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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### ASSESSMENT OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON HEALTH CARE WORKERS

Adil EL Ammouri<sup>1,3</sup>, Imane Agdal<sup>1,3</sup>, Ouissal Radouane<sup>1,3</sup>, Hana Abrebak<sup>1,3</sup>, Yassine Rassame<sup>1,3</sup>, Fatima Zahra Chamsi<sup>1,3</sup>, Farah Nsabi<sup>1,3</sup>, Fadela Bousgheiri<sup>2,3</sup> and Adil Najdi<sup>2,3</sup>

1. Research Team for Mental Health, University Psychiatric Hospital, Tangier, Morocco (CHU-TTA).
2. Laboratory of Epidemiology and Public Health.
3. Faculty of Medicine and Pharmacy of Tangier (FMPT), Abdelmalek Essaadi University (UAE), Tangier, Morocco.

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#### Abstract

In addition to being a public physical health emergency, Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) affected global mental health as cases increased.

**Objectives:** The aim of this study is to determine the psychological impact on mental well-being and associated risk factors among healthcare workers.

**Research methodology:** a cross-sectional study among Moroccan healthcare workers was conducted to measure prevalence rates of symptoms of anxiety, depression, burn out and their associated factors, objectified by the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS), Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) and a questionnaire, respectively.

**Results:** Symptoms of anxiety, depression, and emotional exhaustion were reported by 38.5%, 28.1% and 85.4% of the 96 respondents, respectively. Being young and having a psychiatric history were associated with more anxiety symptomatology. While working in the intensive care unit, feeling obliged to work in the covid circuit, living with family were associated with depression symptoms.

The factors statistically related to burnout were years of work, having an organic history; working in intensive care unit and considering that the number of staff is insufficient, that the communication with their colleagues and superiors is inadequate and that the training they had before joining covid was not sufficient.

**Conclusion:** The COVID-19 pandemic had a high impact on the mental well-being of healthcare workers increasing the risk of dropout and compromising continuity of care. Efforts must be made to optimize working conditions and reduce workload.

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**Corresponding Author:-** Adil El Ammouri

Address:- University Psychiatric Hospital. BP 398 Gzenaya, Route de Rabat Km 17 Tangier, Morocco.

Mail: [elammouri.adil@gmail.com](mailto:elammouri.adil@gmail.com)

## Introduction:-

The WHO declared the pandemic covid 19 on March 11, 2020 (WHO, 2021). Since then the spread of this unknown disease has continued to propagate around the world causing a major health crisis and quarantining more than half the world's population. The COVID-19 disease has shown high rates of contagion, associated with deadly virulence.

To date, the virus has infected over 500 million people worldwide and killed over 6 million (WHO, 2021).

Since March 2020, Morocco has experienced three waves with 16,101 deaths (Le Portail Officiel du Coronavirus au Maroc). The large number of infected people and deaths have contributed to considerable emotional stress among the general population (Y. Huang et al, 2020).

During the pandemic, healthcare workers faced several challenges including: the increase in the number of patients and deaths related to the pandemic, the exhausting workload (doubled work hours, postponed days off and reduced hours of sleep), the lack of ventilators and beds in intensive care units (ICUs), and the shortage of personnel protective equipment (PPE), which led to emotional and physical exhaustion (Y. Huang et al, 2020; R.Y. Elbay et al 2020). In addition, the increased rate of infection among medical staff and the fear of transmitting the infection to their families was another factor that contributed to their exhaustion (M.S. Spoorthy et al, 2020).

These challenges make healthcare workers (HCW) vulnerable to mental health problems including anxiety, depression, insomnia (P. Wu, et al, 2009), and post-traumatic stress symptoms (PTSS) (Y. Baïet al, 2004; S.M. Lee et al, 2018).

Few studies in Morocco have addressed the psychological impact of the pandemic on health care workers, therefore our study aimed to determine this impact by assessing the prevalence of depressive and anxiety symptomatology, burnout and their associated factors.

