

# US nurses working in critical care have been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic

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The COVID-19 pandemic has, and will continue to have, a tremendous impact on ICU nurses' mental health and willingness to continue in the

critical care work force, according to research presented at the ATS 2021 International Conference.

Jill Guttormson, Ph.D., RN, associate dean for Academic Affairs and associate professor, College of Nursing, Marquette University, and colleagues sought to describe the impact of COVID-19 on ICU nurses through a survey using valid and reliable measures of burnout, moral distress, depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress symptoms.

The researchers recruited a national sample of nurses who have worked in the ICU during the COVID-19 [pandemic](#) between October and December 2020, through the American Association of Critical Care Nurses newsletters and social media.

Four hundred eighty-eight U.S. critical care nurses responded to the survey. Staff nurses comprised 92.5 percent of respondents, 29 percent were reassigned to a COVID unit other than their usual ICU, and 68 percent experienced a shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE).

Nurse respondents reported higher levels of moral distress and burnout than reported for ICU or trauma nurses prior to the pandemic.

They also stated that they had higher anxiety and depression than reported in the general population and higher risk for having post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than recent veterans or patients after traumatic injury. Symptoms of moderate to [severe depression](#) and anxiety were reported, respectively, by 44.6 percent and 31 percent of respondents. Forty-seven percent of respondents were at risk for having PTSD.

"It is vitally important that we allow space and time for critical care nurses to share their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and that this support not stop when the pandemic is over," stated Dr.

Guttormson. "Based on these results, the pandemic will have long-term repercussions for critical care nurses and may result in nurses leaving critical care or the nursing profession."

This study offers important insights about the mental health of nurses during a global pandemic that can guide the development of tailored interventions for ICU nurses to support them as the pandemic continues, as well as after the crisis, noted the authors. "Interventions are needed that allow and support critical care nurses to make sense of and find meaning from their experiences during the pandemic."

Provided by American Thoracic Society

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