

Do mental health concerns contribute to paramedics leaving the profession?

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Introduction

While there is growing research focusing on mental health in the paramedic community, little remains known about the influence of depression, anxiety and stress on the decision to leave the profession.

The purpose of this study was to determine the prevalence of anxiety, depression, and stress, and paramedics' self-reported mental health as determinants of their intent to leave the profession.

Our hypothesis was that the decision to leave the paramedic profession would be influenced by poor mental health.

Methods

Through the *Canadian Paramedic Health & Wellness* survey, paramedics were asked to indicate

1. if they intended to leave the profession in the next two years;
2. their reason(s) for leaving;
3. the number of days of work missed for mental health reasons in the past 12 months; and,
4. their levels of depression, anxiety and stress as measured using the DASS-21.

Analyses were conducted using descriptive statistics and independent samples t-tests.

Results

Based on 2,557 completed surveys, 18.5% (n=473) reported they intended to leave the profession within the next two years.

Lack of opportunities for advancement cited the primary reason (52%).

Of respondents intending to leave the profession, 19% reported that being mentally unable to continue significantly influenced their decision to leave.

Scores on the DASS-21 revealed that for the total population of respondents

- 27.9% of the respondents had mild to severe levels of depression
- 22.5% had mild to severe levels of stress
- 21.1% had mild to severe levels of anxiety

Bivariate Analyses of Mental Health Variables

	<i>Intend to leave</i>	<i>Do not intend to leave</i>	
Missed days of work	M=11.82 (SD 47.8)	M=2.92 (SD 18.02)	t(487.71) = -3.93, p<.001
Depression	M= 9.82 (SD 9.86)	M= 5.79 (SD= 7.62)	t(604.59) = -8.324, p<.001
Anxiety	M= 6.12 (SD 7.27)	M= 3.89 (SD 5.22)	t(584.11) = -6.27, p<.001
Stress	M=13.34 (SD 9.87)	M=9.37 (SD 7.91)	t(614.89)= -8.14, p<.001

Conclusion

Mental health was not the most frequently cited reason to leave the paramedic profession; however, it was identified as influential in nearly 20% of cases. Underlying levels depression, stress, and anxiety may indirectly be contributing factors.

Scores on the DASS-21 may present an avenue for determining exit patterns from the profession.

Absenteeism and employee turnover have been identified as a significant cost to employers. Paramedic organizations and management should be aware that mental health concerns, including depression, anxiety, and stress may be contributing to workforce instability.

Limitations

- Vulnerable to non-response and social desirability bias.
- Cross sectional data; correlation is not causation.

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Questions?

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