

COVID-19 Pandemic: Assessment of Knowledge, Attitude and Practice of Nurses Towards Care for Elderly: A Narrative Review

Victor Mathias*, & Bupe Khalison Mwandali

School of Nursing, Kairuki University, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

*Corresponding author: Victor Mathias, School of Nursing, Kairuki University, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

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Abstract

Nurses have a role in providing quality care for older people with Covid-19 through their knowledge and skills. The aim of the review was to identify nurses' knowledge, attitude, and practice (KAP) in caring for older people in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The literature review included theoretical and empirical literature. Peer-reviewed scientific journals related to nurses' knowledge, attitude, and practice (KAP) in caring for older people in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic were obtained from three databases (Google Scholar, PubMed, a HINARI). In addition, key words search of these databases was used. One hundred fourteen studies (n=114) on nurses' KAP in caring older people with COVID-19 were identified. A Later analysis was followed to analyse the studies whereby researchers merged findings of single and independent studies. Four main themes emerged from the analysis namely nurses' KAP as a whole, nurses' knowledge on clinical features of COVID-19 in elderly, nurses' attitude towards caring elderly infected with COVID-19 and nurses' practice towards caring for older people infected with COVID-19. The review suggests that nurses need additional education to effectively care for older patients hospitalized with COVID-19 or during similar public health challenges.

Keywords: Covid-19, Elderly Care, Nurses' Attitudes, Nurses' KAP, Nurses' Knowledge, Nurses' Practice.

Introduction

The increasing number of older people mean that population aging is becoming a major public health concern globally [1]. The number of older people is expected to increase to one in six of the global population by 2050. According to the WHO (2018), by 2050, the proportion of people aged over 60 years will increase from 12% in 2015 to 22%, and 80% of them will be from developing countries. In Tanzania, the number of people aged 60 years and over will increase from 4% to 10% of the total population by 2050. The older population is known to have a weakened immune system and is therefore at risk of many health problems, including infectious diseases such as coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) [2,3]. In addition, elderly people are considered a vulnerable group because of the biological effects of aging, which lead to common physical health problems. In Tanzania, the first case was confirmed on 16 March 2020 and by 2022, there were 42,927 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 846 deaths. Evidence suggests that older people were at high risk of

acquiring and dying from COVID-19 and the older population accounted for around 15% more COVID-19-related deaths than younger people. A US study showed that 45% of all COVID-19 deaths occurred in homes for older people, and 42%–57% of COVID-19 deaths were among older people [4]. In addition, a study conducted in Tanzania by indicated that the burden of stroke, a condition that mostly affects older people, had increased following COVID-19 infection [5].

The severity of symptoms, along with uncertainties regarding health outcomes and circumstances surrounding end-of-life care were also higher among older patients compared with younger patients, which increased the burden on healthcare systems. In general, the increasing number of older people requires an adequate number of healthcare providers with gerontology skills. This need is heightened in crisis or pandemic situations. The shortage of nurses is already a worldwide burden, and the COVID-19 pandemic made it even worse [7]. Nurses have

a high level of exposure to COVID-19, and therefore, require special attention. Assessing nurses' KAP toward COVID-19 is significant for identifying gaps in the prevention and control of negative outcomes. It also serves as one of the indicators of the nurses' readiness to deal with COVID-19 transmission.

It has been noted that the large number of older people in Sub-Saharan African countries, including Tanzania, has increased the burden on the scarce healthcare resources available to care for this population. Accordingly, the purpose of the literature review was to identify the KAP of nurses regarding caring for older people within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods and Search Strategy

The literature that was reviewed included theoretical and empirical literature. In addition, the literature review included previous studies on nurses' KAP towards caring for older people infected with COVID 19 globally. Most of the literature used consisted of studies published from 2020 to 2024. A few references older than 10 years were used because they were foundational, influential, primary and relevant references. In addition, references used for the literature review included significant theories.

