

Job Burnout in Paramedics and Guards of Educational Hospitals of Semnan University of Medical Sciences During The COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The sudden outbreak of the new coronavirus disease (Covid-19) may lead to job burnout due to this disease in paramedics and hospital guards. In this regard, the present study was conducted to evaluate and compare job burnout due to Covid-19 in paramedics and guards of educational hospitals of Semnan University of Medical Sciences in Semnan, Iran.

Materials and Methods: In this cross-sectional descriptive-analytical study, 129 paramedics and guards of Kowsar and Amir Al-Momenin hospitals were assessed in terms of job burnout using the Maslach Burnout Inventory (1981). The collected data were analyzed using SPSS software.

Results: In this study, it was shown that emotional exhaustion was more frequent in female paramedics and male guards with a positive history of Covid-19. Also, in terms of depersonalization, the staff of Kowsar hospital, especially the paramedics, had a higher score compared to Amir Al-Momenin Hospital. Also, a significant relationship was observed between the subscale of lack of personal success and the history of Covid-19 ($P < 0.05$); In those who did not have a history of Covid-19, the level of this subscale was reported to be lower.

Discussion: The results of the present study demonstrated that there is a significant relationship between job burnout and anxiety of coronavirus infection among paramedics and hospital guards; So that the mental and physical abilities of employees, especially in the health sector, have been affected by the outbreak of Covid-19. Therefore, more attention should be paid to hospital staff in these disease conditions.

KEYWORDS:

Job Burnout, Paramedic, Guard, Covid-19

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INTRODUCTION

The pandemic of coronavirus in different parts of the world and its high rate of contagion and rampant spread has caused many concerns in different countries (1). Job burnout is a psychological syndrome that is considered a prolonged response to chronic interpersonal stress at work. Prolonged pandemic, high rate of transmission, lack of appropriate care equipment especially in the early stages, increase in the number of hospitalizations at some point in time, increase in the mortality rate, unstable behavior of the virus, increase in the rate transmission to young people, as well as an increase in the rate of re-infection in later stages, have caused constant stress in hospital staff who are in contact with this virus, during

the Covid-19 pandemic. These conditions, along with more intense work shifts, lead to physical problems such as gastrointestinal problems and high blood pressure, as well as mental health problems, including extreme tiredness, feelings of pessimism, feelings of inefficiency, lack of personal success, and job burnout (2). According to Maslach's psychosocial theory in 1981, burnout is defined in three dimensions, namely emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased personal accomplishment (3). Given that each person spends most of their life at work, the sources of stress in the work environment including environmental and physical factors, human factors, and organizational factors, lead to reduced job satisfaction and ultimately lead to burnout (4). Job burnout has detrimental effects on general health, physical and mental

condition, and affects a person's occupational and social performance (5). In addition, burnout reduces the quality of services provided by employees and causes absenteeism, demoralization and irresponsibility (6). Hospital guards and paramedics are members of the health staff who work alongside other medical teams, and without their cooperation, treatment activities in the hospitals are impossible. However, considering the prevalence of Covid-19 in Iran and the high number of patients, the occurrence of psychological consequences of the outbreak of this disease, such as burnout, in this group seems very likely (7). Therefore, the aim of this study was to compare the dimensions of job burnout in paramedics and guards of Kowsar and Amir Al-Momenin hospitals in Semnan during the coronavirus pandemic.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study method and study population

This is a cross-sectional descriptive-analytical study and the study population included all guards and paramedics (service personnel) working in Kowsar and Amir Al-Momenin hospitals in Semnan in 2020.

Sampling and volume of the statistical population studied

The census sampling method was implemented in this study; Thus, all guards and nurses of Kowsar and Amir Al-Momenin hospitals were included in the study. In this study, the sample size was estimated equal to the statistical population of 161 people, and due to illiteracy, dissatisfaction, and a history of mental illness in a number of samples, the number of samples was limited to 129 people.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria included all guards and paramedics working during the corona epidemic in Amir Al-Momenin and Kowsar hospitals in Semnan, satisfaction with the study, literacy, and absence of mental illnesses. Exclusion criteria included dissatisfaction with the study, history of psychological diseases, use of psychiatric drugs, and physical illnesses.

