

A study to assess the knowledge and attitude of staff nurses regarding human rights of mentally ill patients at selected hospitals of Bangalore, India

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Abstract

Background: Mental illness raises many human rights issues. People with mental disorders are exposed to a wide range of human rights violation both within and outside the health care context. People with mental illness and their families do not exercise their rights, because of lack of awareness that they have such rights, lack of knowledge about how to effectively assert their rights, and lack of confidence in asserting their rights. The most important factor in ensuring patient's rights is the knowledge, attitude and commitment of the mental health professionals.

Objectives: The objectives of the study were to assess knowledge and attitude of staff nurses regarding human rights of mentally ill patients.

Methods: A descriptive approach was adopted for the study. A total of 50 staff nurses working in psychiatric wards of general hospitals and in psychiatric hospitals of Bangalore were selected through purposive sampling technique. A structured knowledge questionnaire was used to assess level of knowledge and a four-point Likert scale was used to assess attitude of nurses regarding human rights of mentally ill patients.

Results: The overall mean knowledge score was 50 percent and the overall mean attitude score was 68.65 percent among the staff nurses.

Conclusion: The results of the study exposed the requirement of continuing education of staff nurses regarding human rights of mentally ill patients.

Key words: Attitude, Human rights, Knowledge, Mentally ill patients, Staff nurses

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, people with mental disabilities have suffered some of the worst indignities of any group repeatedly. Feared and misunderstood, they often have been excluded from meaningful participation in civil society and denied opportunities, taken for granted by most. Like many vulnerable groups they have endured inequality, discrimination and serious social stigma¹.

Human rights encompasses the "basic rights and freedoms to which all humans are entitled." This covers a broad range of rights related to civil and political issues such as right to life and liberty, freedom of expression,

right to equality before the law and social, cultural and economic rights, including the right to participate in culture, the right to food and the right to education. It is critical that the rights of human beings in the event of an unsound mind or mental illness are contextualized and examined with careful consideration².

Human rights laws provide fundamental protections without qualification or exception³. People with mental disorders are particularly exposed to a wide range of human rights violation both within and outside the health care context. Violations often occur in psychiatric institutions through inadequate, degrading and harmful care and treatment as well as unhygienic and inhuman living conditions⁴. Issues related to consent for admission and treatment are often ignored, people are assumed to be incapable of making decisions concerning their admission and treatment because independent assessment of capacity is not undertaken⁴.

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The most significant and serious international effort to protect the rights of mentally ill is the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 46/119 on the Protection of Persons with Mental Illness and the Improvement of Mental Health Care, adopted in 1991 in which there are twenty five principles⁵. The principles focus primarily on human rights in relation to mental health system⁶.

Human rights issues are increasingly recognized as an area of immediate attention in the protection of persons with mental illness and in the improvement of mental health care⁷.

Health professionals and health authorities are most closely aware of human rights abuses and will need to play an active role in eradicating such abuses and preventing them from occurring in health institutions. This will require a clearer awareness of the rights of people with mental illness and a much more critical approach to clinical and institutional practices⁸.

Nurses of future cannot practice in ignorance of individual rights. Neither can the nurses ignore health care professionals and health care facilities responsibility to respect rights. The nurse's first responsibility is to be aware of the client's legal rights. The nurse's major responsibility is to follow through the client's rights with the nursing actions that ensure implementation of those rights⁹.

Perhaps the most important factor in ensuring patient's rights is the knowledge, attitude and commitment of the mental health professionals¹⁰.

The objectives of the study were to assess knowledge and attitude of staff nurses regarding human rights of mentally ill patients and to determine the relation between knowledge and attitude of staff nurses regarding human rights of mentally ill patients.

METHODS

A descriptive approach was adopted for the study. A total of 50 staff nurses working in psychiatric wards of general hospitals and in psychiatric hospitals of Bangalore, India were selected through purposive sampling technique. Ethical clearance was obtained from the ethical committee of the college. Formal written permission was obtained from the concerned authorities of selected hospitals of Bangalore. The written consent of the participant was obtained before data collection.

