

One in ten NHS health care workers experienced suicidal thoughts during pandemic, study finds

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Concerns were raised about the risk of suicide among health care

workers during the pandemic after a number of high-profile cases were reported in the media. Researchers from the University of Bristol, King's College London and UCL (University College London), sought to investigate the prevalence and incidence of suicidal thoughts and behavior among NHS health care workers in England and their relationship with occupational risk factors.

The team analyzed responses from the [NHS CHECK](#) longitudinal online surveys completed by health care workers (clinical and non-clinical), students, and volunteers in 18 NHS Trusts across England during the COVID-19 pandemic. Responses from 12,514 participants were completed at baseline, and 7,160 participants at six months follow up, between April 2020 and August 2021. Approximately one in 10 health care workers experienced suicidal thoughts during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the study published in *PLOS ONE* today (June 21).

Results highlighted that exposure to events that went against [moral values](#), a lack of confidence about raising safety concerns, and these concerns being addressed, feeling unsupported by managers, and having to provide a reduced standard of care, significantly contributed to staff distress during the pandemic. At the second six-month time point, among clinicians, a lack of confidence about safety concerns being addressed, independently predicted suicidal thoughts.

Paul Moran, Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Bristol's Center for Academic Mental Health and one of the study's lead authors, said, "Our findings show that several modifiable workplace risk factors, such as exposure to events that may have gone against a health worker's moral code, providing a reduced standard of care, or feeling unsupported by managers all increased the likelihood of suicidal thoughts being reported by health care workers."

Dr. Prianka Padmanathan, Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Bristol's Center for Academic Mental Health and one of the study's lead authors, added, "Our analyses show that among health care workers who had not experienced suicidal thoughts when first completing the survey, one-in-ten reported experiencing them six months later. Additionally, almost one in 25 staff reported having attempted suicide for the first time.

"These findings highlight the scale of mental health issues across the NHS at a time of unprecedented concern. Improvements in mental health support and addressing structural issues around workforce and resources might significantly reduce [suicidal thoughts](#) and behavior among [health care workers](#)."

Professor Sir Simon Wessely, NHS CHECK Chief Investigator and Professor of Psychiatry at King's College London, added, "Let's not forget that having a job is usually better for our mental health than not having a job. But sometimes the nature of the job can increase stress and strain on the individual. In these cases this work reminds us that the best source of support to maintain your health and well-being are not [mental health](#) professionals or the people in charge of your organization. It is the person next above you—your immediate supervisor, manager or report, and the people around you—your friends, family and colleagues."

More information: Suicidal thoughts and behaviour among healthcare workers in England during the COVID-19 pandemic: a longitudinal study, *PLoS ONE* (2023). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0286207](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0286207)

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