

The reporting behaviours of student nurses who have experienced verbal abuse

Terence Ferns and Professor Liz Meerabeau

Background

- ◆ Aggression experienced by health care workers in the general hospital setting is currently receiving considerable attention and student nurses have been identified as a group vulnerable to experiencing verbal abuse (Little 1999, Celik and Bayraktar 2004).
- ◆ Internationally under-reporting of incidents of verbal abuse has been identified as a research limitation leading to incomplete data collection when researching aggression in health care facilities.
- ◆ This can call into question conclusions, recommendations and policy initiatives based on research.



Background

- ◆ Arnetz and Arnetz (2000) suggest that effective incident reporting processes and analysis of these reports can lead to an increased awareness of how to avoid negative interactions in the workplace and how to deal with incidents effectively.

Factors believed to influence reporting practices

- ◆ The frequency and number of incidents is so great that the issue goes unreported-experiencing aggression is routine.
- ◆ Previous reporting of incidents has not led to change, so staff believe that reporting incidents is not worthwhile.
- ◆ Reporting procedures are overly time-consuming.
- ◆ Nurses may fear they will be accused of negligence and inadequate performance.
- ◆ Nurses may wish to avoid blame by colleagues or administrators.
- ◆ Lack of agreement on definitions of workplace violence.
- ◆ Lack of awareness of the reporting system.



Factors believed to influence reporting practices

- ◆ The belief that the incident was not serious enough to report.
- ◆ Beliefs that the perpetrator was provoked by staff.
- ◆ The practice of not reporting “unintentional violence”, for example, that involving confused or disorientated patients.
- ◆ Professional and social variables.
- ◆ The perception that nurses are hardened or desensitised to workplace violence and perceive it as “part of the job”.
- ◆ Excessive workloads.
- ◆ The nursing ethic of coping.



Study aims

- ◆ This paper is a report of a study to explore the reporting behaviours of student nurses who have experienced verbal abuse while gaining clinical experience in health care settings in the south east of England, using as a definition;
- ◆ “The use of inappropriate words or behaviour causing distress and/or constituting harassment.”

(Department of Health 2003)



the
UNIVERSITY
of
GREENWICH

Design/Sample

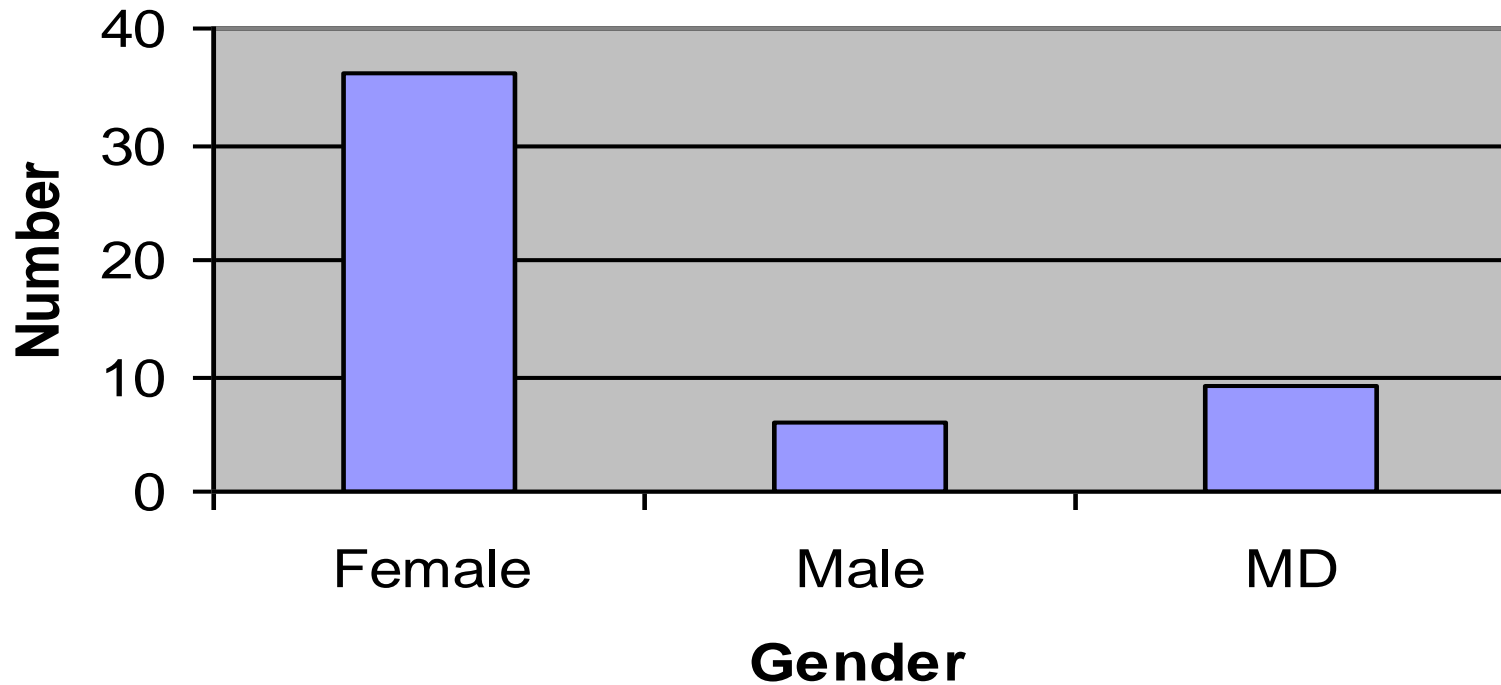
- ◆ A descriptive survey design was adopted and questionnaires were distributed in 2005 to a convenience sample of 156 third year nursing students from one pre-registration nursing programme in the south east of England.
- ◆ A total of 114 questionnaires were returned, giving an overall response rate of 73.0%.
- ◆ Fifty one students (44.7% of responders) reported verbal abuse; all of these completed the section exploring reporting behaviours.

