

# From isolation to vaccination: School health staff pandemic experiences in Pima County, Arizona



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## Background

- School health staff lead and provide primary health care for children and other staff in schools.
- As schools navigated this unfamiliar COVID crisis, school health staff have played a crucial role in managing student health and wellness.

## Objective

- To qualitatively explore the challenges and experiences of school health staff during the pandemic in the Pima County, Arizona.

## Methods

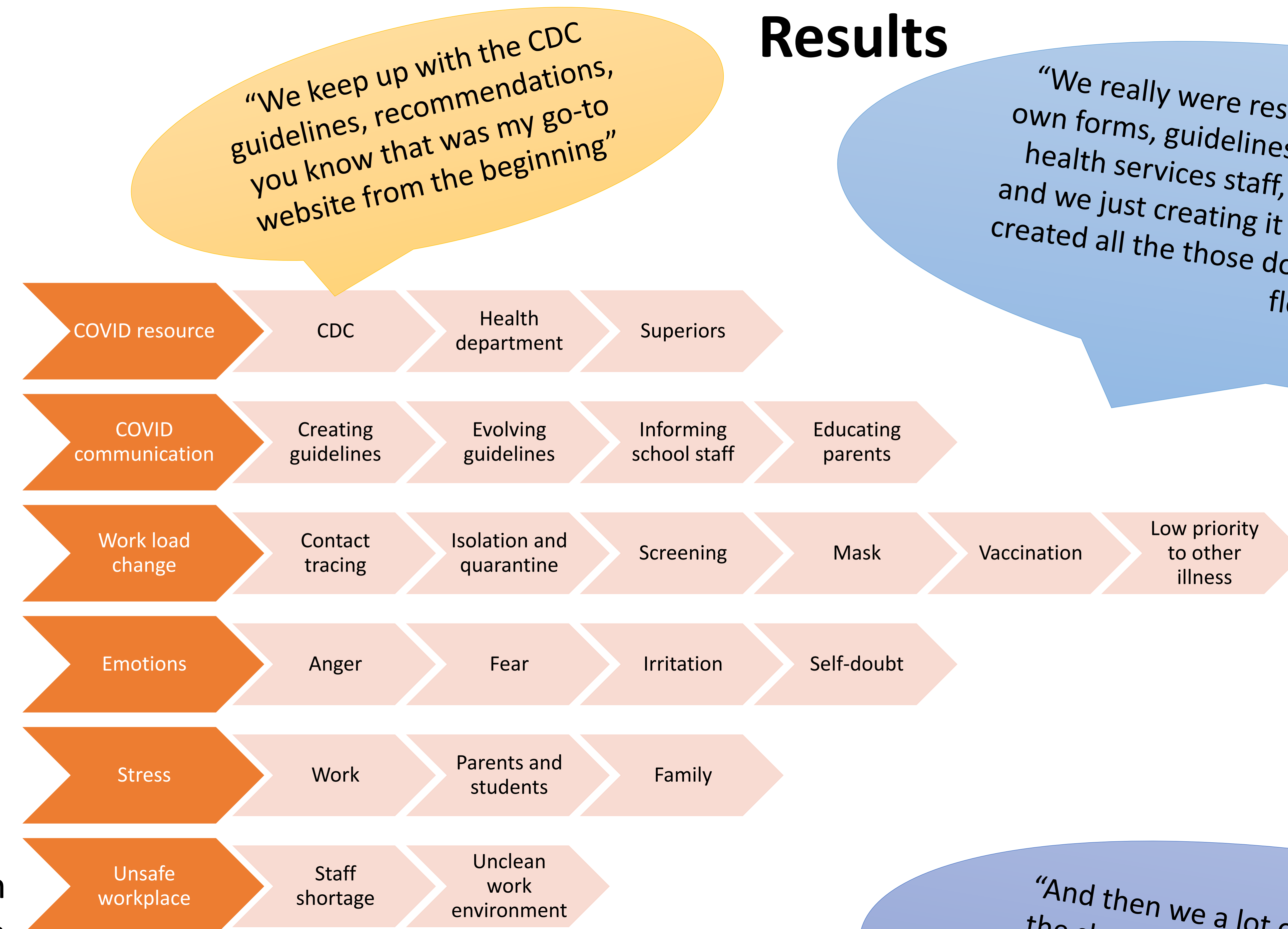
- We conducted focus group discussions (FGDs) in two randomly selected school districts in Pima County, Arizona.
- In January 2022, we conducted two focus group discussions (FGDs) among 50 school health staff for 90 minutes each.
- The study was conducted at the schools by two trained investigators in qualitative studies.
- A discussion guide consisting of ten open-ended questions was used to conduct the FDGs.



Transcribing verbatim



- Thematic content analysis was used to generate codes and themes; data were analyzed using the Atlas.ti software.



"We keep up with the CDC guidelines, recommendations, you know that was my go-to website from the beginning"

"We really were responsible for coming up with our own forms, guidelines, education for staff, and not just health services staff, but like teachers, support staff, and we just creating it ourself and our nurse facilitators created all the those documents, forms, and guidelines, flowcharts"

"Substance shortages, staff substitute shortages, and extreme amount of questioning why are you doing this? Getting like called names and like how can you possibly keep my kid out of the school again."

"I had a kid with 102<sup>o</sup> crash in my office for like 3 hours right, yeah. Well, parents don't want to come pick him up."

"And then we a lot of us so desperately wanted to give the shots here too. So there was you know struggle, to get an appointment and get through the system and people were trying to get registered and I was like just give us the vaccine, we have a army of nurses here. "

- The thematic content analysis yielded six core themes related to the pandemic-related experiences.
- The pandemic has significantly challenged school health staff with new job tasks: managing isolation, vaccination, and developing/implementing new and evolving COVID-19 guidelines.
- School health staff also reported increased stress related to interactions with parents and school administration as well as frustrations with rapid changes to guidance from the health department and policy makers.
- A common issue was not having enough staff or resources to complete the job responsibilities and expectations.

## Conclusion

- The school health staff were underprepared and had difficulty in navigating the pandemic, which has resulted in physical burnout and mental distress.
- Pandemic preparation for schools is important to ensure adequate resources and plans of action that provide psychosocial support for school health staff in future pandemics.