

BURNT Out Summer: An Evaluation of the Effects of COVID-19 on California Lifeguards

Manar Alkuzweny, Callie Burns, Dharm Shah, Denisha Verma, Nancy Binkin, MD, MPH

Bachelor's of Science in Public Health Honors Practicum | University of California, San Diego | Herbert Wertheim School of Public Health and Human Longevity Science

Background

- Lifeguard duties and operations in California dramatically affected by state and county COVID-19 guidelines
- Evaluation undertaken with California Surf Lifesaving Association to understand effects on morale, job performance, and perceived safety

Methods

- Initial qualitative survey sent to directors of the 48 state lifeguard agencies to gain initial insights on effects of pandemic
- Findings used to develop mixed methods Qualtrics survey sent to all agency lifeguards
- Quantitative data analyzed in Excel
- Qualitative themes identified and data coded using Word and Excel

Results

- Estimated response rate = 45% (451/1000)
- Compared with 2019, lifeguards reported:
 - Feeling less safe (60%) and more stressed (60%)
 - Lower morale (58%)
 - Unchanged or lower levels of leadership support (82%)
 - Greater levels of disrespect
- "Lifeguarding is difficult enough without having to run around the beach telling people to wear masks and social distance."*

Conclusions and Policy Implications

- Lifeguards experienced increased stress and felt inadequately supported in the face of changing regulations and job responsibilities
- In the future, lifeguard agencies should consider:
 - Providing increased mental health support to their staff during public health crises
 - Conducting anticipatory training for new job duties during emergencies
 - Establishing better communication between agencies to share best practices and lessons learned

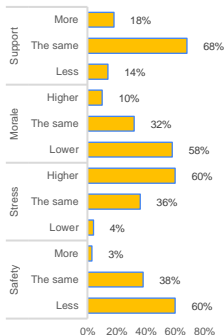
COVID-19 placed major stress on California lifeguards

Future plans should include anticipatory training, mental health support, and better communication between agencies



Figures

Reported changes between 2019 and 2020



"It took away from the whole lifeguard experience. Everyday one of the guards would say, 'You have no idea what it's like to be a regular guard.'"