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Comprehensive Review Of Health Workers' Roles In Mental Health Management In Hospitals

Ali Abdelnour[1], Ali H. Asiri[2], Khalid Adlan Ghazi Alshamrani[3], Abdulaziz Alkhunayfir[4], Nada Abdelwahab Salih[5], Reemana Waleed M Alsudais[6], Taif Ghurmullah Alghamdi[7], Khalid Abdullah Hassan Hazazi[8], Wala Ali Hasan Al Dhaheri[9], Abdullatif Sulaiman Alharbi[10], Zainab Ali Alsalem[11], Raghad Mohammed Al Shehri[12], Anwaar Alawneh[13]

[1]MUDr.MD.MRCS-RCPhSG.FRCS(CTh) Eng, Cardiothoracic Surgeon, St James's Hospital, Leeds, Bexley Wing, Beckett St, Harehills, Leeds LS9 7TF
[2]Psychiatry Department, Abha Psychiatric Hospital,
[3]Intern GP, University Almaarfa
[4]Biomedical Engineering, Department of Medical Services, Ministry of Interior, 10RT0303126,
[5]Orthodontist, 19010037
[6]College of Medicine, King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
[7]Physiotherapy, 22438094
[8]Epidemiologist
[9]GP, Elrazi University
[10]Nursing, Al-Turaq Health Center, Classification Number, 06RN5801
[11]Senior Nurse Student
[12]Respiratory Therapy, Classification number: 22386077
[13] 6the year medical student, University of Jordan

Abstract

The psychological well-being crisis of HCWs has been a pressing problem in hospitals, driven by global health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic that had claimed over 2.85 million lives as of April 2021. The current review provides an extensive discussion on the various facets of HCWs' functions in the management of mental well-being through their contribution to direct patient care, personal self-care practices, and organizational roles in the elimination of psychological distress. It examines the profound impact of occupational stressors—i.e., workload overload, exposure to infectious disease, lack of resources, and societal demand—on HCWs' mental well-being. The review combines findings from systematic reviews, meta-analyses, cross-sectional research, and qualitative studies to highlight high prevalence rates of mental health disorders like burnout (experienced by as many as 45.8% of HCWs in some regions), anxiety (44.3%), depression (53.6%), insomnia (41.1%), and PTSD. It evaluates the effectiveness of interventions, from mindfulness-based stress reduction, peer support, reflective practice groups, resilience training, and co-production models that promote HCWs to collaborate together with patients. Particular emphasis is given to challenges in low-resource settings, e.g., Kenya, where only 34% of HCWs undergo formal mental health training after basic education. The review identifies major gaps in training, gaps in the distribution of resources, and gaps in systemic interventions and recommends viable solutions to policymakers, hospital administrators, and researchers. These are rigorous training programs, systematic organizational reform, and the development of psychosocial safety climates to reduce burnout and enhance resilience. By addressing these challenges, this article aims to highlight the central contribution of HCWs in mental health management and the urgency for prompt focus on their psychological well-being in order to sustain high-quality healthcare provision globally.

Keywords: Healthcare workers, mental health management, hospital settings, burnout, psychological well-being, mindfulness interventions, peer support, co-production, COVID-19, resilience training,

organizational interventions, psychosocial safety climate, low-resource settings, mental health training, patient care outcomes, occupational stressors.

Introduction

Healthcare workers (HCWs) such as physicians, nurses, clinical officers, allied health scientists, and nonclinical staff are the pillars of managing mental health in hospital settings. Their roles range from the diagnosis and treatment of disorders of the mind to attending to their own psychological well-being in the face of extreme occupational stress. COVID-19 pandemic, which overwhelmed the healthcare systems across the world, brought unprecedented pressure like additional patient loads, enhanced risk of infection, and shortage of resources, leading to more mental issues among HCWs. Studies show mind-boggling prevalence rates of burnout (45.8%), anxiety (44.3%), depression (53.6%), and PTSD, particularly among front-line workers. These conditions affect not only the own welfare of HCWs but also the quality of care of patients, since a scoping review of 56 articles in 16 nations determined that there was a direct connection between HCWs' mental welfare and patient outcome **(1).**

