

Stigmas and challenges experienced by various healthcare worker divisions diagnosed with positive COVID-19: A qualitative analysis in a Northern Malaysian tertiary centre

Mushaddik IL¹, Anuar A¹, Abd Halim N², Jamaluddin R^{1,3}

¹Clinical Research Center, Hospital Tuanku Fauziah, Perlis, Ministry of Health, Malaysia, ²Department of Emergency and Trauma, Hospital Tuanku Fauziah, Perlis, Ministry of Health, Malaysia, ³Department of Psychiatry and Mental Health, Hospital Tuanku Fauziah, Perlis, Ministry of Health, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Introduction: The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the working environment, job demand, and psychosocial well-being. The dual role of healthcare providers and family members may cause psychological conflict. If left unresolved, these internal conflicting thoughts increase the risk of burnout, anxiety, and performance degradation. **Objective:** The study aims to explore the stigmas and challenges faced by various categories of Healthcare Workers (HCWs) diagnosed with positive COVID-19 and their coping and mitigation strategies adopted. **Materials and methods:** A qualitative study was conducted through a one-to-one semi-structured interview involving 15 HCWs who were diagnosed with COVID-19 from January 1st, 2021 to December 31st, 2021 in Hospital Tuanku Fauziah, Perlis, Malaysia. The HCWs were further divided into sub-categories covering administrators, clinical support staffs, doctors, and nurses. Emerging themes were identified using thematic analysis. **Results and conclusion:** There was no salience difference in the types of stigmas and challenges faced by all categories of HCWs. Four emerging themes were: 1) HCWs reported social stigma from neighbors and coworkers, which caused overthinking and contributed to the psychological impact of infection; 2) The main challenges faced by all categories of HCWs were quarantine-related basic needs, professional responsibilities, and post-COVID symptoms. 3) Apart from knowledge of self-monitoring and preventive measures to avoid transmission during quarantine, a supportive work environment and empathy from employers, coworkers and family were essential to reduce their psychological burden; 4) Effective management strategies and frequent dissemination of up-to-date COVID-19-related information were vital in combating stigmas and anxiety during a pandemic. Multifaceted strategies aimed at social stigmas and challenges should be implemented to maintain the psychosocial well-being of infected HCWs in the face of unprecedented pressure, allowing them to continue providing high-quality healthcare services.