Ethical considerations

Participation in this study was completely voluntary and informed consent was obtained from all individuals who participated in the study. Also, the information of the participants was collected anonymously, and an attempt was made to prevent any bias in reporting the results.

Procedure

The study was conducted on the participants in this study after providing information about the procedure and obtaining informed consent. First, demographic information, including age, gender, work experience, and position of work, was recorded using a demographic information questionnaire.

Job burnout was assessed with the maslach burnout inventory

(1981) and in this study, the standardized Persian-language questionnaire, which can be used by Iranian Persian speakers, was used to measure burnout (8). The validity and reliability of this questionnaire were confirmed for the first time in Iran by Filian et al. and its reliability coefficient was estimated to be 0.78 using the Cronbach's alpha method (9).

This questionnaire consisted of 22 items that measured emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment in the context of professional activity, and it is especially used to measure and prevent burnout in professional groups such as nurses, teachers, etc. In this questionnaire, 9 questions were answered about the subscale of emotional exhaustion, 5 questions about the subscale of depersonalization, and 8 questions about the subscale of lack of personal accomplishment. The scores of the items in this questionnaire were based on a 7-point Likert scale.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

In this study, numerical and qualitative variables were reported using mean and standard deviation, and quantity and percentage, respectively. In this study, if statistical assumptions were met (normal distribution, equality of variances) parametric tests including T-test and ANOVA were used, and if statistical assumptions were not met, Mann-Whitney U test and Kruskal-Wallis test were used. Analyzes were performed using SPSS software version 24 and at a significance level of 95%.

RESULTS

The results of analyzing the data obtained from the questionnaires filled out by eligible individuals showed that 129 people participated in this study; the mean age was 37.8 years with a standard deviation of 8.1 years and a minimum age of 23 years and a maximum age of 57 years old. Among the participants, 48 (37.2%) were female and 81 (62.8%) were male. Of these, 42 (32.6%) were Amir Al-Momenin Hospital staff and 87 (67.4%) were Kowsar Hospital staff. 103 participants (79.8%) were service forces and 26 (20.3%) were security forces. Among these, the average years of service (work experience) of the participants were 11.8 years with a standard deviation of 7.4 years and the minimum work experience was 1 year and the maximum experience was 29 years. Due to the level of significance, which was $p = 0.122$, no significant difference was observed between the mean age of the staff of Amir Al-Momenin and Kowsar hospitals.

33 paramedics and 9 guards participated in the study from Amir Al-Momenin Hospital, including 20 women and 22 men. Eleven had a positive history of Covid-19 and 31 had a negative history. Also, 70 paramedics and 17 guards participated from Kowsar Hospital, including 28 women and 59 men. Thirty people had a positive history of COVID-19 and 57 people reported a negative history. A total of 41 people (31.8%) had a positive history of COVID-19 and 88 people (68.2%) had a negative history.

In terms of the emotional exhaustion subscale, the mean score of the participants was 41.4 with a standard deviation of 10.8, with the highest score being 54 and the lowest score being 11. The mean score in terms of the depersonalization subscale was 25.7 with a standard deviation of 11.5 and the lowest score was 0 and the highest was 30. According to the scores recorded in the questionnaires of the participants in terms of the subscale of lack of personal accomplishment, the mean score was 27.5 with a standard deviation of 8.6 and the lowest score was 0 and the highest score was 45.

Evaluation of the completed questionnaires demonstrated that for the emotional exhaustion subscale, 5 people (3.9%) received low scores, 5 people (3.9%) received average scores and 119 people (92.2%) received high scores. In the depersonalization subscale, 1 person (0.8%) received a low score, 2 people (1.6%) received medium scores, and 126 people (97.7%) received high scores (Table 3). Also, based on the results relating to the subscale of lack of personal accomplishment, 87 people (67.4%) received low scores, 28 people (21.7%) received average scores, and 14 people (10.9%) received high scores (Table 1).

