

COVID-19 Lockdown in New Zealand: Perceived Stress and Wellbeing among International Health Students Who Were Essential Frontline Workers

Summary

Abstract: This study examined the stresses and wellbeing of international postgraduate health and nursing students at a tertiary education institute in New Zealand who were mainly essential frontline healthcare workers during the COVID-19 lockdown. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected by purposeful sampling (n = 43). The study utilised a cross-sectional survey, along with the Short Form of Cohen's Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10), adapted for the COVID-19 lockdown, and followed by semi-structured individual interviews. This study is the first in New Zealand to demonstrate that, with a mean PSS-10 score of 21.7 (27.1), international health students experienced higher than optimal levels of stress, with supporting qualitative data identifying four themes for the sources of stress: (1) familial relationships, (2) essential work, (3) finances, and (4) study. However, these students coped because of the extensive support provided by their education institute and employers.

These students played a critical role in the pandemic's response and made a significant public health contribution by working in the frontline of the COVID-19 outbreak. Considering the global shortage of healthcare workers and understanding the key challenges, means of coping and support provisions, as we have here, offer insights for building and maintaining a resilient and resourceful health workforce through international health and nursing students in New Zealand and elsewhere.