

ABSTRACT

General Mental Well Being among Medical Personnel in Two Urban Hospitals in Kingston, Jamaica

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Hospital workers are exposed to high levels of stress since they must deal with life-threatening injuries and illnesses, patient deaths and poor working conditions. These factors may have a deleterious effect on the health and well being of these employees. The mental well-being of doctors and nurses in Jamaican hospitals has not been well studied. The aim of this study was to assess the general mental well-being of doctors and nurses at the University Hospital of the West Indies and the Kingston Public Hospital using the General Health Questionnaire. Specifically, it examined predictors of mental well-being, and associations between possible stress reduction practices and health maintenance practices and caseness.

All doctors and nurses employed to Accident and Emergency, Surgery, Medicine and Anaesthetics and Intensive Care services were eligible for inclusion in the study. A 50% stratified random sample was selected and 212 doctors and nurses participated in the study yielding a response rate

of 83.5%. The General Health Questionnaire-30 (GHQ30) and a 33-item questionnaire were self-administered during the study.

Persons who scored ≥ 5 on the GHQ30 were considered cases and there was a 27.4% prevalence of caseness in the population. There was no association between age, sex or hospital of employment and caseness. Only 7.14% of study participants had ever sought counselling and they did not visit the doctor often (0.93 months and 2.4 years for nurses and doctors, respectively, ($t=-3.3$; $p=0.001$)). The rate of smoking and alcohol consumption was very low and far below the national average.

Length of service was a significant predictor of caseness, the risk of which declined with the length of time employed. Similarly, encounter with a violent or threatening patient or family member was associated with caseness. This factor was also shown to decline with frequency of encounters.

Caseness was also associated with stress, which was non-work related (OR, 1.22 CI 0.31, 4.88), having serious financial difficulties (OR 1.98 CI 0.88, 4.45) and fear of coming to work (OR 3.07 CI 1.37, 6.90). Stress which was work related was significantly associated with caseness ($X^2 = 9.77$; $p = 0.002$), although the relationship was weak (Spearman's $r = 0.279$; $p = 0.01$).

Intervention to improve general mental well being should focus on creating a more healthy work environment. These include reducing stress at home and in the workplace by more human resource friendly policies.

Keywords: Jascinth LM Lindo, General Health Questionnaire, doctors, nurses, Jamaica, mental well being.