

# Substance-Abusing Patients’ Perceptions of Nursing Care

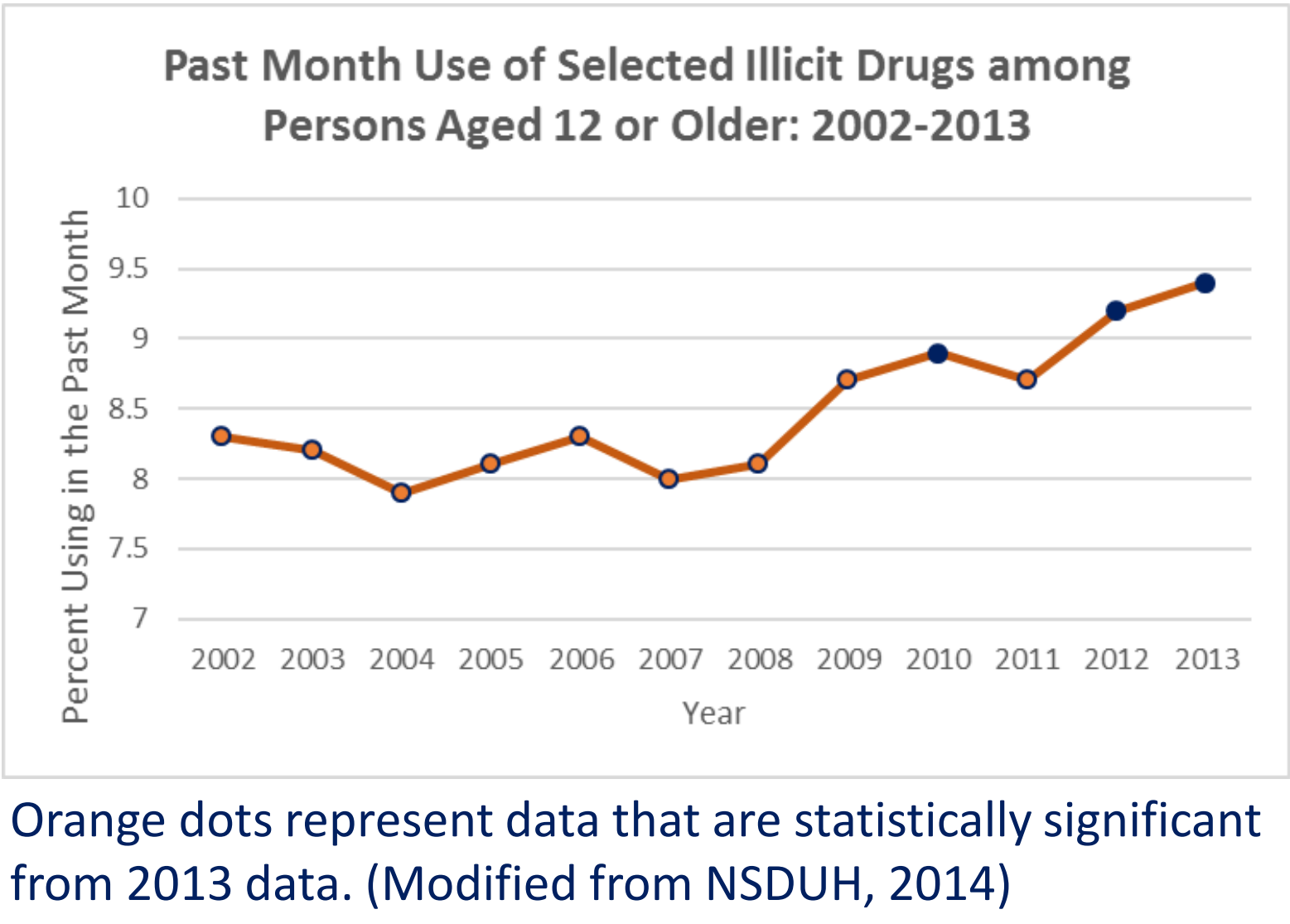
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**Abstract:** Reports have indicated that nurses tend to have negative perceptions of substance-abusing patients, which may affect the care that this population of patients receives throughout the duration of their treatment. The purpose of this study was to further investigate the care given to substance-abusing patients by nurses. Self-identified substance-abusing patients were surveyed to determine their perceptions of the care they received from nurses, as well as their thoughts about the level of knowledge that their nurses had and provided regarding substance abuse, resources, and treatment options. In this study, the data collected was insufficient to produce an accurate and generalizable understanding of this population’s perceptions of these issues, though the data adds to the nursing knowledge base and can be used to allow nurses to provide a higher quality of evidence-based care to this patient population. Overall, after further investigation, these data and conclusions provide an important starting point for future research into this important but understudied issue.

