

# Occupational Anxiety Burnout during The COVID-19 Pandemic, A Review

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** Violations of providing excessive working hours to health workers occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. Doctors and nurses often have to work longer hours than they should during the pandemic with little compensation. The large number of patients during the pandemic overwhelmed health workers and many of them fell ill or died. However, this is not counted as an occupational disease.

**Methods:** A literature review was conducted to explore instances of scientific misconduct in occupational health studies related to Occupational Anxiety Burnout in health worker during pandemic covid-19. The sources were taken from Google Scholar and Scopus. From the entire search, 5 relevant studies were reviewed.

**Results:** Occupational anxiety burnout could result from concerns about the risk of infection and lack of confidence in the safety measures adopted.

**Conclusions:** Although there are no reports of complaints of burnout as an occupational disease among health workers in Indonesia during COVID-19 pandemic, it is more important to reorganize the work, so as to reduce the effort made by each individual worker.

**Keywords:** violation working hour charges, occupational anxiety burnout, health worker, COVID-19 pandemic.

## Abstrak

**Pendahuluan:** Pelanggaran pemberian jam kerja berlebih kepada tenaga kesehatan terjadi selama pandemi covid 19. Dokter dan perawat menjadi seringkali harus bekerja lebih lama dari jam kerja seharusnya pada pandemi tersebut dengan kompensasi yang kecil. Jumlah pasien yang banyak saat pandemi membuat tenaga kesehatan kewalahan dan banyak dari mereka yang jatuh sakit ataupun meninggal dunia. Namun hal tersebut tidak dihitung sebagai penyakit akibat kerja.

**Metode:** Kami melakukan pencarian artikel bahasa inggris yang diterbitkan selama pandemi covid 19 melalui google scholar dan scopus. Dengan kata kunci pelanggaran jam kerja panjang dan tenaga kesehatan dan pandemi covid 19. Didapatkan lima artikel yang sesuai.

**Hasil:** Gangguan anxietas dan burnout akibat kerja disebabkan adanya rasa cemas terkena infeksi dan kurangnya kepercayaan terhadap prosedur keamanan kerja yang ada saat itu.

**Kesimpulan:** Meskipun tidak ada laporan keluhan anxietas burnout sebagai penyakit akibat kerja dikalangan petugas kesehatan di Indonesia selama pandemi COVID-19, terdapat hal penting yaitu menata ulang prosedur pekerjaan sehingga dapat mengurangi resiko yang harus dihadapi oleh petugas kesehatan.

**Kata kunci:** pelanggaran pemberian jam kerja, anxietas burnout akibat kerja, petugas kesehatan, pandemi COVID-19

## Introduction

Doctors and Nurses have played a vital role in the treatment of patients with coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). When the first cases of the COVID-19 disease were reported, it was already clear that SARS-CoV-2 could be transmitted from human to human. Equally evident was the need to adopt very different measures from those previously used to safeguard workers. The rapidity with which the pandemic spread severely tested the ability of the health service to respond. Nationally, there was a grave shortage of protective devices, e.g., masks and disinfectants, and mechanical ventilators for patient care. In many hospitals, emergency rooms, in-patient departments for respiratory and infectious diseases, and intensive care units (ICUs) were suddenly inundated with confirmed and suspected COVID-19 cases, and healthcare personnel were swiftly overwhelmed.

Many of these health workers experience burnout syndrome, anxiety disorders, and even depression while working.<sup>1,4</sup> However, they are often covered with the title of hero or martyr when they die while on duty.<sup>4</sup> This condition is exacerbated by a lack of personal protective equipment,<sup>3</sup> no social security, no health checks before work and low wages for these health workers.<sup>6</sup>

## Methods

A literature review was conducted to explore instances of scientific misconduct in occupational health studies related to Occupational Burnout Anxiety. We searched for English articles published from 2020 to 2024 via Google Scholar and Scopus. With the keyword's violations of long working hours and/or burnout anxiety and/or health workers. Five suitable articles were found

## Discussion

Vulnerability is common among health workers who face exposure to COVID-19 because they conduct operations and services considered essential. Even though many of these jobs place workers in close contact with infected co-workers and the public, enhancing their

potential for exposure to SARS-CoV-2, the provision of minimally effective personal protective equipment (PPE) and adoption of other more effective preventive measures were delayed (in many regions) for many weeks after onset of the pandemic. It was only after the economic downturns became an undeniable reality, even in the richest countries of the world, that these disproportionate effects of the pandemic on higher risk occupational and socially disadvantaged groups began to receive some attention, mostly in editorials in several medical journals<sup>3,4,6,8</sup> and in news reports from the lay press.<sup>6</sup> Many workers entered the pandemic in low-wage jobs<sup>4,6</sup>, and some experienced an additional loss of income, even if they remained employed, due to diminished work hours and hourly pay. Approximately 80% of low-income workers are paid hourly, and around 43% are employed in small firms with fewer than 25 people with employers for whom survival during the crisis is likely most marginal.<sup>6</sup>