It will enable us to better understand in some depth the impact of this latest pandemic, to put in place recommendations and improve preparation for further pandemics to better safeguard the psychological wellbeing of health workers.

## Materials And Methods:-

### Study design and participants:

This is a cross-sectional, descriptive and analytical study conducted during May and June 2020. The participants were health care workers in public hospitals in Morocco (interns, residents, specialists, general practitioners, emergency physicians; nurses and other health care workers).

### Data collection

Given the pandemic situation of the country, a face-to-face survey was not feasible. Data collection was done through an online questionnaire on Google forms: Participants were encouraged to share links from the online Google form with other colleagues and to their professional groups.

### The questionnaire had four sections:

socio-demographic data (age, gender, marital status...); clinical information (diagnosis of a previous physical and psychiatric disorder, history of substance use); socio-professional data (professional category, years of work in the health sector, whether the participants have integrated the Covid 19 circuit, their degree of satisfaction regarding communication between themselves and their colleagues and superiors, the number of health personnel, training before integrating the Covid 19 circuit, their perception of the risk of contamination) and psychometric scales (Maslach burnout inventory, Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale)

### Maslach burnout inventory MBI

This instrument was first validated by Maslach and Jackson (1981) (C Maslach 1981; M do Socorro and al, 2016). In our study, we used the French version of the MBI adapted with 22 items (R. Tessier and al 1994), a rating of responses from 0 to 5 on the 3 dimensions and 3 levels of burn-out: low, moderate, severe. The scores are obtained by summing the responses to the items. The three levels of burnout (low, moderate and high) are defined by specific thresholds: emotional exhaustion (EE) (low BO: score < 18, moderate BO: 18 to 29, high BO: > 29); depersonalisation / loss of empathy (DP) (low BO: < 6, moderate BO: 6 to 11, high BO: > 11); accomplishment assessment (PA) (high BO: < 34, moderate BO: 34 to 39, low BO: > 39).

In our study we used only the 9 items that concerned emotional exhaustion (EE)

### **Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale HADS**

For assessing depression and anxiety HADS scale consisted of 14 items divided into two subscales with seven items for depression and seven for anxiety. Each item is rated on a four-point Likert scale (0–3) with total scores of depression and anxiety subscale ranging from 0 to 21 individually. The depression and anxiety being classified as normal (0–7), borderline abnormal (8–10), and abnormal (11–21). (Spinoven et al 1997; D white et al, 1999)

#### **A. Analysis**

Data analysis was performed using SPSS version 25. The descriptive analysis included all variables of interest (socio-demographic and professional characteristics) in the total sample (percentages, means, and standard deviation).

For univariate analysis, the chi-square test was used to compare the percentages of variables. We also used an independent samples t-test to compare the means. For the variables that were not normally distributed (burnout score for the disturbed sleep variable) a non-parametric statistical analysis, the "Mann Whitney U test", was adopted.

A multivariate analysis was also run, using the multiple linear regression to adjust on confounding factors (i.e., gender, age, living, work unit, risk of contamination, psychiatric and organichistory, length of service, sleep disorder, work in the Covid19 circuit, voluntary participation) on depression, anxiety and burnout scores. All factors with a  $p < 0.2$  were included in the model as well as the variables of interest. The total depression, anxiety and burnout scale were used as dependent variables.

#### **B. Ethics**

Our study respected the principles of informed consent and the guarantee of anonymity and confidentiality of responses via an anonymous questionnaire. The objectives of the research were explained to the participants.

### **II. RESULTS:**

#### **A. Sociodemographic and professional findings**

A total of 96 healthcare workers participated in the study with the mean age of  $36 \pm 10$ . Ratio of females (67,7%) was higher than males (32,3%).

Married people were predominant (54.2%). The dominant professional category was specialist physicians (46,9%), interns (24%), resident physicians (8,3%), general practitioners (7,3%), nurses (5,2%) followed by emergency physicians (2,1%).