Systemic reasons such as resource shortages, micromanaging, and limitations of professional autonomy have been emphasized by the World Medical Association as being core to HCWs' psychological distress. In resource-constrained settings like Kenya, the issue is further aggravated by inadequate training, with just 34% of HCWs having had formal mental health training post-basic training, and just 12% of health facilities having adequate infection prevention supplies. These gaps underscore the significance of developing a clear comprehension of HCWs' roles in managing mental health and the use of effective interventions for their support **(2).**

This review provides a comprehensive analysis of HCWs' contribution to mental health care in hospitals, founded on an extensive literature base encompassing systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and case studies. It discusses their role in direct patient care, self-care action, and organizational interventions, as well as threats arising from occupational stressors, training deficiencies, and gender-related hazards. Evidence-based interventions like mindfulness, peer support, resilience training, and co-production are rated on their effectiveness. The review also takes into consideration the particular problems faced in low-resource settings and offers long-term recommendations to enhance HCWs' mental health support needs with the ultimate goal of improving patient care outcomes and the resilience of healthcare systems

1. Roles of Healthcare Workers in Mental Health Management

Mental health management in hospital institutions is an important area where healthcare workers (HCWs), including physicians, nurses, clinical officers, allied health professionals, and nonclinical workers, play a vital role. Their functions are four-fold, which consist of direct patient care, self-care practice to maintain their own mental wellness, advocacy and education, interdisciplinary collaboration, organizational contributions, and policy and systemic change leadership. These functions are crucial not just for the management of patients' mental well-being but also for HCWs' resilience maintenance and the general effectiveness of care delivery. Subsequently, we explore these roles in greater detail, referencing evidence from systematic reviews, meta-analyses, cross-sectional studies, and qualitative studies, emphasizing challenges and opportunities, particularly in high-stress and limited-resource settings **(3).**

Direct Patient Care

HCWs are the initial mental health professionals in hospitals, screening, diagnosing, treating, and managing many mental health illnesses, including depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder,

and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Physicians and nurses often meet with patients who have mental illnesses for the very first time, either in emergency departments, inpatient psych units, or medical/surgical wards. A 2021 cross-sectional study in Kenya revealed that 78% of HCWs had good knowledge of the etiology and symptoms of depression, but only 50% screened for it regularly due to lack of time and insufficient training in pharmacological as well as psychotherapeutic interventions. This is particularly noted in settings of high pressure, such as ICUs or infectious disease wards during the pandemic with COVID-19, where HCWs were treating patients with complex mental health concerns and being at higher risk personally. For example, a Chinese study referenced that 75% of HCWs who treated patients with COVID-19 experienced extreme distress due to fear of infection and observation of patient death **(4).**

Allopathic health workers like psychologists, social workers, psychiatric nurses, and occupational therapists provide specialized mental health care, like CBT, counseling, and rehab programs. They are generally not available in low-resource settings. In Kenya, 15% of hospitals have on-site psychologists, with general HCWs like nurses and clinical officers handling complex cases with limited skills. A 2020 publication in low- and middle-income countries noted that only 20% of hospitals had specialized mental health workers, left to again overload the general HCWs with the provision of entire care **(5).**

Nonclinical staff, such as administrative workers, patient coordinators, and medical records personnel, indirectly contribute by making available mental health services, scheduling appointments, and ensuring continuity of care. But their work is often hampered by inadequate mental health education. In a 2021 study, nonclinical staff scored 30% lower on mental health knowledge assessments than clinical staff, showing a substantial gap in their ability to effectively assist mental health programs **(6).**

HCWs are also crucial in crisis intervention, handling acute psychiatric episodes like suicidal thoughts, psychotic breakdowns, or severe panic attacks. Emergency room nurses and doctors are trained in de-escalating a crisis, giving emergency medication, and getting the services of psychiatric teams. But lack of resources usually prevents timely interventions. A 2020 US study reported that 40% of HCWs in emergency departments reported delays in psychiatric consultation owing to staffing problems, leading to prolonged distress for patients and increased HCW stress. Low-resource settings also lack specialized psychiatric units, with a Kenyan report identifying only 10% of hospitals with inpatient psychiatric beds, forcing HCWs to address crises on general wards **(1).**

