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Insights from Healthcare Staff: Exploring Perceptions and Experiences of Working with Traumatic Brain Injury Patients with Sleep Disturbances in Inpatient Rehabilitation

**Outline of the study:** Healthcare staff working in Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) rehabilitation have been described as "hidden victims" due to the significant stress and burden caused when caring for TBI service users (Ramchand et al., 2014). Rehabilitation facilities for TBI patients are considered among the most stressful work environments. In recent years, investigating sleep disturbances in the context of TBI has received significant attention from researchers. However, there remains a gap in the literature investigating the impact of consequences of poor sleep following TBI on healthcare staff working in inpatient rehabilitation. To address this gap in the literature, a qualitative approach will be utilized in this study, whereby healthcare staff working with TBI service users will be interviewed. A such, the current study aims to gain the perceptions and experiences of healthcare staff.

**Methods and results:** Participants were five staff members working at a brain injury rehabilitation centre located around different regions across the UK. Data were analysed through thematic analysis, and three themes and six sub-themes were identified.

**Figure 1**

*Thematic map of themes and subthemes*

Diagram

Description automatically generated

**Findings:** The study reveals that sleep disturbances are a major barrier for healthcare staff in providing optimal care and rehabilitation for service users. These disturbances create challenges in administering medication and meals, providing personal care, and accompanying service users during activities. They also impact service users' alertness and daytime activities, which hinders staff in establishing connections with them. Previous literature supports these findings, indicating that healthcare staff may question their competence and criticize themselves when unable to establish a connection with service users (Cheruiyot & Brysiewicz, 2019).

Healthcare staff working with TBI patients often experience stress and feel conflicted about providing care that respects the wishes of service users while causing as little harm as possible. This can result in added agitation and challenging behaviours from service users, leading to emotional distress, anxiety, and work dissatisfaction among staff. Workplace mistreatment, including verbal and physical abuse, is common and can negatively impact the quality of care provided to service users. Establishing a safe and nurturing workplace environment for healthcare staff is essential for their well-being and the rehabilitation experience of service users (Draganich et al., 2019).

Inadequate staffing is also a significant issue reported by participants, leading to increased agitation and burnout among staff. Previous research supports these findings, indicating that staffing issues are a significant barrier to providing quality care, leading to staff burnout (Oyesanya et al., 2018). Addressing staffing shortages is critical for improving the well-being of healthcare workers and ensuring optimal standards of care for service users.

It is essential to prioritize preventing workplace violence and promoting a safe work environment for healthcare professionals. Incidents of mistreatment and humiliation should be adequately addressed by management, and healthcare staff should feel comfortable reporting them. The current study is unique in that it not only reports the impacts of sleep disturbances on service users but also highlights the experiences of healthcare staff working with them. Its findings hold significant implications for policy and practice, emphasizing the importance of addressing sleep disturbances, workplace mistreatment, and staffing shortages in healthcare facilities.