

University of Wollongong - Research Online

Thesis Collection

Title: The interpersonal dynamics of aggression and violence in mental health inpatient units

Author: Jane L Middleby-Clements

Year: 2009

Repository DOI:

Copyright Warning

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study. The University does not authorise you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site.

You are reminded of the following: This work is copyright. Apart from any use permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part of this work may be reproduced by any process, nor may any other exclusive right be exercised, without the permission of the author. Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright. A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. A court may impose penalties and award damages in relation to offences and infringements relating to copyright material.

Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.

Unless otherwise indicated, the views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the University of Wollongong.

Research Online is the open access repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au

2009

The interpersonal dynamics of aggression and violence in mental health inpatient units

Jane L. Middleby-Clements
University of Wollongong

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/theses>

University of Wollongong

Copyright Warning

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study. The University does not authorise you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site.

You are reminded of the following: This work is copyright. Apart from any use permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part of this work may be reproduced by any process, nor may any other exclusive right be exercised, without the permission of the author. Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright. A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. A court may impose penalties and award damages in relation to offences and infringements relating to copyright material.

Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.

Unless otherwise indicated, the views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the University of Wollongong.

Recommended Citation

Middleby-Clements, Jane L, The interpersonal dynamics of aggression and violence in mental health inpatient units, PhD thesis, School of Psychology, University of Wollongong, 2009. <http://ro.uow.edu.au/theses/807>

NOTE

This online version of the thesis may have different page formatting and pagination from the paper copy held in the University of Wollongong Library.

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

COPYRIGHT WARNING

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study. The University does not authorise you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site. You are reminded of the following:

Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright. A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. A court may impose penalties and award damages in relation to offences and infringements relating to copyright material. Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.

The Interpersonal Dynamics of Aggression and Violence in Mental Health Inpatient Units

Jane L. Middleby-Clements

Bachelor of Science (Psychology)

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree**

Doctor of Philosophy

from

The University of Wollongong

School of Psychology

2009

Table of Contents

THESIS CERTIFICATION	I
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	II
ABSTRACT	III
LIST OF TABLES	IV
LIST OF FIGURES	V
LIST OF APPENDICES	VI

Chapter 1: Introduction.....13

1.1. Prevalence of Aggression and Violence in Mental Health Units

1.2. Effects of Aggression and Violence in Mental Health Units

1.2.1. Physical harm

1.2.2. Emotional harm

1.2.3. Impaired therapeutic relationships

1.2.4. Organisational costs

1.3. Responses to Aggression and Violence in Mental Health Units

1.3.1. Guidelines and policy initiatives

1.3.2. Training

1.4. Importance of Present Research

Chapter 2: The Development of a Model of Aggression and Violence	
Specific to Mental Health Inpatient Units.....	35
<i>2.1. Previous Interactional Models of Aggression and Violence in Mental Health Settings</i>	
<i>2.2. The Development of Aggression and Violence within the Individual</i>	
2.2.1. Social learning and the cycle of violence	
2.2.2. Developmental features of aggression	
<i>2.3. The Dynamics of the Stressful Encounter and the Neurobiology of Stress</i>	
<i>2.4. An Interpersonal Model of Aggression and Violence in Inpatient Psychiatric Units</i>	
<i>2.5. Scope of Empirical Studies</i>	
 Chapter 3: Study One: A Qualitative Investigation of Patient Perspectives on Aggression and Violence in Mental Health Inpatient Units.....	 55
<i>3.1. Literature Review</i>	
<i>3.2. Limitations of Previous Research and Current Research Approach</i>	
<i>3.3. Purpose of Study</i>	
<i>3.4. Research Question</i>	
<i>3.5. Method</i>	
<i>3.6. Results</i>	
<i>3.7. Discussion</i>	

Chapter 4: Study Two: The Influence of Clinician Attitudes and Approaches on Aggression and Violence in Mental Health	
Inpatient Units.....	89
<i>4.1. Literature Review</i>	
<i>4.2. Limitations of Previous Research and Current Research Approach</i>	
<i>4.3. Purpose of Study</i>	
<i>4.4. Hypotheses</i>	
<i>4.5. Method</i>	
<i>4.6. Results</i>	
<i>4.7. Discussion</i>	
 Chapter 5: Study Three: The Influence of Policy on Clinician Attitudes and Approaches Concerning Aggression and Violence.....	 141
<i>5.1. Literature review</i>	
<i>5.2. Limitations of Previous Research and Current Research Approach</i>	
<i>5.3. Method</i>	
<i>5.4. Results</i>	
<i>5.5. Discussion</i>	
 Chapter 6: Conclusion.....	 155
 References.....	 165
Appendices.....	191

Thesis Certification

I, Jane L. Middleby-Clements, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the School of Psychology, University of Wollongong, is entirely my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Jane L. Middleby-Clements

May, 2009

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by an Australian Research Council, industry partner scholarship.

