

REVIEW ARTICLE

Patterns and Prevalence of Workplace Bullying in Nursing Professionals: A Systematic Review (2013–2024)

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ABSTRACT

Workplace bullying is a pervasive challenge in the nursing profession, significantly affecting mental health, job satisfaction, and patient care outcomes. This systematic review analyzes studies conducted between 2013 and 2024 to assess the prevalence, antecedents, and consequences of workplace bullying among nursing professionals. Findings indicate widespread bullying behaviors, including verbal abuse, exclusion, and task undermining, with prevalence rates varying across regions and settings. Contributing factors include hierarchical structures, workload stress, and inadequate support mechanisms, exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Bullying adversely impacts nurses' psychological well-being and professional efficacy, underscoring the need for robust support systems. The review emphasizes comprehensive interventions, including education, policies, and reporting frameworks, to cultivate safe and respectful workplace cultures. These insights aim to inform healthcare leaders and policymakers in fostering supportive environments that enhance nurse well-being and healthcare quality.

KEYWORDS

- Workplace Bullying • Horizontal Violence • Nursing Professionals • Prevalence
- Occupational Health • Work Environment • Nurses • Mental Health

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Workplace bullying is a pervasive issue in the nursing profession, characterized by repeated and harmful behavior that undermines

individuals' dignity and professional integrity. Nursing professionals, often working in high-pressure environments, are particularly vulnerable to bullying due to hierarchical structures, staffing challenges, and emotionally charged workplace dynamics.¹ The prevalence

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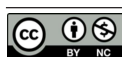
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of workplace bullying in healthcare settings has been reported globally, affecting nurses' mental health, job satisfaction, and patient care outcomes.²

Over the past few years, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, the issue of workplace bullying in nursing has gained increased attention. The pandemic exacerbated workplace stress, resource constraints, and interpersonal conflicts, potentially influencing the dynamics of workplace bullying. Studies conducted between 2013 and 2024 reveal variations in bullying prevalence rates across different regions and healthcare settings, warranting a comprehensive evaluation through a systematic review.³

Need for the Study

Understanding the prevalence and determinants of workplace bullying in nursing is crucial for improving workforce well-being and ensuring optimal patient care. Workplace bullying has been linked to increased turnover intentions, decreased morale, and burnout among nursing staff, which significantly impacts healthcare quality and organizational efficiency.⁴ Moreover, addressing bullying is essential for creating supportive and inclusive healthcare environments that promote professional growth and patient safety.

A systematic review focusing on the prevalence trends of workplace bullying from 2013 to 2024 is vital for identifying patterns and evaluating interventions implemented during this period. This study will provide evidence-based insights to inform policies, training programs, and strategies to mitigate bullying and enhance nursing practice. By synthesizing data from multiple sources, it aims to guide healthcare leaders and policymakers in fostering healthier workplace cultures.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION

- **Workplace-Bullying:** Repeated, intentional, and hostile behavior directed at nurses by colleagues, superiors, or other healthcare staff that causes psychological

or professional harm. This includes verbal abuse, intimidation, exclusion, undermining professional credibility, or other forms of harassment within the workplace setting.

- **Prevalence:** The proportion or percentage of nursing professionals who report experiencing workplace bullying during a specified period, as documented in studies conducted between 2013 and 2024.
- **Nursing Professionals:** Registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, and nursing students working in clinical, educational, or administrative settings in healthcare institutions.
- **Systematic-Review:** A structured and comprehensive synthesis of existing research studies on the prevalence of workplace bullying in nursing, following predefined criteria to ensure objectivity and reliability.

PROJECTED OUTCOME

This study is expected to serve as a valuable resource for healthcare institutions, nursing leaders, and policymakers to foster healthier work environments, improve workforce well-being, and enhance the quality of patient care.

SEARCH METHOD

The search method involved a comprehensive and systematic approach to identify relevant studies on the prevalence of workplace bullying in nursing professional from 2013 to 2024. Databases such as PubMed, CINAHL, Scopus, Web of Science, PsycINFO, and ProQuest Dissertations & Theses were searched using combinations of keywords and Boolean operators like "workplace bullying," "nursing," and "prevalence." Grey literature, including government reports and conference proceedings, was also included to ensure thoroughness. Manual searching of reference lists and key nursing journals was conducted to identify additional studies. Titles and abstracts were initially screened, followed by full-text reviews to ensure eligibility based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria.

INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA

Table 1: The review of literature from 2013 to 2024 included articles based on the following criteria:

Parameter	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Population	Studies focusing on nursing professionals, including registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, nursing assistants, and nursing students in various healthcare settings	Studies focusing on healthcare professionals other than nurses, such as physicians, pharmacists, or administrative staff
Study Period	Studies conducted and published between 2013 and 2024	Studies published before 2013 or after 2024
Outcomes	Studies reporting on the prevalence, types, and consequences of workplace bullying in nursing	Studies that do not explicitly address the prevalence or impact of workplace bullying in nursing, such as those focusing solely on general workplace stress or unrelated workplace behaviors
Study Design	Peer-reviewed studies, theses, dissertations, and grey literature that examine the prevalence of workplace bullying in nursing.	Editorials, opinion pieces, commentaries, or studies without primary data (e.g., reviews or theoretical papers)
Language	Studies published in English	Studies published in languages other than English

DATA EXTRACTION

Using a predefined protocol, researcher searched, collected, extracted and evaluated the information from each individual study included in the review as per the inclusion criteria. The disagreements that occurred during the extraction of the data were resolved by consultation with experts. The information extracted from the individual studies included; the name of the author including the year of publication, geographic location where the study was conducted, title of the study, sample size, research design of the study, the type of instrument used for data collection. The primary purpose of this systematic review was to know the prevalence trends of workplace bullying in Nursing Professional. As described in the Figure-1 a total of 10 studies were included for the review, and 12 studies were excluded at different stages of evaluation.

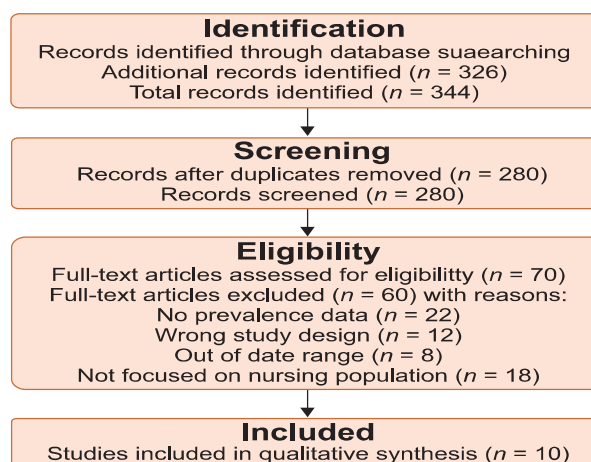


Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram for Study Selection (2013–2024)

This figure illustrates the study identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion process. A total of 344 records were identified, 280 screened after removing duplicates, 70 full-text articles were evaluated, and 10 studies were finally included in the systematic review. Reasons for exclusion included lack of prevalence data, wrong study design, and publication outside the date range.

Table 2: Summary of Included Studies on Workplace Bullying in Nursing Professionals (2013–2024)

Author Details & Year of the study	Geo-graphical Location	Title of the study	N	Research study design	Instrument/ Tool	Main Findings
Fernández-Gutiérrez L, Mosteiro-Díaz MP, et al 2024	Spain	Bullying in Nursing Students	411 Sample	Cross-sectional Study	Data are collected using the NAQ-R questionnaire.	Among 411 nursing students at the University of Oviedo, 92% of nursing students report experiencing bullying. Common negative behaviors include being assigned tasks below their competence level (66.3%), having tasks replaced with more trivial or unpleasant ones (60%), being ignored (52%), and excessive supervision (49%). The high prevalence highlights an urgent need for interventions at institutional, political, and organizational levels to address bullying effectively.

Table Cont....