A total of 50.8% of health professionals had a length of service of more than 10 years. 62.5% worked in the covid 19 circuit: 18% in a hospital ward, 13% in triage, 11% in the emergency department, 9% in the intensive care unit, followed by 5% in non-hospital structures.

More than half of the health professionals who worked in the covid 19 circuit (34.4%) felt obliged to work in the covid circuit. 38.6% judged the number of staff per team to be insufficient. 50% found the risk of contamination to be maximum. 38.4% felt that the training they received before joining the covid circuit was not satisfying. 53.28% were satisfied with the communication with their colleagues and superiors. 66.3% have a disturbed sleep. (Table 1)

Variables	n (%)	
Gender		
Male	31 (32,3)	
Female	65 (67,6)	
Age		
< 40 yearsold	62 (64,6)	
> 40 yearsold	34 (35,4)	
Marital status		
Single	41(42,7)	
Married	52 (54,2)	
Divorced	3 (3,1)	
Do you live alone?		
Yes	57 (58,7)	
No	39 (41,3)	
Professional category		
SpecialistPhysicians	45 (46,9)	
Interns	23 (24)	
ResidentPhysicians	8 (8,3)	
General Practitioners	7 (7,3)	
Nurses	5 (5,2)	
Emergency physicians	2 (2,1)	
Length of service		
< 10 years	51 (53,1)	
> 10 years	45 (46,9)	
Psychiatric history		
No history	80 (83)	
Depression	10 (10)	
Anxiety	4 (4)	
Substance use		
No	89 (92,7)	
Tabac	1 (1)	
Alcohol	1 (2,1)	
Heroin	1 (1)	
Organic history		
Yes	77 (80,2)	
No	19 (19,8)	
Did you work in the Covid 19 circuit ?		
Yes	60 (62,5)	
No	36 (37,5)	
Work Unit		
Hospitalization Service	18(18,8)	
Triage	13 (13,5)	
Emergency	11 (11,5)	
Intensive care	9 (9,4)	
Non-hospital structure	5 (5,2)	
Did you feel obliged to work in the covid 19 circuit?		
Yes	33 (34,4)	
No	27 (28,8)	
How do you judge the number of health professionals per team?		
Sufficient	31 (32,3)	
Insufficient	27 (28,1)	
How do you judge the risk of contamination?		
Important	30 (31,3)	
Medium	21 (21,9)	
Low	9 (9,4)	
How would you rate the quality of the training you received before joining the covid 19 circuit?		
Good	14 (14,6)	
Average	23 (24)	854

Insufficient	23 (24)
How would you rate communication with your colleagues and superiors during the pandemic?	
Good	32 (33,3)
Average	20 (20,8)
Poor	8 (8,3)

**Table 1:-** Sociodemographic and professional characteristics of the health workers' sample.

### Anxious and depressive symptoms :

The significant HADS scores for anxiety and depression are given in Table 2.

Our results indicate significant scores for anxiety (38.5%) and depression (28.1%). The comorbidity of anxiety and depression is estimated at 22.92%. This indicates a significant threat to the mental health of health care workers (Table 2).

**Table 2:-** Anxious and depressive symptomatology according to HADS and emotional exhaustion according to MBI.

	Depression n (%)	Anxiety n (%)
Normal	33 (34,4)	39 (40,6)
Borderline abnormal	36 (37,5)	20 (20,8)
Abnormal	27 (28,1)	37 (38,5)
Emotional exhaustion n (%)		
Low degree	14 (17,1)	
Moderate degree	26 (31,7)	
High degree	42 (51,2)	

We analyzed the influence of factors such as gender, age group, marital status, professional categories, integration of the covid circuit, different work units, in the appearance of symptoms of depression and anxiety.

The data indicate that age favors the appearance of anxiety symptoms in medical staff ( $p < 0.02$ ). It is observed that health professionals below forty years old have more anxiety symptomatology than those who have more than forty years old (Table 3).

