

Dr Kathryn Marsden

Florence Nightingale Grants and Award Recipient Report

MINDHEALTH - long-term psychological morbidity of nurses and midwives during coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) (ETHICS REF: 21677)

DR KATHRYN MARSDEN & JULIE PORTER

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of healthcare workers has already been established, linking workplace factors with high levels of stress, anxiety, depression, insomnia and burnout. Less established was how COVID-19 affects both work, home and social life of nurses and midwives concurrently. Through the generosity of the Returned Sisters Memorial Grant, we were able to describe the prevalence and severity of anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and insomnia and examines their associations with stressors within the work, home and social environment, among nurses and midwives. This study was a world first; a state-wide, longitudinal study conducted in Tasmania which included public sector nurses and midwives working across all spheres of health. It has been published in a high-profile medical journal with the intent to improve the health and visibility of all nurses and midwives across the world.

So what we did was design a longitudinal, mixed-methods, online survey which explored the psychological health of public sector nurses and midwives during the COVID-19 pandemic first year. Surveys were conducted in April (initial) and June 2020 (3-month), and April 2021 (12-month) and consisted of psychological tests including the Patient Health Questionnaire, General Anxiety Disorder, Insomnia Severity Index, and the Impact of Events Scale-Revised; workplace and lifestyle questions, together with free-text comments. The relative strengths of the associations between predictor and outcome variables were estimated using repeated measures ordered logistic regression, and free text responses were themed.

What we found was data show diagnostic levels of anxiety (23%, 18%, 21%) at surveys one, two and three respectively, depression (26%, 23% and 28%), PTSD (16%, 12% and 10%) and insomnia (19%, 19% and 21%). The study found strongest predictors of psychological distress were current home and family stress and poor clinical team support. We also showed, factors which will help preserve the mental health of nurses and midwives include strong workplace culture, reducing occupational risk, clear communication processes, and supporting stable and functional relationships at home.

Through this funding we have increased the visibility of mental distress nurses and midwives endure and established they are pivotal to healthcare. Thank you for enabling us to be able to highlight the needs of Tasmanian nurses and midwives during the COVID pandemic in an attempt to futureproof service delivery and safeguard its service-response capacity. (Publication details below)

Marsden KM, Robertson IK, Porter J (2022) Stressors, manifestations and course of COVID-19 related distress among public sector nurses and midwives during the COVID-19 pandemic first year in Tasmania, Australia, PLOS ONE (Medicine), <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0271824>