

Victorian paramedics are experiencing high levels of psychological distress

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A new study led by researchers at Swinburne University of Technology and RMIT University has found that more than a third of Victorian paramedics feel burned out by their work and are experiencing significant levels of stress.

The findings of this study, which was conducted by Human Resource Management, Marketing and Management experts from Swinburne and RMIT, Professor Peter Holland, Dr. Lara Thynne, Dr. Julian Viecele and Dr. Tse Leng Tham are taken from a comprehensive survey of the paramedic [workforce](#) in conjunction with the Victorian Ambulance Union.

The survey of 663 staff was conducted over a four-week period in September and October 2020, at the height of the second lockdown in Victoria.

Unmotivated and distressed

This report forms the second part of a study on Victorian paramedic and ambulance transport workforce. This study addresses the key indicators associated with workplace climate, workplace wellbeing, and the mental health and wellbeing of Victorian paramedics and ambulance workers.

It was found that while the workforce appeared to be highly engaged in their work, increased workload levels due to the pandemic were sapping motivation and causing significant distress. The elevated levels of stress were especially evident during the second wave of COVID-19 in Victoria.

"There is an underlying concern about work intensification and the increased pressure on quality when completing the job. Fifty-eight percent of respondents expressed that they often have more work than they can do well, with over 34 percent indicating this was a daily occurrence," says Professor Holland.

Another factor contributing to the decline in engagement with this workforce is the low sense of psychological safety.

"Psychological safety is closely related to the concept of trust. Respondents were asked how safe they felt admitting mistakes or voicing concerns and how these were received by other team members. Qualitative data indicates a level of apprehension in sharing key information regarding personal, employee and patient safety, which is concerning," explains Dr. Tham.

Another key finding of the study was around respondents' intention to leave the profession. While nearly nine percent of paramedics and ambulance workers indicate an intention to seek new employment opportunities within the next year, approximately three in 10 respondents said they often think about quitting.

"This result raises cause for concern regarding the retention of these highly skilled staff," says Dr. Thynne.

The way forward

The COVID-19 pandemic has added an exceptional level of stress on an already busy workforce and increased the occupational health and safety risks to these professionals.

"There were numerous episodes of staff needing to quarantine due to potential infection, further stretching the capabilities of the workforce due to staff shortages and increased workloads," says Professor Holland.

Despite this, engagement and job satisfaction levels for this workforce are at a healthy level.

"These findings point to a need for an overhaul of the system. The key concerns highlighted in the study are within the scope of management to address, with the fundamental issue being the provision of additional resources to improve the wellbeing of the paramedic and ambulance

transport workforce," Professor Holland concludes.

Provided by Swinburne University of Technology

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