Table 1: Frequency distribution of individuals by sub-scales

| Subscale | Score | | Moderate | | High | |
|---------------------------------|----------|------------|----------|------------|----------|------------|
| | Quantity | Percentage | Quantity | Percentage | Quantity | Percentage |
| Emotional exhaustion | 5 | 3.9 | 5 | 3.9 | 119 | 92.2 |
| Depersonalization | 1 | 0.8 | 2 | 1.6 | 126 | 97.7 |
| Lack of personal accomplishment | 87 | 67.4 | 28 | 21.7 | 14 | 10.9 |

According to Table 1, it can be seen that the highest number of people with low scores is related to the lack of personal accomplishment subscale.

In the study of the distribution of subscales by the hospital, it was found that the percentage of people with low and moderate levels of emotional exhaustion among the staff of Kowsar Hospital has been reported twice as much as Amir Al-Momenin Hospital. According to the results of the study, the mean age in the group of paramedics (103 people) was equal to 37.3 years with a standard deviation of 8.6, and in the group of guards (26 people), the mean age was 39.7 years with a standard deviation of 5.9. It was observed that there was no significant difference between these two occupational groups in terms of age. Also, the average work experience of the paramedics was 11.2 years with a standard deviation of 7.4, and in the guards, the average work experience was 14.1 years with a standard deviation of 6.9, but no significant difference was observed in terms of years of service ($P = 0.079$). By examining the subscales of paramedics and guards, it was found that there was no significant difference between paramedics and guards in terms of average burnout score and both job groups are on the same level.

On the other hand, the study of subscales by the hospital showed that the average score of emotional exhaustion in Amir Al-Momenin Hospital staff was 43.9 with a standard deviation of 10.1, and in Kowsar Hospital, the average score of emotional exhaustion was 40.2 with a standard deviation of 11; however, no significant difference was observed between the two groups in terms of this variable ($P = 0.07$).

Also, evaluation of the depersonalization subscale demonstrated that in the staff of Amir Al-Momenin Hospital, the average score was 26.9 with a standard deviation of 3.8, and in the staff of Kowsar Hospital, the average score was 25.1 with a standard deviation of 5.6, and a significant relationship was found between the two groups in terms of this variable ($P = 0.032$). According to the P-value, it can be said that the mean scores of the depersonalization subscale are significantly higher among the staff of Amir Hospital.

The study of lack of personal accomplishment subscale showed that in the staff of Amir Al-Momenin Hospital the average score was 28.5 with a standard deviation of 8.3, and in the staff of Kowsar Hospital, the average score was 27 with a standard deviation of 8.7 and according to the significance level of $P = 0.34$, the difference was not significant (Table 2).

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of subscales by hospital

| Subscale | Hospital | Quantity | Mean | Standard deviation | P value |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|----------|------|--------------------|---------|
| Emotional exhaustion | Amir Al-Momenin | 42 | 43.9 | 10.1 | 0.07 |
| | Kowsar | 87 | 40.2 | 11 | |
| Depersonalization | Amir Al-Momenin | 42 | 29.6 | 3.8 | 0.032 |
| | Kowsar | 87 | 25.1 | 5.6 | |
| Lack of personal accomplishment | Amir Al-Momenin | 42 | 28.5 | 8.3 | 0.34 |
| | Kowsar | 87 | 27 | 8.7 | |

According to Table 3, it was shown that there is no significant relationship between the subscales of emotional exhaustion,

depersonalization, lack of personal accomplishment, and gender (Table 3).

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation of subscales by gender

| Subscale | Gender | Mean | Standard deviation | P value |
|---------------------------------|--------|------|--------------------|---------|
| Emotional exhaustion | Female | 41.9 | 11.1 | 0.69 |
| | Male | 41.1 | 10.7 | |
| Depersonalization | Female | 26.6 | 4.5 | 0.126 |
| | Male | 25.1 | 5.4 | |
| Lack of personal accomplishment | Female | 28.4 | 8.9 | 0.34 |
| | Male | 26.9 | 8.5 | |

Since this study investigated the effect of the coronavirus pandemic on burnout and considering the group of people without a history of infection (88 people) the results showed that there was no significant relationship between age, work experience, and history of infection with coronavirus ($P = 0.89$

and 0.72, respectively). Also, the mean score of depersonalization was not significantly different between the two groups ($P = 0.104$), but there was a significant difference between the two groups in terms of the lack of personal accomplishment subscale ($P = 0.002$) (Table 4).

