

The impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of home health care workers in Japan

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Health care workers in home care settings have played a crucial role in caring for vulnerable populations during the COVID-19 pandemic. But now, researchers from Japan have found that these workers need more support to stay mentally healthy.

In a study recently published in *BMC Primary Care*, researchers from the University of Tsukuba have revealed that fear related to contracting COVID-19, as well as anxiety and depression, varied according to occupation in home health care workers.

Home health care workers (home-HCWs) such as visiting doctors, nurses, medical [social workers](#), care workers, and others engage with patients in a community setting, increasing their risk of contracting diseases such as COVID-19. As a result, these individuals have faced highly stressful working conditions during the pandemic. To effectively support these workers, more information is needed about their specific [mental health](#) needs, which the researchers at the University of Tsukuba aimed to address.

"Little is known about levels of anxiety and depression, as well as fear of contracting COVID-19, among home-HCWs during the COVID-19 pandemic," says main author of the study Assistant Professor Jun Hamano. "Information about these mental health factors could help inform efforts to improve the [working environment](#) for [health care workers](#) in home care settings."

To do this, the researchers asked home-HCWs at multiple centers in Japan to complete an anonymous online survey about factors affecting mental health in the workplace, including information about workload, the availability of support and information, the quality of interprofessional collaboration, fear of contracting COVID-19, and anxiety and depression. The survey was conducted during the fifth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, at which point the Japanese government had declared a state of emergency.

"The results were revealing," explains Assistant Professor Hamano. "We found that occupation, teamwork, and unmet support needs were associated with fear of contracting COVID-19 and mental health in

home-HCWs."

Furthermore, non-physicians, such as nurses, medical social workers, and medical office staff were more likely to be fearful and depressed than physicians during the pandemic.

"Our findings indicate that mental health support for home-HCWs should be tailored to individuals based on their profession," says Assistant Professor Hamano.

Given that medical office staff and social workers in home care setting are often the first to interact with patients, these workers may face a heightened risk of infection, and thus be more fearful of contracting COVID-19. Appropriate infection protection systems and mental health support are needed for these workers, as well as physicians and nurses. Further, efforts to strengthen perceptions of good teamwork may help to mitigate COVID-19-related fear as well as anxiety and depression among all healthcare workers.

More information: Jun Hamano et al, Exploration of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of home health care workers in Japan: a multicenter cross-sectional web-based survey, *BMC Primary Care* (2022). [DOI: 10.1186/s12875-022-01745-4](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12875-022-01745-4)

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