

2025

Survey of Michigan Nurses

Specialty Brief

Unanticipated Barriers and Challenges While Pursuing Nursing Education



Dec. 31, 2025

Office of Nursing Safety and Workforce Planning
Michigan Department of Health and Human Services

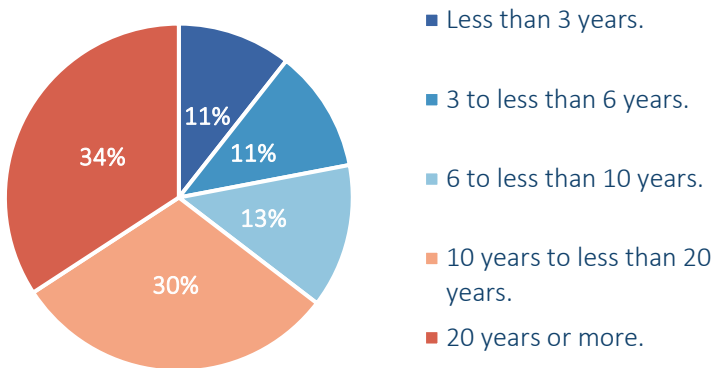
Prepared by the Michigan Public Health Institute

Introduction

The Survey of Michigan Nurses has been supported by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services-Office of Nursing Programs (MDHHS-ONP) annually since 2004 to gather information about the supply of nurses in Michigan. The MDHHS-ONP contracted with the Michigan Public Health Institute (MPHI) to update the annual Survey of Michigan Nurses, collect and analyze the data, and report findings to nursing partners in a variety of formats. In response to partner interest in the challenges new nurses face while pursuing their degrees, a specialty brief has been developed.

Unanticipated Barriers & Challenges While Pursuing a Nursing Degree

Years Working as a Nurse



Years Working as a Nurse

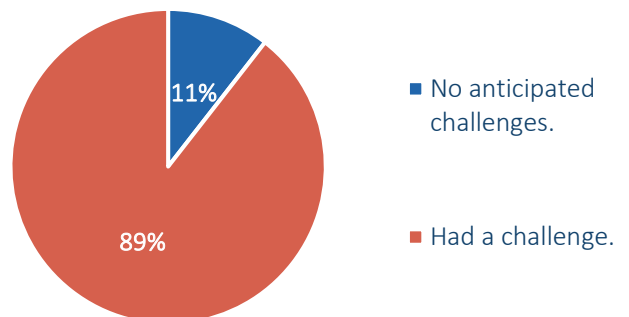
Most commonly, registered nurses (RN) and licensed practical nurses (LPN) had been working as a nurse for 20 or more years. About one-third of RNs and LPNs had been working as a nurse for 10 to 19 years (30.7% and 28.1%). Additionally, 9.9% of RNs had been working for less than three years compared to 17.0% of LPNs, which was statistically significant.

Barriers While Pursuing a Nursing Degree

Nurses with less than three years of experience were asked a series of questions about their educational journey and transition into professional practice.

These nurses were asked if they experienced any unanticipated challenges or barriers while pursuing their nursing degree. A majority reported they did.