**Table 3:-** Association between depression, anxiety, emotional exhaustion and different variables.

Variables	Depression		Anxiety		Emotional exhaustion	
	Mean	p	Mean	p	Mean	p
Gender						
Male	8.25	< 0,58	8.12	< 0.079	23.77	< 0.089
Female	8.75		9.75		29.86	
Age						
< 40 years old	9.19	< 0.056	9.96	< 0.02	31.04	< 0.01
> 40 years old	7.5		7.88		22.14	
Marital status						
Single	9.19	< 0.44	9.41	< 0.93	31.36	< 0.2
Married	8.19		9.09		25.32	
Divorced	7.33		9		25	
Do you live alone?						
Yes	9.82	< 0.016	10.10	< 0.095	30.59	< 0.18
No	7.75		8.63		26.05	
Professional category						
Specialist	10.2	< 0.73	11	< 0.83	34.4	< 0.48
Physicians	9.04		8.6		23.91	
Interns	7.85		9.71		24.85	
Resident	9.87		9		31.87	
Physicians	8.35		9.26		28.35	
General	8.5		12.5		46.5	

Practitioners		<0.06				
Nurses	9.33		10.17	< 0.19	31.11	< 0.04
Emergency	7.75		8.15		24.24	
physiciansLength of		< 0.33				
service	8.32		8.77	<0.018	26.02	< 0.012
< 10 years	10.3		11		39.6	
> 10 years	8		13		36.5	
Psychiatric history		< 0.59				
No history	8.58		9.09	< 0.67	27.62	< 0.58
Depression	8		15		50	
Anxiety	5		10		21.5	
Substance use No	9		11		42	
Tabac		<0.25				
Alcohol	9.57		9.01	< 0.31	26.19	< 0.04
Heroin	8.35		10.10		34.79	
Organic history Yes		<0.15				
	9.06		9.46	< 0.48	29.03	< 0.38
	7.8		8.83		26	
No		< 0.001				
Did you work in the Covid	8.66		8.72	< 0.14	25.33	< 0.001
19 circuit ?	9.84		9.84		31.76	
Yes	9.54		10.09		34	
No	12.33		11.55		38.33	
Work Unit	1.8		5		0.6	
Hospitalization						
Service		< 0.004				
Triage	10.48		9	< 0.58	24.74	< 0.12
Emergency	7.33		9.84		32.54	
Intensive care						
Non-hospital						
structure	9.03	< 0.3	8.93		23.06	
Did you feel obliged to work	9.22		10.22	< 0.35	35.85	< 0.008
in the covid 19 circuit?						
Yes						
No	11.11	<0.437	10.66		33.83	
How do you judge the	8.79		9.27	<0.22	27.82	< 0.3
number of	8.23		8.23		25.07	
health professionals per						
team?						
Sufficient						
Insufficient		< 0.01			21.21	
How do you judge the risk of	6.86		7.79	< 0.003	25.26	< 0.004
contamination?	8.48		8.35		37.57	
Important	11		11.61			
Medium						
Low						
How would you rate the		< 0.012				
quality of the training	7.72		8.54		23.28	
you received before joining	9.95		9.75	<0.49	34.10	< 0.009
the covid 19 circuit?	12.25		9.84		39.38	
Good						
Average						
Insufficient						
How would you						
rate						
communication						
with your colleagues and						
superiors during the						

pandemic? Good Average Poor						
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Psychiatric history is also related to anxiety symptomatology  $p < 0.018$ . Indeed, people with a psychiatric history have more anxiety symptomatology.

The factors associated with depressive experiences are mainly the work unit, in fact, people working in intensive care had a higher average depression than other personnel working in other units ( $p < 0.001$ )

Other factors are statistically associated with depressive symptomatology such as feeling obliged to work in the covid circuit ( $p < 0.004$ ), living with family ( $p < 0.016$ ). People who judged communication with their colleagues and superiors in the covid circuit as unsatisfying also had more depressive symptomatology ( $p < 0.012$ )

### Emotional exhaustion

Analysis of the Maslach subscale : emotional exhaustion revealed that the majority (85.4%) of participants were in burnout. The severe level of burnout was found in 42 (43.8%) of the cases, the moderate level in 26 (27.1%) of the cases and the low level in 14 (14.6%) of the cases.

