

Breaking the Silence:

Lateral Violence, New Graduate Nurses, and Nursing Culture

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What Is Lateral Violence?



- “Nurses eat their young” phenomenon
- Can include bullying, exclusion, criticism, intimidation
- Often normalized as a “rite of passage” or a “part of the job”
- Verbal or psychological bullying is most common type of mistreatment in nursing

Verbal Bullying

Excessive criticism, belittling comments, or public humiliation of colleagues signals workplace bullying behaviour.

Exclusion

Being deliberately left out of meetings, withheld information, or having work sabotaged are common tactics.

Intimidation

Threatening behaviour, aggressive body language, or abuse of authority to control others.



Why does this Matter?

- 78% of nursing students report being bullied in placements
- 50% report witnessing lateral violence during student placements
- Within the first six months of practice, approximately 60% of nurses leave their first job
- 90% of nurses in the emergency department reported lateral violence
- Preceptors are often the perpetrators to the novice nurse they are supposed to be guiding into practice

Impact on Practice:

- Impacts nursing confidence, which can lead to more errors (medication errors, falls etc.)
- Faster burnout and turnover among staff
- Job dissatisfaction
- Significantly impacts patient safety
- Highly prevalent on medical-surgical units
- Negative experiences limit confidence in students
 - increases stress, anxiety, depression
 - reduces motivation to learn



The Cycle of Culture

- Intergenerational pattern
- Frequently normalized - learned behaviours
- Bullying novice nurses leads to unpreparedness for independent practice
- Leads to stress, self-doubt, discouragement
- Worsens turnover, burnout, reduced care quality, reduced professional confidence, and poor patient outcomes



Where It Starts: Education

- Educators have a unique position
- Undergraduate experiences shape identity
- Students remember how they are treated more than what they are taught
- Learning environments shape future workplace culture
- Scaffolding approaches to build confidence

“We are nothing without our students”

- Students = future of healthcare
- Their confidence shapes the profession
- Without support, they will feel voiceless, no advocacy, increasing patient risks



- Teaching = partnership, not authority
- Every interaction shapes identity
- Respect over hierarchy



Educator Responsibility

Culture Begins with Us

- Team relationships set the tone
- Psychological safety
- Modelling behaviour shapes future nurses



Real Voices

“On my first day shift as a new orientee on the surgical floor, my preceptor went home sick. Due to short staffing, I was reassigned and given four patients by another nurse. Although she said she’d be available, she was busy with her own load, and I was left feeling unsafe and unsupported. When I brought my concerns to management, they backed me and told me to go home. While I was charting, management spoke to the nurse about the situation. Not realizing I was sitting nearby, she and other nurses spoke abrasively, saying I had enough help and was being dramatic. I started crying at the station, and only then did they realize I was there. It was a discouraging experience and a clear example of nurses eating their young.”

-2024

“When I had my first shift ever as a new graduate medical-surgical nurse my preceptor made me take two patients on my first day on a new unit. I had not had a medical-surgical placement in over a year and did not feel competent to start with two patients without being orientated to the unit. Due to the unwelcoming feeling, I took two patients despite not feeling comfortable on my first day. The nurse did not ask if I was doing okay and rarely checked in on my first day. I felt as if I was thrown to the wolves and was put in a sink or swim situation.”

-2025

“As a nursing student, I made an oversight in my charting. The primary nurse responded by reprimanding me in front of the entire team at the nursing station.”

