



Strategies To Reduce The Psychological Burden Of Health Outbreak Based On Experiences During The COVID-19 Pandemic Among Hospital Midwives

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ABSTRACT

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) was a public health outbreak that caused significant psychological difficulties for healthcare workers worldwide, including hospital midwives. As a result, strategies to reduce the psychological burden during health outbreaks based on hospital midwives' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic are critical. The goal of this perspective paper was to present some strategies for reducing the negative psychological effects of a health outbreak based on hospital midwives' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Few sources reviewed demonstrated that hospital midwives felt overwhelmed at work and experienced worry and anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these negative consequences, hospital midwives were glad to have developed interpersonal relationships with other health providers and patients as a result of the collaborative effort put in during the COVID-19 pandemic management. Literature suggests that reorganizing the maternity care system, providing adequate supplies, providing strong support, and improving information sharing are among the strategies to lessen the psychological burden during health outbreaks. The pandemic had a negative psychological impact on hospital midwives, which requires attention. Implementing coping strategies to lessen the psychological burden among hospital midwives during health outbreaks contribute to a better provision of healthcare during health emergencies.

Introduction

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a worldwide health outbreak that remains to be a public health issue worldwide (Chookajorn et al., 2021; Iacopetta et al., 2022; Khalilpourazari & Doulabi, 2021). COVID-19 is an infection caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) that originated in Wuhan, China (Serafini et al., 2020). Its symptoms vary from asymptomatic to severe pneumonia with acute respiratory distress syndrome (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, 2021). COVID-19 infection is tremendously infectious and poses a risk to healthcare professionals, as well as their patients, family members, and friends (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, 2021; World Health Organization, 2020).

As of January 23, 2023, there are 673,372,117 total COVID-19 cases and 6,746,738 deaths documented (Worldometers, 2023). Given that healthcare providers administer and supervise COVID-19 management (Cole et al., 2021; Paiano et al., 2020), the overwhelming number of COVID-19 cases potentially impacted the psychological state and impaired the healthcare providers' ability to recognize their signs of distress like anxiety or mood disorder (Lai et al., 2020; Sommerstein et al., 2020). Studies have shown that the devastating number of COVID-19 cases was thought to be the cause of exhaustion, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and overload among healthcare providers (Rapisarda et al., 2022; Serrão et al., 2021; Trumello et al., 2020). Due to the workload demanded by the COVID-19 management, fulfilment and the capacity to provide quality and safe patient care were hampered (Carayon & Perry, 2021; Watkins et al., 2021; Weiss et al., 2021).

Midwives are one of several key professions addressing the pandemic (Jacobsen et al., 2022; Kantrowitz Gordon, 2020). Women are still getting pregnant, giving birth, and they and their families require midwifery assistance and care (Bick, 2020). Midwives have important roles in pregnancy, labor and delivery, and postnatal care as the earliest and most operative providers of midwifery care. Because midwives play a crucial role in enabling and empowering women, their attitudes, knowledge, and abilities can enhance outcomes, making mothers more self-efficient in birthing, nursing, self-care, and neonatal care (Levine & Lowe, 2015; Sauls, 2007). Midwives provide preventive interventions for primary healthcare problems during pregnancy, the identification of adverse maternal conditions, obtaining medical support when necessary, and implementation of emergency measures in the absence of medical assistance (World Health Organization, 2022). Additionally, midwives are active

in health education, health promotion, and the like (D'Angelo et al., 2021; Messina et al., 2020). As a result, midwives play an important role in ensuring that women's needs are addressed and that the care they get is tailored and woman-centred (Lawler, 2010).

Midwives play a wide range of roles in the healthcare service provision spectrum (World Health Organization, 2016). They are both healthcare providers of primary healthcare services, especially among child-bearing women and infants (de Jonge et al., 2015), and they provide midwifery care in the hospital setting (Cronie et al., 2012). During the COVID-19 pandemic, midwives are among the frontline healthcare providers, especially among women (Semaan et al., 2020). Due to the requirement to perform additional treatments to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 infection, the capacity of midwives to deliver maternal care has been severely affected (O'Connell et al., 2020). As hospital midwives are similarly vulnerable to the work-related impacts of public health outbreak (Yörük & Güler, 2021), this brief review aimed to suggest some strategies to lessen the adverse impacts of public health outbreaks based on the experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic among hospital midwives. As a basis in presenting strategies to reduce the psychological impacts of public health outbreaks, experiences on the psychological impacts of COVID-19 pandemic among hospital midwives were reviewed.

Psychological impacts of COVID-19 pandemic among hospital midwives

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented unprecedented challenges for midwives, particularly in the context of the modern world's emphasis on rapid travel and communication. The pandemic's social isolation, restrictions, and health-related precautions have led to feelings of frustration and uncertainty, highlighting the emotional unpreparedness of midwives in responding to health outbreaks. This situation has underscored the fragility and helplessness of everyone in the face of such crises. Midwives must, therefore, be equipped to handle the detrimental effects of COVID-19 while providing maternal and newborn healthcare. Relevant studies have shown that hospital midwives experienced confusion, feeling overwhelmed, and anxiety during the pandemic. However, amidst these challenges, a silver lining emerged, as hospital midwives developed strong interpersonal relationships with fellow healthcare providers and their patients. These connections were established through collaborative efforts in managing the challenges posed by the pandemic.

