

First Aid in Mental Health Nursing: An Essential Component of Early Intervention and Crisis Care

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Abstract: ***Background:** Mental health crises such as panic attacks, suicidal ideation, and psychotic episodes can occur suddenly and require immediate intervention. Mental health first aid (MHFA) is a critical skill for nurses to provide timely support and reduce harm until professional care is available. **Objective:** This article aims to explore the concept, need, and application of first aid in mental health nursing, and to emphasize its importance in early intervention and patient safety. **Methodology:** A narrative review was conducted through secondary sources including WHO guidelines, Indian Nursing Council materials, and recent nursing research published between 2018 and 2024. **Results:** The findings indicate that mental health first aid is under - utilized in India due to stigma and lack of training. Nurses trained in MHFA are more likely to respond effectively, reduce hospitalization needs, and enhance patient trust. **Conclusion:** Integrating first aid principles in mental health nursing can transform early crisis care and reduce long - term psychiatric morbidity. Regular MHFA training should be made mandatory in nursing curricula.*

Keywords: Mental Health First Aid, Nursing Intervention, Crisis Management, Psychiatric Emergency, Early Intervention, Suicide Prevention

1. Introduction

Mental health disorders account for a growing burden of disease globally, with approximately 1 in 8 people affected. In India, the treatment gap remains over 70%, especially in rural areas. During psychiatric emergencies, nurses are often the first responders, making first aid in mental health nursing an essential skill.

Unlike physical first aid, mental health first aid (MHFA) involves identifying early signs of distress, providing reassurance, de - escalating crises, and guiding patients to professional help. Yet, its integration in formal nursing education and practice is minimal, particularly in the Indian context.

2. Methodology

This article is based on a narrative review methodology, using secondary data from:

- 1) WHO Mental Health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP)
- 2) Indian Nursing Council (INC) curriculum guidelines
- 3) Peer - reviewed journals from PubMed, Scopus, and Indian academic databases
- 4) Case studies and hospital protocols from mental health institutions in Punjab

The selection criteria focused on publications from 2018 to 2024, in English, related to nursing - based first aid interventions in mental health settings.

3. Results

Key findings from the review include:

- 1) Improved Outcomes: Nurses trained in MHFA reported a 40% increase in crisis resolution without hospitalization.
- 2) Stigma Reduction: Patients felt more supported and less judged when approached with MHFA techniques.

- 3) Skill Gaps: Most Indian nursing students had minimal exposure to psychiatric first aid scenarios.

A small observational study conducted at a nursing college in Punjab showed that 85% of students could not recognize early signs of psychosis or suicidal behavior, indicating urgent training needs.

4. Discussion

Mental health first aid is not just a theoretical concept but a life - saving intervention. The ALGEE model, widely accepted in MHFA training, includes:

- 1) Assess risk of suicide or harm
- 2) Listen non - judgmentally
- 3) Give reassurance and information
- 4) Encourage professional help
- 5) Encourage self - help strategies

In India, where mental health remains stigmatized, nursing professionals must act as bridge figures between communities and psychiatric services. Incorporating MHFA into nursing practice can improve confidence, reduce burnout, and enhance patient outcomes.

5. Conclusion

First aid in mental health nursing is a critical yet under - addressed aspect of healthcare in India. Given the rise in psychiatric emergencies, especially post - COVID - 19, nurses must be equipped with practical tools to address crises. Mental health first aid should be mandated in nursing syllabi, and periodic workshops should be held in clinical settings.

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