

The Effect of COVID-19 on Pharmacy Staff

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Abstract

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been many statistics about how essential workers have been affected. One group that is often left out of this conversation are pharmacy staff. Pharmacy staff are in vulnerable positions at their place of work as they must be in person at their jobs where they come into direct contact with patients, some of whom may be sick, as they distribute medications to patients. They have been at the forefront of the vaccination rollout, COVID testing, and now, booster shots. Despite the importance of their position, little COVID-related research focuses on pharmacists or how the pandemic has affected their overall sense of well-being. To examine this issue, seven pharmacy staff were interviewed who lived and worked in North Carolina about whether and how the pandemic working conditions altered participants' feelings of mental and physical well-being. The findings indicate that many pharmacy employees felt stressed and overwhelmed during the pandemic due to understaffing issues that resulted in participants feeling overworked and overextended. All seven participants also discussed feeling a dramatic decrease in their mental well-being since the beginning of the pandemic. Findings reveal changes to the well-being of pharmacy staff due to working in person throughout the pandemic. There was interest in whether their tasks have changed or become more stressful due to the additional burden of the pandemic. This is essential information to learn about pharmacy staff as they are struggling right now to complete their jobs as they did before the pandemic. If this continues, many people in this field could be affected long term from these overwhelming feelings of stress. The health effects that also could occur from constantly feeling overworked could be detrimental to the life of pharmacy staff⁶. The inclusion of all pharmacy staff, rather than exclusively pharmacists, will help represent a population of people who are often left out of research when they are just as important as pharmacists during this time.

1. Introduction

This research topic is aiming to discover the overall effect that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on pharmacy staff. While mainly focusing on mental health, this research also examines how pharmacy workers balance their need for employment with the risk of being exposed to the virus at work. This risk has been a huge challenge for pharmacy staff as they are often in fear of losing their jobs while also being in fear of spreading COVID-19 or even losing their lives because of virus contraction⁸. The main question of interest is: What impact has COVID-19 had on Pharmacy staff? This is an important study because pharmacy workers are essential, frontline healthcare workers who have been required to attend work in person throughout the pandemic (rather than quarantine and self-isolate). There has been much research on frontline healthcare workers within a hospital setting, but pharmacy staff have been overlooked in the grouping of "frontline healthcare workers." It is also important to note that while the fear of contracting COVID-19 is possibly a huge factor in the weakening of mental health in pharmacy staff, there are also other factors that could be contributing to this such as burnout related to staffing issues in many retail pharmacies. This burnout can be dangerous as it can lead to lower quality patient care as well as multiple impacts on the health of the providers². This

research also helps us to understand the hardships that pharmacy staff have had to endure throughout the pandemic being major deliverers of the COVID-19 vaccine and the most convenient location for sick or concerned community members to go for COVID-19 testing.

Studying this question as is important as the working class must be advocated for by highlighting the issues that they currently face. It is very important to take pharmacy staff and their efforts into account when discussing frontline healthcare. While not necessarily being directly in contact as hospital staff are, being in a retail environment and having to be in contact with the public puts a great health risk on pharmacy staff. Many pharmacists have had to act in place of doctors as many people are coming to the pharmacy to ask what medicine they should be taking and how to treat other problems they may be having¹⁰.

2. Background

What impact has COVID-19 had on Pharmacy staff? Pharmacy employees are considered essential workers; like all employees with this designation, they are overworked, under protected, and underappreciated for much of the work they are pursuing while working during a global pandemic. Essential workers risk their lives every day, as most essential work occurs in-person, heightening the risk of contracting COVID-19 and transmitting it to their families. In addition, pharmacy employees find that they are having to trade off their own mental and physical health in fear of losing their jobs as this is their main source of income⁸. All these factors seem like they could be quite debilitating for the mental health of people having to go through all this¹.

Pharmacy workers are the population of interest because of their huge involvement vaccinating and testing the American public for COVID-19. Most of the published research finds that essential workers have poor mental health outcomes during this pandemic, though what people suffer from varies occupationally. This literature review will assist in finding common themes amongst the mental health in all essential jobs and will possibly relate or compare to the mental health of pharmacy workers specifically.