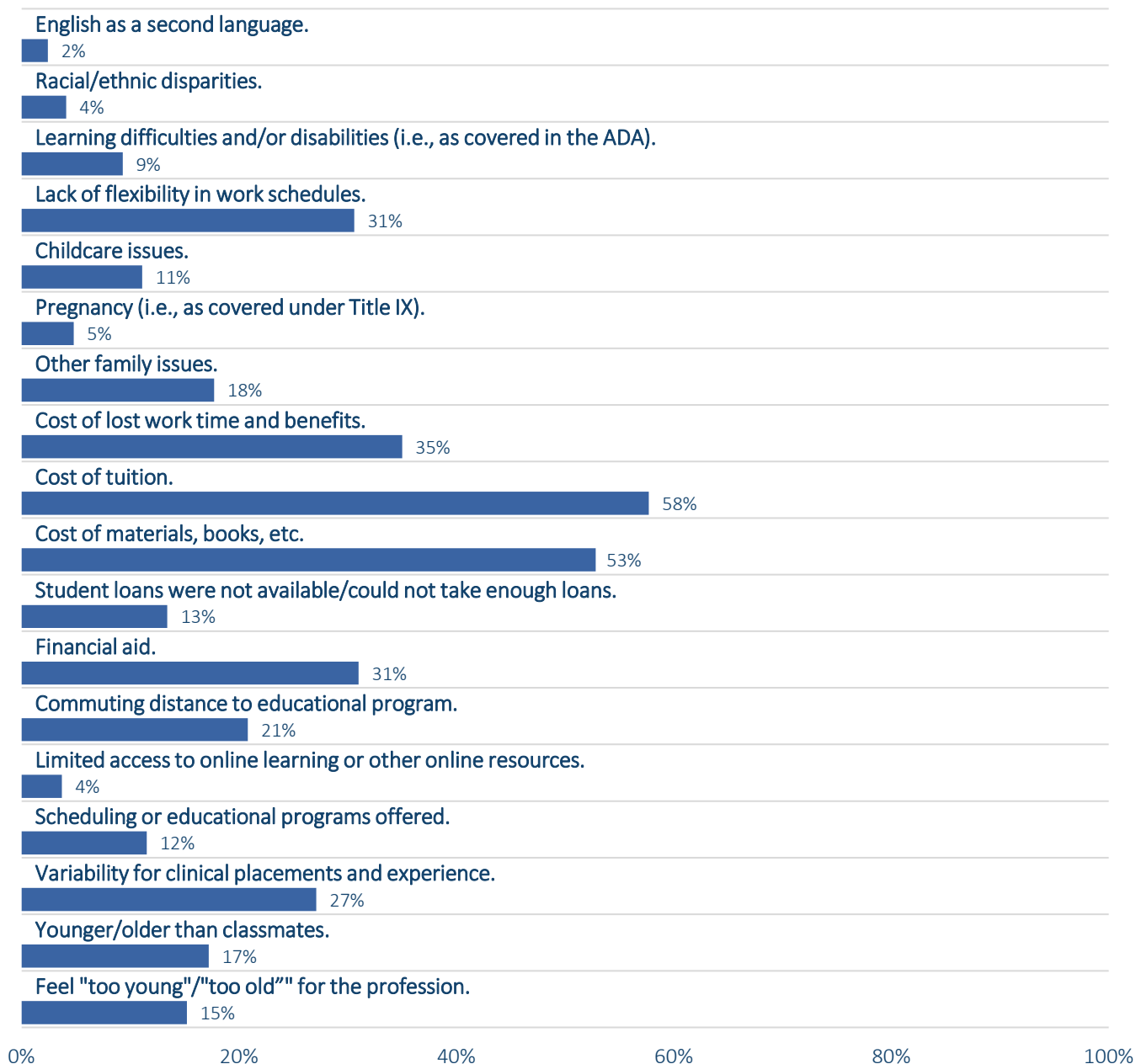
Experienced Challenges or Barriers While Pursuing Nursing Degree



Unanticipated Barriers & Challenges While Pursuing a Nursing Degree

Survey respondents were asked what unanticipated barriers or challenges they encountered while pursuing their nursing degree. The most common barriers indicated by both RNs and LPNs included (57.9% and 56.5%), the cost of materials and books (53.2% and 50.8%), the cost of lost work time and benefits (32.5% and 49.3%), and financial aid (29.6% and 39.5%). LPNs were statistically more likely to indicate the cost of lost work time and benefits (49.3%) as an unanticipated barrier compared to RNs (32.5%).

