The objective of this study was to examine levels of burnout and contributing factors among healthcare providers—including oral health clinicians—working in the safety-net during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods

- Surveys were sent to all of Health Choice Network’s health centers, which spanned 26 health centers in 9 states at the time of survey deployment (9/14/21-10/23/21).
- Study population consisted of more than 3,000 clinicians who provided care in Sept/Oct 2021, including oral health, primary care, and mental health providers.
- Survey instrument included:
  - Single-item measure of burnout experienced by clinicians at time of survey (Sep/Oct 2021), during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2021), and pre-pandemic.
  - List of 10 potential contributing factors including lack of autonomy, shared values, and use of Electronic Health Records (EHR) or other IT tools.
- Characteristics of clinicians such as clinician type, years practicing in healthcare (results not shown).

Results

- The proportion of respondents experiencing burnout was uniformly high across all clinician types during the pandemic (2020-2021). A complete list of contributing factors is shown in Figure 2. Proportionally more clinicians reported symptoms of burnout during the pandemic (57.3%) than at the time of the survey (56.7%) in pre-pandemic (37.2%) (P<0.05).
- Proportionally more clinicians reported feeling under stress, definitely burning out, or completely burned out during the pandemic, while more clinicians reported that symptoms of burnout go away at the time of the survey than other study periods.
- The results highlight high levels of burnout and primary contributors to burnout among oral health providers during the COVID-19 pandemic and emphasize the need for additional research to properly address the effects of the pandemic on healthcare providers.

Study results highlight high levels of burnout and primary contributing factors among oral health clinicians, with chronic work environment and lack of effective teamwork in the organization as the most frequently cited work-related stressors.

Study findings show a high proportion of burnout experienced by clinicians working in the safety-net during the pandemic regardless of clinician type or practice characteristics, particularly during the pandemic beginning in early 2020 and lasting through the third quarter of 2021.

Study results highlight high levels of burnout and primary contributing factors among oral health clinicians, with chronic work environment and lack of effective teamwork in the organization as the most frequently cited work-related stressors.

Further research is needed to assess the prevalence of burnout in dentistry and potential work and family-related factors associated with burnout using validated questionnaires in national representative samples of dentists, hygienists, and assistants.

Future studies are required to evaluate strategies used to increase resilience and potential implications of burnout on oral health workforce recruitment and retention as well as capacity and quality of patient care.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to thank the staff of the Health Choice Network, for their help with obtaining the HCN survey data that is described in this presentation. This work is supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of an award totaling $450,000 with the National vice President for International Health, the Center for Global Health, in support of the Health Workforce Research Center (OHWRC) associated with Burnout Among Oral Health Providers in the Dental Safety-Net During the COVID-19 Pandemic.