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(IJEPC)**[www.ijepec.com](http://www.ijepec.com)**PSYCHOLOGICAL STRESS AND SUPPORT DEMAND OF  
SOCIAL WORKERS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN  
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This work is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)**Abstract:**

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a strong impact on all aspects of social life, on the spiritual life of all social classes, thereby giving rise to the need for mental health care and support. This study was conducted on 171 social workers in public social institutions in Vietnam to investigate their psychological stress, influencing factors as well as their need for psychological support. Through using the DASS-42 scale and the scale designed by the research team, the survey results showed that 95.3% have psychological stress at different levels: 14% have mild stress, 32.7 % moderate, 37.4% severe, 11.1% very severe. The factors: job characteristics, working conditions, professional capacity, fear of disease and psychological support can explain 42.7% of the psychological stress of social workers. 39.8% of social workers said they needed psychological support. Organizations and societies need to pay attention to and deploy psychological support activities to take care of mental health in general and psychological stress in particular for social workers.

**Keywords:**

Psychological Stress, Social Workers, DASS-42, Covid-19, Viet Nam

**Introduction**

The Covid-19 pandemic appeared in January 2020 and has now spread to countries around the world (Nghia, 2021). This is a dangerous and complex pandemic, it has been negatively affecting many aspects of social life and it is the cause of mental health problems of many social classes (Rupani *et al.*, 2020; Severo *et al.*, 2021).

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Social workers are a group of people operating in the field of providing social work services to disadvantaged groups and communities. Social work is inherently complex and stressful (Lloyd *et al.*, 2011, Wooten *et al.*, 2011). In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, this activity has become even more complicated due to the increase in the need for assistance of social groups and the risk of infection (Runcan, 2020; Redondo-Sama *et al.*, 2020; Golightley *et al.*, 2020). The nature of the activity, the professional environment, etc., puts social workers at risk of mental health problems, especially psychological stress (BASW, 2013; Schraer, 2015).

Around the world, there have been many different studies on psychological stress of social workers in normal conditions and in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Some studies focus on stress levels (Walsh *et al.*, 2005; Blomberg *et al.*, 2015; Schraer, 2015; Palmer, 2020; Sanders, 2020), others focus on cause analysis or predictors (Collings & Murray, 1996; Lloyd *et al.*, 2011) or need for help, measures, and strategies to manage psychological stress of social workers (Wooten *et al.*, 2011).

In Vietnam, in recent years, there have also appeared a number of studies discussing mental health in general and psychological stress in particular of social workers (Center for Social Work Research and Counseling and Community Development, 2012; An *et al.*, 2014; Silk, 2021). But most of these studies are in normal conditions, and there are currently no studies on the psychological stress of social workers in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Research was conducted to clarify the following questions:

1. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, to what extent do social workers have psychological stress and is there any difference from normal conditions?
2. What factors are influencing/coordinating the psychological stress of social workers?
3. In the context of the current Covid-19 pandemic, to what extent do social workers need psychological support? Is there a correlation between the level of psychological stress and the need for psychological help of social workers?

## Methodology And Tools

### *Sample*

The research sample includes 171 social workers in public social institutions in the southern provinces and cities of Vietnam. Including 77 men, 94 women; 46 people have less than 1 year of seniority, 125 have more than 5 years of seniority. These people voluntarily participate in providing information through an online survey program.

### *Measures*

We use the DASS-42 scale to survey the psychological stress status of social workers. Performances are measured through self-assessment of social workers with 4 answer options, corresponding to a score from 0-3: 0 - Not true for me at all; 1- True to me partly, or sometimes only; 2 - True to me most, or most of the time, is true; 3 - Absolutely true for me, or true most of the time. The analysis results show that the scale ensures reliability: Cronbach's Alpha = 0.92.

We designed a scale of 15 items to measure the factors affecting the psychological stress of social workers. The content of the items are statements related to the current job characteristics, working conditions, etc. of the social worker. Each item of the scale includes 4 answer options

for the social worker to self-assess/select, corresponding to a score of 1-4: 1 – Completely incorrect for me; 2 - Only partially correct; 3 – Yes; 4 - Absolutely true for me. The analysis results show that these scales ensure reliability, with Cronbach's Alpha = 0.73-0.88.