Burnout was first defined in Freudenberger (1974) as a state characterized by a sense of physical and mental exhaustion, excessive irritability, impatience combined with cynicism, a tendency to isolate oneself, suppressing the emotions, and feelings of chronic boredom. Burnout is the body's response to long-term overload with obligations, too many responsibilities and difficult tasks, as well as exhausting, monotonous and boring work, and most of all, to chronic work-related stress. As the stressors of the COVID-19 pandemic to date only continue to increase with each variant and 'wave' of critically ill patients along with health worker attrition from illness, exhaustion and burnout, the likelihood of errors can be anticipated to increase.<sup>12</sup>

Working excessively is defined as an imbalance between work and home, leisure time, and social relationships. Accordingly, working excessively is not defined by the intensity of work, but that the work is unnecessary. Working excessively occurs in four aspects: a perfectionist work style, loss of control over work, general views about work, and the perceived oppressiveness of the organization. The perfectionist work style is characterized by an excessive passion for order and an exaggerated pursuit of excellence in performing the entrusted responsibilities. General views about work show to what extent the employee agrees with the normative reasons justifying hard work. The perceived oppressiveness of the organization shows to what extent working excessively results from an economic necessity and fear of losing one's job or acting

**Table 1.** Studies compilations on occupational burnout

Article title	Years	Author	Study design	Population	Conclusion
Occupational burnout in nurses: a concept analysis	2020	Jun-Fang Zeng; Ai-Xiang Ye; Hong-Tao Cai; Wei-Ming Li; Zhi-Chuan Xia; Si-Jue Li; Jian-Kui Lin	literature review: walker and avant eight step approach	49 english article from 2008 to 2018	All nurses are vulnerable to occupational burnout
Physician and Nurse well-being and preferred interventions to address burnout in hospital practice, Factors associated with turnover, outcomes, and patient safety	2023	Linda H Aiken, Karen B Lasater, Douglas M Sloane, Colleen A Pogue, Kathleen E Fitzpatrick Rosenbaum, K Jane Muir, Matthew D Mchugh	cross sectional multicenter survey study	21050 physician and nurses in US Magnet Hospitals	High burnout was common among hospital physicians (32%) and nurses (47%). Nurse burnout was associated with higher turnover
The analysis of emergency medicine professional's occupational anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic	2021	Canan Akman, Murat Cetin, Cetin Toraman	descriptive research	168 emergency medical professionals	Emergency medicine professionals who work long hours as a result of close contact with patients who are diagnosed with COVID-19 infection are anxious.
A Study on Burnout of Nurses in the Period of COVID-19	2020	Liu Guixia, Zhang Hui	cross sectional study on nurses	92 practical nurses	The incidence of nurses burnout in COVID-19 period was high, which was correlated with anxiety and depression.
Factors Related to Burnout in The Covid-19 Vaccination Team in Subang District 2020-2022	2022	Muhamad Azhari Maulana, Marsen Isbayuputra, Endang Parahyanti, Dewi S. Soemarko, Yudiana Ratnasari	cross sectional study	131 Vaccination Team members	There is a relationship between mental workload factors, working period, and work locus of control with Burnout in the COVID-19 Vaccination Team,

in accordance with the organization's culture.<sup>13</sup> Still, health care worker often takes on extra shifts to work for absent colleagues because they have a sense of mission about their profession that does not allow them to leave patients unattended, while at the same time they take on additional employment because they are underpaid.<sup>12</sup>

While an individual health care worker may have been the 'last peg' in the safety measures breached, there are typically a series of mistakes and any one health care worker is not likely to be solely responsible. Having a

leadership role in a Rapid Response Team and having been involved in many critical incidents debriefs as well as root cause analysis of critical error events, in our experiences the last peg in the safety breach is often initially unaware of all the previous failures in the safety net that aligned before the final mistake occurred and reached the patient. Assuming sole responsibility when this is not reflective of the actual situation because one is the most responsible physician (MRP), the bedside nurse is a self-sacrificing approach and a psychologically

unhealthy way of addressing the event. Such an approach may result in more psychological distress than is warranted and may make recovery from the event more difficult.<sup>11</sup>

## Conclusion

Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency in Indonesia,<sup>10</sup> there are 2.423 general hospitals and 536 special hospitals, with a total of 202,967 Indonesian health workers in 2024. However, in reality there are no reports of complaints of burnout as an occupational disease among health workers in Indonesia. This can be caused by various causes, for example pressure on researchers given by donors, pressure from superiors at the workplace of health workers.<sup>7,9</sup>

Interventions to improve worker resilience and deal effectively with COVID-19 stress must have been proposed. These programs will certainly be more effective if accompanied by organizational measures aimed at reducing the effort of workers in health care activities. Numerous structural measures have proved effective in reducing the psycho-physical burden of workers. Science-based, data-driven cooperative organization measures, including balance between workload and staffing, shift scheduling, workplace environment design, and employee training, are the first defence against workers' distress.<sup>2,3</sup>

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