Prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder amongst forensic psychiatry nurses

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ABSTRACT

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has been studied in various working populations in which a degree of exposure to trauma is an occupational hazard. Such populations include assaulted psychiatric nurses. No previous studies were found in literature to inform on the prevalence of PTSD in this group of workers. Furthermore, exposure to assaultive violence may differ with forensic and non-forensic psychiatric nurses.

This study attempts to establish the prevalence in these groups and compares posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms in forensic (n=66) and non-forensic (n=76) psychiatric nurses from acute wards of two NHS hospitals.

It is a cross-sectional survey combining instruments for measuring PTSD, psychological distress, job satisfaction & occupational stress. The post-traumatic diagnostic scale is used for measuring post-traumatic stress symptoms & diagnosing the disorder, whilst the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) is used to measure psychological distress.

Prevalence of PTSD amongst forensic psychiatry nurses, 12.1%, was nearly double that of non-forensic psychiatry nurses, 6.6%, but the difference was not statistically significant. Though the forensic group again had higher measures of psychological distress, the difference in GHQ-12 measures was not statistically significant. Statistically significant findings in the study were that job satisfaction is less in FPN p= .019 and they perceive their job as more stressful p= .019. The forensic psychiatric nurses’ experience of trauma was more likely to be at work than non-forensic nurses, 37.5% and 17.1% respectively. This difference was statistically significant p= .033.

Previous literature on PTSD in this occupational group is reviewed and the findings are compared with previous studies. The implications of this on current theory and practice are discussed and further research recommendations are made. Occupational health implications are also explored.