



## Letter

## COVID-19 and Healthcare worker's families: behind the scenes of frontline response

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During the COVID-19 outbreak, healthcare professionals are exposed to a high-risk of infection and mental health problems [1], but also fear of contagion and spreading the virus to their families [2]. In fact, considering them as individuals implies looking beyond their function as frontline responders and taking into account their societal role as parents, spouses and offspring.

While work-family balance is a common challenge for caregivers, this crisis comes with unprecedented threats. Spouses of healthcare professionals live in a state of fear as they're well aware of the actual shortage of human resources and protective equipment, in addition to dealing with an overload of responsibilities. In fact, parenting children alone in the absence of school or daycare is being discussed as one of the burdens of the COVID-19 outbreak with organizations such as the WHO providing instructions to handling "parenting stress" [3], yet recommendations on parenting for healthcare professionals and their spouses remain undiscussed.

Furthermore, as up to 40 % of healthcare workers marry each other, the childcare crisis may cause greater impact. Even relatives' support may not be available because of strict quarantine. Furthermore, in low-income countries such as Morocco where public social services are lacking, the disruption of traditional solidarity systems may worsen the situation. In this context, children of healthcare workers may undergo, besides the negative effects of confinement [4], additional emotional instability caused by the absence of both parents. Some Moroccan hospitals suggested in case of both spouses

being health workers, to only deploy one of them for the COVID management in order to help alleviate strain on their households.

Another burden families are facing is social stigma and dehumanization as they are seen as a source of contagion. Harassment has been widely reported [5], with repeated incidents of healthcare workers being evicted from their own apartments, deprived services or being excluded. Discrimination has even prompted local medical organizations to requisition hotels, lodges and guesthouses to provide shelter for the healthcare professionals facing these tribulations.

Solidarity with healthcare professionals should not only be manifested through "clapping campaigns", but also mitigate the burden on their families, as they are subjected to stress, isolation and emotional distress of exceptional intensity. Several countries including Morocco recognize the contamination of healthcare workers as a professional disability. Further measures such as childcare, social assistance to the spouses and psychological support should also be implemented on a global level in order to protect these families and their future.

### Declaration of competing interests

We declare no competing interests.

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