



UNIVERSITÀ
POLITECNICA
DELLE MARCHE

RESEARCH AREA: COMMUNICATIONS – COMMUNITY - HEALTH

TITLE: COVID-19 pandemic in Italy: social distress and gender imbalance among Health Care Professionals.

Principal investigator: Prof.ssa Rossana Berardi, r.berardi@univpm.it, tel: 071 596 5715

UNIVPM Research Group: Clinica Oncologica

Research activity description: Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) initially originated in the city of Wuhan (central China) in December 2019, showing a surprisingly high contagiousness leading the WHO (World Health Organization) to label it as a “public health emergency of international concern”. The limitation of daily activities, the change in lifestyle habits, the social isolation combined with the fear for potential impact of the infection on us and our family health, the several unknowns related to this new and unexpected condition, have caused an inevitable feeling of loss of control, thus triggering stress reactions. Therefore COVID-19 not only affect the physical health of infected subjects but also the psychological health and wellbeing of the uninfected population, particularly of healthcare professionals (HCP), who are on the frontline, fighting the epidemic and so more physically and emotionally involved.

The aim of our national survey is to assess the HCPs social stress level, especially among who work in the COVID-19 units or who take care of fragile and potentially immunocompromised inpatients or outpatients, who are at higher risk of morbidity and mortality in case of COVID-19 infections, with a special focus on gender gap.

A total of 600 HCPs completed the study questionnaire providing evaluable responses. The major part of participants were female (444, 74.0%) between 36 and 45 years old (32.3%). Oncology was the most represented specialty counting for more than a half of respondents (58.8%). Other disciplines with closer contacts with infected patients were also involved in the survey. COVID-19 pandemic required a rapid and substantial clinical activity



RESEARCH AREA: COMMUNICATIONS – COMMUNITY - HEALTH

reorganization to face new emerging patients' needs. Nevertheless, only a minority of relocated HCPs declared to have been totally (14.3%) or partially (27.3%) informed and trained about patients' management and the new employment. The survey highlighted a critical issue regarding emergency-led shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE): about a third (30.7%) of participants declared they were not adequately and promptly provided with PPE in relation to the clinical needs, whilst in another 35.3% the supply of these devices was limited. The most relevant finding is the fears of being at higher risk of contagion than general population (83.3%) and the weighty concern of infecting their own families (72.5%). This was significant related to the insufficient supply of PPE and the worry of getting infected ($p = 0.0003$), or infecting their own family ($p < 0.0001$), besides with the insufficient information and training about procedures/recommendations to follow ($p = 0.0092$). Among 600 HCPs who filled out the questionnaire, more than two third declared a change in family organization and daily life. The main aberration consisted in limitation of close personal contacts with their relatives living separately together in the same house or moving to other places. In order to avoid infecting their relatives, 43% of HCPs have modified their housing conditions since they have changed home (28%) or moved the family (8%) or only the children (7%). Those who choose to stay with their family have taken safety measures to reduce the risk of infection, such as sleeping in different rooms, avoiding close contacts especially with children and maintenance of distances of at least 1 meter with the other cohabitants. Unfortunately, hospitals provided an adequate accommodation for HCPs' needs only in about 20% of cases, mostly hotel rooms, reconverted hospital's areas not currently used and apartments. Furthermore, the majority of participants revealed other obstacles in family management, as difficulties to buy groceries (54.7%), to find baby-sitters (22.8%) and/or caregiver for not self-sufficient relatives (10.5%). The main repercussions imposed by COVID-19 pandemic concern families and closest relatives of HCPs, with 80.8% of participants declared to have not seen their parents for more than 14 days. Job relocation was significantly correlated with not have seen their children for more than 14 days ($p = 0.0176$).



UNIVERSITÀ
POLITECNICA
DELLE MARCHE

RESEARCH AREA: **COMMUNICATIONS – COMMUNITY - HEALTH**

With this survey we will turn the spotlight above all on the social impact that this health emergency has on HCPs, especially on women, who deal with “caring”, in the hospital as well as at home, juggling to fulfill together multiples roles of professional, mothers, wives and caregivers for elderly parents. We wish that Institutions could involve themselves concretely to guarantee HCPs perform work in a safe way, in a context appropriate to proper professional skills and with the adequate social and psychological support. Reduce HCPs’ fear of contagion and psychological distress will bring certainly to significant positive repercussions for the National Health System.

Collaborators: Torniai Mariangela and Women for Oncology Italy.