Among the socio-demographic and professional factors, the factors statistically related to burnout were years of work ( $< 0.023$ ): health personnel with fewer years of work had a higher average burnout; psychiatric ( $p < 0.012$ ) and organic ( $p < 0.04$ ) history; work unit ( $p < 0.001$ ): intensive care personnel had more burnout compared to other units.

Those who consider that the number of staff is insufficient ( $p < 0.008$ ), and that the communication with their colleagues and superiors is inadequate ( $p < 0.009$ ) and that the training they had before joining covid was not sufficient ( $p < 0.004$ ) have a higher average burnout than the other healthcare workers (Table 3)

**Table 4:-** Comparison between the results of the univariate and multivariate analysis.

Variables	Depression		Anxiety		Emotional exhaustion	
	Univariate analysis p	Multivariate analysis p	Univariate analysis p	Multivariate analysis p	Univariate analysis p	Multivariate analysis p
Depression	-	-	<b>&lt;0,001</b>	<b>&lt;0,001</b>	Non sig	<b>0,001</b>
Anxiety	<b>&lt;0,001</b>	<b>&lt;0,001</b>	-	-	Non sig	Non sig
Emotional exhaustion	Non sig	Non sig	<b>&lt;0,001</b>	Non sig	-	-
Age	Non sig	Non sig	<b>&lt;0,008</b>	Non sig	Non sig	Non sig
Psychiatric history	Non sig	Non sig	<b>&lt;0,018</b>	Non sig	<b>&lt;0,012</b>	Non sig
Organic history	<b>&lt;0,04</b>	Non sig	Non sig	Non sig	<b>&lt;0,04</b>	Non sig
Did you feel obliged to work in the covid 19 circuit?	<b>&lt;0,004</b>	<b>&lt;0,001</b>	Non sig	Non sig	Non sig	Non sig
Work unit	<b>&lt;0,001</b>	<b>&lt;0,01</b>	Non sig	Non sig	<b>&lt;0,001</b>	Non sig
Do you live alone ?	<b>&lt;0,016</b>	Non sig	Non sig	Non sig	Non sig	Non sig
How would you rate communication with your colleagues and superiors during the pandemic?	<b>&lt;0,012</b>	Non sig	Non sig	Non sig	<b>&lt;0,009</b>	Non sig
How do you judge the risk of contamination?	Non sig	Non sig	Non sig	Non sig	Non sig	Non sig
How would you rate the quality of the training	<b>&lt;0,01</b>	Non sig	<b>&lt;0,003</b>	Non sig	<b>&lt;0,004</b>	Non sig

you received before joining the covid 19 circuit?						
Length of service	Non sig	<0,035	Non sig	Non sig	<0,023	Non sig
How do you judge the number of health professionals per team?	Non sig	Non sig	Non sig	Non sig	<0,008	<0,045

### Discussion:-

The current study's concern about depression, anxiety and burnout among health care workers. We found that 38.5% of health care workers experienced anxiety, which is consistent with the results of a study in Pakistan which showed an anxiety rate of 50.4% (I. Ullah et al, 2022). Another study found an anxiety rate of 41.8% (C. Pierre Mboua et al, 2021) among health care workers. Our study showed that there is a statistically significant relationship between anxiety and psychiatric history ( $p < 0.018$ ); in fact, people with a psychiatric history have a higher average anxiety symptomatology than people without a history; this is in line with the results of a study in China which shows that current medical disease (including psychiatric disorders and substance abuse), and a past medical history (including psychiatric history and substance abuse) were associated with increased risk of depression and/or anxiety (Wang, C. et al, 2020).

With regard to depression, our results show a prevalence of 28.1%. A review of the literature conducted on 10 studies showed a pooled prevalence of depression of 22.8% among health care workers (S. Pappa et al, 2020). Another review of literature in China showed a prevalence of depression among health care workers ranging from 4% to 82 % depending on the timing of the study in relation to the peak; with a pooled prevalence of 31 % (Yong yan et al, 2021).

