

Abstract

Background: Management of the dead in disasters has significant economic, legal, psychological and social consequences on the survivors and the community. Improper management of the deceased can hinder the identification, lead to loss of important forensic evidence and affect the dignity of the dead. Army soldiers play a vital role in dead body management in disasters.

Objectives: To describe the knowledge, attitudes and self-reported practices on management of the dead in disasters among a group of army soldiers in Galle district, Sri Lanka.

Methods: This descriptive cross sectional study was conducted using a pre-tested self-administered questionnaire in 2017. All army soldiers working in two selected camps in Galle district were selected and descriptive analysis was used for this study.

Results: Out of the total of 188 army soldiers included in this study, a majority (61.2%, n=115) had a moderate level and 32.4% (n=61) had a good level of overall knowledge on management of the dead in disasters. In particular, knowledge on wearing face masks by dead body recovery teams, taking photographs, spraying disinfectants to dead bodies and use of ambulances to transport the deceased was poor. Regarding dead body management in disasters, respectively 21.8% and 52.1% believed that funeral rites are not important and dead bodies of foreign nationals should be treated better than locals. Only 12.8% believed that there's no need to respect dead bodies as they are dead. A majority (69.1%) had reported that they had engaged in dead body management in disasters as army soldiers and 59% (n=111) had reported that they had used gloves and boots in dead body recovery process.

Conclusions and Recommendations: Even though a majority had either moderate or good level of overall knowledge, deficiencies of knowledge in certain aspects of management of the dead in disasters were evident. A majority had more favourable attitudes in many aspects of management of the dead in disasters although there were some negative attitudes to a certain extent. There is a space for improvement in certain practices of dead body management. Improving training opportunities for army soldiers is necessary to enhance their knowledge and experience on management of the dead in disasters.

Keywords: Management of the Dead, Disasters, Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices, Army Soldiers, Sri Lanka