

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Occupational stress among community health workers in a rural field practice area of Belagavi

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Abstract

Introduction: Community health workers (CHW) are the first level of contact between the health system and the community. This study aimed to find out the level and areas of occupational stress among CHWs so that they can be addressed accordingly. **Methods:** This study was carried out among 105 CHWs in a rural field practice area of Belagavi. A pre-tested, structured, standard questionnaire was provided to them. After obtaining informed consent, they were asked to fill in the questionnaire. The collected data was entered and analysed through SPSS Version 26. **Results:** The mean age of the participants was 41.91 years. Majority were Hindu (79.1%). Most of the participants had completed high school (51.4%). 25.7% of the participants belonged to socioeconomic class IV, 34.3% said that theirs is the only income in the family, and 22.9% said that salary is the motivation for them to continue working. Among the participants, 16.19% had low stress, 80.95% moderate stress, and 2.85% high stress. The major area of stress was role overload (18.3%). **Conclusion:** CHWs are vital for the efficient functioning of primary health services at community level and their role in healthcare and the delivery of various national health programmes is indispensable, so their health and proper work environment should be ensured and safeguarded.

Keywords

Occupational Stress, Community Health Workers, Rural

Introduction

Community health workers (CHW) at a primary care level are Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA), Anganwadi Workers (AWW), Health Assistants (male and female), First divisional assistant, Community Health Officers (CHO), Pharmacists, Lab technicians, and Class D workers. They work at grassroot level to create awareness, provide information to the community on health aspects like nutrition, basic sanitation & hygienic practices, healthy living and working conditions, existing health services and the need for timely utilization of the same. They are the first level of contact between the health system and the community. They are an important workforce powerful enough to bring a change in the community regarding community participation in health activities, planning, and ensuring equitable access to all health services.(1)

However, this group of workers are also the ones that are affected by stress, which might be due to their unique work environment.(2) Low salary, tedious register work, long meeting hours, usually out of duty timing, education, poor community participation, no adequate space are some of the causes of concern since a long time and they remain to be so in current times, too.(3,4)

Stress at work influences the development of subjective stress and may lead to psychosomatic complaints.(5) Continuous stress, so much so that it becomes a usual happening, can negatively impact the health of workers, and can cause increased depression, decreased job satisfaction and psychological distress.(6) The most basic factor that has a great influence on the quality of work and individual productivity of a worker is the amount of stress that they face in their job.(7,8)

Aims & Objectives

To assess occupational stress index among Community Health workers.

Material & Methods

Study Type: Cross-sectional study

Study Period: October 2022 to December 2022

Study population: All community health workers registered under a rural PHC were included in the study (105).

Sampling technique: Universal sampling

Inclusion Criteria:

Community health workers who have been working under the rural PHC for a minimum of one year.

Exclusion Criteria:

Community health workers registered under the rural PHC, who were indisposed and were not able to fill in the questionnaire.

Data collection procedure: A pre-tested, structured, standard questionnaire was provided to the CHWs. After obtaining informed consent, they filled in the questionnaire, and handed it back to the investigator.

Data processing and analysis/statistical analysis: The collected data was entered and analysed through SPSS Version 26.

Ethical Clearance: The ethical clearance was obtained from the Institutional Ethics Committee (MDC/JNMCI/74).

Results

The mean age of the participants was 41.91 years. Majority were Hindu (79.1%). Most of the participants had completed high school (51.4%). 25.7% of the participants belonged to socioeconomic class IV, according modified B.G.Prasad classification. 34.3% said that theirs is the only income in the family. 73.3% did not make any savings and 43.8% had to borrow money in the last month ([Table 1](#)). 22.9% said that salary is the motivation for them to continue working ([Table 2](#)).

Among the participants, 16.19% had low stress, 80.95% moderate stress, and 2.85% high stress ([Table 3](#)).

The major area of stress was role overload (18.3%) ([Figure 1](#)).

The stress scores showed high significant association with the following areas of stress: Role overload, role ambiguity, role conflict, intrinsic impoverishment, strenuous working condition, and unprofitability ([Table 4](#)).

Discussion

Occupational stress among CHWs is seldom addressed. It is a vital aspect as the quality of services rendered by them depends on a stress-free work environment, which will increase performance and productivity of the workers. Hence, the present study assesses the levels and areas of stress among CHWs, so that the problem areas can be identified and resolved.

