Thai Nurses’ Experiences in Providing Mental Health Services to Survivors of the 2004 Tsunami Six Months Post-disaster *

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Abstract

Purpose: This research explored Thai nurses’ experiences in providing mental health services six months after the 2004 tsunami disaster, and their perspectives of factors that promoted and impeded services in the affected areas working in Phungha Province.

Design: A qualitative research design was employed.

Methods: Information was obtained from 16 nurses who had worked at a variety of health service centers. Data were collected by conducting 2 focus groups and 10 in-depth individual interviews, and analysed by content analysis.

Main findings: Five themes were emerged. The first related to care during the crisis phase: Be a friend to face with struggle, helping to manage forthcoming problems, and being supportive. Themes two, three and four related to management of mental health services: Informing people in the community, so that individuals with stress were discovered; Working as a bridge, lack of participation; and Working separately, no collaboration, lots of confusion. The last theme related to mental health service providers: When the sky became bright, health care personnel became exhausted. Key promoting factors of mental health services included having nurses to be responsible for providing mental health services in affected areas; having strong community networking and health volunteers; and learning management strategies from other areas. On the other hand, impeding factors for mental health services included a lack of systematic management and having large numbers of survivors living in the same areas.

Conclusions and recommendations: The findings suggest a plan for psychological assistance of survivors of the disaster by having community participation as well as a plan for systematic management of the people in the affected areas.

Keywords: disaster nursing, content analysis, mental health services, survivors, tsunami