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Factors associated with the psychological distress and coping behaviors among frontline nurses at National Hospital Sri Lanka during COVID-19 pandemic

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Background: Nurses are the vulnerable group to experience higher psychological distress during the COVID-19 pandemic with increased workload and responsibilities of managing infection. Psychological distress negatively impacts an individual’s health and quality care and coping behaviors may be influenced on better mental health well-being of nurses.

Objective: The study was aimed to assess factors associated with psychological distress, coping behaviors of frontline nurses at National Hospital Sri Lanka during the COVID-19 pandemic

Methods & Materials: A descriptive cross-sectional survey was carried out among 412 nurses at National Hospital Sri Lanka from May to October 2021 using the simple random sampling method. Nurse’s duty registries were considered as a sampling frame and the questionnaire was pre-tested among twenty nurses in NHSL. The Kessler psychological distress scale (K10) and 15-item, a 4-point coping was used to collect data with the author’s permission. The study was ethically approved at KIU (KIU/ERC/21/80) and data were analyzed using SPSS version 25. $p < 0.05$ was considered significant.

Results: Mean age of participants is 32.38 ± 5.8 years and the mean working experience in the nursing profession is 6.75 ± 5.4 years. The majority were female (90%), married (75.5%) engaged with 24 hour duty schedules (88.1%) in COVID-19 infected patient units (46.45%) that were consisted of more than 40 patients in a single unit (65.5%). Psychological distress was experienced in high (20.6%), very high (2.9), moderate (44.7%), and lower levels (31.8). Coping mechanisms were very low (12.9%), lower level (26.5%), moderate (34%), high (19.2), and very high (6.6). Both psychological distress and coping mechanisms were associated with the working unit ($p < 0.001$) and the number of patients in a single unit ($p = 0.009$; psychological distress, $p = 0.001$; coping behaviors).

Conclusion: Working units and the number of patients in a single unit are significantly associated with the psychological distress and coping behaviors of nurses. Further studies such as comparative studies need to be continued to assess the mental health well-being among nurses.