## Literature Review

Studies have demonstrated that there has been an increase in the number of individuals that are using illicit drugs, thus **increasing the number of potential interactions that nurses have with substance-abusing patients.** <sup>1</sup>



**Existing research consistently documents that most nurses have negative attitudes toward patients who are substance abusers.**

When asked about their thoughts and feelings about working with substance-abusing patients, nurses responded that these patients were:

**“Aggressive” <sup>2</sup>**

**“Manipulative and drug seeking” <sup>2</sup>**

**“Taking time from other patients” <sup>2</sup>**

Nurses that reported a “motivation to care for substance abusing patients” <sup>3</sup>	30%
Nurses that reported having “gained satisfaction from treating these patients” <sup>3</sup>	15%

Additionally, according to the literature, **nurses may be more likely to allow lower-quality care** for their drug-using patients. <sup>4</sup>

These patients, then, may receive less comprehensive and lower quality care, which can significantly influence their overall health outcomes and their opinions regarding their hospital experiences.

**How do substance-abusing patients themselves perceive the nursing care that they receive during hospitalization?**

## References

<sup>1</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *Results from the 2013 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Summary of National Findings*, NSDUH Series H-48, HHS Publication No. (SMA) 14-4863. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Neville, K., & Roan, N. (2014). Challenges in nursing practice: nurses’ perceptions in caring for hospitalized medical-surgical patients with substance abuse/dependence. *The Journal of Nursing Administration*, 44(6), 339-346. doi: 10.1097/NNA.0000000000000079

<sup>3</sup> Ford, R., Bammer, G., & Becker, N. (2008). The determinants of nurses’ therapeutic attitude to patients who use illicit drugs and implications for workforce development. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 17(18), 2452-2462. doi: 10.1111/j.1365-2702.2007.02266.x

<sup>4</sup> Gilchrist, G., Moskalewicz, J., Slezakova, S., Okruhlica, L., Torrens, M., Vajd, R., & Baldacchino, A. (2011). Staff regard towards working with substance users: a European multi-centre study. *Addiction*, 106(6), 1114-1125. Retrieved from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.proxy.longwood.edu/doi/10.1111/j.1360-0443.2011.03407.x/abstract;jsessionid=481949E10E3AD37C84FA165C3F1F7C00.f03t02>. doi: 0.1111/j.1360-0443.2011.03407.x

## Methodology

To qualify, research subjects must be substance abusers and must have either visited an emergency department or been hospitalized in a non-psychiatric unit within the last year. Participants were asked questions regarding the following categories:

### Resource Offerings

- Community resources
- Healthcare resources

### Perceptions of Nurses’ Feelings

- Belief that substance abuse was a personal choice
- Comfort level with patient
- Feeling safe around patient
- Patient preference
- Comfort level with substance abuse care

### Nursing Care

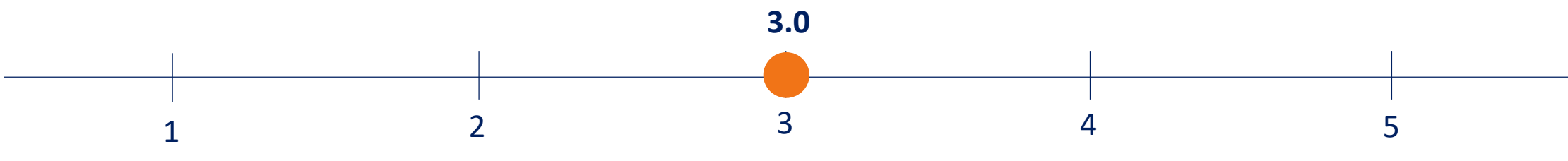
- Pain medication
- Pain reports
- Requests for help