Other than acute care, HCWs also facilitate support for persons with chronic mental disorders. Psychiatric nurses, for instance, monitor medication adherence, are in charge of side effects, and provide psychoeducation to patients as well as families. Social workers facilitate access to community resources such as housing or support groups that are crucial for the long-term preservation of mental health. In resource-rich settings, these functions are typically integrated by multidisciplinary professionals, whereas in low-resource settings, general HCWs necessarily undertake them, often with little training or supervision **(7).**

Self-Care and Resilience

Individual mental well-being is required for HCWs to maintain competent patient care, particularly in light of high occupational stressors they encounter. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly increased the prevalence of mental health issues among HCWs, with global studies reporting depression (53.6%), anxiety (44.3%), insomnia (41.1%), distress (31.0%), and burnout (45.8%) in Kenya alone. PTSD was the most prevalent mental health illness globally in pandemic times, with a 2021 meta-analysis determining that front-line HCWs stood at 1.5 times higher risk of PTSD compared to non-front-line

workers, driven by traumatic experience of patient deaths, ethical dilemmas, and resource limitations **(8).**

HCWs employ an array of self-care interventions to foster resilience and cope with these problems. Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) has also widely been adopted, as a randomized controlled trial conducted in 2005 was able to demonstrate a 30% reduction in levels of stress among HCWs after an 8-week MBSR. Deep breathing techniques, meditation, and mindfulness exercises are employed to allow HCWs to manage acute stress and prevent burnout. Yoga interventions have also gained relevance, with a 2020 single-arm clinical trial demonstrating a 25% increase and reduction in burnout and affectivity in HCWs who partake in regular yoga practice **(9).**

Reflective practice groups, such as Balint groups or Schwartz rounds, provide settings for HCWs to be capable of coping with challenging situations and emotional burdens. A Southampton Children's Hospital case study found the worth of virtual and face-to-face Schwartz rounds, with 80% of the subjects reporting reduced levels of stress and heightened emotional resilience. They promote a sense of belonging and a forum for HCWs to share experiences and feelings of loneliness. Computer-assisted resilience training, such as webcourses targeted towards NHS keyworkers, has also proven effective, and 85% of the subjects in a study conducted in 2022 reported that their coping abilities were enhanced after participating in a 6-week program **(10).**

HCWs also employ informal self-care practices, such as work-life balance, peer support, and professional counseling. Stigma and time typically block resources from HCWs to prioritize self-care. In a 2021 qualitative study in Kenya, 65% of HCWs avoided mental health treatment due to fear of professional consequences or social stigma, suggesting the importance of accessible, confidential services **(3).**

Advocacy and Education

HCWs also play an important role in increasing mental health education and awareness among hospitals and communities. Clinicians like doctors and nurses often teach patients and families about mental illness, treatments, and coping techniques, reducing stigma and improving treatment adherence. For example, psychiatric nurses in the UK have been a key professional in delivering psychoeducation, with one study in 2019 recording a 35% increase in medication adherence among patients who received nurse-delivered education **(11).**

HCWs also advocate for systems change to improve the provision of mental health care. In Kenya, the Mental Health Plan of Action (2021-2025) emphasizes the need for HCWs to advocate for increased funding and resources for mental health care. Community health workers in particular bridge the gap between hospitals and communities by conducting outreach programs, educating individuals on mental health issues, and referring clients to care. A 2020 rural Kenyan study found that case detection rates were improved by 40% among community health workers who had mental health screening training, demonstrating their role in the extension of mental health care beyond hospital doors **(12).**

In hospitals, HCWs educate and sensitize their peers on mental health issues, promoting a sense of familiarity and concern. For instance, peer workshops on recognizing burnout and stress have been implemented in some U.S. hospitals, and one 2022 study reported a 20% increase in help-seeking behavior among HCWs with such interventions. However, in limited-resource settings, limited training opportunities essentially bar HCWs from performing this function to the best of their abilities, such that only 34% of Kenyan HCWs possess formal mental health training after primary education **(13).**

Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Hospital care management requires inter-disciplinary work, and HCWs are centrally engaged in care coordination. Physicians, nurses, psychologists, social workers, and pharmacists work together to develop holistic treatment plans to ensure patients receive whole-person care. For example, in schizophrenia care, psychiatrists administer antipsychotics, nurses assign side effects checks, and social workers arrange community support plans, while occupational therapists offer rehabilitation. 2021 Australian research published that hospital readmission of psychiatric patients was reduced by 25% by interdisciplinary teams than by non-collaborative care **(14).**

HCWs also collaborate with external stakeholders such as community organizations, schools, and government agencies to address the social determinants of mental health such as poverty and housing instability. In low-resource environments, where mental health experts are not easily accessible, general HCWs get to play multiple roles within such teams. A Kenyan study in 2020 found that 60% of mental health consultations at rural hospitals were provided by clinical officers who are not specifically trained psychiatricians and should focus more on interdisciplinary care **(14).**

Successful teamworking relies on efficient communication, yet hierarchical organizations and time constraints erode teamwork. A qualitative study from the UK in 2019 established that 45% of HCWs considered poor discipline communication to be a reason for delay in mental health care. Improving coordination of care can be achieved through interdisciplinary teamworking and leadership training by breaking down impediments such as these **(15).**

Organizational Contributions

HCWs are also involved in the management of mental health by getting involved and influencing organizational strategies of psychological well-being. Peer support groups and buddy systems have been effective debriefing interventions for shared experience and reducing burnout. Systematic review of 118 interventions found that peer support programs reduced the likelihood of burnout by 40% when implemented on a consistent basis. These communities provide a platform for HCWs to share challenges, discuss ethical dilemmas, and offer mutual support, fostering friendships and countering loneliness **(9).**

Co-production, which involves joint working between patients and HCWs in developing and evaluating mental health services, is another key contribution. In 2021, a UK study reported that co-production interventions improved the workplace satisfaction of HCWs by 40% and reduced burnout by enabling staff to exert influence over the manner in which the service was being delivered. For example, HCWs within a London hospital worked with patients to develop a peer-support initiative for depression that resulted in improved patient outcomes and staff morale. In Kenya, the Mental Health Plan of Action (2021-2025) facilitates HCW participation in co-production to address gaps in care, particularly in rural Kenya **(16).**

HCWs also shape organizational culture by creating psychosocial safety climates, which emphasize mental health and well-being within workplaces. In 2022, research has shown that the hospitals with a good psychosocial safety climate had 60% less burnout among HCWs. HCWs promote policies aimed at improving the workload, staffing, and resource allocation, such as adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) or breaks. Hospitals in China, including Second Xiangya, implemented HCW-initiated programs on the basis of staff questionnaires, providing material help such as meals, accommodation, and on-site counseling that reduced distress by 35%. **(17).**

HCWs are also involved in quality improvement activities, such as formulating protocols for mental health screening or crisis intervention. For example, American hospital nurses initiated the implementation of a standardized depression screening tool that increased detection rates by 30%.

Again, so often these contributions are limited by organization-bound constraints, such as limited resources and resistance to change, especially within low-resource settings **(9).**

Leadership in Policy and Systemic Change

HCWs, particularly those in leadership roles, like medical directors or nursing supervisors, play a major role in shaping mental health policies and shaping change at the system level. They shape hospital policy for the distribution of mental health resources, staff training, and patient care standards. For instance, a 2020 study in Canada found that advocacy by HCWs in one large network of hospitals resulted in 10% increased expenditure on mental health services. In settings with limited resources, HCWs push for reform at the government level, with this including mental health infrastructure investment. The Kenya Mental Health Plan of Action (2021-2025) was developed with input from a high level of HCWs, who stressed the need for more psychiatric centers and training programs **(18).**

HCWs also lead mental health management research and innovation. Physicians and nurses can participate in clinical trials or quality improvement studies to evaluate new interventions, such as CBT provided through telehealth or mobile apps for stress management. In one study published in 2023, an HCW-led mobile app for mental health support improved self-reporting of well-being by 20% among hospital workers. Through contributions to evidence-based practice, HCWs promote mental health care delivery and policy **(19).**