There are many kinds of essential workers whose mental health has been negatively affected by the pandemic. Essential employees are facing higher amounts of anxiety especially during this time as they are not able to social distance at their places of work and could be in close contact with someone who is not aware they are carrying COVID-19⁹. Essential workers range from low-wage workers, all the way to doctors making well over six figures. It is also important to mention that the studies are from all over the world demonstrating that the mental health of essential workers, specifically pharmacists and pharmacy personnel, has been impacted in negative ways¹⁰. For example, Italy was hit very hard during the beginning stages of the pandemic. Di Tella and colleagues evaluated the mental health of healthcare workers in Italy using a response survey of healthcare workers in different areas of Italy. Rossi and colleagues used a similar web-based study to evaluate mental health problems among frontline and second-line healthcare workers in Italy) using questions about demographics, workplace, and proximity to being infected with COVID-19. Both studies found raised rates of PTSD and depression among healthcare workers along with anxiety and insomnia, etc. This could be due to the number of deaths having to be endured while working on the frontline in COVID-19 wards specifically⁵. De Boni and colleagues also measured depression levels through web surveys in Brazil and Spain while also evaluating anxiety levels and lifestyle through a multidimensional scale that related directly to the COVID-19 pandemic. The results found that unhealthy lifestyles contributed to higher rate of mental health disorders during the pandemic. These unhealthy lifestyles could be due to the number of hours being worked as well as the smaller access to food that essential workers may have because of their efforts and dedication to their jobs.

While there was little research that directly assessed the experiences of pharmacists during COVID-19, one study discussed the specific challenges pharmacists faced including increased number of patient interactions, shortages of medications, and patient stressors being taken out on pharmacists⁶. Burnout is another huge issue that was mentioned that pharmacy employees have had to face during this time. Not only can burnout be negative for the providers as this can lead to substance abuse issues, declining self-care practices, and depression, but this can also be negative for patients². Providers may find it difficult to be more emotionally present for patients which can lead to lower quality care that patients are receiving². This pandemic occurring on top of the many devastating happening in the world at the beginning of 2020 can also majorly contribute to the mental health of essential workers like pharmacy staff in Australia as the pandemic directly followed the major bush fires that happened at the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020. McCallum and colleagues argue that pharmacies are some of the few places that have remained opened throughout Australia's major COVID and bush fire related lockdowns. Community pharmacists provide people with quick and easy access to healthcare assistance as people can just walk into a store and speak to a pharmacist. This has increased the risk to pharmacists due to their lack of personal protection equipment despite their close contact with

the public¹⁰. Distressed calls to pharmacy support lines have also increased in Australia because of these major events that pharmacy staff have had to endure in such a short span.

Grooms and colleagues research are one of the few studies to examine the mental health experiences of essential workers of color. It is known that people of color are being disproportionately affected by COVID-19⁷. Using a National Panel Study of the Coronavirus Pandemic to evaluate how the pandemic was affecting study participants, Grooms and colleagues found that there were higher incidences of mental health problems among people of color than white people⁷. Grooms and colleagues argue that workers who can work from home are privileged because they do not have to risk their lives for their jobs. Grooms and colleagues mention that a huge number of essential workers are made up of people of color so there is a greater risk that people of color are having to endure as they are in-person at their jobs. Along with these issues, there has also been mention the racism that many Asian pharmacists and pharmacy staff have had to deal with as anti-Asian racism has become so prevalent due to misinformation regarding surrounding COVID-19⁶. Lan and colleagues bring up more about the specific risk factors in his study regarding essential retail workers and their risk of infection. Using a cross-sectional study design where PCR COVID-19 test results were used as well as General Anxiety Disorder qualifications and Patient Health Questionnaires, Lan and colleagues found that many of the essential retail grocery clerks were five times more likely to test positive for COVID-19 than the average person⁹. There was also a major finding of asymptomatic people within those positive test results. This is showing that these retail workers were at a high risk of contracting and spreading COVID-19 because they do not have the privilege of staying safe and working from home which in turn, increases their anxiety of getting sick or transmitting COVID-19 to family or high-risk people in their lives.

