Peer Review Report

Review Report on The Mental Health Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Healthcare Workers in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: a Scoping Review
Review, Int J Public Health

EVALUATION

Q 1   Please summarize the main theme of the review.

The main subject of this scoping review was to investigate mental health issues for health care workers (HCW) during the COVID-19 pandemic. HCW are at particular risk due to the increased job burden and stress levels that came up since the COVID-19 outbreak. The authors want to review the existing literature on this topic, focusing on the East Mediterranean region.

Q 2   Please highlight the limitations and strengths.

The study's strength is certainly the investigation of a population in countries where either data is sparse, or where the target population differs from other regions in the world (like HCWs have different burden due to fragile state structures, under-developed health care systems etc.). A limitation is the clarity. The authors should better justify the research questions in their introduction, and re-structure the discussion accordingly, so readers can follow their different main topics they investigate.

Q 3   Please provide your detailed review report to the authors, structured in major and minor comments.

MINOR COMMENTS

Introduction

– Lines 40-41: the authors write "and the unexpected loss of...", does this refer to HCW or to their patients? If to HCW, why is the unexpected loss of friends and family something that's especially found among HCW? Isn't the population in general affected by "unexpected loss"?

– Line 43: Please check if it's appropriate to use "that's" instead of "that is".

– Lines 43-46: I think the claim (and causal statement) made here is too bold. I don't think there's a very clear causal effect for "mentally health HCW" means "productive HCW", and in particular I don't think that a healthy general population is only dependent on mentally healthy HCW. Please rephrase and don't use causal claims without providing evidence for these claims.

– Line 50/51: I think what the authors want to say is that a high prevalence of symptoms occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, as could be shown by a meta-analysis. The current sentence may imply that a meta-analysis was accidentally published during the pandemic and showed something that is not necessarily related to the pandemic. Please rephrase, to emphasize that the meta-analysis refers to the context of COVID-19.

– Line 57: Abbreviation "EMR" was not introduced in the main text before. Please write out the full name once. You provide some more information about the countries included in this region (i.e. name the countries once), maybe you refer to that section so readers know details will follow.

- Lines 61/62: "Unfortunately, the literature on the mental health (...) is expanding" – I think it's good if we have more research on that topic, not "unfortunate". I guess the authors wanted to point out that the increasing prevalence of mental health issues can be seen due to the increasing research about this topic. Please rephrase to avoid misunderstandings.

- Lines 70-72: "Finally, we also strive to serve as a model for future systematic assessments on the mental health consequences of the CODVID-19 pandemic in the EMR countries." – What does this mean?

Methodology

Study design

- Why are the two sub-questions mentioned here, but not the main question? I think research questions should be posed in the introduction.

Literatur search strategies

- Line 84: "limited", probably replace by "initially" or "preliminary"?

Results

- Line 148: Possible type: "counties" or "countries"?

- Line 158 "nearly half of them" is misleading, it's not clear whether the half refers to the 94 from the previous sentence or the total sample. Please revise.

- Line 167: The text says "red line" but I don't see a red line in fig. 3. Please correct.

- Lines 173 following: the description is a bit misleading, as the N's are written as numbers in the text (not inside parentheses), and are not embedded into the sentence with "proper language", like: "The most frequent tools used for anxiety in the included studies were the Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD-7) 35 (37.6%)"
I would suggest: "The most frequent tools used for anxiety in the included studies were the Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD-7) (n=35, 37.6%)".
This formulation is ok: "while 11 (11.7%) of the included studies employed tools..."

- Lines 187 following: you stop reporting N's and only refer to percentages. Please revise to be consistent.

Discussion

- Line 216: Abbreviation "KSA" is not introduced.

- Line 218: "rates of growth" what does this mean? Where does "growth" refer to?

- Line 220 following: Please correct spelling and other typos like punctuation marks etc.

- In general: "HCWs'" – why is there a ' after the s, since it's mostly used as plural, which would be HCWs, not HCWs'.

General

- Please check the language/grammar/style. There are several occurrences where white spaces are missing after comma, period etc. and sometimes there are superfluous white spaces.

MAJOR COMMENTS

Introduction

- Lines 69-70: what is the rational behind investigating "various instruments and methodologies used"? This isn't clear to me after reading the introduction. Please explain, and/or revise the introduction accordingly so it becomes clear why that is also under investigation. Furthermore, an inclusion criteria was "cross-sectional design", so what kind of "methodologies" were expected beyond this study design?

Methodology

Literatur search strategies

- Line 87 following: What does "vocabulary of the database" mean? Why is it relevant? And why isn't the search strategy described (search string etc.)? Were search strings adapted for the different data bases?

Results

- Table 1/2/3 should be better described (title/footnote): it looks like there were hundreds of studies included, but I think that actually some studies looked at different outcomes at the same time. Please be more clear in this regard and add more information to the table title/footer. Readers should fully understand the tables and get all information without needing to read the text.

- In general, it remains unclear why assessment instruments are important for the research question. Either remove these results, or revise the introduction the it becomes clear to readers why these information are useful to answer your research question.

Discussion

- Lines 209-214: How is the topic of access to, quality and safety of health care related to your research question? You investigated stress among HCW. Not sure if this paragraph fits into this discussion.

In general, the discussion could be revised to gain more clarity. Sometimes, argumentation focuses on "stress" or "depression", then authors state that they were "particularly interested in six significant mental health burdens", but only some were reported in detail, others not mentioned. Lines 242-249 discuss the duration from submission to acceptance of studies, but it remains unclear how this is linked to the research questions posed in the introduction. It seems like the authors include much more findings in the discussion than would be expected by readers, based on the introduction. Or lines 254-256: Why do the authors mention the checklist here? How does this relate to their main research interest of this scoping review? I think the discussion will become clearer when the authors probably provide a more visible structure, like "findings on mental health issue" and "quality of results based on methodological issues", because it seems to me that this was one of their aims – providing an overview on mental health of HCW during COVID-19 ("what is known?") and how much evidence do we have ("can we trust the results because appropriate study designs and instruments were used to assess and measure mental health").

PLEASE COMMENT

Q 4 **Does the reference list cover the relevant literature adequately and in an unbiased manner?**

Yes.

Q 5 **Does this manuscript refer only to published data? (unpublished data is not allowed for Reviews)**

Yes.

Q 6 Does the manuscript cover the issue in an objective and analytical manner

Yes.

Q 7 Was a review on the issue published in the past 12 months?

No.

Q 8 Does the review have international or global implications?

Yes.

Q 9 Is the title appropriate, concise, attractive?

In general, yes, however, the title contains an abbreviation (EMR), which is probably not instantly clear to readers. Furthermore, there's a sentence inserted ("pandemic's aftermath"), so the title consists of three parts, which is confusing. I suggest removing "pandemic's aftermath".

Q 10 Are the keywords appropriate?

COVID-19 is missing, since the review investigates the particular situation in a pandemic context.

Q 11 Is the English language of sufficient quality?

Not fully, there are several occurrences where white spaces are missing after comma, period etc. and sometimes there are superfluous white spaces. Else, quality of language seems sufficient.

Q 12 Is the quality of the figures and tables satisfactory?

No.

QUALITY ASSESSMENT

Q 13 Quality of generalization and summary

Q 14 Significance to the field

Q 15 Interest to a general audience

Q 16 Quality of the writing

REVISION LEVEL

Q 17 Please take a decision based on your comments:

Major revisions.