First, and foremost, I extend my deepest appreciation to Associate Professor Brin F.S. Grenyer for his tireless support and encouragement in assisting me with this research. His calm and thoughtful approach, in allowing me to express my ideas, is a quality that has enabled me to think extensively about the area being investigated in this dissertation.

I also sincerely thank the participants of this study, both Area Health Service staff and patients, who generously gave of their time and thoughts in the data collection phase of this work. It is ultimately for these individuals that this work hopes to make a contribution.

Similarly, I thank the South Eastern Sydney and Illawarra Area Health Service management for their support of this research, both financially as an industry partner and for the ease with which I was provided with practical support during the data collection phase of this research. In particular a debt of gratitude to Aggression Management Trainer Philip Biro, who assisted me diligently and patiently with data collection. I would also like to thank Olga Ilkiw-Lavalle for her conscientious effort as Project Officer during the data collection phase of

this work. Thanks also to Professor Frank Deane from the Illawarra Institute for Mental Health for his support of this research.

Most significantly my sincere and heartfelt gratitude is extended to my partner in life Gregory and our daughters Jessica, Lillian and Isabelle, for their enduring patience and loving support as I have worked to complete this thesis. Finally, many thanks to both sides of my extended family and to my closest friends for their unwavering encouragement.

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents Michael and Lesley Middleby, whom I admire and owe so much. Michael for his boundless enthusiasm for life, his ability to think beyond the conventional or established, and to dream of endless possibility. Lesley for her passionate optimism, and her inclination to see humour and feel joy along the 'roller-coaster of life'. Together they have inspired a love of learning and taught me more about life than any academic pursuit could ever aspire to accomplish.

Abstract

Rationale: Mental Health professionals' ability to manage aggression and violence in mental health units is hampered by a lack of evidence-based research.

Aim: The research aimed to investigate the relationship between Health Professional attitudes and subsequent aggression by mental health inpatients.

Method: An interpersonal model specific to inpatient mental health units guided three empirical studies. Study one investigated patient views on staff management of aggression. Study two examined specific staff variables such as rigid attitudes in dealing with aggression. Study three investigated the impact of a management philosophy upon staff attitudes in a controlled design.

Results: In study one, patients reported that interpersonal factors with mental health staff were salient contributors to their aggression. Study two extended this and found that high staff rigidity was associated with low tolerance for patient aggression. Interestingly, staff characterised by low rigid attitudes were found to be more involved in high severity aggressive incidents. Study three found training in zero tolerance had the unintended consequence of increasing rigid attitudes, while reducing tolerance toward aggression.

Discussion: Staff play a role in helping or hindering inpatients with aggressive impulses. Staff with less rigid attitudes were those most likely to assist in difficult incidents, those incidents that are likely to be unavoidable. More rigid staff were involved in a greater proportion of low-medium severity incidents,

those incidents likely to be more easily avoided if managed well. Management approaches that reduced tolerance toward aggression appeared to have a negative impact on variables most likely to help patients manage aggressive impulses. Together these studies highlight that staff and management policy are critical variables in understanding and responding to aggression.

List of Tables

Table 1	Patient opinions on staff management of aggressive incidents
Table 2	Patient views about the causes of aggression
Table 3	Patient opinions about how staff could improve their management of aggressive incidents and how aggression could be reduced
Table 4	Themes and their subsumed formulated meanings
Table 5	Mean (standard deviation) and independent samples t test (sig p) scores for the low and high rigidity groups on the variables of interest (skill, personal accomplishment and depersonalisation)
Table 6	Pearson correlations and p values for significant associations between RF and variables of interest (tolerance, skill and confidence)

List of Figures

- Figure 1 Interpersonal model of aggression and violence in mental health inpatient units
- Figure 2 Mean Confidence, Skill, Tolerance, Rigidity and Maslach Burnout Inventory subscale scores, (MBI 1 = Personal Accomplishment; MBI 2 = Emotional Exhaustion; MBI 3 = Depersonalisation), pre and post training
- Figure 3 Pearson correlation between rigid attitudes of staff and severity of reported aggressive incident
- Figure 4 Pre and post mean scores and standard error bars for each aggression minimisation training intervention (Group1 = pre-zero tolerance training and Group 2 = includes zero-tolerance training) on the staff variables of interest (staff rigidity, tolerance, confidence and skill in managing aggression)

List of Appendices

Appendix A	Semi Structured Patient Interview
Appendix B	Rigid Approaches Toward the Management of Aggression (IPP Rigidity Scale)
Appendix C	Tolerance for Aggression Scale
Appendix D	Confidence in Coping with Patient Aggression Instrument
Appendix E	Skill in Dealing with Aggression Scale (IPP Skill Scale)
Appendix F	Aggressive / Assaultive Incident Form
Appendix G	Structured Staff Interview