

ABSTRACT

Background

Disasters can cause many harmful effects, both physically and psychologically. In Sri Lanka, floods, landslides, cyclones, droughts, and tidal waves are frequent. Rathnapura is one of the leading disaster -prone areas in Sri Lanka. Teaching hospital Rathnapura is the largest government health care facility located in the Rathnapura district. It is the main hospital in the Rathnapura district, and it provides secondary and tertiary care to neighboring districts as well. Because of the recurrent disasters in the Rathnapura area, the teaching hospital in Rathnapura can be filled with a large number of casualties within minutes. Medical officers working at the Rathnapura Teaching Hospital are one of the main groups in a disaster situation in the Rathnapura district. They will participate in both medical management and psychological health of the victims of a disaster.

Objectives

To assess preparedness and knowledge related to psychological first aid during a disaster and the factors associated with knowledge among medical officers in Teaching Hospital Rathnapura.

Methods

Hospital-based descriptive cross-sectional study was carried out in the Teaching hospital Rathnapura. The calculated sample size for the study was 245 and there were 294 eligible medical officers working in the Teaching Hospital Rathnapura. Data was collected using a questionnaire which was developed using the WHO Psychological First Aid facilitator's manual for field workers for the knowledge assessment section. Preparedness questions were developed using the WHO hospital safety index, a guide for evaluators. Associated factors with knowledge questions developed using the training module in PFA for red cross and Red Crescent societies. Knowledge and preparedness were assessed using a separate scoring system in the questionnaire. Above the median score was considered good knowledge and preparedness, and below or equal

to the median was considered poor knowledge and preparedness. Associated factors were assessed in areas such as past disaster responses, past trainings on PFA, current working unit, current designation, and educational qualifications of the participants.

Results

A total number of 270 eligible medical officers participated in the study. The mean age of the study population was 36 years with the standard deviation being 7.13 years. Among study population 90.7% had good knowledge on Psychological First Aid. In preparedness assessment 95.6% of participants had good confidence level on providing Psychological First Aid. Participants who had past training programs and past experience of PFA providing had better knowledge of Psychological First Aid. Statistically significant association was noted between; current designation and knowledge ($\chi^2 = 29.691$, $df = 10$, $p < 0.001$), current working unit and knowledge ($\chi^2 = 334.88$, $df = 170$, $p < 0.001$), current working unit and past training received ($\chi^2 = 105.66$, $df = 17$, $p < 0.001$), past disaster experience and knowledge ($\chi^2 = 23.283$, $df = 10$, $p = 0.01$), past training on PFA and knowledge ($\chi^2 = 20.321$, $df = 10$, $p = 0.026$) and knowledge on PFA and confidence levels of providing PFA ($\chi^2 = 464.735$, $df = 180$, $p < 0.001$).

Conclusion and recommendations

This study highlights the knowledge competencies, preparedness and factors associated with Psychological First Aid among medical officers at Teaching Hospital Rathnapura. The study identified good knowledge of PFA among participants in certain aspects such as definitions and principles of PFA, core components of PFA and cultural considerations of PFA. Study population had poor knowledge regarding who can provide PFA in disaster situation, indicating the need for structured, continuous training programs, using existing resources, to strengthen overall knowledge and improve disaster response capacity. Study identified gaps in preparedness on providing PFA. Study population had good overall confidence level on providing PFA but poor awareness on hospital disaster management plans and hospital preparedness. It's recommended that individual-level preparedness as well as institutional preparedness

should be improved through awareness and simulation programs on PFA. Significant associated factors identified were current designation of the participants and knowledge on Psychological First Aid. Among study population senior medical officers had higher proportion of knowledge. Significant association was found between current working unit of the participants and knowledge on Psychological First Aid. Pediatric unit and, Accident and Emergency unit had higher proportion of knowledge. There was a significant association between knowledge on Psychological First Aid and confidence levels of providing Psychological first aid as well.

Keywords – Psychological first aid, knowledge, associated factors, preparedness, disasters, medical officers