However, leadership roles do have additional stressors such as the handling of teams during periods of resource scarcity or bureaucratic complexities. One 2021 study suggested that 55% of HCW leaders turned into burnouts because of the dual pressures of clinical and administrative work. Leadership development assistance, such as decision-making and stress management training, is required to enable HCWs to perform this function effectively **(1).**

2. Problems Faced by Healthcare Workers

Occupational Stressors

Healthcare workers (HCWs) are faced with many occupational stressors that impact their mental well-being. Excessive workloads, extended working hours, and exposure to traumatic events are common in hospitals. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these stressors were magnified by the risk of infection—with 75% of HCWs in a Chinese study reporting distress due to inadequate PPE and fear of transmission to family. Media attention and public pressure further intensified stress levels, especially for front-line health workers. In low-resource environments such as Kenya, only 12% of health facilities had proper infection prevention supplies, heightening HCWs' anxiety levels and perceptions of vulnerability **(20).**

Limited Training and Resources

Insufficient mental health training is a key obstacle. In Kenya, 90% of HCWs indicated a lack of specific mental health training within the last five years, resulting in delays in diagnosis and treatment. Nonclinical staff were particularly lower in mental health assessment knowledge, which hinders their role in facilitating mental health programs. Resource constraints—such as a deficiency of psychological resources or counseling services—also contribute to mental health problems. A 2020 study found that only 20% of hospitals in low- and middle-income countries offered targeted mental health care to HCWs, compared to 60% in high-income nations **(20).**

Gender and Role-Specific Risks

Professional and gender roles influence mental health risk among HCWs. Female HCWs—who form the majority of the workforce—have a higher risk of severe depression and anxiety, with a 1.8 times

higher odds ratio for female nurses in a 2021 study compared to males. In Kenya, front-line doctors reported higher psychological distress than nurses, possibly due to cultural expectations or decision-making responsibilities. These findings differ from international trends, where nurses generally show more distress, and highlight the need for context-specific interventions **(21).**

Stigma and Cultural Barriers

Mental health stigma deters HCWs from seeking assistance. In most cultures, acknowledging psychological distress is considered a sign of weakness, especially among physicians. A Kenyan qualitative study found that 65% of HCWs avoided mental health treatment due to fear of professional punishment or social stigma. Limited access to confidential counseling further contributes to untreated mental illness **(22).**

3. Evidence-Based Interventions

Individual-Level Interventions

Individual-level interventions equip HCWs with tools to manage stress and build resilience. Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) has been extensively studied—a 2020 meta-analysis reported a 25% reduction in anxiety and 20% reduction in depression among HCWs receiving MBSR. Yoga interventions, as seen in a 2020 single-arm clinical trial, improved affectivity and reduced burnout. Project ECHO, a web-based mental health platform, was implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic to connect HCWs with specialists for resilience and coping support. The NHS keyworker program's internet-based resilience training led to an 85% improvement in coping skills, as reported by participants **(23).**

Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) has also shown promise. A 2019 randomized trial found that telehealth-delivered CBT reduced depression and anxiety symptoms by 30% among HCWs. These interventions are most effective when tailored to HCWs' specific needs, such as coping with death-related trauma or ethical dilemmas **(23).**

Organizational-Level Interventions

Organizational-level strategies are essential in addressing system-level factors contributing to mental health problems. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health's Impact Wellbeing campaign promotes changes such as reduced workloads and improved staffing ratios. Hospitals with adequate staffing reported 50% lower burnout rates in a 2022 report. Supportive supervision, good communication, and access to break times also significantly ease psychological distress **(24).**

In China, Second Xiangya hospitals introduced holistic support including on-site psychological counseling, stress management workshops, and basic needs support (e.g., meals, accommodation), leading to a 35% reduction in reported distress. The UK's NHS also developed "wobble rooms"—designated spaces for HCWs to unwind—improving morale and reducing absenteeism **(24).**

Co-Production and Systemic Approaches

Co-production involving both HCWs and patients in intervention development has been promising. A UK study in 2021 found that co-production increased job satisfaction by 40% and reduced burnout through a shared sense of purpose. Kenya's Mental Health Plan of Action (2021–2025) advocates for HCW involvement in designing mental health services, especially in rural areas **(25).**

