

LATERAL WORK VIOLENCE IN NURSING: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

Authors: Alayna Riozzi-Bodine, Shannon Denehy, Nooran Hassan, Cecilia Aversano

Monmouth University, West Long Branch, NJ

Background

The term “to eat the young” is something that has plagued the new graduate nurses' experience for many years. It can be defined as “interpersonal conflict between two nurses at the same hierarchical levels in organizations” (Rosi et al., 2020). This workplace violence causes job dissatisfaction, high turnover rates and emotional distress that can affect well-being (Renfro et al., 2023).

Purpose

This systemic review aims to evaluate the effects of lateral workplace violence against the experience of new graduate nurses and their ability to transition from education to job. The purpose is to investigate the direct and indirect experiences of horizontal violence in newly graduated nurses and to shed light on the phenomenon and bring it awareness and recognition.

Methods

A comprehensive literature search was conducted across multiple databases, including EBSCO Host, CINAHL, for studies published from 2017 to 2025. Studies included assessing the reporting of lateral workplace violence, interviews of 32 nurses to explore their experience with lateral workplace violence, and face-to-face interviews with 21 nurses who had a work experience of 6 months to 3 years.

Results

The study examined horizontal violence among nurses through various research methods, including systematic reviews, qualitative phenomenological analysis, and interviews. A systematic review of global reports found a prevalence rate ranging from 7% to 73%, varying by frequency, type, and timing of incidents within the first year (Anderson & Morgan, 2017). Qualitative analysis identified four main themes: perpetrators of violence, methods used, effects on victims, and protective strategies (Renfro et al., 2023). Interviews with nurses revealed three key findings: intergenerational hostility is common, workplace hostility is normalized within the profession, and nurses are often treated as dispensable (Rosi et al., 2020). The findings underscore the persistence of horizontal violence, its ties to workplace stress, and its justification as a rite of passage.

Outcomes

The review highlights the detrimental effects of lateral violence on newly qualified nurses, leading to:

- Job burnout
- Emotional distress
- Decreased job satisfaction
- Higher turnover rates
- Not only affects nurses' well-being and professional conduct but also compromises patient care quality.

What is next...

- These findings emphasize the need for structural changes, including intergenerational training, mentoring programs, and communication interventions, to foster a more supportive nursing culture.
- Implementing strategies that promote psychological safety and mitigate hostile interactions is essential for improving nurse retention, workplace morale, and overall job satisfaction.

References

Anderson, L. B., & Morgan, M. (2017). An Examination of Nurses' Intergenerational Communicative Experiences in the Workplace: Do Nurses Eat Their Young? *Communication Quarterly*, 65(4), 377–401. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463373.2016.1259175>

Renfro, S., Ruley, A. K., Alford, E., Broussard, K., & Fisher, M. J. (2023). Nurses Eating Their Young: Do We Have the Tools to Stop Lateral Workplace Violence? *Oklahoma Nurse*, 68(3), 10.

Rosi, I. M., Contiguglia, A., Millama, K. R., & Rancati, S. (2020). Newly graduated nurses' experiences of horizontal violence. *Nursing ethics*, 27(7), 1556–1568. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0969733020929063>