

Prevention and management of unprofessional behaviour among adults in the workplace: A scoping review

Summary

Unprofessional behaviour is increasingly being recognised in academic medicine. Given that the victims of such behaviours are more likely to show increased stress and depression, and ultimately the impact these behaviours have on patients, it is critical to identify strategies to prevent or manage these behaviours. A scoping review was conducted to identify interventions to prevent and manage unprofessional behaviour among adults in workplace or professional settings. Most of the studies identified from our scoping review described interventions consisting of in-person education sessions to raise staff awareness of workplace incivility. Fewer studies targeted the institutional culture or addressed behaviour change. Further research is required to strengthen the interventions that target unprofessional behaviour in the workplace, in particular those that target organisational change.

Implications

Current intervention strategies are likely not sufficient to address unprofessional behaviour. The results of this scoping review can be used to target a full systematic review to help better inform professionalism in academic medicine and medical education.

Reference: Tricco AC, Rios P, Zarin W, et al. Prevention and management of unprofessional behavior among adults in the workplace: A scoping review. *Plos One*. 2008 Jul 26;13(7):e0201187.

PMID: [30048512](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30048512/)

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What is the current situation?

- Unprofessional behaviour has recognized as a major issue in academic medicine, with surveys that showed up to 98% of physicians experienced it with perpetrators including trainees, patients, nurses, allied health professionals and physician colleagues.
- The impact of workplace abuse has been associated with increased stress, depression, anxiety and workplace absenteeism.

What is the objective?

- To identify interventions to prevent and manage unprofessional behaviour among adults in workplace or professional settings.

How was the review conducted?

- A scoping review was conducted following the methods manual by the Joanna Briggs Institute.
- Two reviewers independently screened citations and full-texts for relevance, and subsequently performed data abstraction.
- Thematic analysis was conducted to identify constructs used to define unprofessional behaviour in the literature.

What did the review find?

- 12,468 citations and 130 full-texts were screened. 23 articles (with a total of 11,025 participants) met the eligibility criteria.
- Most interventions targeted behaviour change at the individual level (22 studies, 95.7%) rather than addressing institutional culture (4 studies, 17.4%).
- Most studies (21 studies, 91.3%) focused on increasing awareness around unprofessional behaviour rather than effecting behavioural change.
- The most frequently targeted behaviour change was sexual harassment (4 of 7 studies).
- Most interventions were delivered as in-person education sessions (19 studies, 82.61%); 3 studies used online or computer-based training (13.04%).
- The following four constructs were identified in the definitions of unprofessional behaviour: verbal and/or non-verbal acts, repeated acts, power imbalance, and unwelcome behaviour. None of the constructs were universally present across the included studies.
- Changes in knowledge of or attitudes towards bullying was the most common outcome (17 studies, 73.9%), followed by the results of uncivil behaviour or outcomes of workplace bullying (14 studies, 60.9%).
- Three of the four studies that reported on staff retention or absenteeism found improvements following the intervention and three of seven studies that reported on changes in perceptions or reporting of workplace bullying found increases following the intervention.