Peer-reviewed scientific journals related to nurses' knowledge, attitude, and practice (KAP) in caring for older people in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic were obtained from three databases (Google Scholar, PubMed, and HINARI). These databases were searched for articles published in peer-reviewed scientific journals. The search terms included "nurses' KAP", "attitude of Nurses", "Covid-19", "older people care", "knowledge of nurses", or "practice of nurses". References of the included articles were also used to search for other eligible articles. The references that were searched were managed by Endnote software.

Review

One hundred fourteen studies (n=114) about nurses' KAP in caring for older people with COVID-19 were identified. A Later analysis was conducted to analyse the studies. The narrative review process and analysis were conducted according to the steps described by Lee (5) namely formulation of the research question, literature searching, selection of quality, published, and relevant studies on the subject and decision on the variables to include. Lastly sources of between-studies heterogeneity were examined which allowed the analysis of studies by subgrouping them according to the specific themes. Analysis of the results of the studies reviewed revealed four main themes, namely, nurses' KAP as a whole, nurses' knowledge of the clinical features of COVID-19 in older people, nurses' attitudes towards caring for older people infected with COVID-19, and nurses' practices in caring for older people infected with COVID-19.

Nurses' KAP Towards Caring Older People Infected with COVID-19

Approximately half of all healthcare workers globally are nurses [8]. In their study done in Tanzania, identified that stroke, a condition that mostly affects older people, had an increased burden following COVID-19 infection. In their study done in indicated that despite older people care requiring healthcare workers with specific knowledge, skills, attitudes, and practices, many health care workers in Tanzania are not adequately prepared to

care for the elderl [4.5] as nurses form a large component of the healthcare workforce, they were at the forefront of COVID-19 care for older patients. Because COVID-19 placed older people at increased risk given their weakened immunity, nurses needed appropriate KAP related to caring for older people in this context [9]. Furthermore, gaps in knowledge and attitudes were highlighted in a study from Yemen that assessed nurses' KAP in relation to COVID-19 [10]. The study recommended to healthcare authorities should help to alleviate anxiety, fear, and panic and improve nurses' KAP. However, the study did not identify the required strategies for improving KAP.

A study from Ethiopia found that 26%, 28% and 33% of nurses had low knowledge, negative attitude and poor practices, respectively (Tadesse et al. (2020). Furthermore, the gap in knowledge and attitude was highlighted in the study done in Yemen to assess KAP among nurses towards COVID-19 [10]. The authors further stated that because of age related comorbidities, it is very important that healthcare for older people should be provided by nurses with geriatric knowledge, positive attitude and gerontological expertise. However, it has been identified that most of nurses in health systems especially in low-and middle-income countries have limited guidance on how to provide effective care to elderly and at the same lacking gerontological expertise [11]. Ahmed, Shakoor, Vohra, Abduljabbar, Mariam and Rehman (2020) indicated that 81.9% of healthcare workers believed that the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 were the same as those of common flu, while 79% stated that older people were the main group affected. However, the authors identified that 48% of healthcare workers were not aware of the measures required to combat COVID-19, while 38% were practicing inadequately to combat the disease.

In addition, despite older people with COVID-19 being at high risk of hospital admission, needing intensive care and dying, there appeared to be limited evidence of nurses' KAP regarding provision of effective care for this group (Kunz & Minder, 2020; Lloyd-Sherlock et al., 2020) [11]. A study conducted in indicated that despite older people requiring healthcare workers with specific knowledge, skills, attitudes and practices, many healthcare workers were not adequately prepared to care for this population [5].

The severity of the COVID-19 pandemic among older people highlighted the need for effective nursing care to promote good health among this group [8]. The evidence from the reviewed studies, including the study conducted in Zanzibar (Tanzania islands), indicates a gap in nurses' KAP regarding the provision of adequate care for older people hospitalized with COVID-19.