Author Details & Year of the study	Geo-graphical Location	Title of the study	N	Research study design	Instrument/ Tool	Main Findings
Goh HS, Hosier S, Zhang H 2022	Globally	Prevalence, Antecedents, and Consequences of Workplace Bullying among Nurses – A Summary of Reviews	12 studies	Systematic review	Databases like PubMed or Scopus, and systematic frameworks like PRISMA	The review reports that workplace bullying affects 21% to 46% of nurses across diverse healthcare settings, with common antecedents including organizational culture, power imbalances, and workload. Consequences range from diminished mental health to impaired patient care quality, emphasizing the urgent need for targeted interventions at the organizational and policy levels.
Attia AA, Abo Gad RA, Shokir ME. 2020	Egypt	Workplace bullying and its effect on staff nurses' work engagement.	250 sample	Descriptive correlational	Data are collected using the workplace bullying questionnaire and nurses' work engagement questionnaire.	The study reveals a high prevalence of bullying among staff nurses, with over two-fifths reporting low work engagement. A significant correlation is found between bullying and reduced engagement. To address this issue at ELMenshawy Hospital, nursing administrators should develop anti-bullying policies and establish mechanisms for reporting workplace bullying incidents.
Al-Ghabeesh, S.H., Qattom 2019	Amman, Jordan	Workplace bullying and its preventive measures and productivity among emergency department nurses	134 sample	Descriptive Survey	Four-part questionnaire used to collect the data which included demographic data, the Negative Acts Questionnaire, questions on prevention of bullying, and a health and productivity survey	A study reveals that 90% of participants experience workplace bullying, with less experienced emergency department nurses being more affected. 61.7% report reduced productivity. The mean score on the prevention of bullying questionnaire is 94.51, with the "Individual sub-scale" scoring highest. Notably, the item with the highest mean score is "I know the process of how to report bullying."
Bambi S, Foà C, De Felippis C, et al 2018	Globally	Workplace incivility, lateral violence and bullying among nurses.	41 Studies	Narrative Review	Three Database (MEDLINE, CINAHL and Embase)	Bullying prevalence ranges from 2.4% to 81% , workplace incivility is reported at 67.5% to 90.4% , and lateral (peer) violence occurs between 1% and 87.4% . These wide-ranging figures indicate that while some workplaces may experience minimal occurrences, others face alarmingly high rates of these behaviors.
Hartin P, Birks M, Lindsay D 2018	Australia	Bullying and the nursing profession in Australia	23 Studies	Integrative review	Three Database (MEDLINE, CINAHL and Scopus)	61% of respondents in Australia report workplace bullying events within the previous 12 months.
Nwaneri AC, Onoka AC, Onoka CA 2016	Nigeria	Workplace bullying among nurses working in tertiary hospitals: Implications for health workers and job performance.	286 Sample	Descriptive survey	Data are collected using a modified 22-item Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ) and a 26-item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ).	Workplace bullying among nurses in tertiary hospitals is reportedly high, with 82.6% of respondents identifying as victims. Common behaviors over the preceding six months include gossiping (22%), backbiting (18.7%), excessive workload without supervision (17.3%), and public humiliation (12.1%). Senior nurses are identified as the main perpetrators (76%), targeting primarily junior nurses (84.1%). Female nurses are identified as both the main perpetrators (93.9%) and targets (92.1%). The impacts include anger (50.5%), intentions to migrate abroad (33.6%), anxiety (21.5%), frustration (16.8%), and strained workplace relationships (11.2%).

Table Cont....

Author Details & Year of the study	Geo-graphical Location	Title of the study	N	Research study design	Instrument/ Tool	Main Findings
Karatza, C., Zyga, S., Tziaferi, S. et al. 2016	Greek	Workplace bullying and general health status among the nursing staff of Greek public hospitals	841 sample	Cross-sectional study	Data are collected using the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ) and the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) and also by demographic characteristics.	Workplace bullying among nursing staff in Greece is a significant concern, with 0.2% of respondents reporting psychological harassment in the past six months. Those with support from family and friends demonstrate better health outcomes, while respondents perceiving their work environment negatively due to bullying experience poorer general health. Effective support systems are crucial for mitigating bullying's adverse effects and should be prioritized in prevention and intervention policies.
ALBashtawy M, Al-Azzam M, Rawashda A, et al. 2015	Jordan	Workplace violence toward emergency department staff in Jordanian hospitals	355 sample	Cross-sectional study	Data are collected using a self-administered questionnaire	72% of participants report exposure to workplace violence, with patients and their relatives being the primary perpetrators. Contributing factors include overcrowding, resource shortages, staff shortages, and the lack of effective anti-violence policies.
Spector PE, Zhou ZE, Che XX 2014	Globally	Nurse exposure to physical and nonphysical violence, bullying, and sexual harassment	136 Studies	Quantitative review	Three Database (CINAHL, Medline and PsycInfo)	Violence exposure rates among nurses are 36.4% for physical violence, 66.9% for nonphysical violence, 39.7% for bullying, and 25% for sexual harassment, with 32.7% reporting physical injuries from assaults. Rates vary by region, with the Anglo region experiencing the highest physical violence and sexual harassment, while nonphysical violence and bullying were most prevalent in the Middle East. Patients are the primary source of violence in Anglo and European regions, whereas families and friends of patients are the main source in the Middle East.