Among the factors statistically associated with depression we find the fact of living with family ( $p < 0.016$ ), contrary to what we find in the studies where living alone and being single exposes more to the risk of depression because of the absence of family support (I. Ullah et al, 2022; M. Alegria et al, 2022; Emily Zhang et al, 2020). In fact; our results can be explained by the fear of contaminating their families which aggravates their symptomatology.

Another factor was also associated with depressive symptomatology: training before joining the circuit, which was unsatisfying ( $p < 0.010$ ). The lack of training worsened the climate of anxiety; in fact, it added to several stress factors - such as the lack of protective equipment, the workload, the reduced teams, the fear of contaminating their relatives - the feeling of insecurity and incompetence in the face of the patient (W. El-Hage et al, 2020).

We note the presence in 22.92% of our population of a comorbidity of depression and anxiety. Depression and anxiety are two pathologies with points in common in their physiopathology, in fact, the disturbances of the neurotransmission of serotonin and norepinephrine are both implicated in anxiety and depression, and the changes in one system are reflected in the other (D.S. Baldwin et al, 2002). The association between anxiety and depression is very frequent according to several studies (V. Lenzo et al, 2021; S. Motahedi et al, 2021). This association is a factor of severity, chronicity and poor response to treatment, as well as an increased risk of suicide. (J.M. VANELLE, 2005)

Out of the 96 responses recovered, 82 cases, or 85.4% of our respondents were affected by burnout, this is in line with the results of a study conducted in Morocco which showed a burnout rate of 84.44% among health professionals working in health monitoring units (R.L. Kapasa et al, 2021). In our study, the severe level of burn-out was found in 42 (43.8%) of the cases, the moderate level of burn-out in 26 (27.1%) of the cases and the low level in 14 (14.6%) of the cases. This clearly indicates the importance of the psychological impact of the pandemic among the health professionals who participated in our study.

Furthermore, the majority of professionals (64.6%) in our sample were under 40 years of age. Our results show that health professionals under 40 years of age have a higher rate of burnout than those over 40 years of age ( $p < 0.01$ ), they also show that people with more years of work in the health sector have less burnout ( $p < 0.023$ ). Studies support this result and show that younger and therefore less experienced people have more burn out (Kamal AH et al, 2022)



Another statistically significant factor in burnout was work unit ( $p < 0.001$ ); indeed, healthcare workers working in the ICU had more burnout than other workers in other units. This may be explained by the fact that this category is more in contact with deaths, had to work under extremely stressful circumstances and took dramatic decisions, including how to provide care to several seriously ill patients with constrained resources.

Preventive measures are specifically recommended for front-line professionals to reduce the double psychological and professional burden, in terms of listening, psychological and psychiatric support, valuing the efforts made and multifactorial motivation. Sports rooms, meditation rooms and group therapy for discussion and expression with preventive and therapeutic aims should be made available to them. The establishment of a psychological support system is necessary.

The present study has some limitations. First, given the particularity of the pandemic, it was difficult to collect data through a face-to-face meeting, so we used online questionnaires. Hence, the sample size was small and this may lead to a negative bias. In addition, it is possible that people with more psychological problems who had participated in the study, thus they might not be representative of the study population. Finally, the type of study, which is cross sectional, does not allow a cause-and-effect relationship to be established and does not enable for long-term follow up of participants.

### Conclusion:-

In conclusion, the study highlighted the high prevalence rates of depression, anxiety and burn out among HCWs and findings showed that being young, having a psychiatric history, working in the ICU, feeling obliged to work in the covid circuit, living with family, considering that the number of staff is insufficient, that the communication with colleagues and superiors is inadequate and that the training before joining covid was not sufficient were risk factors and have an inevitable emotional impact on HCWs. The most important recommendation would be awareness among HCWs regarding use of personal protective equipment and infectivity of the virus. Mental health courses and workshops should be carried out amongst the HCW for helping them to cope up with their mental exhaustion.

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