

# Brief Overview of Recent Studies on Healthcare Social Work Scope of Practice During COVID-19

This overview summarizes five studies drawn from the *Healthcare Social Work Scope of Practice During COVID-19* qualitative dataset, led by co-principal investigators **Drs. Terri Lewinson and Tiffany Washington**. The research explores the roles, experiences, and challenges of healthcare social workers during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting key themes such as interprofessional communication, psychological distress, technology use, ethical dilemmas, and shifting workplace dynamics.

## 1. Psychological Distress and Coping Among Healthcare Social Workers

**Lewinson, T. D., Washington, T. R., Allen, S. E., Murphey, J. M., & Onsando, W. M.** (2023). "We're kind of on the back burner": Psychological distress and coping among medical social workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Social Work in Health Care*, 62(6–7), 243–262. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00981389.2023.2221718>

**Summary:** This article explores heightened psychological distress during COVID-19. Participants described being overlooked in healthcare responses, facing emotionally taxing decisions, and experiencing role overload. Despite these stressors, many used self-care, peer support, and professional values as coping mechanisms. The study calls for systemic attention to social worker wellbeing.

## 2. Social Worker Roles and Communication in Interprofessional Teams

Cooper, Z. W., Johnson, L., **Washington, T. R., & Lewinson, T.** (2024). Analyzing the roles, workflows, and communication dynamics of social workers within interprofessional care teams. *Journal of Interprofessional Care*, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13561820.2024.2403015>

**Summary:** This study used a qualitative approach to examine how healthcare social workers contribute to care coordination and communication in interprofessional care teams. Findings emphasized that social workers often fill communication gaps, provide psychosocial context to medical decisions, and adapt workflows based on team dynamics. The study highlights both the unique contributions and the systemic under-recognition of social workers in team-based healthcare delivery.

## 3. Technology and Virtual Practice

Power, S. R., **Washington, T. R., & Lewinson, T. D.** (2024). Talk to the Tablet: Technology's Impact on Medical Social Work Practice during COVID-19. *Journal of Technology in Human Services*, 42(3), 194–214. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15228835.2024.2343687>

**Summary:** This study applied social presence theory to explore how technology-mediated communication altered healthcare work practice. Findings revealed shifts in immediacy, intimacy, and interactivity due to virtual care. Participants expressed concern over ethical and equity implications and reported "professional dissonance" from the disconnect between traditional values of presence and the demands of remote care delivery.

#### **4. Workplace Dynamics and Scope of Practice**

**Washington, T., & Lewinson, T. D.** (2024). Healthcare Social Workers' Scope of Practice during COVID-19. *Healthcare, 12*(2), 174. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare12020174>

**Summary:** This article documents the evolving scope of practice for healthcare social workers during the pandemic. Findings indicate that social workers rapidly assumed nontraditional tasks without clear protocols, often navigating moral distress and administrative confusion. The authors call for formal policy guidelines to better support healthcare social workers during public health emergencies.

#### **5. Ethical Challenges in Crisis**

Dasgupta, A., Allen, S. E., Power, S. R., **Washington, T. R., & Lewinson, T. D.** (Under review). *Navigating crisis: A qualitative exploration of medical social workers' responses to ethical issues during COVID-19.*

**Summary:** Using the NASW Code of Ethics as a deductive framework, this study categorized ethical dilemmas encountered by medical social workers during the pandemic. Challenges included social injustices, scope-of-practice conflicts, patient isolation, and insufficient emergency preparedness. The research highlighted how social workers used professional values to guide ethical action despite unclear protocols and systemic constraints.