Table 4: Mean and standard deviation of subscales by the history of Covid-19

| Subscale | History of Covid-19 | Mean | Standard deviation | P value |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|------|--------------------|---------|
| Emotional exhaustion | Negative | 40.7 | 11.3 | 0.26 |
| | Positive | 43 | 9.7 | |
| Depersonalization | Negative | 25.2 | 5.4 | 0.104 |
| | Positive | 26.8 | 4.4 | |
| Lack of personal accomplishment | Negative | 25.9 | 8.1 | 0.002 |
| | Positive | 30.8 | 8.8 | |

In the study of the emotional exhaustion subscale, it was found that men, with 93.8% compared to women, have the highest score of emotional exhaustion in the study population. However, no significant difference was found between men and women in terms of high depersonalization ($p = 1.0$). Also, no significant difference was observed between men and women in the study of the distribution of lack of personal accomplishment ($p = 0.596$).

In the study of emotional exhaustion between people with a

history of COVID-19 and healthy people, it was found that 97.6% of people with a positive history of COVID-19 had a higher score of emotional exhaustion compared to healthy people; but no significant relationship was found between the history of COVID-19 and a high score of emotional exhaustion ($p = 0.121$) (Table 5). However, in the study of lack of personal accomplishment between individuals with a positive history of COVID-19 and healthy people, it was found that there is a significant relationship between these two variables (Table 5).

Table 5: Distribution of subscales of personal accomplishment and emotional exhaustion by history of COVID-19

| | Lack of personal accomplishment score | | | | | | Emotional exhaustion score | | | | | |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------|------|----------|------|------|------|----------------------------|-----|----------|-----|------|------|
| | Low | | Moderate | | High | | Low | | Moderate | | High | |
| History of infection | Qty | % | Qty | % | Qty | % | Qty | % | Qty | % | Qty | % |
| Negative | 67 | 76.1 | 16 | 18.2 | 5 | 5.7 | 5 | 5.7 | 4 | 4.5 | 79 | 89.8 |
| Positive | 20 | 48.8 | 12 | 29.3 | 9 | 22.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 2.4 | 40 | 97.6 |
| Total | 87 | 67.4 | 28 | 21.7 | 14 | 1.9 | 5 | 3.9 | 5 | 3.9 | 119 | 92.2 |

DISCUSSION

Job burnout is a term used to describe negative changes in people's attitudes, moods, and behaviors in the face of work-related stress (10). The most common definition of burnout is provided by Maslach and Jackson in 1993, who considered this problem a psychological syndrome consisting of three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased sense of personal accomplishment (11). The central symptom of burnout is emotional exhaustion, which is a general reaction to stress in the form of feeling stressed and depleted of emotional resources (12). Depersonalization is a

negative and ruthless response and indifference to people who are usually the recipients of services and care and refers to a person's negative attitude towards clients (13). The reduced sense of personal accomplishment is a decrease in the sense of worthiness and successful performance of duty and is a negative self-assessment (14). The sudden outbreak of covid-19 has caused stress and anxiety, which are the main causes of job burnout, among hospital staff, including paramedics and guards (15). In this study, the rate of burnout in the staff and guards of Amir Al-Momenin and Kosar hospitals in Semnan, who were serving during the Covid-19 pandemic, has been compared.

According to the results of statistical analysis of the data collected by the questionnaires, women working in both hospitals had on average less work experience than men (16). Although there was no direct relationship between work experience and burnout, in cases such as the relationship between the mean score of emotional exhaustion and gender among paramedics of Kowsar Hospital with a positive history of Covid-19, women had significantly lower mean scores.

In a 2019 study, Chernoff et al. examined burnout in emergency department staff at Cork University Hospital. The results showed that 75% of employees (doctors, nurses, managers, radiographers, care assistants, and porters), including 63% of managers (8 people), 100% of care assistants (3 people), 78% nurses (50 people), 70% of physicians (23 people), 67% of porters (3 people) and 80% of radiographers (10 people) met the job burnout criteria and they concluded that burnout was very common in the emergency department (17). Approximately three out of four staff members experienced burnout. In another study in 2020, Barelo et al. evaluated the rate of burnout in front-line personnel fighting COVID-19 in Italy. In this study, out of 1153 people who were willing to complete the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), 376 people were selected who were in direct contact with Covid-19 patients. The results showed that the rate of emotional exhaustion in women was significantly higher than in men. Also, the rate of emotional exhaustion in physicians was significantly lower than in nurses (18). However, in our study, it was shown that there was no significant difference between men and women in terms of the level of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, lack of personal accomplishment, which was different from the results of Barelo et al study.

