

Nurses as second victims following adverse clinical events like falls

Glory Mma Felix[1], Anne Forster[2], Louisa Burton[3].

1. Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust.
2. University of Leeds.
3. Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

Background: Adverse events occur in hospitals causing preventable patient harm, for example patient falls. Such events have significant implications for both patients and healthcare professionals. Nurses often take professional responsibility but may also experience emotional and psychological stress, often becoming "second victims" of the incident.

Aims: To explore the experiences of nurses (including student nurses) following an adverse event in hospital wards (excluding intensive care and emergency units).

Method: A scoping review was conducted: research studies were sourced from Google Scholar, PubMed, Springer Link Journals, and Taylor and Francis between 2014 and 2024. Papers were included if they reported nurses' experiences but excluded if they only described survey results or adverse events relating to medicine prescribing or medical record keeping. Identified titles and full texts of papers were assessed against these criteria by two independent reviewers. Included papers were summarised through narrative reporting.

Results: Following abstract review of 198 studies, 43 underwent full text review and 9 studies were included, none were from the UK. Study participants reported physical and primarily psychological effects following an adverse event. This included sleeplessness, guilt, anxiety and stress, which impacted their ability to work. Peer support following such an event was appreciated, but pro-active help rarely reported.

Conclusion: The second-victim phenomenon impacts nurses and patient care. Enhancing awareness, implementing structured support systems and fostering a blame-free culture could contribute to improving nurse well-being and maintaining workforce stability.

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