

In the experiences' of NHS professionals what impact, if any, has stress related to the COVID-19 pandemic had on their current/long-term mental health and can talking therapies help?

Aim/Purpose: We aimed to explore the stress levels experienced by NHS professionals who worked throughout the pandemic to ascertain the impact this had on their current/long term mental health. Our purpose is to inform counselling practitioners of our findings.

Design/Methodology: Following BACP guidelines for research in counselling/psychotherapy (Mitchels, 2018), four NHS workers self-selected to be our respondents. Participants were audio-recorded during semi-structured interviews.

Conclusions/Implications: As our respondents appeared to prefer reliance on peer-support, there is strong indication here suggesting a counsellors' lack of shared lived experience might be a barrier to effective therapy. It is also possible that offering talking-therapy, during this on-going traumatic experience for NHS professionals, might be currently inappropriate as our respondents feared the loss of control that it seems they deem necessary to maintain effectiveness in their work.



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Results/Findings: It appears respondents' have experienced significant negative impact on their mental health since the onset of the pandemic. Fear/anger was expressed at being exposed to a deadly virus and profound concern for personal safety was high; Participants also disclosed being overwhelmed by patient death rates, their own levels of uncertainty around effective medical procedures and feelings of being unappreciated/taken for granted at work; which led to increased emotional/physical exhaustion. Our participants were affronted by the weekly public display of appreciation; experiencing this as another example of inappropriate support. However, concerns were expressed around accepting the minimal/inappropriate support (as it was experienced). These concerns specifically included fear of losing control/being misunderstood; instead respondents appeared to prefer reliance on peer support/mindfulness. All participants disclosed concern for the long-term impact on their mental health.

Research Limitations: The relatively small respondent group may limit generalisation of our findings (McLeod, 2003) and as our analysis was based on phenomenological principles findings may be considered subjective.