Coping, dealing with stress and adapting to the 'new norm': A qualitative analysis of the narratives of mental health workers during the COVID-19 pandemic

The importance of peer and team-based support, reflective supervision and visible leadership in coping and adapting to the mental health challenges associated with the pandemic

👤 **Cogan, N., Deakin, K., Archbold, H., Griffith, B., Saez Berruga, I., Smith, S. & Tanner, G.**

INTRODUCTION

Rapid research has reported that the uncertainty associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and its containment measures has had adverse mental health effects in previously healthy people and especially in people with pre-existing mental health problems.

Efforts have been made to adapt the delivery of mental health care to the demands of COVID-19.

Little research has considered the impact on mental health workers (MHWs).

METHODS

Qualitative research design based on semi-structured, in-depth interviews.

One to one, online interviews were conducted with MHWs (N = 30) working on the frontline of mental health services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and managed using NVIVO. Qualitative data was analysed using an inductive thematic approach.

RESULTS

Thematic analysis suggested the following themes were important to mental health workers in adapting to new ways of working during the pandemic and maintaining their own mental wellbeing:

Self care as essential to caring for self while caring for others.

Peer support in helping each other adapt and cope.

> We would do a virtual tea break on a Friday afternoon, um, and one of my colleagues who's trained in mindfulness set up a virtual mindfulness group. We were quite proactive about making sure we were still connected (Ellen).

Increased perceived team resilience helps mitigate against the adverse impact that COVID-19 related stressors have on MHWs' mental wellbeing.

Visible and supportive leadership is essential in helping staff gain access to current and accurate information on COVID-19 and in helping workers adapt to constant change.

DISCUSSION

The implications of these findings at both the individual and organisational level, emphasise the importance of both peer and team-based support in alleviating the negative impact that COVID-19 has on MHW's mental wellbeing.

The importance of supportive and reflective supervision and visible leadership was emphasised by MHWs.

> I think the managers have made a massive effort to make it supportive for us, you know, my manager has talked to us about "what d'you want? What d'you think would support you?", there's been like a lot of effort into making us feel comfortable (Lisa).

The need to provide psychological support to MHWs who need it was recommended.