Research indicates that essential workers experienced multiple stressors due to their increased contact with members of the public. Depression and anxiety were the major mental disorders reported in the surveys and questionnaires done in the different research studies. Vaccine rollout and increased access to COVID-19 testing at pharmacies are additional stressors that could negatively impact mental health of pharmacy staff which is why this will be an aspect of this research project. This research project will be very similar to Elbeddini and colleagues' study which would discuss mental health struggles of pharmacists while also including the added pressure of vaccine roll out and increased access to testing in pharmacies. This project will also examine all pharmacy staff (pharmacy technicians, pharmacy cashiers) rather than just pharmacists. Pharmacy staff are important people in the community because they can provide direct healthcare services in a pinch when a doctor visit may not be possible. Despite this, pharmacy staff are excluded from the conversation when talking about the impact of COVID-19 on healthcare workers. It is important to include pharmacy staff in that conversation as they are experiencing their own struggles due to exposure to the public, increased patient volume, and now, dedication to vaccinating the public.

3. Methodology

For this project, interviews were conducted with seven people who have been working in the pharmacy throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. This sample consists of pharmacy workers, including pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, and rotating staff who work in the pharmacy and other parts of the retail pharmacy store. All the participants are pharmacy employee currently working in North Carolina. To recruit participants, snowball sampling was used; study participants often referred their coworkers who they felt would benefit from this study.

This sample is comprised of working aged pharmacy employees. The people in this sample were all white women ranging from ages 21 to 44 as that was what was most accessible through finding participants. In total there were three pharmacists and four pharmacy technicians. Pharmacists varied in specific job titles as one was a staff pharmacist, one was the pharmacy manager, and one was a floating pharmacist who works at multiple locations in the area. Another was a pharmacy technician who had previously worked in the front end of the store prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The third were an inventory specialist who oversees inventory for the whole store, but due to staffing issues spends most, if not all, of her time assisting as a pharmacy technician. The last pharmacy technician is a shift lead who has spent time working in and out of the pharmacy for a lot of her career. Many of the participants have had to become multitaskers at their retail pharmacy locations over the past few years but have especially had to shift what they do at work because of the lack of other staff, and the high workloads of pharmacy duties due to COVID-19.

After obtaining IRB approval, the process of recruiting participants began. To recruit participants, the project was verbally explained to coworkers, and they were asked if they would be interested in being interviewed. Then an email address was obtained for each participant and would send an overview of the interview process as well as the IRB approved consent form. An e-signing website called "Sign Now" was used to allow for the participants to provide an

e-signature on the consent form that was sent via email. Once the consent form was e-signed, the participant chose a time to meet online over Zoom. The interviews were recorded using Zoom's recording option.

The questions that were asked during the interview all consisted of before and after questions to better understand how the pandemic affected certain aspects of the participants' jobs. Participants were asked about job tasks as well as how they feel their mental and physical health has been affected as they have had to work during this time of uncertainty. It was attempted to evaluate the amount of stress that they have experienced as essential workers throughout the pandemic when it came to added tasks such as vaccinations and testing. The questions can be found in the appendices at the end of this paper.

Interviews were used rather than surveys because it would provide qualitatively richer data. Interviews would be most accessible as many coworkers have previously expressed the stresses regarding work due to the pandemic. Using interviews as means for collecting data allowed for a much deeper understanding of how the pandemic has affected pharmacy staff. Interviews also allow for flexibility in the questions as each set of questions could be catered to the participant throughout the interview.

After the interview was conducted, the Zoom recording of the interview was transcribed with the assistance of a transcription program called Otter.ai. Otter.ai produces transcriptions with 90% accuracy. The transcription that was provided by this service was reviewed to correct any mistakes and make sure that the transcript aligned perfectly with the audio recording. Once all the interviews were conducted and transcribed, a grounded theory method was used to identify themes in the answers provided. This method relies heavily on discovery as a main way to develop the theories that come from the research that is being conducted³. The coding process was started, which also has roots in the grounded theory. Coding is a way of sorting and categorizing data in a way that allows for an easier depiction of what the answers to the questions mean³. According to Charmez, in using the grounded theory approach you first will look for themes through codes and you will follow up with "memo writing" to analytically evaluate and connect the codes. Each transcription was searched through, and a log was created documenting the frequency of participant responses to tackle the process of coding.

