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# The psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on healthcare workers

## To the Editor

Ever since its outbreak, the COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly affected our lives. The novel coronavirus poses a threat not only to physical but also to mental health. Survivors often suffer from the so-called post-COVID-19 syndrome, experiencing symptoms such as fatigue, loneliness, anxiety, and even depression, that persistently influence their functioning [1, 2]. However, we must not forget about the toll taken on the psychological well-being of people subjected to preventive measures, namely quarantine and isolation [3]. In that context, healthcare workers standing on the frontline of this global crisis, are a particularly affected group [4]. The importance of understanding the psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the medical staff cannot be overstated.

With that in mind, I read with great interest the recent article by Burak and Grzonkowska [5] entitled *The experience of quarantine among employees of the National Medical Rescue System during the COVID-19 pandemic*. The researchers sought to analyse the feelings, experiences, and coping mechanisms of Emergency Medical Service workers that were subjected to quarantine or isolation in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study was conducted from December 2020 to February 2021 using a survey questionnaire. It included 89 healthcare workers — physicians, nurses, and paramedics — mostly employed in emergency departments. During quarantine, the feelings experienced by the participants included mostly ambiguous mood (64%,  $n = 57$ ), anxiety (57.3%,  $n = 51$ ), and irritability

(56.1%,  $n = 50$ ). Half of the respondents experienced stress with the inability to leave home and the feeling of helplessness identified as the most severe aspects of the quarantine. Interestingly, the researchers found significant differences between women and men, with the former experiencing anxiety and fear more often than the latter; however, men exhibited an increased desire to consume alcohol while in quarantine (48.8% vs. 22.9%,  $p = 0.014$ ). The authors also reported on age-related differences: younger employees felt significantly more helpless in the face of the situation and the loss of income. Sadly, most of the respondents stated that they did not have an opportunity to access psychological help (78.7%,  $n = 70$ ). But, as a silver lining, the quarantine inspired 40.4% ( $n = 36$ ) of the participants to undertake additional activities such as catching up on films and reading or doing minor home repairs. The most prevalent attitude toward the time spent in quarantine was a positive one, with an increased appreciation for one's health. One-fifth of the respondents rated it as having changed their lifestyle for the better.

Importantly, Burak and Grzonkowska underlined the need for conducting further research on the mental health and well-being of medical staff in crises such as the current pandemic. I strongly concur with their conclusion and applaud them for their contribution to better understanding the psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on healthcare workers.

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