI is lacking. Considering that these stressors are frequent and modifiable occupational risk factors, they may constitute promising prevention targets. This study aimed (a) to evaluate the associations between PSWs and MI in HCWs during the third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Quebec, and (b) to explore potential differences between urban and non-urban regions.

Methodology & Theoretical Orientation: The sample of this study consisted of 572 HCWs and leaders from the Quebec province, Canada. Prevalence Ratios (PR) of MI and their 95% Confidence Intervals (CI) were modelled using robust Poisson Regressions. Several covariates were considered, including age, sex, gender, socio-economic indicators, and lifestyle factors.

Findings: Results indicated HCWs exposed to PSWs were 2.22 to 5.58 times more likely to experience MI. Low ethical culture had the strongest association (PR: 5.58, 95% CI: 1.34-23.27), followed by low reward (PR: 4.43, 95% CI: 2.14-9.16) and high emotional demands (PR: 4.32, 95% CI: 1.89-9.88). In addition, workers from non-urban regions were less likely to report MI (11% versus 16%).

Conclusion and Significance: Identifying predictors of MI could contribute to the reduction of mental health problems and the implementation of targeted interventions in urban and non-urban areas. Moreover, prevention efforts deployed to reduce these mental health problems could promote the retention of professionals specializing in health, a category of workers extremely in demand.

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