

Introduction:

This study looks at how stress and bathroom habits during work affect urinary incontinence (UI) in nurses, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many nurses delay using the bathroom due to their busy schedules, which can lead to problems like stress urinary incontinence (SUI) and urge urinary incontinence (UUI). This study is so important for nurses as well as other healthcare workers because of how many report having lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS). A. 60% of nurses report to have at least one symptom of LUTS.

B. Unhealthy bladder behaviors cause SUI and UUI. Such as: straining while voiding, delayed and premature voiding.

Purpose:

The goal is to understand:

1. How nurses manage their bathroom breaks.
2. If certain bathroom habits are linked to stress and UI symptoms.
3. What workplace stressors impacted nurses' ability to use the bathroom.
4. What specific stressors did nurses face during COVID-19 that affected LUTS.

Method:

- **Phase 1:** An online survey with 602 nurses, asking about their bathroom habits, stress levels, and UI symptoms.
- **Phase 2:** Follow-up interviews with some nurses to get more details on their experiences.
- Nurses were recruited through social media and emails.

1. Developmental Phase

- Nurses were recruited through social media (Facebook & Instagram) and emails.
- They had to be female-assigned at birth, English-speaking, and working in U.S. hospitals during COVID-19.
- Participants completed a 70-item online survey about their bathroom habits, stress, and urinary symptoms.
- Tools used in the survey:
 - o Michigan Incontinence Symptom Index: Checked for stress and urge urinary incontinence
 - o Nurses Occupational Stressors Scale: Measured workplace stress.
 - o Toileting Behaviors-Women's Elimination Behaviors: Assessed toilet habits.
- 334 surveys were analyzed

2. Exploratory Phase (Interviews - Qualitative Research)

- Some survey participants volunteered for **one-on-one virtual interviews**.
- They shared **personal experiences** about their bathroom habits during work.

- **Goal:** To get deeper insights into how COVID-19 and job stress affected nurses' ability to use the restroom.

Results:

- 82.3% of nurses reported symptoms of UI.
- The most common unhealthy habit was delayed voiding (holding in urine for too long).
- Stress at work made nurses more likely to either hold their urine too long or urinate early (just in case).
- Straining while urinating was linked to higher chances of developing UI.
- Staffing shortages made bathroom breaks even harder to take.

Conclusion:

Nurses' work conditions and stress affect their bathroom habits, which can lead to UI. Hospitals should create policies that ensure nurses can take regular bathroom breaks to protect their bladder health. Ensuring adequate staffing is a major way to improve conditions for all staff and patients involved.