4. Findings

Through the seven semi-structured interviews that were conducted, there were many common themes that pharmacy staff feel they have experienced. The overall well-being of pharmacy staff was the interest of this project throughout conducting these interviews. Participants first answered a question about how they would rate their mental well-being before the pandemic and how they are feeling now as we are still in COVID times. Five out of seven participants claimed their mental well-being had decreased since COVID-19. The other two participants claimed their mental well-being did not change, as they rated their mental well-being the same before and during COVID-19 using a Likert scale.

4.1 Understaffing

Understaffing is one of the main stressors that was discussed by interviewees. When being asked about what resources could be useful in their continued fight against COVID-19, many of the participants responded with the need for more staff. The theme of understaffing was ever-present throughout most interviews, often being the answer to questions that did not even really ask about understaffing. Sherri stated, "We're always short staffed now because it's not considered rewarding anymore. It's a, it's a grind, and people don't want to do it. And I don't blame them for that, but that makes it very hard. We can't retain staff so nobody's trained," when responding to the question asking about the most stressful part of her job. This idea of not having enough staff or staff training can make the job immensely stressful as pharmacy staff have complicated duties, including dealing with billing issues due to insurance policies that can take multiple people to fix. Vicky mentioned that having someone be the designated trainer for new employees would be a huge help so that people would all learn the new job. Becky and Sophia both had responses that stuck out when they were presented with the question about the labor shortage due to COVID-19. Becky stated that the pharmacy had always been understaffed so she feels as though this COVID-19 "labor shortage" has not really affected her store. This response supports Sophia's belief that there may not be a labor shortage. Sophia stated, "I think it's a wage shortage, and people just don't want to work for crap wages." This leads to the next theme being pay of pharmacy staff as a source of stress during COVID-19.

4.2 Lack of Rewarding Pay

Another theme that participants discussed was pharmacy staff pay, specifically technicians. Sophia referred to the wage shortage that she feels there is, while she also mentioned recent raises that have taken place within the retail pharmacy company that she works for. She claimed that this pay raise made her quite angry as this is also usually the time that the company does their yearly pay increases. According to her, the pay was raised to 15 dollars an hour (for technicians), but that did not include the amount of time that someone was employed with the company. She was upset that she was making the same amount (the starting pay of 15/hour) as someone who was just hired and has relatively no knowledge regarding pharmacy duties. It was most interesting that out of all the pharmacy staff who were interviewed, the pharmacists (who are typically making more than livable wages) were the ones who brought up pay the most regarding pharmacy technicians. All three pharmacists interviewed noted that technicians are not paid enough for the number of responsibilities, and the amount of knowledge required to succeed in the position. Jasmine noted how important pharmacy technicians are to keeping the pharmacy running smoothly and argued that if they pay is not improved, she does not see a reason for them to stay, as the job is tough. There seems to be a consensus that the pay is simply not enough for all the COVID related duties that have been added to a pharmacy technician's job including testing, all COVID-19 vaccine responsibilities, and the increased amount of regular pharmacy duties like filling prescriptions and dealing with insurance/billing issues.

4.3 Treatment by Patients

Another stressor was the treatment by patients during COVID-19. Almost all participants, claimed that before the pandemic, patients were usually a bit more understanding and were not as rude and hostile as they are now. The pharmacy is performing more duties than they ever have due to COVID-19, yet patients are not patient or understanding. For example, Jolene claimed there was much better treatment towards the start of the pandemic as a patient delivered lunch to her store to say thank you for being an essential worker. She said that there has really been a shift since the beginning of COVID-19 as she now feels hostility from patients, and she feels like she is constantly being rushed in her job, so she is not able to focus as much on the quality of her work. Jasmine also expressed the change in attitude that she has received from patients. She claimed, "So even though we definitely had that negative aspect with the public relations before, it's just happening a lot easier and a lot faster than it was. And I just feel like it's kind of a lot stronger than it was." She also made sure to express how she feels that there is positive energy that she gets from some patients. She explained that while the negativity has been worse, the positivity has also increased since before the pandemic. Both participants were pharmacists, which is interesting. They both brought up the little bit of positivity that they have seen regarding treatment from patients while all pharmacy technicians and rotating staff interviewed claimed that patients have been largely hostile and did not seem to mention any positivity.

