

Does previous SARS experience help healthcare workers cope with COVID-19?

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A doctor holds a face mask and stethoscope. Credit: Ashkan Forouzani, Unsplash, CC0 (creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/)

Previous work during the 2003 SARS outbreak has no overall impact on the psychological distress seen in healthcare workers during the

COVID-19 pandemic, although it was associated with lower scores of PTSD and depression, according to a new study published this week in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE* by Rima Styra of University Health Network, Toronto, Canada, and colleagues.

Surveys of physicians and nurses conducted during the current COVID-19 pandemic have found significant levels of depression, anxiety, insomnia and post-traumatic distress, similar to those seen during the 2003 Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreaks. Experience working during a prior infectious disease could either heighten or attenuate a person's psychological response to an emerging infectious disease.

In the new study, Styra and colleagues conducted an [online survey](#) of 3,852 [healthcare workers](#) in the greater Toronto area, including 1256 nurses (34.1%), 1243 non-[clinical staff](#) (28.3%), 1034 allied health staff (28.1%) and 345 physicians (9.4%). 29.1% of respondents had also worked during the 2003 SARS outbreak. Mental health outcomes of [healthcare](#) workers were measured using three distinct scales.

More than half (50.2%) of all healthcare workers surveyed had moderate or severe scores for symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), while rates of anxiety (24.6%) and depression (31.5%) were also high. Non-clinical healthcare workers were found to be at higher risk of anxiety (OR, 1.68; 95% CI, 1.19–2.15, $P = .01$) and depression (OR 2.03, 95% CI, 1.34–3.07, P psychological distress). While those who worked during the SARS outbreak experienced lower scores of PTSD ($p=0.002$) and depression (p

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