

More than 1 in 4 healthcare workers seek mental health support during COVID

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The harsh impact of the COVID pandemic on healthcare workers' mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing has been laid bare in a study showing how the impact intensified the longer the pandemic dragged on.

Early findings reveal how depression, sleep problems, and [personal relationship](#) issues all increased through the course of the pandemic, with more than a quarter (26%) of [healthcare workers](#) seeking help for their [mental health](#), and over four in ten experiencing burnout.

In September 2020, half of [healthcare](#) workers (50%) reported feeling depressed or hopeless, but this increased to nearly six in ten (58%) by January.

Similarly, the number of people saying they had difficulty falling and staying sleep increased (from 64% to 71%), and the proportion saying that work was affecting their personal relationships jumped from one third (32%) to nearly half (48%).

The study, which was funded by Barts Charity, found that [anxiety levels](#) shot up dramatically during the first wave, with more than 8 in 10 (84%) worrying that they would pass COVID on to their relatives. In fact, one fifth of healthcare workers made new living arrangements to protect clinically vulnerable family members.

Petra Francis, matron for specialist medicine at Newham University Hospital, said: "It was a very emotional time for me as I saw a lot of families affected by the virus and lot of loved ones die. I stopped watching news and stopped talking about work at home in order to get time out. I was always tired and worried about my loved ones and me. I am very thankful for the team that worked with me, we all supported each other to get through the tough times. We cried together a lot as a team and it made us stronger for those who needed us."

As time went on, more people said that the amount of physical activity they were doing had decreased (48% to 55%), and that they had put on weight or increased in dress size (40% to 45%).

Two thirds of healthcare workers said they had trouble relaxing throughout the pandemic, and half found it impossible to stop worrying.

Study lead Dr. Ajay Gupta, a cardiovascular consultant at St Bartholomew's Hospital and senior clinical lecturer at Queen Mary University of London, said that the findings were shocking and clearly demonstrated how hard it had been for [healthcare professionals](#): "It is clear that the pandemic has taken a big toll on the healthcare workforce—perhaps even bigger than we initially suspected. Levels of depression and anxiety have been high, and many colleagues are experiencing frequent feelings of burnout.

"Three months into the pandemic we could already see the impact the stress was starting to have on staff, and, sadly, this only got worse with time. However, our study clearly, for the first [time](#), points out specific areas to act on to help improve this situation. It also provides for understanding about various interventions that may be useful to reduce this extreme burden posed by the [pandemic](#)."

More than 1,000 healthcare workers took part in the study, most of whom were doctors and nurses working in London.

The findings will be sent for publication in due course.

Provided by Queen Mary, University of London

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