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Separation at the workplace after the nuclear accident due to The Great East Japan Earthquake: Is the classification for dividing hospital nurses accurate

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Statement of the problem: Following the nuclear accident at Fukushima reactors with The Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011, part of the Fukushima prefecture was designated as the evacuation zone. Even from other areas where no evacuation orders were issued, many citizens evacuated themselves voluntarily. Previous reports showed that many nurses were absent from work in still-operating hospitals outside the evacuation zone and that they were split into groups based on their action regarding evacuation. However, how the nurses distinguished themselves remains unknown. The purpose of this study was to understand how nurses classified themselves and what terms had been applied to describe the classification at hospitals outside the evacuation zone.

Methodology: We conducted a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews with twenty nurses and six nurse managers who worked at three hospitals, which were located close to, yet outside, the evacuation zone during the dire period of the disaster. We analyzed the transcripts of the interview data by focusing on the classification terms and its contexts used by the nurses at the workplace.

Results: Nurses used “evacuees” or “non-evacuees” as classification terms even though not all nurses who were absent had left the city. The terms do not always refer to actual evacuation. In fact, such terms were used from the viewpoint of attendance and absence. However, the classification did not fit that of the organizational treatments regarding attendance. Moreover, the actions taken by nurses at that time did not match with the meaning of the terms. The division was classified intuitively based on ambiguous and inconsistent criteria. Furthermore, such ambiguous classification with unfit terms had been used across hospitals.

Conclusion & Significance: The terms used to classify themselves had been used very ambiguously. Therefore, it requires a careful consideration when understanding and interpreting the terms.

Biography

Keiko Kunie RN, PHN, PhD is an assistant professor of the Department of Nursing Administration, Graduate School of Medicine, The University of Tokyo. She has expertise in improving organizational operation in nursing departments and communication in the nursing workplace. Her research interests include nursing organization and providing practical support to nursing managers to run an organization effectively. She is also involved with the co-researchers figuring out the situation at workplace and nurses' experience of working at hospitals in Fukushima prefecture after the nuclear accident.

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