However, systemic interventions are underutilized. Only 17% of 118 interventions reviewed were classified as high-quality, primary prevention programs. Most focused on secondary or tertiary care

(e.g., counseling, crisis intervention), without addressing root causes like excessive workload or lack of resources **(25).**

Technology-Based Interventions

Technology is increasingly used to support HCW mental health. Mobile apps offering guided meditation, stress tracking, and online counseling are widely adopted. A 2023 review found a 20% improvement in self-reported well-being among HCWs after three months of app use. Virtual reality relaxation tools for ICU nurses are also being developed, with early results indicating stress reduction. However, in low-resource settings, only 30% of HCWs reported regular internet access, limiting the reach of such tools **(26).**

4. Gaps and Recommendations

Gaps in Current Practices (27).

1. **Restricted Systemic Interventions:** Most interventions focus on individual-level solutions like mindfulness or counseling, without addressing systemic contributors such as workload.
2. **Training Deficiencies:** Mental health training—especially for nonclinical staff—is inadequate, limiting their ability to provide whole-person care.
3. **Geographic Disparities:** Most research is focused on urban hospitals, with limited data from rural or community settings.
4. **Underreporting of Outcomes:** Many intervention programs do not publish their results, hindering development of evidence-based best practices.
5. **Cultural and Stigma Barriers:** Stigma around mental illness continues to prevent HCWs from seeking help, especially in conservative cultures.
6. **Resource Constraints:** Limited access to psychological care and training resources impedes mental health efforts in low-resource settings.

Recommendations (27).

1. **Enhance Comprehensive Training Programs:** Implement continuous, mandatory mental health education—including pharmacological, psychotherapeutic, and crisis management—for all HCWs, clinical and nonclinical alike.
2. **Foster Systemic Organizational Reforms:** Address workload, staffing, and psychosocial safety through programs like the Impact Wellbeing campaign.
3. **Expand Co-Production Activities:** Involve HCWs and patients in intervention design and evaluation to enhance ownership and outcomes.
4. **Broaden Research in Low-Income Settings:** Conduct research in rural and community settings to address geographic disparities.
5. **Facilitate Outcome Publication:** Encourage hospitals and researchers to publish results of interventions to build an evidence base for best practices.
6. **Break Through Stigma:** Launch stigma-reduction campaigns and offer confidential counseling to encourage HCWs to seek support.

7. **Leverage Technology:** Scale up mobile and telehealth interventions, while improving infrastructure to ensure access in low-resource areas.

5. Future Directions

HCWs' mental health remains a critical issue to be addressed through future research and policymaking. The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in screening and intervention delivery offers scalable support solutions. AI-powered chatbots, for instance, could provide real-time emotional support—though concerns over privacy and data security must be resolved **(28).**

Longitudinal studies are necessary to assess the lasting impact of interventions like co-production and systemic reform. Global health organizations must standardize mental health education for HCWs, especially in middle- and low-income countries. Moreover, collaboration among governments, institutions, and international bodies is crucial to closing the resource gap and ensuring equitable access to mental health care **(28).**

The World Health Organization's Mental Health Atlas 2020 highlights the need for integrated mental health services in primary care—a goal that demands proper training and support for HCWs. Community-based systems and partnerships with local organizations should also be explored to extend mental health services beyond hospitals **(29).**

Conclusion

Mental healthcare professionals are essential to both providing and receiving mental health support. As front-line practitioners and participants in institutional reform, they play a vital role in shaping safer, healthier workplaces. The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the psychological vulnerabilities of HCWs, emphasizing the need for scalable, sustainable support systems. Evidence-based solutions—ranging from mindfulness and resilience training to co-production and technology—hold great promise, but systemic barriers like inadequate training, stigma, and resource scarcity must be overcome.

Prioritizing the mental well-being of HCWs can strengthen individual resilience, enhance patient satisfaction, and improve the global health system. Policymakers, administrators, and researchers must now act collaboratively to implement lasting, systemic change.

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