

Survey shows the pandemic was a tough time for pharmacies

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Customers showing up even when they were sick, not agreeing with the restrictions, and many new tasks for staff. These are factors that contributed to heavier workloads and tougher work environments in

pharmacies during the pandemic, a study reveals.

The [study](#), published in the journal *Exploratory Research in Clinical and Social Pharmacy*, was conducted by researchers at the University of Gothenburg and Åbo Akademi University.

The data consists of a questionnaire that was distributed to all pharmacists working in pharmacies in Sweden. The number of respondents was 2,034, or 41%. The group of pharmacists includes prescriptionists and pharmacists.

While many parts of society were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, pharmacists make up a group that has not received much attention. According to the study, a majority of pharmacists experienced increased workloads and a deteriorating work environments.

Customer conflicts and infection risk

Most pharmacists (62%) felt that their [workload](#) had increased during the pandemic, while the work [environment](#) had deteriorated. However, 47% felt that the physical work environment had deteriorated, while 59% of respondents felt that the psychosocial work environment had deteriorated.

Reasons that were highlighted included conflicts due to the unwillingness of some customers to comply with the restrictions. Pharmacists also described an increased fragmentation of their work as their regular tasks were expanded with rapidly introduced new tasks during the pandemic.

For example, pharmacists would ensure that the number of customers in the [pharmacy](#) was in line with regulations, carry out extra cleaning or serve customers outside the pharmacy.

Respondents were not satisfied with the communication within pharmacy companies and described a lack of understanding of the situation in pharmacies during the pandemic by both companies and society in general. In addition, there was a fear of contracting COVID-19.

Communication and understanding

Christina Ljungberg Persson is a senior lecturer in community pharmacy at Sahlgrenska Academy, University of Gothenburg and the first author of the study.

"When other health care services became less available, pharmacies remained open and customers increasingly turned to pharmacies for advice even if they were ill," she says, adding "Clear communication within a pharmacy company is important to show that management understands the burden a pandemic places on pharmacists who serve customers."

Despite the increased workload and deterioration of the work environment, 55% of respondents felt that patient safety in pharmacies had not been affected.

This result is not in line with other studies where high workloads and poorer work environments have often been linked to impaired patient safety. The researchers therefore call for more studies on patient safety in Swedish pharmacies during the [pandemic](#).

More information: C. Ljungberg Persson et al, A survey of pharmacists' perception of the work environment and patient safety in community pharmacies during the COVID-19 pandemic, *Exploratory Research in Clinical and Social Pharmacy* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.rcsop.2023.100327](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rcsop.2023.100327)

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