Data Analysis

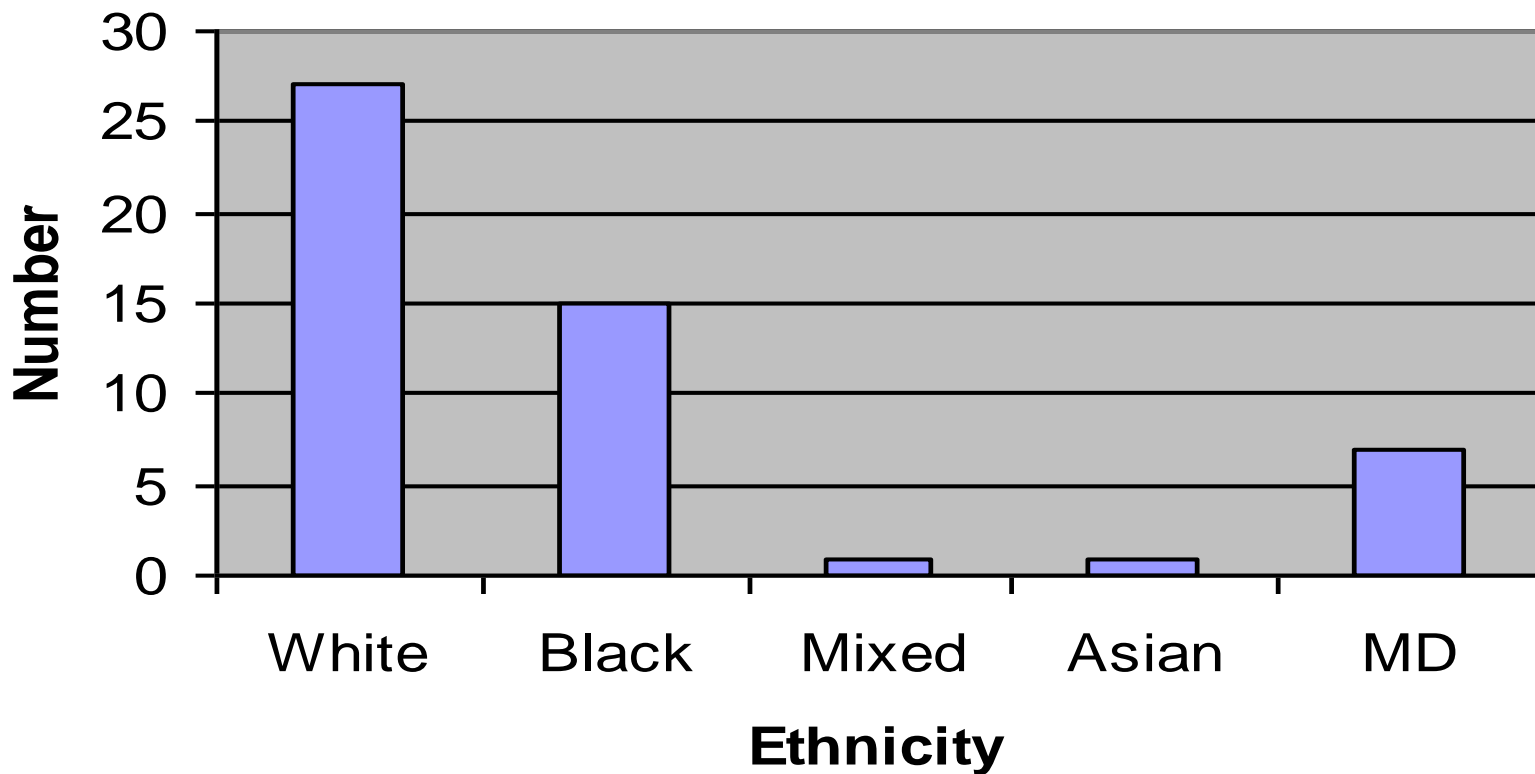
- ◆ Qualitative data were analysed using textual analysis (Polit and Hungler 2004).
- ◆ Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 10 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Inc, Chicago, IL, USA).
- ◆ Statistical analysis included using descriptive statistics, cross tabulation, Fisher's exact test, independent samples t-tests and chi-squared tests to test the strength of correlation when analysing variables.



