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Experiences of Healthcare Workers in Long-Term Care during COVID-19: A Scoping Review

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Impact of COVID-19 on LTC

1

- COVID-19 impacted profoundly on older adults and LTC services.

2

- 93% of the deaths were individuals aged 60 or older during COVID-19.¹

3

- Severe staffing shortages. Canadian LTC faced staffing challenges (86%) in 2020.²

4

- There were infrastructure issues in LTC, including outdated buildings and technology.

Note: LTC = Long-term care

HCWs' Mental Health

1

- In several studies, HCWs in LTC were observed with mental health issues during COVID-19.³

2

- Anxiety, panic attacks, and depressive symptoms were more prevalent among HCWs.

3

- Despite these challenges, little was known about the unique experiences of HCWs at LTC.

4

- Our review explored HCWs' experiences in LTC during COVID-19, focusing on mental health impact and their unique challenges.



Study Design

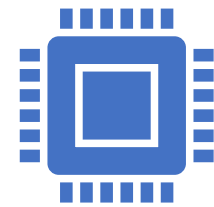
This is a scoping review and we followed Arksey and O'Malley's six-step methodological framework.⁴

1. Identifying a research question;
2. Identifying relevant studies;
3. Selecting a study;
4. Charting data;
5. Collating, summarizing, and reporting results;
6. Optional stage, consultation exercise (optional).

Data Sources



An appropriate search strategies were developed with the help of trained librarian



The search was conducted in CIHNAL, AgeLine, PsycINFO, MEDLINE, OVID, and Google Scholar.

Criteria of Included Studies

Inclusion Criteria:

- Peer-reviewed empirical research studies
- Published in English
- Study period: March 1, 2020, to June 1, 2022
- No geographical restrictions for a comprehensive global perspective.
- Encompassing qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method studies.

Exclusion Criteria:

- Review studies, commentaries, and policy reports/briefs.



