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Post-traumatic stress and coping strategies of South African nurses during the second wave of the COVID-19 Pandemic

CITATION

Engelbrecht MC, Heunis JC, Kigozi NG. 2021. Post-Traumatic Stress and Coping Strategies of South African Nurses during the Second Wave of the COVID-19 Pandemic. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18, 7919. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18157919>

ABSTRACT

Prior to the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, the South African healthcare system was already under severe strain due to amongst others, a lack of human resources, poor governance and management, and an unequal distribution of resources among provinces and between the public and private healthcare sectors. At the center of these challenges are nurses, the backbone of the healthcare system, and the first point of call for most patients in the country. This research investigated post-traumatic stress and coping strategies of nurses during the second wave of COVID-19 in the country. A structured self-administered questionnaire captured the biographic characteristics, perceived risk factors for COVID-19, and views on infection control of 286 nurses. Data were subjected to descriptive and binomial logistic regression analyses. More than four in every 10 nurses screened positive for higher levels of post-traumatic disorder (PTSD). Self-reported risk for contracting COVID-19 mainly centered on being a health worker and patients' non-adherence to infection prevention guidelines. Unpreparedness to manage COVID-19 patients, poorer health, and avoidant coping were associated with PTSD. Nurses voiced a need for emotional support and empathy from managers. Emotional, psychological, and debriefing intervention sessions that focus on positive coping strategies to actively address stress are recommended.

Keywords: COVID-19, nurses, post-traumatic stress, coping