In another 2020 study, Sahin et al. examined the level of anxiety and burnout of health care personnel of emergency department in comparison with other departments, during the COVID-19 epidemic in Turkey (19). The study was conducted on 950 active personnel in Covid-19 care centers, emergency medical services, health institutions, and dental centers throughout Turkey in the form of three questionnaires: demographic, Maslach Burnout Inventory, and Beck anxiety scale. The results showed that the level of emotional exhaustion of active personnel in the emergency departments was higher than in other departments ($P = 0.001$) and the rate of personal accomplishment in them was lower compared to other departments ($P = 0.049$) (19). In the present study, in addition to the results of the emotional exhaustion subscale, which was previously discussed in relation to employees that are in direct contact with Covid-19 and more crowded departments such as the emergency department, the mean score of the subscale of lack of personal success in people without a positive history of COVID-19 was lower, or in other words, people who did not have a history of infection with the new coronavirus feel less successful. The above result demonstrates that the fear of Covid-19 and its unpredictable consequences is a great concern and intellectual and emotional conflict that can seriously affect people's minds and their energy and physical strength (20). However, due to the fact that people who were infected with Covid-19 not only

experience and cope with this disease once but also are generally less afraid of being infected for some time after the disease due to the acquired immunity and tolerate less stress, which can be a factor for increasing the level of personal success in them.

In our study, it was found that due to the larger size of Kowsar Hospital, higher number of staff and patients, the conversion of Kowsar Hospital to the center of Covid-19 during the Corona pandemic, and higher number of Covid-19 patients, the rate of burnout among the staff of Kowsar hospital was higher compared to Amir Al-Momenin Hospital. In the staff of Kowsar Hospital, regardless of gender and job position or work experience, the rate of job burnout was higher than the staff of Amir Al-Momenin Hospital, which shows the effect of the location of service on the rate of burnout.

In this study, lack of personal accomplishment accounted for the largest number of people with low scores among all three subscales. The low level of personal accomplishment in the subjects is an important and significant issue; because it shows that the workers and guards under study do not achieve the necessary success and this feeling can lead to feelings of alienation and lack of positive human attitudes. Pinez and Maslachmi stated that a sense of personal success and mastery of tasks arises when people are able to influence an organization's policies, thereby exposing their abilities and developing positive attitudes about themselves and their patients (21). However, the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic and related anxiety reduce the sense of accomplishment of caregivers and hospital guards who are constantly at risk for this disease. There is ample evidence that job burnout imposes many consequences and costs on organizations and employees; Such as frequent change of job and workplace, frequent absences and vacations, decrease in the quantity and quality of work, turning to the abuse of cigarettes and substances, and adverse effects on employees' mental health (22). These consequences in hospital caregivers can have adverse effects on the provision of services to patients. Significant frequency of severe burnout, especially the reduction of personal adequacy in hospital staff and guards requires special attention, and intervention to reduce burnout seems to be necessary. One type of intervention can be organizational, which includes encouraging teamwork, involving employees in decision-making, job support, reducing job conflicts and ambiguities, and increasing control over job events. Another type of intervention is psychological intervention, which can reduce job stress in the current Covid-19 situation. Many researchers believe that these interventions should not only be performed in the workplace but also due to the stresses caused by the coronavirus disease, this training should be included in the training programs of health care workers.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it was shown that during the Covid-19 pandemic, the rate of job burnout is increasing among hospital guards and paramedics. Given the importance

of the role of caregivers and guards in the hospital, it is recommended to pay extra attention to this group of staff. It is also recommended to review the management policies of hospitals, in such a way that by reducing successive shifts and changes in these shifts (reducing variable shifts), improving work-rest cycles, and increasing social support, the factors affecting this mental disorder (job burnout) would be controlled, and productivity and performance of these people, especially during the corona pandemic, would be increased.

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