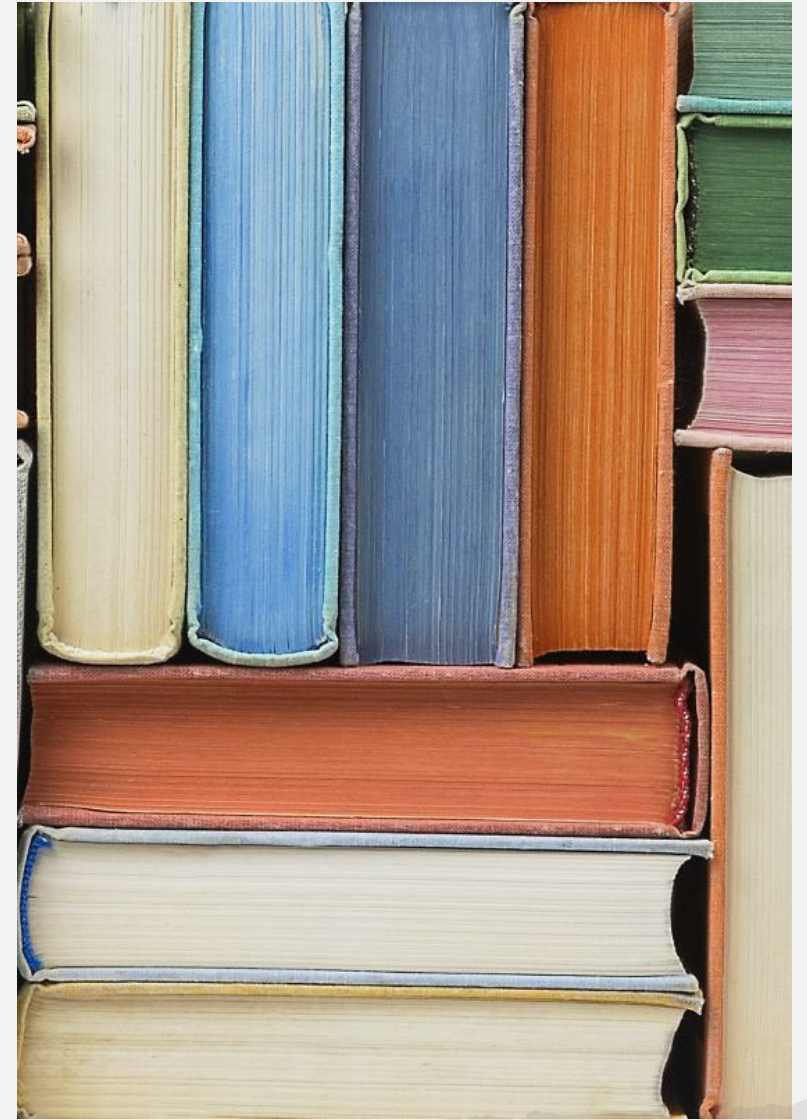
Literatures

Our search identified a total of **25,708** records.

We included **40** relevant studies after evaluation and screening.

They are:

- 18 (45%) qualitative studies
- 14 (35%) quantitative studies
- 8 (20%) mixed-method studies



Thematic Analysis in a Nutshell

Our analyses revealed three interrelated themes of all findings:



1. Carrying the load
(**moral distress**)



2. Building pressure and
burning out
(**emotional exhaustion**)



3. Working through it
(**a sense of duty to care**)

Carrying the Load (moral distress)



Carrying the load (moral distress) refers to the cognitive, socio-emotional, and psychological burden on HCWs during COVID-19.



25 out of the 40 studies reported negative emotions and internal struggles that HCWs experienced during COVID-19.



These emotions included deep sense of **sadness, helplessness, anger, frustration, discomfort, and fatigue** caused by high-intensity work and concerns for residents.



HCWs also reported uncertainty, fear, and a sense of devaluation.

Carrying the load

Feelings of moral distress

“They’re literally smothering to death; they’re literally choking to death. And all you can do is sit there and hold their hand and try to make them comfortable... This possibly could have been prevented”

US nurse

Building Pressure and Burning Out (emotional exhaustion)

- This refer to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors faced by HCWs as job demands increased during pandemic.
- **20 out of the 40 studies** reported various symptoms associated with burnout that HCWs experienced at LTC during COVID-19.
- Our findings of burnout symptoms were categorized as following:
 - **Physical:** chronic fatigue, and extreme exhaustion
 - **Emotional:** fear, anger, and frustration
 - **Cognitive:** mental fatigue, and difficulty in making decisions
 - **Behavioral:** cynicism, and negativism



Working Through It (a sense of duty to care)

- Working through it refers overcoming the structural and systemic barriers persisted in the LTC sector.
- **22 out of the 40 studies** reported concerns about work environment during COVID-19.
- These concerns include the following:
 - Facility size
 - Age of the home (e.g., narrowing hallways, shared accommodations)
 - Short-staffing
 - Lack of preparedness and safety
 - Lack of resources such as personal protective equipment



