

CHOICE PROJECT TANZANIA POLICY BRIEF

(TITLE)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (1/2 PAGE)

Mental health (MH) and psychosocial support are crucial for healthcare workers however, often neglected. Barriers towards seeking psychosocial support include stigma, high workload, lack of time and perceived lack of need. Mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts among healthcare workers contributes to medication errors, reduced work performance, poor provider-receiver interaction, loss of empathy to patient care and high staff turnover. Therefore, it is crucial to establish formal processes within healthcare systems to support the mental health needs of healthcare workers. This will ultimately reduce the cost of care and save more lives.

KEY MESSAGE (1/2 PAGE)

Mental health (MH) and psychosocial support are crucial for healthcare workers however, often neglected.

Healthcare workers, particularly physicians, face greater challenges with their mental health and emotional well-being compared to other professions.

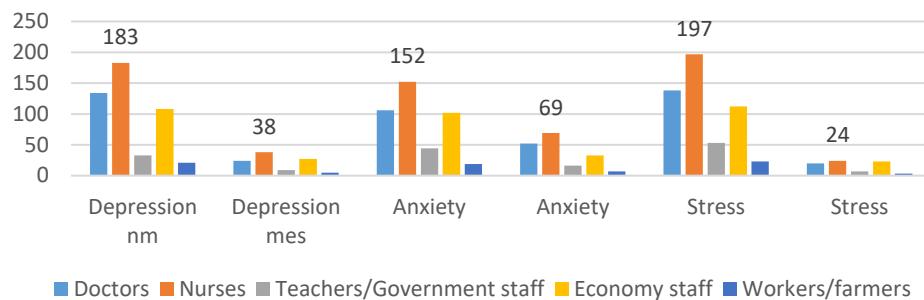
On-site fitness facilities and exercise programs, offering flexible work schedules to allow time for physical activity.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION (MAXIMUM 1 PAGE)

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as a state of well-being whereby individuals recognize their abilities, manage everyday stress, work productively and contribute to their community (World Health Organization, 2022). Achieving mental health requires individuals to understand their psychological and emotional state and have access to mental health care in their community (World Health Organization, 2022).

Healthcare workers, particularly physicians, face greater challenges with their mental health and emotional well-being compared to other professions. The figure below illustrates the DASS-21 scores (Depression, Anxiety, Stress scale) for various professions (Du et al., 2020).

Figure 1, Mental health conditions among healthcare workers in China.



The situation observed in China is expected to be similar in Tanzania. This is because both countries face: high patient-to-doctor ratios, inadequate medical resources, insufficient staffing and lack of mental health support services specifically tailored for healthcare workers. Moreover, in Tanzania, there is lack of investments in research to generate evidence on the burden of mental health (WHO, 2022). The government of Tanzania currently spends less than the recommended US\$2 on mental health (WHO, 2022). This underinvestment highlights the gap for the need of mental health services and available resources to address mental health challenges in the country.

Countries like Australia have a comprehensive mental health policy that includes support for healthcare workers. It has implemented programs that aimed at reducing stress and improving mental health among healthcare professionals which has reflected in better mental health outcomes for these workers compared to countries without a policy (WHO, 2021)

RECOMMENDATIONS (1/2 PAGE)

1.  The Solution The government should increase its budget allocation and regulate mental health service provision.

Currently, the government allocates less than the recommended US\$2 per person for mental health. This financial shortfall leads to a greater burden on the public, as mental health treatment is not typically included in insurance schemes. This investment is crucial for improving overall mental health outcomes and ensuring the well-being of the population.

2. Revise the national health policy to incorporate specific provisions for mental health and psychosocial support for healthcare workers it is essential to revise the national health policies to include dedicated measures for mental health and psychosocial support. This will lead to better healthcare outcomes and a more sustainable healthcare system. This adjustment is crucial for maintaining a healthy, productive healthcare workforce, ultimately benefiting the broader population.
3. Implement physical activities in healthcare institutions

Encouraging and enabling physical activity among healthcare workers is essential for reducing fatigue, burnout, and associated health problems. By investing in the physical well-being of

HCWs, healthcare institutions can enhance productivity, improve healthcare outcomes, and contribute to a healthier economy. This proactive approach is vital for sustaining a robust and effective healthcare system (Balatoni et al., 2023). Therefore, healthcare institutions should implement programs that promote and facilitate physical activity among HCWs. This can include providing on-site fitness facilities and exercise programs, offering flexible work schedules to allow time for physical activity, educating HCWs on the benefits of regular exercise and ways to incorporate it into their daily routines

CONCLUSION (1/4 PAGE)

Addressing the mental health and psychosocial support needs of healthcare workers in Tanzania is crucial for the sustainability and effectiveness of the healthcare system. By implementing the recommended policies, Tanzania can significantly enhance the well-being of its healthcare workforce. This, in turn, will lead to improved health outcomes for the entire population. Prioritizing the mental health of healthcare workers is not only a compassionate approach but also a strategic investment in the nation's overall health and economic stability.

REFERENCES (1 PAGE)

1. Balatoni, I., Szépné, H.V., Kiss, T., Adamu, U.G., Szulc, A.M. and Csernoch, L., 2023, July. The importance of physical activity in preventing fatigue and burnout in healthcare workers. In *Healthcare* (Vol. 11, No. 13, p. 1915). MDPI.
2. Du, J., Mayer, G., Hummel, S., Oetjen, N., Gronewold, N., Zafar, A. and Schultz, J.H., 2020. Mental health burden in different professions during the final stage of the COVID-19 lockdown in China: cross-sectional survey study. *Journal of medical Internet research*, 22(12), p.e24240.
3. Tanzania, D.H.I.S., 2021. Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children.
4. Wang, J., Fitzke, R.E., Tran, D.D., Grell, J. and Pedersen, E.R., 2023. Mental health treatment-seeking behaviors in medical students: A mixed-methods approach. *The Journal of Medicine Access*, 7, p.27550834221147787.
5. Wang, Y., Li, B. and Liu, L., 2020. Telemedicine experience in China: our response to the pandemic and current challenges. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 8, p.549669
6. World Health Organization (WHO). (2020). Mental health in the workplace
7. World Health Organisation (2021). *Mental Health ATLAS 2020*. [online] www.who.int. Available at: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240036703>.
8. WHO | Regional Office for Africa. (2022). *Tanzania holds its first-ever national mental health dialogue*. [online] Available at: <https://www.afro.who.int/countries/united-republic-of-tanzania/news/tanzania-holds-its-first-ever-national-mental-health-dialogue>.

9. World Health Organization (2022). *Mental Health*. [online] World Health Organization. Available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response> [Accessed 31 May 2024].