4.4 Feeling Exposed on the Frontline

Many participants also discussed feeling exposed to COVID-19 while having to be in-person at their job throughout this time. Most participants felt like Sophia did, who stated, "I'm kind of mad because a lot of people are just very inconsiderate, and I feel like you see a lot more of the selfishness when you're working in a retail pharmacy because people just don't care...They don't see pharmacy employees or anyone who works in the store as a human being that could get sick or that minds at all." Other participants mentioned how this time has shown the true selfishness of patients when it comes to patients caring about spreading COVID-19 to people who are aiming to keep them safe. Sherri brought up an interesting piece of information about viewpoints regarding facemasks, "I feel like it's a science question, a polarizing question. So, the people who just didn't want to and made it an issue, you know, there's a very simple thing to do for others, and it was a thing that was about helping others, but it became about your personal rights." This is often the narrative that we see with the great mask debate. Many people who come into the participants' places of work also choose not to wear a face mask while asking to get tested as pharmacies are an accessible outlet for testing for COVID-19. Jolene detailed a specific interaction where this occurred, "...and this guy didn't have a mask on. And he came in and I was still adjusting because I did not leave the house when I was on maternity leave at all...and he's saying something quiet...so, I'm getting closer to him because I don't hear what he's saying. And then he was like, "I need a COVID test you can you test me?" And I'm right in his face at that point." Jolene goes on to explain how upset she was over this interaction while expressing her surprise that she has yet to contract COVID-19 due to the many interactions that she has had with patients like this one. One participant expressed the struggle she has been having enforcing the mask mandates at her work location. She stated that she was helping a patient who was

wearing a face mask and there was another patient in the store who was not wearing a face mask. The patient wearing a face mask began to become angry with Vicky as they explained to the patient that while her place of work does require face masks, upper management does not allow staff to enforce the policies. This was interesting to hear as this shows the disregard that upper management and corporate has for keeping their staff and their other customers/patients safe.

4.5 Disappointment with Corporate

All the pharmacy employees spoken with are employees of retail pharmacies, meaning they have upper management/corporate managers who are in charge. The goal was to see about their satisfaction with corporate during the pandemic. The answer to this question was extremely consistent. Participants discussed they never really had been happy with corporate, but they felt they could have received more support throughout the thick of the pandemic. Most complaints were regarding how understaffed they have been during COVID-19 while having many more responsibilities than before. They felt that corporate did not assist when they needed assistance. As mentioned above, Vicky restated how upset she was that she was not allowed to enforce a mask mandate as she felt very unsafe in close contact with unmasked folks. Zoe claimed that corporate had been trying but failed to do anything that she felt would help. She was one of the participants who wanted corporate to resolve staffing shortages. She claimed, "Corporate definitely should take a step back and look at what we're responsible for doing day in and day out at the pharmacy and come up with plan to help us. You know, find us more staff, maybe you shut down a couple of pharmacies for a while and just to get us caught up, you know, move those staff into other stores so that you can run a fully supported pharmacy and do everything that you need to do daily in a store." Zoe gave a suggestion in her answer as many participants did since they understand daily struggles unlike many of the people who are making the policies in the corporate world. Jasmine mentions, "A lot of the people that work above you have never been in your situation. So, it's hard for them to relate to us." This is something that could make it hard as many employees feel misunderstood by their upper management during this time. Jasmine is suggesting coming up with a way that upper management could spend some time in the pharmacy during the workday to really experience struggles common to pharmacy workers such as no mask policy enforcement or staff shortages.

