

Unmasking the Unspoken: The Epidemic of Suicide among Healthcare Professionals in India

Konuşulmayanların Maskesini Ortaya Çıkarmak: Hindistan'da Sağlık Çalışanları Arasında İntihar Salgını

Sakarie Mustafe Hidig¹ 

Fidele Kakule Kitaghenda² 

1-Division of Hepatobiliary and Pancreatic Surgery, Department of Surgery, The Fourth Affiliated Hospital, Zhejiang University School of Medicine, Zhejiang Province, China.

2-Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery, The Affiliated Hospital of Xuzhou Medical University, Xuzhou, Jiangsu, People's Republic of China.

Dear Editor;

In the bustling corridors of hospitals and the serene confines of clinics, healthcare professionals (HCPs) stand as pillars of strength and compassion, dedicated to healing others. Yet, behind the façade of white coats and stethoscopes lies a silent crisis that demands urgent attention: the alarming prevalence of suicide among healthcare workers (1). A recent study sheds light on this sobering reality, revealing that the suicide mortality rate among HCPs in India is a staggering 2.5 times higher than the global average. Academic stress, mental illness, and workplace harassment emerge as predominant factors driving individuals in this noble profession to the brink of despair. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated these challenges, thrusting healthcare workers onto the frontline of an unprecedented health crisis while subjecting them to heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and burnout (2). The relentless demands of battling the pandemic, coupled with the fear of infection and the trauma of witnessing countless lives lost, have taken a toll on the mental health of HCPs. Despite the gravity of the situation, there remains a glaring lack of comprehensive research and clinical studies in this field, particularly in the Indian context. It is imperative that we bridge this knowledge gap and develop evidence-based strategies tailored to the unique needs of different subgroups within the healthcare workforce. Moreover, proactive interventions are urgently needed to address this crisis. Routine mental health screenings, stress management workshops, and telehealth services are essential components of a multifaceted approach to safeguarding the well-being of healthcare professionals (3). Destigmatizing mental illness and fostering a supportive environment within healthcare institutions are also critical in encouraging individuals to seek help without fear of judgment or reprisal (4).

Firstly, Addressing the silent crisis of suicide among healthcare professionals in India requires comprehensive research initiatives as a foundational step. Longitudinal

studies and qualitative research can offer invaluable insights into the unique stressors faced by medical students, resident doctors, nursing staff, and senior consultants. Such research endeavours will pave the way for tailored interventions that address the specific needs of each subgroup, promoting mental well-being and resilience. Secondly, institutional reforms are essential to cultivate a supportive work environment within healthcare institutions. This entails implementing policies that reduce workplace stressors, foster a culture of psychological safety, and promote work-life balance. By prioritizing the mental health of employees and providing access to confidential support services, institutions can mitigate the risk factors associated with suicide and create a healthier workplace culture. Lastly, leveraging technology-driven solutions and advocating for awareness and collaboration are critical components of suicide prevention efforts. Telepsychiatry platforms, mobile applications for self-care, and online support groups offer accessible avenues for healthcare professionals to seek help and support. Advocacy campaigns can challenge stigma, raise awareness, and promote open dialogue about mental health within the healthcare community. Through these concerted efforts, we can strive towards creating a safer and more supportive environment for those who dedicate their lives to caring for others.

In conclusion, the plight of healthcare professionals grappling with mental health issues and suicidal thoughts demands immediate attention and concerted action. By unveiling the silent crisis behind the scenes of healthcare settings, we can begin to dismantle the stigma surrounding mental health and ensure that those dedicated to saving lives receive the care and support they so desperately need. Only through collective efforts and unwavering commitment can we hope to stem the tide of this silent epidemic and protect the mental well-being of our healthcare heroes.

Correspondence: Sakarie Mustafe Hidig, Division of Hepatobiliary and Pancreatic Surgery, Department of Surgery, The Fourth Affiliated Hospital, Zhejiang University School of Medicine, Zhejiang Province, China. **E-mail:** hidig2015@icloud.com
Cite as: Hidig SM, Kakule Kitaghenda F. Unmasking the Unspoken: The Epidemic of Suicide among Healthcare Professionals in India. Phnx Med J. 2024;6(3):136-137.

Received: 05.05.2024

Accepted: 14.06.2024

Online Published: 22.10.2024



Conflict of Interest: No conflict of interest was declared by the authors.

Funding: None

Approval of final manuscript: All authors.

REFERENCES

1. Das N, Khar P, Karia S, Shah N. Suicide among Health Care Professionals-An Indian Perspective. *Healthcare (Basel)*. 2022;10(2):354.
2. Chahal S, Nadda A, Govil N, Gupta N, Nadda D, Goel K, Behra P. Suicide deaths among medical students, residents and physicians in India spanning a decade (2010-2019): An exploratory study using online news portals and Google database. *Int J Soc Psychiatry*. 2022;68(4):718-728.
3. Varshney K, Patel H, Panhwar MA. Risks and Warning Signs for Medical Student Suicide Mortality: A Systematic Review. *Arch Suicide Res*. 2024:1-19.
4. Harmer B, Lee S, Duong TVH, Saadabadi A. Suicidal Ideation. 2024 Feb 5. In: *StatPearls [Internet]*. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing; 2024 Jan.