

ABSTRACT

Introduction- Disasters can occur at any place and time without any warning and it can cause many physical as well as psychological harm to the affected population. Teaching Hospital Peradeniya is one of the central health care institutions of the province. It readily extends secondary and tertiary care services to its draining population and extends its specialized services to patients from some neighboring provinces as well. Because of the above factors, if a disaster strikes, Teaching Hospital Peradeniya can be flooded with patients within minutes. Medical Officers form an integral part of first response, the Emergency Treatment Unit, casualty, non-casualty surgical wards, and from all other relevant wards, medical officers will come together at the first notification of a disaster situation. These officers along with other relevant health staff will be the ones who will be involved with addressing the victims and their medical needs including PFA.

Objective – The main objective of the study was to assess the knowledge, attitude and practices about psychological first aid in a disaster situation among the medical officers of Teaching hospital Peradeniya, Sri Lanka.

Method - A Descriptive Cross-Sectional study was carried out on the Medical Officers of Teaching Hospital Peradeniya. Out of the 196 medical officers, 180 had participated in the study.

Results- The majority of the participants had a good total knowledge score (64.4%) and a good practice score (88%). But the number of participants who have had experience in managing a disaster situation was low (39.4%) and the number of participants who have practiced psychological first aid was only 27.8% of the total participants.

Discussion – The majority of the participants showed good knowledge in psychological first aid that could be due to the work experience as a majority of the doctors had more than 10 years of work experience (35.6%) and also due to the experience and knowledge that comes with being in the medical field. Almost all the doctors showed good attitudes towards the importance of psychological first aid. Although the practice scores were satisfactory among the participants despite their work experience or knowledge, only 27.8% had experience practicing psychological first aid in a crisis situation. It was also shown from this study that from the 50 (27.8%) participants who have practiced psychological first aid, only 27 (34%) have had prior training in psychological first aid. When inquiring about the reasons for not practicing psychological first aid, it was shown that the main reasons were the lack of awareness and training of PFA (25.2% each)

Conclusion – It was apparent that the majority of the medical officers of Teaching Hospital Peradeniya lack the awareness and training about PFA which leads to poor preparedness of providing psychological first aid in a crisis situation. With proper and regular training programs on PFA provided to the medical officers, this gap in disaster management can be rectified.

Key words- *Psychological First Aid, Disaster, Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices, Teaching Hospital Peradeniya, Medical officers,*