

Bullying in academia more prevalent than thought, scholar says

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Bullying isn't only a problem that occurs in schools or online among young people. It can happen anywhere to anyone, and a Rutgers–Camden nursing scholar is shedding some light on how it is becoming increasingly common in academia.

"What worries me is the impact that [bullying](#) is having on the ability to recruit and retain quality educators," says Janice Beitz, a professor at the Rutgers School of Nursing–Camden. "It has become a disturbing trend."

Beitz is a co-author of "Social Bullying in Nursing Academia," an article published in the September/October 2013 edition of *Nurse Educator* that draws upon interviews conducted with 16 nursing professors who were the victims of social bullying in an academic nursing workplace. Beitz says that the participants described in detail instances in which they were slandered, isolated, physically threatened, lied to, or given unrealistic workloads, among various other bullying tactics.

The participants in the study were primarily non-tenured female faculty teaching in baccalaureate programs throughout the United States.

"We don't know how widespread this is, but it exists," says Beitz, who says she was bullied in her career. "Not many people look at bullying in the academic environment. We wanted to raise awareness of it."

In the study, Beitz notes that in the most common cases of bullying, academic administrators are targeting faculty, but in some cases, faculty

are bullying other faculty members or their administrative superiors.

Bullies may be threatened by a fellow academic's qualifications and scholarship, or victims may be targeted because they are perceived as weak, Beitz says.

"The bully can make life miserable for the target," she explains. "That's because in an administrative role, a bully has the power to make decisions about the target. Part of it is the unique nature of higher education. The tenure process is different than any other environment. Administrators in [academia](#) have power over colleagues, and sometimes that power causes them to bully their subordinates."

Beitz says bullying victims will often blame themselves for the actions of a colleague and she says sometimes the only thing a victim can do is leave the environment altogether, which can dissuade nurses from pursuing careers as educators.

"Institutions need to have good faculty who are experienced clinicians and researchers. That doesn't happen in a bad bullying environment," she says. "If I hadn't had support from fellow faculty, I would have left education. I wouldn't have wanted that to happen. I've enjoyed my career. I feel like I've had an impact on a lot of wonderful graduates who have gone on to have great careers. People want to feel valued. That's why it's important to serve the people you work with and employ a collegial, positive environment."

Beitz is now working on a follow-up study on resilience and how victims are surviving when bullied. Additionally, since her bullying study does address the prevalence of bullying in nursing academia, Beitz hopes to cast a wider net and perform a quantitative study on the issue nationwide.

Beitz's co-authors on "Social Bullying in Academia" were La Salle University nursing professors Earl Goldberg, Ciara Levine, and Diane Wieland.

At Rutgers–Camden, Beitz oversees the state's first graduate certificate program in wound, ostomy, and continence nursing. She was inducted as an American Academy of Nursing fellow in October, joining a distinguished group of more than 2,000 academy fellows—including three other Rutgers–Camden nursing scholars—as leaders in nursing education, management, practice and research.

The Cherry Hill resident has co-authored numerous research articles in refereed nursing and interdisciplinary journals, and co-authored multiple book chapters and one book. A research study and algorithm on pressure ulcer prevention was recently published in *Ostomy Wound Management*, and she recently was part of a research team that developed a step-by-step ostomy instrument that allows nurses to properly assess ostomy patients and their needs.

Beitz received her bachelor's degree from La Salle University, her master's degree from Villanova University, and her doctoral degree from Temple University. She also graduated from the Germantown Hospital School of Nursing and received her post-master's certificate from La Salle University.

Provided by Rutgers University

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