

Healthcare workers have increased insomnia, risk of severe mental health problems: COVID-19 study

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Researchers at the University of Ottawa have found the mental health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have particularly impacted healthcare professionals and their sleep, putting these frontline workers at risk of severe future mental health problems.

Jude Mary Cénat, an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Social Sciences' School of Psychology, and his team conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of 55 global studies involving nearly 190,000 participants for "Prevalence of symptoms of depression, anxiety, insomnia, [posttraumatic stress disorder](#), and psychological distress among populations affected by the COVID-19 [pandemic](#): A systematic review and meta-analysis," which is published in *Psychiatry Research*.

Dr. Cénat's team found when assessing COVID-19 affected populations that [mental health problems](#) such as depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) had significantly climbed

throughout the pandemic. Strikingly, healthcare workers who have been on the front lines without relent since the emergence of the novel [coronavirus](#) at the start of 2020, have seen their mental [health](#) significantly impacted, with concern about their future should the proper mental health support not be provided.

Dr. Cénat, Director of the Vulnerability, Trauma, Resilience and Culture Research Laboratory (V-TRaC Lab), was happy to discuss some of the key findings from the study.

Why did you decide to conduct this study?

JMC: "Conducted in a global mental health perspective, the main objective of this systematic review and meta-analysis was to analyze the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of affected populations to help develop and implement mental health programs based on initial evidence."

What did you find?

"We found an increased prevalence of depression (up 15.97 percent), anxiety (+15.15%), insomnia (+23.87%), PTSD (+21.94%), and psychological distress (+13.29%) among COVID-19 affected populations. These findings are important because the rates of symptoms and disorders we found are higher than the usual prevalence reported by the World Health Organization; depression was three times higher; anxiety was four times higher, and PTSD was five times higher in our study."

What was the case with healthcare workers?

"Healthcare workers (HCWs) had reported significantly more insomnia than the [general population](#) while presenting similar rates to the

general population for other symptoms. These results are consistent with previous studies that have shown that during epidemics and crises (such as SARS or Ebola), HCWs generally have the same level—or fewer—mental health problems than community members. However, longitudinal studies need to be conducted to determine whether this non-differentiation between HCWs and the general [population](#) is related to temporary coping strategies associated with being on the front lines.

Did findings vary at all depending on the origin of the study you reviewed?

"There were no significant differences observed for gender, geographical regions, and [healthcare workers](#), except for insomnia being more prevalent in this latter group. The short-term mental health consequences are equally high across affected countries."

What is the long-term worry?

"After the pandemic ends, HCWs may develop more severe mental health problems. For example, the prevalence of insomnia that is more than two times higher among HCW is a predictor of depression and suicidal ideation."

Why are these findings so important?

"This is the largest and most comprehensive [systematic review](#) of this matter since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our study will help guide research and the development of better mental health programs during and after the pandemic."

More information: Jude Mary Cénat et al, Prevalence of symptoms of depression, anxiety, insomnia, posttraumatic stress disorder, and psychological distress among populations affected by the COVID-19 pandemic: A systematic review and meta-analysis, *Psychiatry Research* (2020). [DOI: 10.1016/j.psychres.2020.113599](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2020.113599)

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