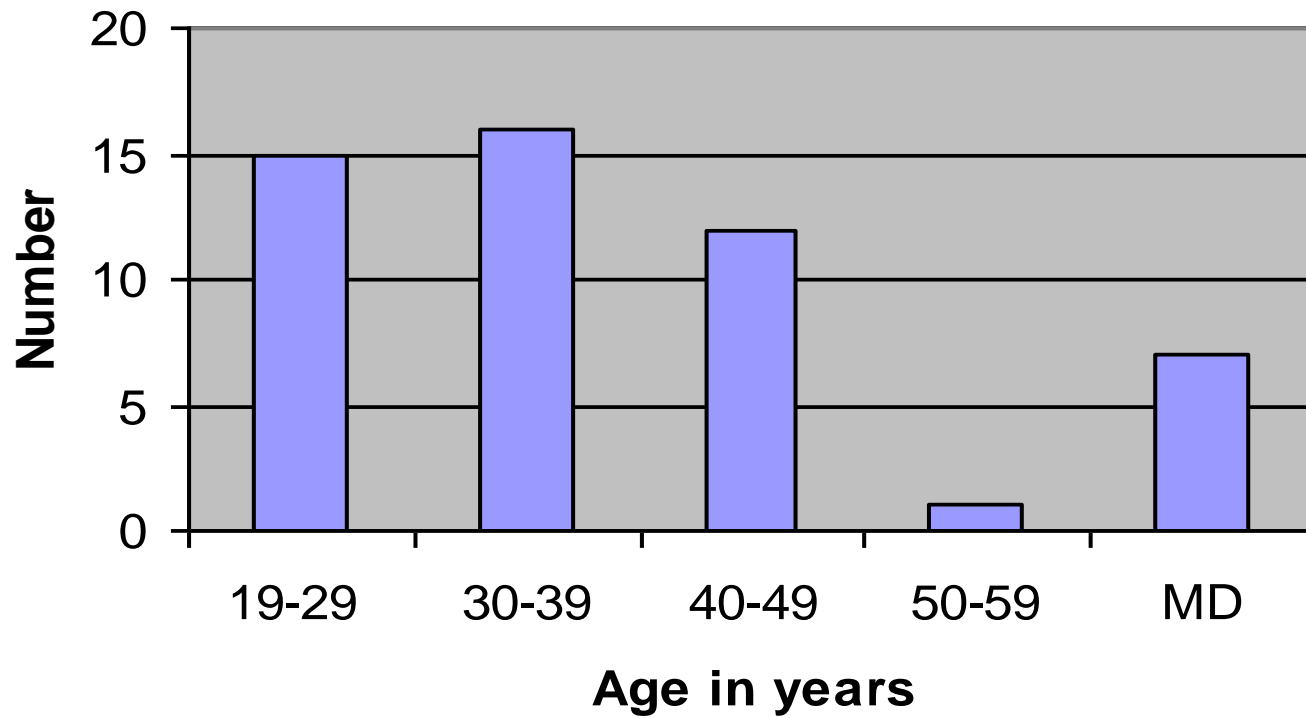
Gender Demographics of those reporting verbal abuse (n=51)



