

Stress in the Workplace: Results from a Perceived Stress Survey of ART Laboratory Professionals

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Objective: Workplace stress is a global risk factor for workers' health and safety. Numerous studies of healthcare workers have demonstrated increased stress resulting in burnout and significant health issues. The purpose of this study was to conduct a Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) survey (Levenstein et al., 1993) of ART laboratory staff to determine the levels of stress in this group.

Design: Review of survey results.

Materials and Methods: A link containing the PSS was sent by email and posted on a social network site. Participation was voluntary. Participant responses were compiled and de-identified by the online survey tool. The PSS score was calculated for each participant with the resulting number between 0 and 1. Higher scores indicate greater levels of stress. Data was compared using unpaired t-test, with significance of $p < 0.05$.

Results: Non-physician ART lab staff (n=103) answered the survey. 96.8% were located in the U.S., 36% were Ph.D., 28% Master, 36% Bachelor degrees. Respondents identified as embryologists (n = 57), Lab Directors (n=39), and Andrology technicians (n=7). The mean score (\pm SD) was .41(0.2) for Andrology Technicians, 0.51 (0.13) for Embryologists and 0.49 (0.17) for Laboratory Directors, and 0.5(0.2) for the entire group. No significant differences were seen between the groups ($p > 0.05$). Embryologists were trending to higher scores than Andrology Technicians ($p = 0.06$), IVF Lab Directors were trending to higher scores than Andrology Lab Directors ($p = 0.08$). The lowest score was seen in the Andrology Technicians(0.12) and the highest in IVF/Andrology Lab Directors(0.93). Regional differences were also seen. Previous reports showed PSS scores of 0.36, 0.42, 0.44, 0.53 for students, healthcare workers, hospital outpatients and hospital inpatients respectively (Levenstein et al., 1993).

Conclusions: These data point to a relatively high level of stress experienced by ART lab professionals. The results and submitted comments point to a critical need to address the causes and amelioration of stress levels. Further controlled studies of a larger group are warranted. It is hoped that this preliminary report will garner increased attention to the stress level experienced by ART staff and develop means to minimize these stress levels.

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