Data collection instrument used was a structured pro forma for demographic variables. A structured

knowledge questionnaire was used to assess level of knowledge of nurses regarding human rights of mentally ill patients. The tool had a total of twenty items. All the items were multiple choice questions. Correct answer were given one score. A four-point Likert scale was used to assess attitude of nurses regarding human rights of mentally ill patients. It consisted of 20 statements and four columns i.e. strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. Pilot study was conducted to assess the feasibility for the main study.

Data was collected from 9th May 2011 to 28th May 2011 and was analyzed with the help of Statistical package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16.

RESULTS

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

The study showed that most of the staff nurses, 26(52%) were in the age group 20-23 years (Mean \pm S.D.: 22.2 \pm 5.75). The result showed that the majority, 32(64%) of the staff nurses were females. The mean income was found to be Indian Rupees 4700 \pm 68.21. Among the total staff nurses under study, the majority, 39(78%) of them had completed General Nursing and Midwifery. The mean year of experience in psychiatry ward was 1.60 \pm 0.495.

Table 1 shows that the overall mean knowledge score was 50% among the staff nurses. The highest mean knowledge score was found in the areas of right to treatment and seclusion and restraint (70.0 %), whereas, lowest mean knowledge score was found in the area of right to enter into legal contracts (20.0 %).

Table 2 depicts that in the area of general information, out of total respondents, 66% had the knowledge regarding role of nurse to protect rights of a psychiatric patients. Similarly, 74% knew patient had the right to refuse treatment. Out of the total respondents, 44% of the respondents knew the nurse's action to protect client's right to privacy. Furthermore, 70% of the respondent had the knowledge of the criteria that justify seclusion and restraint. Only 30% of the respondents knew the rights of involuntarily committed patients. Knowledge responses of the respondents in aspects of violation of patient's right ranged from 18% to 34%.

The data presented in Table 3 shows that the overall mean attitude score was 68.65% among the staff nurses. The highest mean attitude score was found in the aspect of information on illness or treatment (72.33 %), whereas lowest mean attitude score was found in the aspect of forced treatment (65.87 %).

Table 1: Knowledge of the staff nurses regarding the human rights of mentally ill patients

n=5

S.No	Knowledge aspects	Statements	Range score	Knowledge score		
				Mean	Standard Deviation(SD)	Mean%
1	General information	8	1-7	3.82	1.320	47.75
2	Right to communication	1	0-1	0.28	0.454	28.0
3	Right to enter into legal contracts	1	0-1	0.20	0.404	20.0
4	Right to privacy	1	0-1	0.44	0.501	44.0
5	Right to informed consent	2	0-2	1.08	0.601	54.0
6	Right to treatment	1	0-1	0.70	0.463	70.0
7	Seclusion and restraint	1	0-1	0.70	0.463	70.0
8	Involuntarily committed patients	2	0-2	0.76	0.771	38.0
9	Violation of patient's right	3	0-3	0.84	1.017	28.0
Combined		20	2-18	10.00	5.014	50.0

Table 2: Findings related to distribution of correct responses to the knowledge questionnaire

n=50

No.	Knowledge Question	Correct response	
		N	%
I. General Information			
1.	Definition of human rights	31	62.0
2.	Key international human rights instrument	17	34.0
3.	Principal legislation of human rights in India	11	22.0
4.	Role of nurse	33	66.0
5.	Patient's right to refuse treatment	37	74.0
6.	Civil rights	32	64.0
8.	A situation presenting patient's rights	20	40.0
13.	A situation presenting patient's rights	10	20.0
II. Right to communication			
7.	Nursing action	14	28.0
III. Right to enter into legal contracts			
9.	Condition to validate a contract	10	20.0
IV. Right to privacy			
10.	Nursing action	22	44.0
V. Right to informed consent			
11.	Informed consent	28	56.0
14.	Nursing action	26	52.0
VI. Right to treatment			
12.	Criteria for adequate treatment	35	70.0
VII. Seclusion and restraint			
15.	Criteria that justify seclusion and restraint	35	70.0
VIII. Involuntarily committed patient			
16.	Criteria for involuntary admission	23	46.0
17.	Right of involuntarily committed patient	15	30.0
IX. Violation of patient's right			
18.	Situation	9	18.0
19.	Situation	16	32.0
20.	Situation	17	34.0