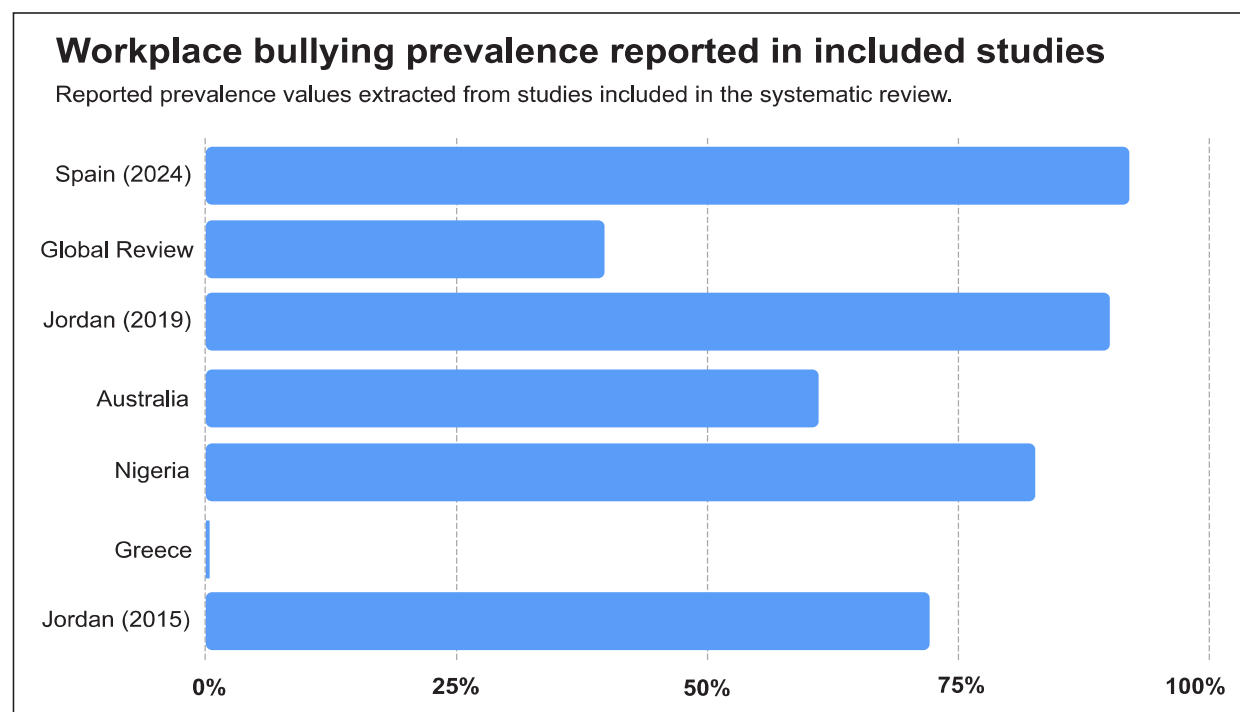


Figure 2: Prevalence of workplace bullying reported across the included studies. The reported prevalence varies considerably across countries and healthcare settings, ranging from 0.2% to 92%, indicating substantial heterogeneity in workplace bullying among nursing professionals.

DISCUSSION

This systematic review highlights the pervasive issue of workplace bullying in the nursing profession, spanning various regions and healthcare settings from 2013 to 2024. The findings emphasize the multifaceted nature of bullying, encompassing behaviors such as verbal abuse, undermining professional competence, and exclusion, with prevalence rates ranging widely. Contributing factors include hierarchical workplace structures, workload stress, and inadequate support systems. Bullying adversely affects nurses' mental health, job satisfaction, and work engagement, with downstream impacts on patient care quality and organizational efficiency. Regional disparities in prevalence and antecedents were noted, reflecting the influence of cultural, organizational, and policy frameworks. For instance, higher rates of bullying were associated with limited reporting mechanisms and the absence of anti-bullying policies. Additionally, the pandemic exacerbated workplace stress and conflicts, intensifying bullying behaviors in some contexts. Support systems, including family, friends, and organizational initiatives, play a critical role in mitigating the negative effects of bullying. Studies demonstrated that nurses with robust support networks reported better health outcomes and higher resilience. Conversely, those subjected to hostile work environments suffered from psychological distress and diminished professional efficacy. The review underscores the urgent need for comprehensive interventions, including education, policy development, and robust reporting systems, to foster respectful workplace cultures.

CONCLUSION

Workplace bullying remains a significant challenge in nursing, with detrimental effects on individuals, healthcare teams, and patient outcomes. Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach involving institutional support, targeted policies, and cultural shifts to create safe, inclusive, and supportive work environments. By prioritizing interventions that strengthen organizational frameworks and support systems, healthcare institutions can enhance workforce well-being, improve job satisfaction, and ultimately deliver better patient care.

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Conflict of Interest: Nil

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