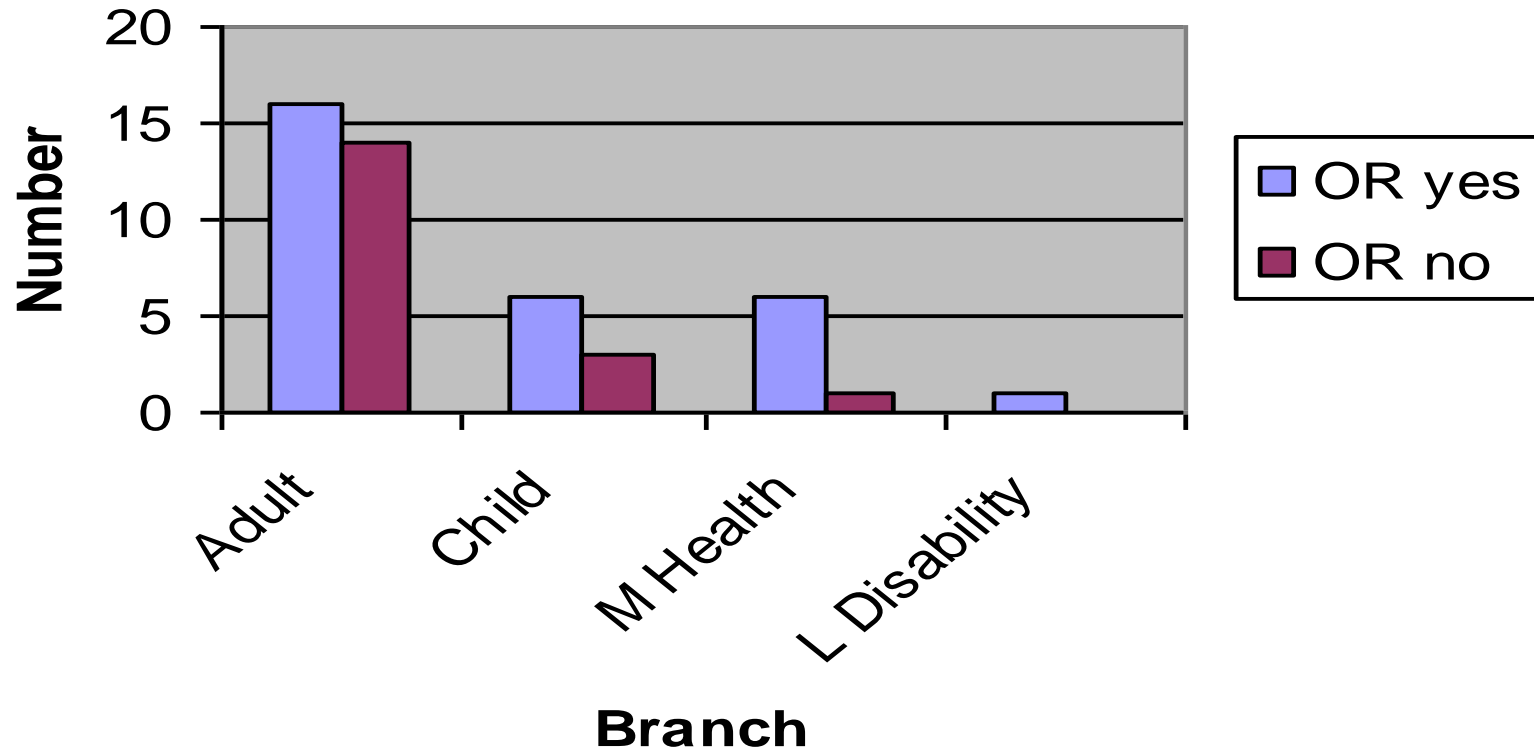
Demographics by Ethnicity



Demographics by Age



Response by branch and oral reporting by practices



Findings

- ◆ The incidents involved patients in thirty three cases (64.7% of reported cases).
- ◆ Eight cases involved visitors.
- ◆ Ten cases involved other healthcare workers.
- ◆ Seventy nine percent of incidents occurred in the presence of other staff, patients or visitors.
- ◆ Only four incidents were formally reported in writing.