Nurses' Knowledge of the Clinical Features of COVID-19 in Older People

Arcadi, Simonetti, Ambrosca, Cicolini, Simeone, Pucciarelli, Alvaro, Vellone and Durante (2021) indicated that nurses need to be prepared including through frequent trainings in order to prevent stress among them and ensure better quality care of the elderly with COVID-19. Current evidence suggests that older people are at higher risk of both acquiring and dying from COVID-19. Older people are estimated to account for up to 15% more deaths than younger people infected with COVID-19. The severity of symptoms, uncertainties regarding health outcomes

and circumstances surrounding end-of-life care demand appropriate care for older patients. Despite the elderly population being at higher odds of hospital admission, requiring intensive care and dying from COVID-19, there appear to be limited guidance to nurses on how to provide effective care to this particular group [11]. In order to increase knowledge, promote positive attitudes, and improve practices among health workers in Tanzania, training aimed at equipping them with the necessary skills was provided in the country to enable healthcare workers to treat critically ill patients, especially those suffering from COVID-19 [7]. In addition, Jhpiego has been providing training to nurses to build their capacity for responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, [12].

However, it was identified that 43.5% of nurses had low knowledge despite being at high risk of contracting the disease. In addition, in their study, indicated that 42.6% of the nurses had low knowledge about caring for COVID-19 patients [13]. In assessing nurses' awareness of COVID-19, Fakhri, Jallal, Belabbes, Khudur, Kaddar, Oubaasri, Elhadraoui, Mohammed Abdallahi, Al Hassani and Nejari (2021) indicated that 16.8% of them did not know that if elderly people were at higher risk of developing a severe COVID-19.

Because COVID-19 placed older people at increased risk given their weakened immunity, nurses needed good knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) relating to caring for older people in this context [9]. However, many studies reported that nurses lacked knowledge about providing care during COVID-19. found that 43.5% of nurses had low knowledge despite their risk for contracting COVID-19 [9]. Similarly, a study conducted in Dubai indicated that 42.6% of nurses had low knowledge about caring for patients with COVID-19 [13]. As nurses were front-line care providers for patients with COVID-19, they needed to be well informed about the pandemic [14].

Nurses' Attitudes Towards Caring for Older People Infected with COVID-19

The review found that nurses experienced negative emotions, which impacted the provision of immediate care [15]. It was further stated that anxiety, fear and panic were noted among health care providers when caring for older people affected with COVID-19, [10]. indicated that preparation for nurses should include frequent training to prevent stress and ensure better quality care for older people with COVID-19[16].

Nurses' Practices Towards Caring for Older People Infected with COVID-19

Approximately half of healthcare workers globally are nurses [8]. Following the global spread of the infectious disease known as COVID-19, healthcare workers, especially nurses, were at greater risk because of direct contact with patients while providing care [9]. It was identified that the majority of older people from Sub-Saharan African countries, Tanzania inclusive, suffer from non-communicable diseases, with inadequate human and material resources for the provision of the required health services to older people. The increasing number of older people also requires an adequate number of healthcare providers with gerontology skills [17]. The severity of COVID-19 pandemic among older people has highlighted the need of good nursing care which can promote good health among the group [8].

Therefore, society needs to increase awareness of the risks facing the elderly and to identify means of protecting and caring for them [15]. A study conducted in Tanzanian outpatient facilities to determine COVID-19 prevention and control found that health workers infection prevention and control compliance was inadequate [18].

In their study on bearing the brunt of Covid-19 among older people in low- and middle-income countries, found that it was not easy to deal with problems facing older people, especially in settings where there is often weak public health infrastructure. The authors further stated that a lack of gerontological expertise at all levels of the health system and limited trust in government have been obstacles in dealing with problems facing older people with COVID-19 [11]. Despite the efforts of the Tanzanian Government to care for older people, including the formulation of the National Ageing Policy, the majority of older people have continued to experience difficulties accessing and enjoying their entitled basic rights, including health services [20-31].

Conclusion

The literature review identified several areas of competence that are required by nurses to provide care for older people infected with COVID-19. The researchers identified four domains of nurses' requirements for caring for older people with COVID-19, which were termed themes in the review. The four domains identified were nurses' KAP as a whole; nurses' knowledge of the clinical features of COVID-19 in older people; nurses' attitudes towards caring for older people infected with COVID-19; and nurses' practices in caring for older people infected with COVID-19. Thus, for any country to have nurses who can provide quality care to older people infected with COVID-19, nurses should be adequately prepared and equipped with positive knowledge, attitudes, and practices across these domains.

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