

Psychological effects and motivations among public health nurses during the COVID-19 pandemic in Japan

Akari Miyazaki

Master's program in Nursing Science, University of Tsukuba

Tomoko Omiya

Faculty of Medicine, Division of Health Innovation and Nursing, Department of Public Health Nursing, University of Tsukuba

Naoko Deguchi

Faculty of Medicine, Division of Health Innovation and Nursing, Department of Public Health Nursing, University of Tsukuba

Background

Public health nurses (PHNs) are one of the few municipal civil servants who lead community infection control and prevention works in Japanese public health centers (PHCs). Unfortunately, the number of centers was reduced by 45% in the 30 years prior to the COVID-19 outbreak. The decreased number of PHCs and the COVID-19 outbreak have increased the amount of PHN's workload. The level of distress suffered by PHNs has not been investigated.

Aim of the study

This study aimed to investigate the difficulties faced by PHNs. Also clarify in detail how they coped with their distress and continued their work in a fragile public health system.

Methods

Narrative interviews with 11 PHNs in various ages were conducted. They all have been involved in prevention and control of COVID-19 in PHCs. Inductive analysis was performed with these data.

Results

In early 2020, an uncertainty of the virus caused high anxiety to people including medical care workers. Under such situation, PHNs experienced psychological distress, caused by challenges in establishing local medical system and receiving frustration and anger from residents. As the number of COVID-19 positive cases increases, PHNs are faced with managing patients with more medical attentions in under-resourced local medical settings. The main motivation for the PHNs to continue working in the PHCs is dependent on the collaborative environment with the colleagues and improvements in the organizational structure.

Conclusions and implications

Organizational Resilience – not individual strength – enables PHNs to fulfill their roles flexibly under crisis. Strengthening Organizational Resilience is vital for maintaining delivery of public health services during a crisis situation.