

## MEDICINE AND PHARMACY

# The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health of medical university faculty

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**Background.** The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on all areas of public life. As of March 2023, there have been more than 750 million confirmed cases, including nearly 7 million deaths [1]. Along with the colossal health deterioration, there is the evidence of the COVID-19 adverse effects on mental health. Numerous studies have enlightened the symptoms of psychological distress and suicidal behaviors due to fear of the disease, uncertainty, loneliness, and financial losses. In March 2022, World Health Organization (WHO) released “Mental Health and COVID-19: Early evidence of the pandemic’s impact” report [2], estimating the increase in prevalence of major depressive disorder by 27,6% and anxiety disorder by 25,6% during the pandemic. Accordingly, the largest increase in cases of mental impairment was recorded in countries hardest hit by coronavirus infection. Another issue demanding investigation is the mental health of healthcare workers and academic faculty, who were affected differently due to working frontline, medical school closures, and implementing distance learning. Considering the complexity and diversity of functions performed by educators in modern academia, psychological damage, which may be a consequence of the role overload, had certainly become a matter for discussion among scholars.

**Methods.** We conducted comprehensive literature search in PubMed, Scopus, SpringerLink, Google Scholar databases. Articles for inclusion were dedicated to the COVID-19 impact on academic faculty mental health, published from March 2020 to March 2023. Non-English articles and proceedings of conferences were excluded from the review.

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**Results.** From the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, medical educators faced multiple challenges allied with shifting to online learning. Wide-scale school and university closures has obliged the teachers to continue the educational process on digital platforms as ZOOM, Microsoft Teams, Webex Meetings, with no initial preparation. Besides teaching and clinical duties, faculty were obligated by new functions on adjusting curricula, revising study material, creating digital content, mentoring students and younger colleagues, and so forth. In addition to the increased professional workload, child-rearing and caring for older or sick family members have also increased in the light of quarantine restrictions and social isolation [3]. Kramer et al. [4] investigated mental well-being in German university hospital workers and reported on higher rates of subjective burden and stress in staff working in a COVID-19 environment. Due to global disruption of education and research processes brought by the pandemic, faculty physicians reported on higher levels of stress and impaired productivity [5]. In Kazakhstan, there have been an increase in perceived depression and anxiety among women teachers. Moreover, levels of mental impairment were higher in urban areas, rather than rural [6].

**Conclusion.** The COVID-19 has significantly affected the population mental health. However, some groups particularly suffered from pandemic. Since healthcare and education were the sectors hardest disrupted by the pandemic, academic faculty staff were found at their intersection. Dramatically increased burden on faculty has led to escalation of stress, depression, anxiety, and burnout levels. There is a need to enhance psychological support services for educators and develop effective coping mechanisms.

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