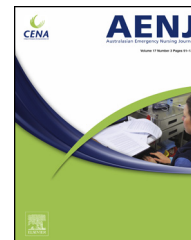




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RESEARCH PAPER

Perceptions of knowledge of disaster management among military and civilian nurses in Saudi Arabia



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Received 2 October 2014; received in revised form 1 February 2015; accepted 13 March 2015

KEYWORDS

Disaster;
Nursing;
Management;
Saudi Arabia;
Military;
Knowledge

Summary

Background: It is generally accepted that nurses have insufficient knowledge about disaster preparedness due to a lack of acceptance of core competencies and the absence of disaster preparedness in nursing curricula.¹ This study explored nurses' knowledge and sources of knowledge, and skills as they relate to disaster management in Saudi Arabia, where more than 4660 people have died, 32,000 people have been affected, and US\$4.65 billion in damage has been caused by disaster since 1980.²

Methods: A quantitative, non-experimental, descriptive research design.

Results: Nurses in Saudi Arabia have moderate knowledge concerning disaster preparedness. However, nurses in military hospitals possess more knowledge than those who work in government hospitals. The majority of nurses gained their knowledge and skills from disaster drills.

Conclusions: Nurses need more education in all areas of disaster management, most importantly in their roles during response to disasters. Nurses perceive themselves as not well-prepared but they are willing to improve their skills in disaster preparedness if educational opportunities are provided.

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What this paper adds?

- This study is the first study of the perceptions of preparedness for disaster management (as opposed to disaster clinical skills) for nurses in Saudi Arabia. The level of preparedness was found to be moderate, with a high interest by nurses in furthering their education in this area.
- In cities which are vulnerable for disaster in Saudi Arabia, the perception of preparedness by nurses working in military hospitals is higher than for those working in government hospitals.
- The disaster management nursing educational needs and preferences have been identified for the first time.

What is known about the topic?

- Nurses have insufficient knowledge about disaster preparedness.
- There is an absence of disaster preparedness content in nursing curricula.
- Nurses are not equipped with essential knowledge and skills for disaster management due to a lack of opportunity for education and training.
- Nurses are interested in improving their disaster – preparedness knowledge.

Introduction

The increase in the number of disasters of all types over the last 15 years has been accompanied by an increased focus on the work of responding health workers, both within countries and in international response.³ Awareness of, and preparedness for, disasters by both communities and healthcare workers are essential for the management of associated injury, death and loss of health service infrastructure. The field of disaster nursing is in an early stage of development. There is insufficient evidence on disaster upon which to base practice, together with a lack of qualified educators and a lack of formal education and training at the level of health organisations.¹² In addition, it is not fully incorporated into nursing curricula.⁷ Consequently, it is important to develop disaster nursing, particularly disaster nursing management, to ensure that nurses practice with a high level of competence and clearly understand their roles and the roles of others in disaster.

Due to differences in experience and qualifications, nurses hold disparate knowledge and skills in terms of disaster preparedness.^{13,14} However, these issues can be resolved through the identification of gaps in their expertise and the subsequent provision of further education and training to mitigate those deficits. To extend effective help to communities before, during and after the occurrence of a disaster, all nurses, including students, novice practitioners and experienced nurses, must possess high-level knowledge and proficiency in disaster nursing.¹⁵ Nurses play a critical role in managing disasters, as they account for the largest

professional group in the healthcare sector. Slepski and Littleton-Kearney¹⁶ argued that adequately prepared nurses were critical to confidently respond to and provide effective healthcare for victims of disaster. Nurses also play important roles in the planning, strategy, evaluation and policy development of disaster management.

However, several studies have found that in many countries nurses are not fully prepared for their role in disasters.^{4–9} There is a growing awareness by governments, communities and healthcare agencies of the need to evaluate nurses' roles in an organised response, especially the role of nurses in response to humanitarian disasters where populations need long-term on-going health support.²

In 2005, the World Health Organization (WHO)¹⁰ called on all countries to establish a clear plan to reduce the risks associated with disasters. In the same year, WHO identified strategies for disaster preparedness, including continuous assessment and monitoring, coordination, planning, implementation and building resilience. In particular, healthcare workers in hospitals and other medical organisations were required to possess sufficient information and skills regarding disaster management so they could assist in the event of mass casualties or damage to the facility itself. Areas that required particular attention with respect to creating guidelines were communication, response processes, chain of command, resource management, patient safety, transportation, triage and contamination.¹¹

Disaster nursing in the Middle East is not reported often in the literature. Only a small number of studies were found that aimed to evaluate disaster management information, skills and preparedness. After the Bam earthquake in Iran, which killed more than 43,000 people, researchers investigated nurses' experiences and skills in disaster management through semi-structured interviews of 13 Registered Nurses (RN).¹⁷ The findings were a lack of practical protocols, lack of effective teamwork at disaster sites and lack of education in disaster relief. Furthermore, there was a need to develop strategies for staff to manage catastrophic events. Recently, an integrative literature review was conducted to explore the issues of disaster nursing in Iran. This review revealed that: there is a lack of coordination between organisations that participate in disaster response; nurses are not equipped with the essential knowledge and skills for disaster management due to a lack of opportunity for education and training; finally, like many other countries, the education system of disaster nursing in Iran is not fully developed.¹⁸

Among Jordanian nurses, who share the same language, culture and religion, and a border with Saudi Arabia, a sample of 471 practitioners from five hospitals participated in a study to evaluate preparedness for disaster management.⁴ The study was conducted using the Disaster Preparedness Evaluation Tool (DPET) created by Tichy and Bond in 2007.^{4,8} The authors found variations in disaster preparedness ranging from moderate to low. The nurses had low knowledge and skills in terms of disaster planning and a low understanding of preparations for bioterrorism. However, the nurses recognised their limitations and were aware of the disaster risks in their communities. The authors found that more nurses acquired their skills from disaster drills than from any other situation. Nearly all of the participants wanted to increase their skills and knowledge in this area.

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