

## **The other side of COVID-19: a cross-sectional study on mental health in a sample of Italian nurses**

**Erika Renzi**

*E Renzi<sup>1</sup>, V Baccolini<sup>1</sup>, C De Vito<sup>1</sup>, G Migliara<sup>1</sup>, C Marzuillo<sup>1</sup>, P Villari<sup>1</sup>, A Massimi<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup>Department of Public Health and Infectious Diseases, Sapienza University of Rome, Rome, Italy

Contact: erika.renzi@uniroma1.it

### **Background:**

The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting drastic increase in the workload for healthcare professionals, particularly nurses, has had serious consequences on the psychological well-being of these professionals. Our study aimed at (i) identifying demographic, work-related factors, and clinical predictors of Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) in nurses employed during COVID-19 pandemic and (ii) assessing problem-focused coping strategies implemented by nurses.

### **Methods:**

We carried out a cross-sectional study between December 2020 and April 2021, addressed to nurses employed during the

COVID-19 second wave (October - December 2020). PTSD and GAD were assessed by Social Readjustment Rating Scale, Impact of Event Scale - Revised (IES-R) and General Anxiety Disorder -7 scale.

**Results:**

Overall, 359 nurses were included in the study, whose mean age was 31.75 years ( $SD \pm 9.77$ ). Most were female (80.8%), unmarried (53.2%) and employed in the central (52.5%) and northern (36.4%) regions of Italy. A total of 59.7% of all participants had clinical predictors of PTSD, recording a mean score of IES-R of 38.2,  $SD \pm 19.2$ , range 1- 84 (cut-off  $>33$  for PTSD). Furthermore, 45.6% of respondents reported moderate - severe symptoms consistent with generalized anxiety disorder. Statistical significance was found between GAD and nurses being employed on the front line (Intensive care unit and emergency department) during the COVID-19 second wave ( $p = 0.016$ ), and between GAD and clinical predictors of PTSD ( $p = 0.001$ ). Furthermore, we found a statistically significant association between PTSD and nurses who were employed in hospitals or institutions dedicated to COVID-19 ( $p = 0.028$ ).

**Conclusions:**

PTSD and GAD represent a public health problem to be addressed in the post-pandemic period. Healthcare organizations need to activate specific support and rehabilitation networks and programs for healthcare professionals employed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Key messages:**

- The levels of PTSD symptoms and anxiety among nurses were high during the pandemic.
- It is necessary for health systems to differentiate between temporary and long-term mental disorders in order to provide the health workforce with appropriate rehabilitation.