The need for psychological support of social workers is measured through a scale, with 4 answer options, corresponding to a score of 1-4: 1 – None; 2 - Low; 3 – Medium; 4 - High.

### **Data Analysis**

The survey results were processed by the statistical software SPSS 20.0.

The psychological stress scale includes 14 expressions with 4 answer options, corresponding to a score of 0-3. We use descriptive statistics to calculate the total score of the scale in each individual, thereby determining the level of psychological stress of social workers. The total score is calculated by adding the scores of the component expressions, then multiplying by a factor of 2 and is evaluated on 5 levels:

<b>Levels</b>	<b>Score</b>
Normal	0 – 14
Mild	15 – 18
Moderate	19 – 25
Severe	26 – 33
Very severe	≥34

The scale of need for psychological support needs of social workers includes 4 answer options, corresponding to a score of 1-4. We use descriptive statistics to calculate the percentage of people with need for consultation at 4 levels: None, Low, Medium, and High.

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to identify factors affecting psychological stress of social workers from the scale of influencing factors.

Inferential statistics (correlation and regression analysis) are used to analyze the influence/predictive level of factors on psychological stress and find the relationship between psychological stress and need for support of social workers.

## **Results And Discussion**

### **Psychological Stress Of Social Workers**

Online self-assessment survey of social workers about their psychological stress on the DASS 42 scale, we obtained the following results:

**Table 1. Frequency And Severity Of Stress In Social Workers**

Levels	Stress, N(%)
Normal	08 (4.7)
Mild	24 (14)
Moderate	56 (32.7)
Severe	<b>64 (37.4)</b>
Very severe	<b>19 (11.1)</b>
<b>Total:</b>	<b>171 (100)</b>

The data in Table 1 shows that 4.7% of social workers say they have no psychological stress, the remaining 95.3% report having different levels of psychological stress (Mild, Moderate, Severe, Very heavy). In which, 14% had mild stress, 32.7% was moderate, 37.4% was severe, 11.1% was very severe. This study found that the number of social workers with severe and very severe psychological stress is quite high. This is a very interesting number.

**Table 2. Stress Of Social Workers Analyzed By Gender And Seniority**

Characteristics		M	SD	Independent Samples T Test
<b>Gender</b>	Male	1.85	0.59	$P=0.518>0.05$
	Female	1.83	0.59	
<b>Seniority</b>	Less than 5 years	2.03	0.75	$P=0.023<0.05$
	Over 5 years	1.78	0.51	

\* Note:  $P$ : significance level,  $p>0.05$  – no difference,  $p<0.05$ : there is a statistically significant difference.

Analyzing the difference in psychological stress levels of social workers by gender and seniority, the results in Table 2 showed that there is no difference by gender but there is a difference by seniority. The group of social workers who have worked for more than 5 years have lower psychological stress than the group of less than 5 years (mean average = 1.78 compared with 2.03,  $p < 0.05$ ). In our opinion, the reason may be that employees who have worked for more than 5 years have better adaptability to work, better ability to control psychological stress, and lower psychological stress levels.

The results of our study are quite similar to the findings of previous studies: Schraer (2015) conducted a stress survey on 2,000 social workers and found that 97% of these were stressed at moderate level or very stressful. Dima *et al.* (2021) found that 87.8% ( $n = 195$ ) felt stressed because of work and 12.2% ( $n = 27$ ) said they were not stressed.

Compared with the recent research results on the stress of social workers in normal conditions of some authors in Vietnam, we found that in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the psychological stress of social workers tend to be more stressed, especially under severe and very severe stress (Lua, 2021).

**Factors Affecting Psychological Stress Of Social Workers**

Through factor analysis, we have identified 5 factors affecting the psychological stress of social workers:

F1. Job characteristics: include the following factors: quantity of work to be done, working time, and nature of work to be done.

F2. Working conditions: including the following factors: tools and means of performing work; support at work from colleagues; job support from superiors.

