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STRESS LEVEL OF HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS IN LITHUANIA: WHAT FACTORS COULD BE INFLUENCING IT?

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Introduction: Members of medical community regularly experience high levels of psychological stress and tension in their workplace. They have to deal with patient deaths, lack of skills and knowledge, insufficient work conditions. Studies show that one-third of physicians have experienced burnout at certain points throughout their careers and male physicians are 70% more likely to commit suicide compared to general population. In this pilot study stress level of doctors in Lithuania was evaluated. Moreover it was analysed how the stress level differs depending on sex, age, branch of medicine (therapeutic, surgical) and persons ability to classify and express feelings (tendency for alexithymia).

Methods: The research data were gathered using self-rating questionnaires. 257 healthcare professionals filled out the questionnaire. Participants were asked to evaluate their stress level on a scale from 1 to 10. Additionally questions from Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20) were used to evaluate persons ability to express his feelings. Total scores were organized into two categories: a score of 52 and more indicated alexithymia or tendency for alexithymia (difficulty expressing and classifying feelings) and a score of 51 and less indicated no alexithymia. Data was processed using R Commander.

Results: Average stress level of healthcare professionals in Lithuania was 6,83. No significant differences between different genders, age groups, branches of medicine were found ($p > 0,05$). However statistically significant difference of stress levels was found when compared by alexithymia categories. Alexithymic doctors had higher average stress level (7,81) compared to non-alexithymic ones (6,55).

Conclusions: Healthcare professionals in Lithuania experience higher than average level of stress. Person's tendency for alexithymia could lead to higher level of stress. Further research of other factors that could determine higher level of stress is needed.

Keywords: Stress, doctors, healthcare professionals, burnout, alexithymia