4.6 Stress

This theme goes without saying, but to put it plainly, pharmacy employees are stressed and have been stressed for much of the time that they have had to work through the pandemic. Many of the themes already discussed are driving factors for the major amounts of stress being felt, but there is so much more. When responding to the question about how her overall well-being has been as she worked through the pandemic, Vicky explained how she is stressed to the point of feeling like she has no energy when she is at work as well as feelings of sadness about being at her job. When asked about the most stressful aspect of their job, all participants mentioned vaccinations and testing as being a very stressful addition. Sherri stated, "...even though we've now been doing the COVID testing, they're now adding the second type of COVID testing. So, I'm personally responsible for two types of COVID testing, all vaccines: COVID, flu, pneumonia, shingles, in addition to filling prescriptions and medication therapy management, and the metrics that are required of the job." She expressed that the number of responsibilities assigned to her is a one of the primary reasons she feels so stressed out. While most participants mention certain duties that have been introduced to their job due to COVID-19 (like vaccinations and testing) as causing much of their stress, Sophia mentions that she is constantly having to cover other employee's hours resulting in her working fifty hours a week, a steep increase in her work schedule pre-COVID. She said that it is because she is having to cover other people's hours and come in on her days off, so she is feeling overworked which is contributing to her stress. Much of the stress that the participants are feeling is coming from feeling exposed to COVID-19 as mentioned above, but the workload was what Jolene said she experienced the most. She stated, "We have such a high workload, to where I am just going, going, going. And especially at some of these stores, if I'm there for a 12-hour shift, I probably get there early to make sure I have everything good before we open, and then I'm going to be staying late...and you are going that whole time, like, you do not take a breath." She describes that these long shifts where she often does not get a break to even eat something are the days when she is most stressed as she is constantly worrying about what they are going to do next and never gets to take a moment to relax and breathe.

4.7 Dissatisfaction with Job

Lastly, there was a huge discussion around dissatisfaction that participants felt regarding their jobs. All participants described how COVID-19 made them view their jobs in a more negative way than they did before the pandemic. The most powerful answer to the question regarding job dissatisfaction came from Zoe, who is a pharmacy technician. She noted, “Prior to COVID. I enjoyed coming to work. I like the people that I work with. The job itself was easy. I've been working in and out of pharmacy for 20 plus years, you know, I wouldn't have stayed so long if I didn't like it. But then COVID hit, and I dreaded going to work every day. I would cry before my shift started. I would sit in the parking lot and cry because it was scary.” Zoe spoke about her concerns about her mental well-being that also started to be exacerbated because of her job. She has completely different feelings about coming to work than she once did. When answering this question, Jasmine said that she is less positive about her job as she once was before the pandemic. She said that she thinks the pandemic has really exposed some of the flaws in the system that she could not see before such as how she is constantly taken advantage of. She says that she feels like there should be more pharmacists during a shift but instead she is expected to do the work of two or three people all by herself. She is working upwards of 75 hours a week now just to cover the amount of work that it takes to keep the pharmacy running so she is feeling much more negative about her job. A few pharmacy technicians and rotating staff explained that they never really were in love with their job but having to work through COVID-19 has made them dread having to go to their place of employment.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

As Brookwalter stated in her piece highlighting burnout of pharmacy employees, “The new, unique challenges directly associated with the COVID-19 pandemic are exacerbating an already stressful work environment in community pharmacy.” There have indeed been many challenges that have come up since the COVID-19 pandemic started, including for pharmacy staff. COVID-19 has taken a toll on people across the world as this has been a time of great loss and navigation of new ways to live life. The hope is that this study helps to shed light on struggles that are being faced by retail pharmacy employees. From major amounts of stress to how pharmacy staff are treated by patients, these factors could potentially have long-term consequences to the health of the staff.

The findings highlight problems within retail pharmacies including a lack of corporate support and the major need for staff to keep the pharmacy running smoothly. In addition to the struggles explained through the research, the participants in the study also offered suggestions that could make their lives a bit easier and their jobs a bit more bearable. Some of those suggestions include the ability to enforce a mask mandate, having someone in the pharmacy who is designated to train new staff, and offering more competitive wages to keep staff motivated to stay with the company. While many of these suggestions would include major policy changes with retail pharmacy companies, this are necessary changes that could assist in some of the issues being faced. For instance, if pharmacy technicians were offered a more competitive wage, they would probably be more inclined to stay with the company. This would allow for a lot of stress relief for existing employees as they would be able to distribute the workload with more employees.

Future research could include many aspects which might make it more interesting such as comparing pharmacists to pharmacy technicians as there is a huge pay gap in what each of them make annually. This would be an aspect that could differ depending on pay as a pharmacist may not have many economic struggles that they are facing because of COVID-19 whereas other hourly pharmacy staff may. This could also differ as access to doctor's offices has been limited due to the fear of going to the doctor's office and contracting COVID-19 as well as there being an overflow of people trying to get treated for the virus. It is presumed that future research would find similar themes when interviewing employees about their experiences as many of these problems described could apply not only nationally but universally. In the background research, it was found that pharmacists in other countries experienced many of the same issues that pharmacy staff in the study. For this reason, the research could be applicable to many places with retail pharmacy in the world.