A community based cross sectional study carried out for a period of 6 months from January 2019 to July 2019 at Kolar, India included 150 ASHAs from 8 PHCs. The results showed that 86.7% perceived that received payment for the work was low, 60.7% had to spend more than 2 hours for walking for the official work, and 35.3% had working hours more than 8 hours. It was also found that 45.3% had mild to moderate anxiety, 9.3% had Moderate Anxiety according to Zung Anxiety scale. 54% had moderate stress according to Cohen's perceived stress scale and 23.3% had personal burnout, 22% had work-related burnout and 2.7% had Client related Burnout of Moderate levels according to Copenhagen Burnout Inventory scale.(9)

A cross-sectional study conducted in 2019 among 347 community health workers of 16 primary health centers of Mangalore taluk, Karnataka. 40.5% of the participants had occupational stress. Various stressors such as under participation, powerlessness, low status, and unprofitability were significantly associated with occupational stress. The findings of this study are similar to the present study.(10)

A study by Sagar S *et al.* in Bangalore among 140 public health care workers showed that 37.1% (52) had mild stress, 52.1% (73) were moderately stressed, and 10.7% (15) were severely stressed, which are similar to the present study.(11)

A study conducted in 2019 among 30 anganwadi workers (AWW) in Rajkot, Gujarat, reported that 81.2% of AWWs experienced moderate level of stress and 18.8% of them reported severe stress. This is in line with the present study.(12)

Conclusion

Among the participants, 16.19% had low stress, 80.95% moderate stress, and 2.85% high stress. The major area of stress was role overload (18.3%).

Recommendation

CHWs are vital for the efficient functioning of primary health services at community level and their role in healthcare and the delivery of various national health programmes is indispensable, so their health and proper work environment should be ensured and safeguarded.

Limitation of the study

A limitation of the present study is that it has been carried out among the CHWs of only one PHC. A larger study including CHWs of various PHCs would produce results that are more generalizable.

Relevance of the study

Occupational stress among CHWs is often an overlooked aspect, and only a few studies have been carried out on this. The present study has clearly established the levels and areas of stress, using a standard questionnaire, among the CHWs of a rural field practice area. This will help in addressing the problems identified more

effectively. The results of this study can also be used to compare with the findings of similar studies in the future.

Authors Contribution

All authors have contributed equally.

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Tables

TABLE 1: SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

S.No.	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
1	Religion		
	Hindu	83	79.1
	Muslim	14	13.3
	Christian	3	2.8
	Others	5	4.8
2	Educational Qualification		
	Primary school completed	3	2.9
	Secondary school completed	17	16.2
	High school completed	54	51.4
	College completed	20	19.0
	Postgraduate degree completed	11	10.5
3	Marital Status		
	Single	4	3.8
	Married	94	89.5
	Separated/ Divorced	4	3.8
	Widowed/ widower	3	2.9
4	Type of family		
	Joint	44	41.9
	Nuclear	54	51.4
	Three-generation	3	2.9
	Broken/ Problem	4	3.8
5	Socioeconomic class		
	1	26	24.8
	2	25	23.8
	3	26	24.8
	4	27	25.7
	5	1	1.0
6	Importance of CHWs’ income to the total household income		
	It is the only income	36	34.3
	Largest part of the household income	28	26.7
	It makes a substantial contribution	20	19.0
	Helps to increase total household income as an add-on to other income sources	21	20.0
7	Saved money in the last month		
	Yes	28	26.7
	No	77	73.3
8	Had to borrow money in the last month		
	Yes	46	43.8
	No	59	56.2

TABLE 2: MOTIVATION FACTORS TO STAY IN JOB

S.No.	Motivation factors	Frequency	Percentage
1	Salary	24	22.9
2	Good working conditions	22	21.0
3	Opportunities for training	14	13.3
4	Social status	21	20.0
5	Opportunity to serve the community	21	20.0
6	Close to family/ home	2	1.9
7	No better options are available elsewhere	1	1.0

TABLE 3: LEVELS OF STRESS

S.No.	Level of stress	Frequency	Percentage
1	Low	17	16.19
2	Moderate	85	80.95
3	High	3	2.85

TABLE 4: CROSSTABULATION BETWEEN STRESS SCORES AND AREAS OF STRESS

	Occupational Stress			P Value
	Low	Moderate	High	
Total score	115(112.5,118)	137(125,142)	165(161,166)	<0.001***
Role overload	15(13,17)	19(17,22)	21(20,22)	<0.001***
Role ambiguity	9(7.5,11.5)	13(11,14)	16(16,18)	<0.001***
Role conflict	12(11.5,14)	15(13,17)	18(16,18)	<0.001***
Unreasonable group and political pressure	9(7.5,10)	12(9.5,15)	16(14,18)	0.001**
Responsibility	7(5.5,8.5)	8(7,10)	9(8,14)	0.081
Under participation	13(11.5,16)	12(9,15)	13(12,15)	0.255
Powerlessness	11(8,13)	9(6,10)	7(3,7)	0.004*
Poor peer group relations	10(8.5,12)	11(9,12)	13(12,14)	0.119
Intrinsic impoverishment	10(8,10)	12(11,13)	14(14,17)	<0.001***
Low status	7(6,8.5)	8(7,10)	11(9,12)	0.004*
Strenuous working condition	9(6,11.5)	12(10,13)	17(14,17)	<0.001***
Unprofitability	3(2,3)	5(3,6.5)	9(9,10)	<0.001***

***Highly Significant; **Moderately Significant; *Significant

Figures

FIGURE 1: AREAS OF STRESS

