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Stressors Occurring in Psychiatry Residents Working in Psychiatric Hospitals During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 reached Egypt on February 14, 2020.¹ At that time, 2 patients were diagnosed with COVID-19 and subsequently died. Psychiatry residents working in psychiatric hospitals have encountered difficulties during the pandemic. Thus, the objective of this study was to identify the stressors these young physicians are experiencing related to the COVID-19 crisis.

Methods

Through qualitative phenomenological research, 20 psychiatric residents were interviewed from January 5, 2020, to July 5, 2020. The male to female ratio of participants was 12:8. The age of the residents ranged from 25 to 28 years, and most were unmarried. Their clinical experience was moderate, and they worked in a psychiatric hospital located in Minia City, Egypt, with more than 200 inpatients. Semistructured 45-minute interviews were conducted with each study participant.

Results

The analysis of the data obtained from the interviews led to the identification of 4 stressors.

1. *Inadequate precautions to guard against the outbreak:* The residents did not have enough knowledge about the virus, including its prevalence, symptoms and signs, and protection level. One resident commented,

“We don’t know the exact precautions that prevent the virus from attacking us.”

2. *High exposure risk:* The patients typically lived in crowded places, increasing their odds of contracting COVID-19. About 2 to 3 patients with severe mental illness such as aggressive behavior, mania, or acute schizophrenia were admitted to the hospital from the emergency department each day. These patients might exhibit risky behaviors toward the residents such as tearing off their masks or spitting on them. Also, these patients and their families could not provide adequate histories about their general condition.
3. *The conflict between family and work:* In Egypt, adults are responsible for the care of elderly parents and their younger siblings. Provision of care to elderly parents during a pandemic, especially those with chronic diseases, is extremely challenging. Also, residents are anxious about being carriers of COVID-19 and the possibility of transmitting the infection from patients to family members.
4. *The postponement of personal and career plans:* Due to the pandemic, certain personal plans are delayed such as marriage or traveling abroad for training or studying.

Conclusion

The results of this study may shed some light on the stressors that psychiatry residents are facing during the COVID-19 pandemic and provide insight for these young physicians as they navigate the ongoing crisis.

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