F3. Fear of Covid-19: includes the following factors: fear of being infected, fear of infected subjects, fear of an outbreak and prolonged Covid-19 pandemic.

F4. Professional competence: includes elements: professional knowledge, professional skills, and professional attitudes.

F5. Psychological support: includes the following elements: family support; organizational support; community support.

**Table 3. Results Of Correlation And Regression Analysis Among Variables**

Factors	M (SD)	r	R <sup>2</sup>
<b>F1.</b> Job characteristics	2.12 (0.75)	0.50*	0.252**
<b>F2.</b> Working conditions	1.76 (0.62)	0.55*	0.301**
<b>F3.</b> Fear of Covid-19	2.26 (1.04)	0.45*	0.162**
<b>F4.</b> Professional competence	1.32 (0.51)	0.46*	0.214**
<b>F5.</b> Psychological support	1.94 (0.84)	0.44*	0.192**
<b>All 5 factors</b>		0.65*	0.572**

\* Note: \* with  $p < 0.05$ , \*\* with  $p < 0.001$

The results of the correlation analysis in Table 3 showed that, all 5 factors F1-F5 are positively correlated with psychological stress of social workers (correlation coefficient  $r = 0.44$  to  $0.55$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). In which working condition is the factor with the strongest correlation ( $r = 0.55$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This means that when factors F1-F5 change, it will lead to changes in psychological stress of social workers in the direction of increasing or decreasing.

The results of univariate and multivariable regression analysis showed that the factors F1-F5 have the ability to explain psychological stress of social workers from 16.2% to 30.1% (predictive coefficient  $R^2 = 0.162$  to  $0.301$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The factor "F3-Fear of Covid-19" has the ability to explain 16.2%, the factor "F5-Psychological support" has the ability to explain 19.2%, the factor "F4-Professional competence", the factor "F1-Working characteristics" has the ability to explain 25.2% and the factor "F2- Working conditions" has the highest explanation at 30.1%. The sum of all 5 factors has the ability to explain 57.2%, higher than the individual factors. Thus, the 5 factors surveyed in this study only explained 57.2% of the psychological stress of social workers, the remaining 42.8% were explained by other factors not within the scope of the study. save this.

We found that the research of some recent authors on the factors affecting the stress of social workers also had similar findings: Lloyd *et al.* (2011) confirmed that the factors were identified as contributing to stress and burnout including the nature of social work practice, work environment, etc. Parton's study (2019) found the most common cause of work stress due to

too much paperwork, long working hours, working culture/customs, .... Raudeliunaite *et al.* (2020) identify factors such as working conditions, employee relations with colleagues, with managers are very influential factors.

### ***Psychological Support Needs Of Social Workers***

In addition to surveying the level of psychological stress, in this study we also surveyed the self-assessment of social workers about their need for psychological support and obtained the following results:

**Table 4. Social Worker Self-Assessment Of Need For Psychological Support**

Levels	N	%
None	103	60.2
Low	47	27.5
Medium	10	5.8
High	<b>11</b>	<b>6.4</b>
<b>Total:</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>100</b>

The data in Table 4 shows that 60.2% of social workers say they have no need for psychological support, the remaining 39.8% have different levels of need for psychological support: 27.5% at low, 5.8% medium and 6.4% high. This result indicates that it is necessary to deploy psychological support activities for social workers in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Through correlation analysis, research results showed that the need for psychological support of social workers is positively correlated with their psychological stress ( $r=0.34$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), psychological stress explains 11.4% ( $R^2 = 0.114$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) the need for psychological support of social workers.

### **Conclusions**

From the survey results on psychological stress and support needs of social workers in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic in Vietnam, we draw the following conclusions:

Most social workers currently have psychological stress, the percentage of employees with severe and very severe stress is quite high.

Psychological stress of social workers is influenced by many different factors, in which factors: work characteristics, working conditions, professional capacity, fear of disease, support psychotherapy has a significant effect.

A sizable number of social workers seek psychological support.

From the research results, we believe that the society needs to have legitimate attention on mental health in general and psychological stress in particular of social workers. psychology at the workplace and in the community to help social workers cope effectively with psychological stress, thereby improving their health and professional performance.

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