

Lateral Violence

What is lateral violence?

Lateral Violence is gossiping, rumours, sabotaging and back-stabbing. Lateral Violence is a destructive force that creates unhappy and unhealthy workplaces. It is rooted in colonization... the impacts of lateral violence include lack of trust, lack of safety, high absenteeism and turnover - and reduced quality of service.¹

Lateral violence is displaced violence; that is anger and rage is directed towards members within a marginalised or oppressed community rather than towards the oppressors of the community - one's peers rather than adversaries. Developed by scholars within the global Indigenous first people's community, this construct is one way of explaining minority-on-minority violence occurring within marginalized and oppressed communities. It is a cycle of abuse and its roots lie in factors such as: colonisation, oppression, intergenerational trauma and the ongoing experiences of racism and discrimination.²

Lateral violence means acts of aggression or abuse perpetrated by one colleague toward another colleague, such as communication through words, manner, or tone, to intimidate, disparage, threaten, accuse, patronize, or disrespect another.³

Contributors to Student-to-Student Abuse

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation (2014) conducted research to examine the origins of lateral violence and in doing so, studied survivors and advocates of Indian Residential Schools, as well as, service providers and others. This research uncovered factors that contribute to lateral violence which are categorized into three key themes.

The themes identified as contributors to student-to-student abuse comprise the traumatic reactions, social learning, and normalization of abuse that occurred among residential school students as a result of being abused and witnessing the abuse of others; the lack of protective factors within residential schools that otherwise may have prevented some of the negative outcomes associated with their trauma; and the anger and frustration that students experienced at school as well as the need to feel a sense of power and/or control.⁴

Unfortunately, these learned behaviours are continuing to be passed down from generation to generation in Indigenous communities. That's why lateral violence continues to be prevalent in Indigenous communities.

¹ [Lateral Violence — First Health Solutions](#). Accessed 4 April 2022.

² [Lateral violence - Wikipedia](#). Accessed 4 April 2022.

³ [Workplace Violence Policy \(fnhpa.ca\)](#). Accessed 4 April 2022.

⁴ [lateral-violence-english.pdf \(ahf.ca\)](#), page 60. Accessed 4 April 2022.

Effects of Lateral Violence

Lateral violence can show up in many different forms, depending on the severity. Individuals affected by lateral violence could experience:

- Sleep disorders - either not being able to sleep or not wanting to get out of bed in the morning;
- Changes in eating habits – either eating more or less or differently;
- Weight loss or gain;
- Moodiness – lack of sleep will usually mean that you won't be all that happy;
- Self-doubt –you question all your decisions and abilities;
- Decreased self confidence;
- Feelings of worthlessness;
- Forgetfulness;
- Chronic anxiety;
- Depression;
- Emotional and teary eyed;
- Higher absenteeism-not wanting to be at work;
and
- Weakening immune system – resulting in greater susceptibility to colds, flu and other illness.

“When individuals feel inferior, inadequate and afraid, they take on the qualities of the oppressor as a way of acquiring strength and an illusion of power.”
~Jane Middleton-Moz

Because the individual may have no other employment options, as the lateral violence continues or gets worse the individual may experience more intense physical and emotional health deterioration. Some individuals end up on sick leave and long-term disability. In the extreme, it can end in suicide or violent death.⁵

Addressing Lateral Violence

A brochure produced by the Native Women's Association suggests taking the following measures to address lateral violence.

For the individual:

- Report the behaviour to the appropriate manager in your workplace.
- Keep a record of the negative behaviours. Make notes about the time, date, location and any witnesses who may have seen the incidents.
- Address your concerns with the aggressor and ask them if they can stop.
- Seek help and advice at work or in the community. In the workplace, you may have a human resources manager, or manager who can assist you in resolving the situation.
- Speak to an Elder.
- Seek external advice.
- Seek the support of friends and family.

⁵ [2011-Aboriginal-Lateral-Violence.pdf \(nwac.ca\)](#). page 4. Accessed 4 April 2022.

For the Organization:

- Admit that lateral violence exists.
- Establish policy and procedures for lateral violence.
- Have workshop sessions on lateral violence.
- Establish rules for civil meetings... no one can cut the other off.⁶

Resources to Address Lateral Violence

From Lateral Violence to Lateral Kindness, published by the First Nations Health Authority is available at: [FNHA-COVID-19-From-Lateral-Violence-to-Lateral-Kindness.pdf](#)

Lateral Violence: the Behaviours that Hurt Us All, published by the Southern Stl'atl'imx Health Society is available at: [Lateral Violence brochure for digital.indd \(sshskindnessproject.ca\)](#)

⁶ [2011-Aboriginal-Lateral-Violence.pdf \(nwac.ca\)](#). page 5. Accessed 4 April 2022.