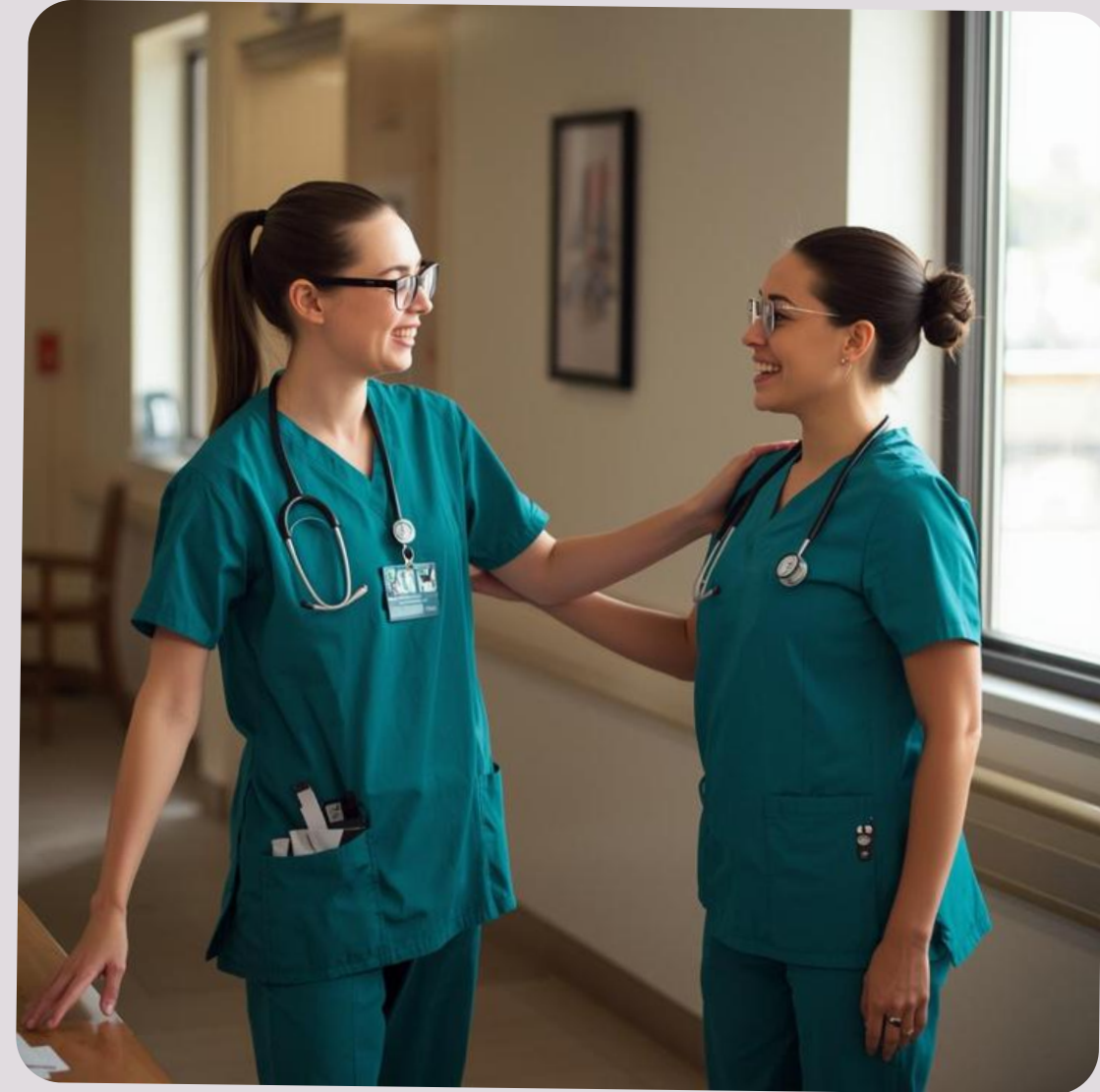
-2025

“Day after day, I was getting picked on by this one nurse, well at least that was my perception and then finally I said to the seasoned nurse ‘what am I doing that is bothering you? What have I done wrong?’ They then responded with ‘OK you do have a backbone.’ And then everything was fine after that. My concern afterwards was what if I didn’t say anything? What will happen to the next person who doesn’t feel confident enough to address this. I was ready to leave that unit.”

-2011

What Builds Confidence?

- Psychological safety
- Mentorship
- Encouragement
- Feeling seen and supported



Framework



Reframing Accountability

- Accountability does not equal intimidation
- Feedback should build not break
- Safe correction improves learning

Psychological Safety

- Ask questions without fear
- Make mistakes safely
- Learn without shame

Breaking the Silence

- Name the behaviour
- Challenge normalization
- Support those experiencing it
- Shift from silence to accountability

Collective Responsibility

- Educators
- Senior nurses
- Leadership
- Institutions

What We Give, They Become

- When we support, they lead
- When we respect, they collaborate
- When we uplift, they thrive

*Who we are to our
students is who they
become for their patients.*

Next Steps

- Pilot Study: A qualitative narrative inquiry to explore healthcare practitioners' lived experiences of nurse bullying and “nurses eating their young”, emphasizing how workplace culture can shape these experiences.

Questions?

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