### Interpersonal Interactions

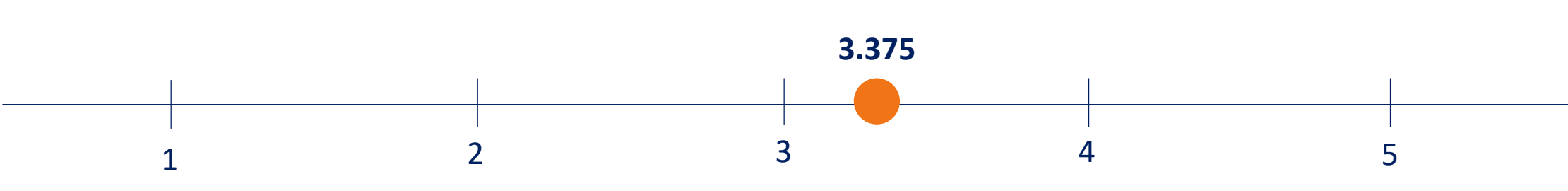
- Respectful treatment
- Good communication
- Genuineness of care

## Results

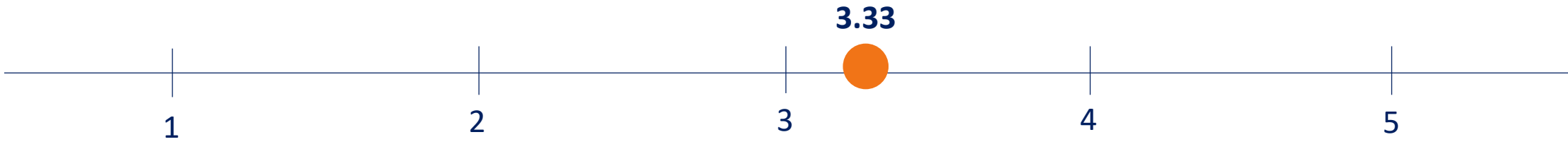
### Resource Offerings



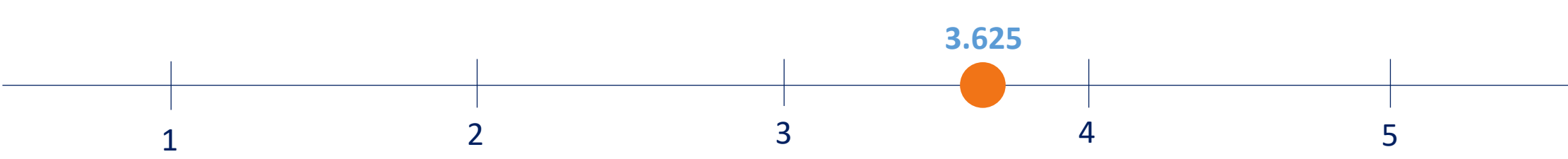
### Perceptions of Nurses’ Feelings



### Nursing Care



### Interpersonal Interactions



**Average patient response.** 1= very negative nursing care characteristics, while 5= very positive nursing care characteristics (n=2).

## Conclusions, Limitations, and Future Research

A review of the current literature on this topic suggests **a trend of nurses having negative attitudes toward substance-abusing patients.** However, whether patients are able to perceive this bias remains understudied.

Overall, these results suggest that perceptions may vary and indicate a need for further research.

The major limitation in this study was a **lack of participation**, possibly brought on by:

- Confidentiality within the population
- Difficulty in finding and surveying members of this population
- Unwillingness to participate

Therefore, further research is required to fully understand the perceptions of substance-abusing patients regarding nursing care. If future research indicates that the perceived quality of nursing care is lower among substance-abusing patients, it will be **important to understand the factors causing this disparity and begin to develop and implement evidence-based solutions.**

Possible factors include:

- Lack of nursing training and education concerning substance abuse
- Inadequate nursing experience with this population
- General biases and stigmas facing this population

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