Table 3: Attitude of the staff nurses regarding the human rights of mentally ill patients.

n=50

S.No	Attitude aspect	Statements	Range score	Attitude score		
				Mean	SD	Mean%
1	Forced treatment	4	7-15	10.54	1.908	65.87
2	Restrictions	4	9-13	11.0	1.178	68.75
3	Forced hospitalization	3	6-11	8.06	1.346	67.16
4	Confidentiality	3	6-11	8.22	1.055	68.5
5	Information on illness or treatment	3	7-12	8.68	1.168	72.33
6	Treatment	2	3-8	5.72	1.278	71.5
7	Civil rights	1	1-4	2.70	0.931	67.5
Combined		20	47-66	54.92	4.539	68.65

Correlation between knowledge score and attitude score of the staff nurses regarding human rights of mentally ill.

The findings of the study revealed a positive correlation between knowledge and attitude of respondents on human rights of mentally ill patients. The correlation between knowledge and attitude indicates that staff nurses with good knowledge on human rights of mentally ill patients have a favorable attitude towards it. ($r=+0.538$).

DISCUSSION

The overall mean knowledge score was only 50 percent among the staff nurses. This suggests that there is lack of awareness in nurses regarding rights of mentally ill. This may be due to the absence of continuing education in the health care setting they work.

The mean percentage of knowledge score on general information showed 47.75 percent in this study. In the area of general information, the findings of this study depicted that 66 percent knew about nurse's role to protect the rights of a psychiatric patient which is consistent with the finding of a study conducted in UK¹¹ in which 59 percent were aware about ICN- nurse's role in safe guarding human rights. Similarly, on the aspect of general information, the study result showed that of the total respondents, 74 percent knew patient had the right to refuse the treatment which is slightly higher than the findings of a study conducted at Ain Shams University where the knowledge score of right to refuse treatment was 59.4 percent¹². Similarly, in the area of general information, only 22 percent knew about the principal legislation protecting rights of mentally ill in India whereas a study conducted in UK reported a higher percentage of 64.2 as per their knowledge regarding human rights act in UK¹³.

The study findings revealed a mean knowledge score of 44 percent in the area of right to privacy. A study conducted at Ain Shams University, Egypt revealed a score of 87.6 percent on this area. This finding is not in accordance with this study¹². The present study documented a mean knowledge of 54 percent on right to informed consent. In contrast to the present study two studies conducted at Turkey¹⁴ and Egypt¹² had a higher percentage score of 99 percent and 85.3 percent respectively on the knowledge of this right.

In the present study the area of seclusion and restraint had a mean score of 70 percent whereas a study in Hong Kong demonstrated only a modest level of knowledge of restraint use among the nurses¹⁵. The mean percentage knowledge score on rights of involuntarily committed patients is 38 percent in this study. A study conducted in England showed a slightly higher percentage of 45 percent on knowledge of patient's right at the time of an involuntary admission¹⁶.

The study finding on attitude of rights demonstrate that staff nurses favor the view that patient's right should be compromised in situations when they felt that there is a reasonable chance of benefiting the patient. This finding is supported by a study conducted in Israel to compare the patients and staff members' attitude of rights of hospitalized psychiatric patients. Their findings seem to support the often exaggerated stereotype of mental health professional as being authoritarian and not always sensitive to patient's rights which is also in accordance to this present study.

The study further expressed the view that the staff members attitudes appeared to be close to the "treatment driven model" which endorses a right to object to treatment but not a right to refuse it. The present study also supports this view of staff members¹⁷.

CONCLUSION

The results of study exposed the requirement of continuing education of staff nurses regarding human rights of mentally ill patients. It should be made

mandatory that topics on rights of mentally ill patients and other legal aspects be included in the curriculum of all nursing education programmes.

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