Findings

- ◆ Of the group responding thirty two students (62.7%) stated that they did report the incident of verbal abuse they experienced and nineteen (37.3%) of respondents reported that they did not.
- ◆ Of the incidents involving patients twenty four were reported (72.7%) and nine were not (27.3%).
- ◆ Of the incidents involving patients` visitors, six incidents (75%) were reported and two (25%) were not.
- ◆ Of the incidents involving colleagues two incidents (20%) were reported and eight (80%) were not.



Findings

- ◆ There was a statistically significant association ($P = 0.003$) between the focus of verbal abuse (patient/visitor or colleague) and the respondents reporting practices with respondents experiencing verbal abuse from colleagues less likely to report incidents.

Findings

- ◆ No statistically significant relationship could be identified between gender ($P = 0.380$) and whether the incident was reported or not.
- ◆ No statistically significant relationship could be identified between white and non-white respondents ($P = 0.122$, $df\ 1$) and whether incidents were reported or not, although in a previous paper (Ferns and Meerabeau 2008) it was found that abuse was often racially based.
- ◆ No statistically significant relationship could be identified between age and whether incidents were reported or not ($p = 0.079$, $df\ 2$).



Feelings after the incident	Experiences involving colleagues (n=10)	Experiences involving patients/visitors (n=41)
Embarrassed	7	19
Hurt	6	9
Shocked	6	11
Anger	5	8
Disbelief	3	8
Anxious	3	11
Frustrated	3	8
Powerless	3	13
Resentment	3	4
Not worried	2	5
Blamed myself	2	0
Helpless	2	9
Oppressed	2	1
Afraid	1	8
Sorry for abuser	1	16
Guilty	1	2



Feelings after the incident	Feelings of non reporters (n=32)	Feelings of reporters (n=19)
Embarrassed	11	15
Hurt	9	6
Powerless	7	9
Shocked	7	10
Anger	6	7
Frustrated	6	5
Anxious	5	9
Disbelief	5	6
Sorry for abuser	4	13
Helpless	4	7
Resentment	4	3
Afraid	2	7
Not worried	2	5
Guilty	2	1
Oppressed	1	2
Blamed myself	0	2



Positive responses to incidents involving patients and visitors

- ◆ On six occasions actions involved a member of the nursing team speaking to the person identified as being verbally abusive and in one incident the patient concerned received medication.
- ◆ One student was asked by security to inform them if she was approached by a particular person again and that security would remove this individual.



Negative responses to incidents involving patients and visitors

- ◆ One respondent stated: “the manager dealt with it but I don’t know what happened”.
- ◆ On three other occasions respondents identified no action following reporting their concerns.
- ◆ Explanations for not reporting incidents related to;
 - *The incident being witnessed.*
 - *Incidents being viewed as lacking seriousness or intent.*
 - *Incidents being overly frequent in nature or to be expected.*
 - *A perception that reporting was a futile exercise and would not lead to a positive outcome.*



Discussion

- ◆ **Inconsistent reporting practices.**
- ◆ **A lack of action and feedback following incident reporting.**
- ◆ **Negative feelings after the incident (mixed feelings).**
- ◆ **Evidence of bullying.**
- ◆ **A lack of post-incident support.**

Conclusion

- ◆ **Both Higher Education Institutions and health care providers should consider emphasising the formal reporting and documenting of experiences of verbal abuse during student nurse training and access to formal support services should be promoted.**



?

Reference

- ◆ **Original publication**

- ◆ Ferns, T and Meerabeau, L (2008) Verbal abuse experienced by student nurses. *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 61 (4), 436-444.

- ◆ **Previous Conference Presentation**

- ◆ Ferns, T and Meerabeau, E (2007) “The exposure to verbal abuse of student nurses gaining placement experience” *Royal College of Nursing International Nursing Research Conference Presentation* May 1st 2007.