While great information was found through the study, there were some limitations. The biggest limitation would be that it was a harder time getting participants for the study than was anticipated. As previously stated, I am an insider as I am employed at a retail pharmacy as rotating staff. Many of the participants are coworkers, but there were some participants that were employed at different retail pharmacy locations. The original plan was to interview five pharmacy technicians and rotating staff as well as two pharmacists but could not find more than four pharmacy technicians who have been working in retail pharmacy since before the pandemic. Many of the interview questions

asked about comparing before the pandemic to now. Due to the mass amounts of understaffing and quick turnaround that the retail pharmacy locations have been experiencing, there was not an ability to find very many pharmacy technicians that were not recently hired in pharmacy locations that were feasible. There were also a few people who had been reached out to who responded by claiming they were not sure that they would have free time for the interview. Since pharmacies are so understaffed, one pharmacy employee expressed that they are spread thin at work and did not feel like they would be able to interview. There was another potential participant that expressed they worked two jobs and do not have much free time outside of work. It is inconclusive on how much this has affected the findings. It is upsetting that there was no ability to find another pharmacy technician as there was a want to focus on the representation of pharmacy technicians and how they have been affected. The findings did not really differ much between the pharmacists and pharmacy technicians. The only difference was the emphasis on how low wages are for pharmacy technicians. One last limitation is the need to not violate any HIPPA laws by asking about mental health issues too in depth. If other researchers could get approval to ask more about mental health issues in depth to find out how their mental health issues may have changed due to being employed through COVID-19.

Another limitation that was noticed and should be highlighted while going through participant demographics. All participants are white women which is a huge limitation in this study that should be expanded upon in follow up research if there was to be any. There are no viewpoints on how these issues have been for men or Black, Indigenous, or people of color. There could be much different results if there were more ethnicities and genders included in the study as they have much different experiences than white women. This very important limitations must be noted and recognized. One of the articles that was found for background section noted how Asian-American pharmacists were experiencing racism due to misconceptions about the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a reason that led to beliefs that the findings would have been quite different if there had been an inclusion of different demographics of people. It is thought that the main category that would have differed is how patients treated pharmacy staff during this time. For this reason, there is hope that there is to be more research to come with a diverse set of participants for better representation of all people.

There is much hope that this research helped highlight the major importance that pharmacy staff have had on the COVID-19 pandemic while being in-person at their jobs throughout this troubling time. There is also hope that there will be additional research on this specific topic to include even more participants and make these struggles faced by pharmacy staff more well-known. Lastly, if there is further research on this topic, there is hope that it will bring some sort of change to these conditions that pharmacy staff are enduring.

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7. Appendices

Interview Questions

1. What is your job title at your place of work?
2. How old are you?
3. How many hours do you work per week?
4. Have these hours per week increased or decreased since the start of the pandemic?
5. How would you rate your mental well-being on a scale from 1-10 before and during the pandemic?
6. How would you rate your physical health on a scale from 1-10 before and during the pandemic?
7. Tell me about your mental well-being before the pandemic?
8. How has your overall mental well-being been while working through the pandemic?
9. Have you felt particularly exposed to COVID-19 at your job? Explain.
 - a. How did that make you feel?
10. What has been the most stressful aspect of your job since the COVID-19 pandemic started?
11. How have you felt about coming to work before the pandemic?
 - a. And after/during the pandemic?
12. How did your stress levels change as pharmacies became a place to get vaccinated and tested for COVID-19?
13. How have you been treated by patients during this time and has this treatment changed since the start of the pandemic?
14. Do you feel as though your workplace has been affected by the labor shortage?
15. Do you feel overworked (are you doing more at your job than you previously had to before the start of the pandemic)?
16. Do you feel that you are an essential part of helping fight the pandemic? If so, how has this affected your overall well-being?
17. Has the pandemic made you view your job differently?
18. What resources do you feel you could use to make your job less stressful during this time?
19. Do you feel supported by corporate?
 - a. What would make you feel more supported by corporate?