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Salivary Cortisol, Subjective Stress and Quality of Sleep among Female Healthcare Professionals

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Stress in the workplace is globally recognized as a risk factor impacting workers' health and workplace safety. Women healthcare professionals are at risk for considerable stress given the demanding nature of their jobs and working conditions in hospitals. This study assesses levels of stress among the female healthcare professional workforce according to measures of their cortisol levels, subjective stress and quality of sleep.

Methods: Using a cross-sectional research design, data on stress was collected from 335 apparently healthy adult women healthcare professionals. Eligible women were asked to provide morning and bedtime saliva samples for analysis of their cortisol levels. Perceived Stress Scale, Stress Symptoms Scale, Brief Coping Scale and Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index were used to assess perceived stress level, symptoms of stress, strategies for coping with stress and sleep quality consecutively.

Results: One third of the women evaluated had below-average morning cortisol levels. Around 57% of women reported moderate levels of perceived stress, with more frequent reporting of symptoms of stress related to vital signs, including heart rate, rapid breathing and back and/or neck pain symptoms. Poor sleep quality was reported by around 60% of study participants. Religion, spiritual beliefs, prayer and meditation were reported to be sources of comfort and relief from symptoms of stress. Participants' physical activity was found to be a predictor of levels of both morning and bedtime cortisol levels.

Conclusion: Evaluating cortisol levels and subjective perceptions of stress could help to identify groups with impaired response to stress and elevated morning cortisol levels. These findings can serve to encourage decision makers to assess and seek to reduce workplace stress among women healthcare professionals to promote their health and productivity and maintain workplace safety.

Biography

Wegdan Bani-issa is a PhD prepared nurse faculty. Dr. Wegdan finished her Masters in nursing from the University of Windsor/Ontario Canada and her PhD studies from the University of Kansas Medical Center, USA. Her main specialization is in diabetes care and management as well as nursing education. She is currently working as an associate professor at the University of Sharjah and conducted several research in the area of diabetes. Additionally, she is interested in using electronic health records and women's health.

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