

# Impact of the Covid 19 Pandemic on the Mental Health of Pharmacy Practitioners

Okello VO\*

Post graduate counseling psychology student, Kenyatta University, Kenya

**\*Corresponding author:** Osoo Victor Okello, Post graduate Counseling Psychology student, Kenyatta University, Kenya, Email: vosoo.vo@gmail.com

**Received Date:** June 24, 2024; **Published Date:** July 24, 2024

## Editorial

As a mental health practitioner and an advocate for the same, it would be unfortunate for me to avoid this discussion. So much has happened since the last time we had our annual scientific conference, even in our branches so much has happened. It's sad that physical meetings where we usually come up together to encourage and motivate each other and air out our challenges and grievances have not happened but we appreciate the idea was noble and it aimed at ensuring that we were all safe and protected from the upsurge of the disease.

So many trainings on capacity building have been done and I believe we have learnt so much during the two years or so this pandemic has been together with us. My key area of concern and interest during this time was assessment of the mental impact the pandemic has had on health care workers and the society in general. We can all agree that there have been serious repercussions the pandemic has posed on the society and as members of the society we were not spared. We have gone through significant losses. The losses experienced included loss of finances due to a deep in our business, loss of loved ones, loss of employment, loss of social networks, loss/death of colleagues among many more.

My aim in this article is to share briefly on specific mental health impact the pandemic has had on pharmacy personnel and discuss briefly remedial measures that we can use to be able to cope since we aren't sure how long this pandemic will be with us considering the various mutations and different strains and waves that are talked about so often. My disclaimer is that I have not seen a specific study published in any international journal about this topic in Kenya but I will

borrow from studies done in other countries and personal experiences, stories and observation done here in Kenya.

According to Johnston K. (2020) in his study published in the International Journal of Clinical pharmacy he noted that 20% of his respondents who were pharmacy practitioners experienced anxiety, 25% were depressed, 39% were emotionally distressed while 8% had insomnia. There were also other minor mental challenges that I invite all of us to read more on. Having interviewed both from the community pharmacy and hospital pharmacy staff they noted no significant difference of the results obtained. I can authoritatively state that in my engagement with my pharmacy colleagues most of them have shared the same sentiments and challenges where anxiety and depression seems to be the leading mental health concern among my comrades. This can be traced from the loss of business and or employment where one had a stable income precovid and things just went south, most lost stocks as expiries while business went as low as 50% less. With financial obligations and bills to pay life has not been so easy. For some the death of their parents, children and or spouses made things worse and tough for them since these are usually the source of social support during challenging emotional times. This therefore left them vulnerable to depression and other mental challenges especially for those who had close emotional ties with their departed family members and colleagues.

In another study done in China and Italy the researchers noted that 50% of pharmacy practitioners were experiencing traumatic distress. Burnout was also reported as a common feature among our colleagues and I believe we can attest to this. The explainable cause could probably be due to the sickness and death of colleagues made the workload

to increase since the organizations could not employ a replacement especially for those who went for two weeks to recover. Increase in work load lead to increase in working overtime thus emotional exhaustion and fatigue. Companies were also experiencing challenges with payment of employees in some cases due to liquidity challenges and this made it worse for pharmacy staff in that they work so many hours yet their pay delay and they are not able to meet their financial obligations. The inability to meet their financial obligation was also stated to be causing anxiety and a source of distress.

A very distinct challenge for pharmacy practitioners was the medication supply challenges. This created a lot of distress and anxiety among pharmacy managers in that during the initial phases there was procurement challenges and delays plus serious expiries and stock outs of essential medicines and pharmaceutical products. The pressure was worsened by our other colleagues and patients who expected the pharmacies to supply them regardless. Accruing of the products was also prohibited by the escalation of the cost of medical and pharmaceutical products including protective gears some of the costs went up with over 300%. Fear of exposure to the pandemic, lack of adequate information

to share with the community especially for community pharmacy staff among others. Some of the challenges faced by male pharmacy staff included depersonalization, client incivility, and social detachment among the rest.

In another study done in Canada it was noted that 47% of pharmacy practitioners needed psychological support since the Covid pandemic had affected them in some way. Some of the risk factors that were noted to predispose pharmacy workers to mental health challenges included but was not limited to high risk of exposure to the Covid 19 pandemic, fear of social stigma, lack of organizational support and limitations brought about by the quarantine period.

The challenges are many but I would kindly desire to conclude with a few things that can help mitigate the challenges of mental health. I would wish to encourage all of us to be our brother's keeper, offer each other social support, provision of PPEs by employers, infection control, getting time off to unwind and relax with family and close friends. It would also be very important to always seek counseling and guidance when we realize that our physiological response is inhibiting our normal functioning.