Do bystanders help or hinder at the scene of drowning incidents? A review of Irish press reports

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If a lifesaver has to deal with a rescue the most likely assistance available will be a bystander. Because of the hazardous nature of lifesaving incidents, lifesaving trainees need to be trained to a standard which is fit for purpose. Accordingly, the lifesaver's operating environment needs to be established and understood as is the likelihood of what occurs at the rescue scene. However, no research has been found which deals with what occurs at the rescue scene or what assistance is available. Therefore, there is a need to fill this information gap.

To identify the environment in which lifesavers operate and to establish what happens at the rescue scene in Ireland. A review of 149 newspaper reports of aquatic rescues undertaken in Ireland between 2002 and 2007 was undertaken. Forty-four of these reports were of rescues undertaken by individuals, not by the emergency services. A literature review identified the assistance which, good practice would suggest, rescuer should seek. It also indicated the reactions of individuals under pressure. By calculating the chances of different types of risks this gives lifesavers an indication of the risk associated with them.

This study established the chances of events occurring and what is likely to happen in a rescue situation. Lifesavers require the following eight types of information:
How do individuals react at the scene of a rescue? (1, 2, 4)
Are the emergency services actively summoned or do they arrive on the initiative of some third party? (2, 3).
Is information sought from bystanders? (5)
How do helpers perform at the scene? (1).
How amenable are individuals to being organised? (1)
Do they accept instructions or directions? (1)
How often do rescuers require assistance?
In what locations are lifesavers likely to attempt rescues?

Discussion

This approach gave an indication of what occurs at the rescue scene in Ireland in a given period. It can be replicated in any geographic area and utilised at any time in the future. Repeating the procedure will allow comparison over time or geographic areas.

Conclusion

The results of this study give an indication of assistance available at the rescue scene and how beneficial it is likely to be. It also suggests that in most cases the rescuer will operate alone. In a small number of cases good quality help is forthcoming, but in a small number of cases the bystander intervention can be extremely dangerous. The rescuer needs to make sure the emergency services are summoned to ensure their own safety.

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References

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