The attempt to maintain physical distancing during a

face-to-face consultation, substitute telemedicine for prenatal exams, and restrict postpartum care consultations are some of the implemented strategies of midwives to reduce the spread of COVID-19 (Galle et al., 2021; Wilson et al., 2022). Despite the various efforts of addressing the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the steady increase in incidence and mortality cases every day resulted in socioeconomic catastrophe and psychological suffering worldwide (Serafini et al., 2020). Additionally, the workforce across all economic sectors decreased, owing to social isolation, travel limitations, and job losses (Nicola et al., 2020). In addition to the negative socioeconomic impact, COVID-19 has affected how people feel psychologically, causing widespread anxiety, irritation, boredom, and crippling loneliness (Serafini et al., 2020). Midwives working in the hospital setting had a fair share of sufferings during the pandemic. Several studies have shown that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the work and life of hospital midwives. Interestingly, COVID-19 also had a positive impact on hospital midwives in terms of developing interpersonal relationships with other healthcare field professionals and having built a connection with their maternity care patients.

Confusion and being overwhelmed

The chaotic work environment caused by the drastic change in maternity care organization, restructuring of the workstation, disparities in hospital policies, and frequent revisions of policies due to the pandemic resulted in the feeling of being overwhelmed (Baloushah et al., 2022; González-Timoneda et al., 2021) and confusion at work among hospital midwives (Fumagalli et al., 2022; Huysmans et al., 2021). Factors contributed to the feeling of being overwhelmed in providing midwifery care included restriction of women's companions during pregnancy or labor, limited hospital personnel due to rapidly increasing COVID-19 cases added to the workload, and shortage of supplies and equipment (Baloushah et al., 2022; Bradfield et al., 2022; Fumagalli et al., 2022). Similar to other studies (Arnetz et al., 2020; Hearn et al., 2022), the devastating COVID-19 cases causing additional workloads may impose strain on hospital midwives.

Fears and anxiety

Fear and anxiety are the common psychological reaction to pandemics. Several existing studies demonstrated that hospital midwives feel worried that they may get infected with COVID-19 and lose their lives; fear to be rejected by neighbors and relatives for being a specialized COVID-19 healthcare provider and; and felt anxiety for uncertainties because of the new experiences during the pandemic (Baloushah et al., 2022; Fumagalli et al., 2022). Even the maternity ward head

nurse found their midwives to be stressed, anxious, and worried during the pandemic due to fear of infecting their families because of exposure to laboring women without wearing a mask, and uncertainties of whether to wear or not to wear personal protective equipment (PPE) (Halperin et al., 2022). The limited experiences and training leading to the feeling of being unfit to provide specialized care given the complexity of COVID-19 infection (Baloushah et al., 2022), and limited PPE such as isolation suit gowns and N95 respirator mask supplies (Halperin et al., 2022; Valverde-Espinoza et al., 2022), also have contributed to the fear among hospital midwives. These psychological impacts of COVID-19 were shown in many studies (Bai et al., 2004; Cava et al., 2005; Desclaux et al., 2017; Jeong et al., 2016; Park et al., 2020) that make fear as a major emotional reaction during pandemics (Aksoy & Koçak, 2020; Gotlib et al., 2021; Salari et al., 2020; Saragih et al., 2021).

Delighted with developed interpersonal relationships

Hospital midwives have built interpersonal relations with other healthcare providers and with their maternity care patients during the pandemic. The developed network made hospital midwives delighted while they provide care to COVID-19 infected patients (Baloushah et al., 2022). While hospital midwives experience personal struggles, fears, and difficulties, the development of a relationship with colleagues in their workstations is regarded as the primary source of support (Fumagalli et al., 2022). Maternity care patients also continued to contact hospital midwives for consults and medical advices (Baloushah et al., 2022) which demonstrate that women receiving maternity health services understand and appreciate the care provided by hospital midwives during the pandemic (Fumagalli et al., 2022). Fumagalli et al. (2022) added that the positive relationship created with women during COVID-19 was noted as empowering in the professional practice and personal growth among hospital midwives.

Reducing the psychological health burden in hospital midwives during health outbreaks

COVID-19 has affected the work and life of hospital midwives both negatively and positively. Coping strategies are needed to address the negative psychological impact of health outbreak such as the COVID-19 pandemic, while the positive impacts needed to be reinforced and emphasized for better self-worth and fulfillment.

Reorganizing maternity care system

Reorganization of the workstation and maternity care system can be adapted to ease the strain on hospital

midwives while limiting the spread of the infection. For instance, women from the Netherlands were encouraged to give birth at home to minimize the number of people present around the laboring women (Coxon et al., 2020). In some settings, women were encouraged to have a medical evaluation with the aid of questionnaires or contacted through emails for assessing potential symptoms before they come to the hospital (Alfieri et al., 2020; Peña et al., 2020; Pietrasanta et al., 2020; Rochelson et al., 2020; Saiman et al., 2020). Hospital guidelines for the early and successful handling of health emergencies must be adopted, and healthcare staff must be provided with proper protective equipment (Serafini et al., 2020).

