

Knowledge and Exposure to Occupational Hazards in Nursing Profession Among Nursing Undergraduates in Three State Universities, the University of Peradeniya, the University of Sri Jayawardhanapura and the University of Ruhuna in Sri Lanka

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Nurses are an integral component of the healthcare system and, they are prone to various hazards. Most of the research on occupational hazards (OH) in the nursing profession (NP) involves nurses, and a very small number of research have been conducted among nursing students in countries such as: Ethiopia, Turkey, China, and Egypt. There is no research published in Sri Lanka on this area. The objective of the study is to determine the knowledge of an exposure to OH in the NP among nursing undergraduates (NU) in three state universities. This was a descriptive cross-sectional online study, conducted among 308 NU from University of Peradeniya (UoP), University of Sri Jayawardhanapura (UoJ), and the University of Ruhuna (UoR). A proportionate random sampling method was utilized, such that a proportionate number of participants was recruited from each batch of nursing degree programme from each University. The questionnaire was sent out to all students via WhatsApp groups and emails. After two weeks, reminders were sent requesting to fill out the questionnaires. Upon receiving responses, proportionate numbers of responses were selected using random number generator on Excel. Data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire. Permission was obtained from the developers of the questionnaire in Ethiopia. The questionnaire was pre-tested among 30 NU. It comprised six parts: socio demographic data, knowledge about OH, and exposure to biological, physical, mechanical & psychological factors. The knowledge part comprised 5 questions. Biological, physical, mechanical, psychological factors; each comprised 6, 6, 6, and 8 questions respectively. The overall percentages reported in the findings were calculated similar to the study done in Ethiopia. The majority of participants were females 81.2%. 59.9% represented UoR. 20.1%, and 19.7%, were from the UoJ and the UoP respectively. In the study, 29.6%, 28.5%, 26.5% and 15.2% of participants were from the first, second, third, and final year respectively. The majority, (90%) of the students had learned about OH at the university. The majority, 95.5% of participants had knowledge that needle prick, blood flush, and skin cuts can cause OH while only 94.8% knew that mechanical injuries and chemical & biological factors can cause OH. The prevalence of exposure to biological, mechanical, physical and physiological factors was 66.85%, 50.42%, 58.32% and 63.10% respectively. The NU had a high prevalence of exposure to OH. Although, majority of the NU had learnt about OH at the university and had knowledge about OH, the exposure to OH was high. Ongoing training on OH, safety and infection prevention and control for NU is strongly recommended based on the study results.

Keywords: Occupational hazards, nursing undergraduates, nursing profession