Working through it

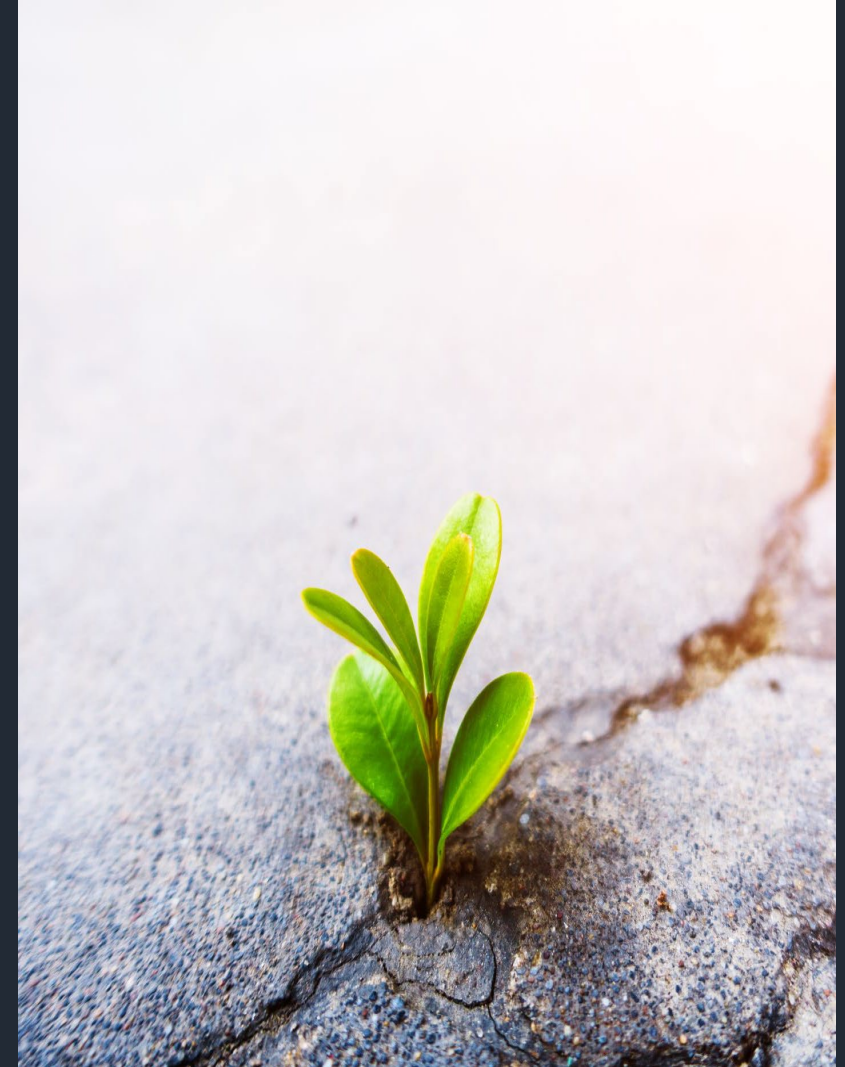
Overcoming stigma & racism yet, feeling a sense of duty to care and obligation to residents

“I’ve had so many people say to me in my personal life, ‘I’m still going to work even if I test positive’ because I can’t afford not to work”

UK nurse

Implication in LTC

- Our study identified a multitude of workplace factors which impact HCWs' job performance and wellbeing.
- Our findings also point to areas for improvement within and beyond the LTC context to support HCWs and residents/ patients alike.
- Implement promising strategies in response to the growing need for expanded HCW support, such as:
 - Wellness supports
 - Mental health care policies
 - Creating more safer and healthy work environment
 - Incentive programs
 - Appropriate recognition
 - Recognize potential psychological difficulties
 - Protect the psychological and mental health
 - Specialist counselling
 - Remote psychological first aid and online platforms
 - Strong leadership



Future Research

Researchers and decision-makers should support HCWs in LTC. Based on our study, **we recommend following questions** to be considered in the future research in LTC:

- How existing workplace supports have fallen short in the context of COVID-19.
- How and to what extent current promising approaches at various levels (e.g., directed funding mechanisms, wellness coaching) can be administered in additional settings/contexts.
- How specific subgroups of HCWs in LTC (e.g., racialized women) can be empowered and protected from disproportionate burden.

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Next steps...



Healing the Healer's Project

TEAM: Sheila Boamah (PI); Brenda Vrkljan, Elizabeth Alvarez, Rachel Weldrick, Sandra Moll (co-Is); Scott Mitchell (PKU)



GOAL: Identify strategies at **individual**, **organizational**, and **system level** to lessen or prevent the effects of burnout and mental distress experienced by healthcare workers in LTC.



RECRUITING: Personal Support Workers (PSW), Nurses (RN, RPN, NPs), Physicians, Social workers, Physiotherapist; Occupational therapist, LTC directors; manager, Administrators, Policy makers



For further information or to participate, please contact us:



click on [this Healer's Project link](#)



email: healers@nurseworklife.com



webpage: <https://ilivee.ca>

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