Providing enough supplies

As supplies such personal protective equipment (PPE) influence fear of hospital midwives due to the possibility of being infected and infecting their families and patients, provision of adequate needed supplies is critical. Supplies of PPEs have now become increasingly relevant with the increasing mortality rate among healthcare providers due to a lack of equipment (Bowden et al., 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, some hospital midwives developed some creative strategies on how to obtain additional supplies. This included sewing personal face masks, recovering extra PPE from industrial constructions, purchasing boxes of face masks and distributing them to colleagues, requesting PPE intended for deceased PPE-entitled health workers, and transforming rubbish bags into medical aprons (Huysmans et al., 2021). Some of these strategies can be applied during health outbreaks to aid supply difficulties. There is a need for sufficient essential supplies and equipment during health outbreaks to maintain treatment standards and patient safety (Eglseer et al., 2019; Zwakhalen et al., 2018). Furthermore, PPEs are very important because they were found to successfully protect healthcare personnel and patients against COVID-19 by lowering the likelihood of transmission (Liu et al., 2020; Valverde-Espinoza et al., 2022). When the workplace and healthcare providers are well-equipped, optimum healthcare can be achieved (Cipriano, 2018; Valverde-Espinoza et al., 2022).

Providing strong support

Among hospital midwives, fears and anxiety were brought about by their feeling of being unqualified and lack of expertise to provide specialized care to patients. To increase the capability and contribute to the reduction of fear and anxiety among hospital midwives, providing training on the needed competency in addressing health outbreaks is crucial. It was found that knowing the nature of the virus, its transmission,

and its management is vital to ease stress, worry, and uncertainty in the workplace (Gotlib et al., 2021). Another factor that increases the fear and anxiety of hospital midwives was the enormous workload due to the rapidly increasing COVID-19 cases day by day (Baloushah et al., 2022; Hazfiarini et al., 2022). It was cited that pressure from the workplace contributes to decreased enthusiasm to work, an increased level of sickness, and quitting of professional practice among hospital midwives (Cronie et al., 2019). This suggests that the reduction of the caseload is important in terms of the job satisfaction of hospital midwives. During the pandemic, a strong support system for healthcare providers is also beneficial for their mental health (Suresh et al., 2021). Support from family and friends was recommended for hospital midwives to withstand the emotional challenges, difficulties, and strains while providing healthcare services during pandemics (Fumagalli et al., 2022).

Enhancing information sharing system

Rampant misinformation and poor coordination and management during the pandemic contributed to confusion and anxiety among hospital midwives (Fumagalli et al., 2022; González-Timoneda et al., 2021). Misinformation is a barrier to making an informed decision (Bin Naeem & Kamel Boulos, 2021) while poor coordination and management contribute to a rapid spread of an outbreak (Heymann et al., 2015). To prevent health misinformation, machine learning-based methods (e.g. application that detects false information), health literacy recommendations (e.g. checking if the information is up to date), checklists (e.g. verifying the account of an expert who shares health information), myth-busters (i.e. promotion of facts), and fact-checkers (i.e. evaluating the authenticity of a specific claim) are among the ways that can be applied (Bin Naeem & Kamel Boulos, 2021). In addressing poor coordination and management, the development of a social media platform to construct an information-sharing network was found to aid in the acceleration of some government response and recovery operations during the COVID-19 pandemic (Li et al., 2020).

Although COVID-19 has a negative influence on the majority of healthcare personnel's psychological state, the pandemic has had a beneficial impact on hospital midwives' personal and professional growth, as well as their sense of self-worth and empowerment (Baloushah et al., 2022; Fumagalli et al., 2022). This suggests that developing networks with other healthcare professionals and building interpersonal relationships with patients promote resilience among hospital midwives during health outbreaks. This review showed that COVID-19 pandemic was difficult and have

influenced the mental health of hospital midwives. Nonetheless, building resilience through establishing a strong support system can be a coping strategy for all the challenges (Eglseer et al., 2019; LoGiudice & Bartos, 2021).

Conclusion

Amid health outbreaks, it is essential to provide hospital midwives with psychological and professional support to enable them to deliver effective and efficient healthcare services. To maintain the standard of care during such crises, it is crucial to alleviate the workload burden of midwives, ensure timely procurement of essential supplies, enhance the sharing of health information, and provide skills training to acquire the competencies needed for specialized care. Integrating these strategies is vital to effectively manage health outbreaks. The psychological impact of such outbreaks induces fear and anxiety, which must be recognized as a public health priority by health authorities and policymakers. They must act quickly to implement clear strategies aimed at reducing the disease burden and mitigating the catastrophic mental health repercussions experienced by hospital midwives.

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Author contribution

The initial draft of the paper was conceptualized and written by EBF, with FWL, MJRT, AOF, and FE helping in reviewing and editing the manuscript. All authors have given their approval for the final version of this paper.

Conflict of interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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