



COPING WITH STIGMA: EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF INFECTION STIGMA AND RECOVERY EXPERIENCES AMONG DEPLOYED HEALTHCARE WORKERS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Joan M. San Juan¹, Purisimo Frederick C. Tabasa², Bryan C.
Lee¹, Cleto T. Respicio, Jr.² and Merites M. Buot^{3*}

¹Office of Health Service, Bureau of Fire Protection, Philippines

²National Headquarters, Bureau of Fire Protection, Philippines

³Department of Human Kinetics, College of Arts and Sciences,
University of the Philippines Los Baños

*Corresponding author: mmbuot@up.edu.ph

ABSTRACT – During the COVID-19 pandemic, this study examined the effects of infection stigma and recovery stories on 112 deployed healthcare workers at two major BFP-managed facilities: the Filinvest Quarantine Tent Mega Temporary Monitoring and Treatment Facility in Alabang, Muntinlupa, and the Philippine Arena Mega Swabbing Facility in Bocaue, Bulacan. The research aimed to ascertain the levels of perceived stress and recovery experiences among the BFP personnel deployed during the COVID-19 pandemic, and to formulate a comprehensive, long-term stress recovery program tailored for BFP healthcare workers deployed during the pandemic. A descriptive-correlational methodology was employed, utilizing standardized assessments such as the Infection Stigma Scale, Perceived Stress Scale, and Recovery Experience Questionnaire. Employing a significance level of 0.05 for two-tailed tests, the results underwent statistical analysis incorporating metrics like frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and the Pearson correlation coefficient (r). The findings revealed that BFP personnel deployed to the two facilities experienced a moderate level of both internal and external infectious stigma, coupled with emotions of guilt, disappointment, rejection, and embarrassment from the community due to their roles as COVID-19 healthcare professionals. The community stigmatization resulted in moderately high levels of perceived stress, primarily driven by task demands and pressures exceeding their knowledge and personal safety. Healthcare personnel adopted psychological detachment as a recovery strategy amidst moderate to high stress levels. However, their ability to regain control and engage in leisure activities as recovery strategies declined. Notably, stress, whether internal (self-perception) or external (from external sources), consistently correlated with an increase in the stigma associated with infection. During recuperation, healthcare providers who faced infection-related stigma (internally or externally) exhibited greater psychological distance. Additionally, activities associated with relaxation, such as watching movies, listening to music, or meditating, significantly contributed to reducing feelings of shame or negative self-perception. Furthermore, an improved recovery experience was linked to lower levels of internal stigmatization, while a better sense of control as a recovery technique was associated with reduced overall infection stigma. These insights can inform the development of targeted interventions and support programs for healthcare workers facing similar challenges in the future.

Keywords: healthcare workers, pandemic, social support



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