Unanticipated Barriers or Challenges While Pursuing a Nursing Degree



Unanticipated Barriers & Challenges While Pursuing a Nursing Degree

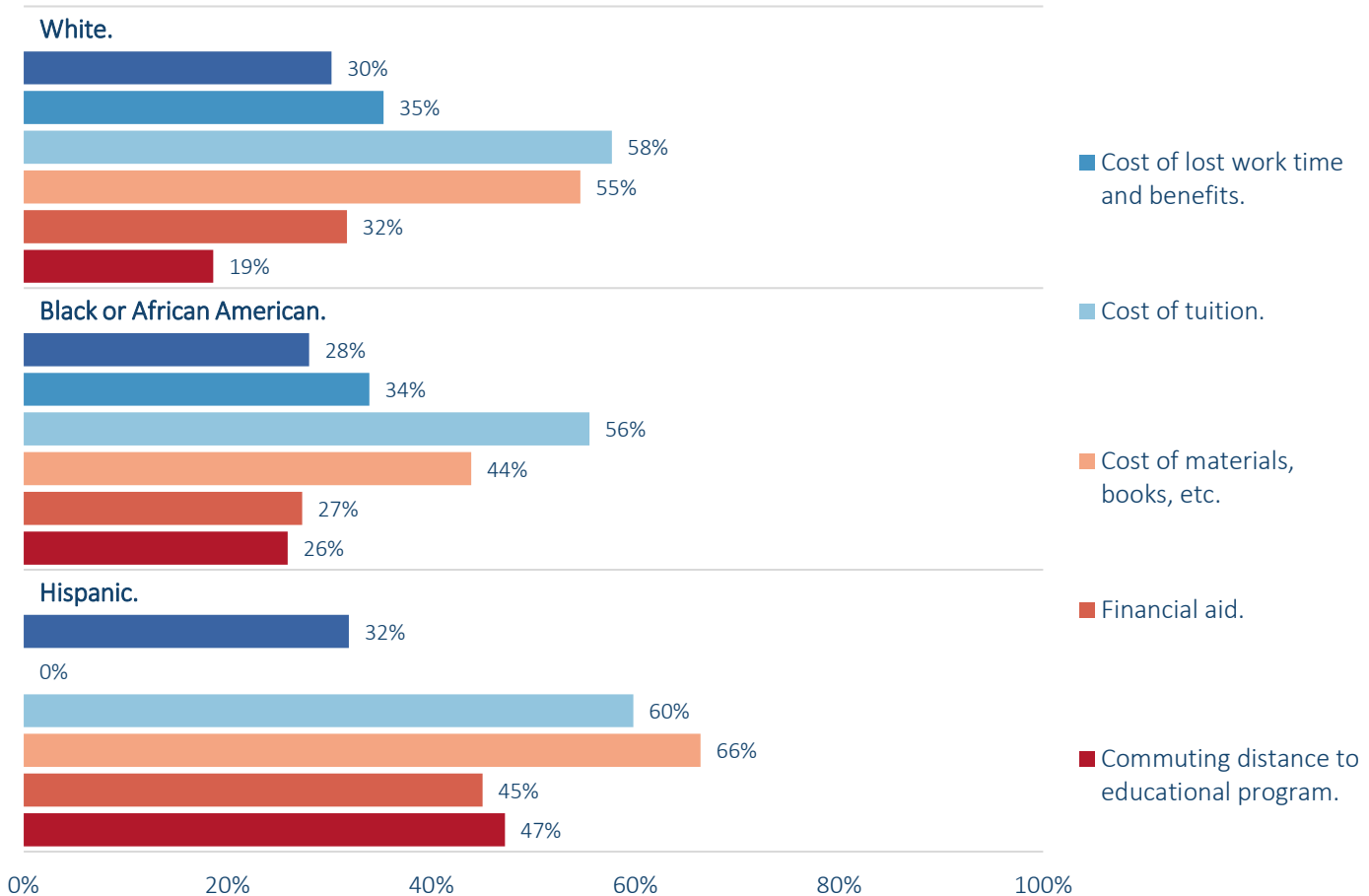
Unanticipated Barriers & Challenges While Pursuing a Nursing Education by Race and Ethnicity

According to respondents, unexpected barriers and challenges were experienced across all racial groups—not confined to any specific group. The most common challenges or barriers included cost of lost work time and benefits, cost of tuition, cost of materials, books, etc., financial aid, and commuting distance to educational program.

Data has been broken down by race and ethnicity. Hispanic or Latinx nurses were statistically more likely to say the commuting distance to educational programs were an unanticipated barrier compared to White nurses (45.7% vs. 18.6%). While not one of the most common barriers, Black nurses were statistically more likely to experience racial/ethnic disparities compared to White nurses (31.8% vs. 1.3%).

Due to the suppression rule, no data was available for American Indian or Alaska Native nurses, or nurses of some other race. While data for Asian and Middle Eastern nurses was limited, both groups identified cost of tuition as a significant barrier.

Unanticipated Barriers & Challenges While Pursuing a Nursing Degree by Race and Ethnicity



*Data are suppressed if count is less than 10.

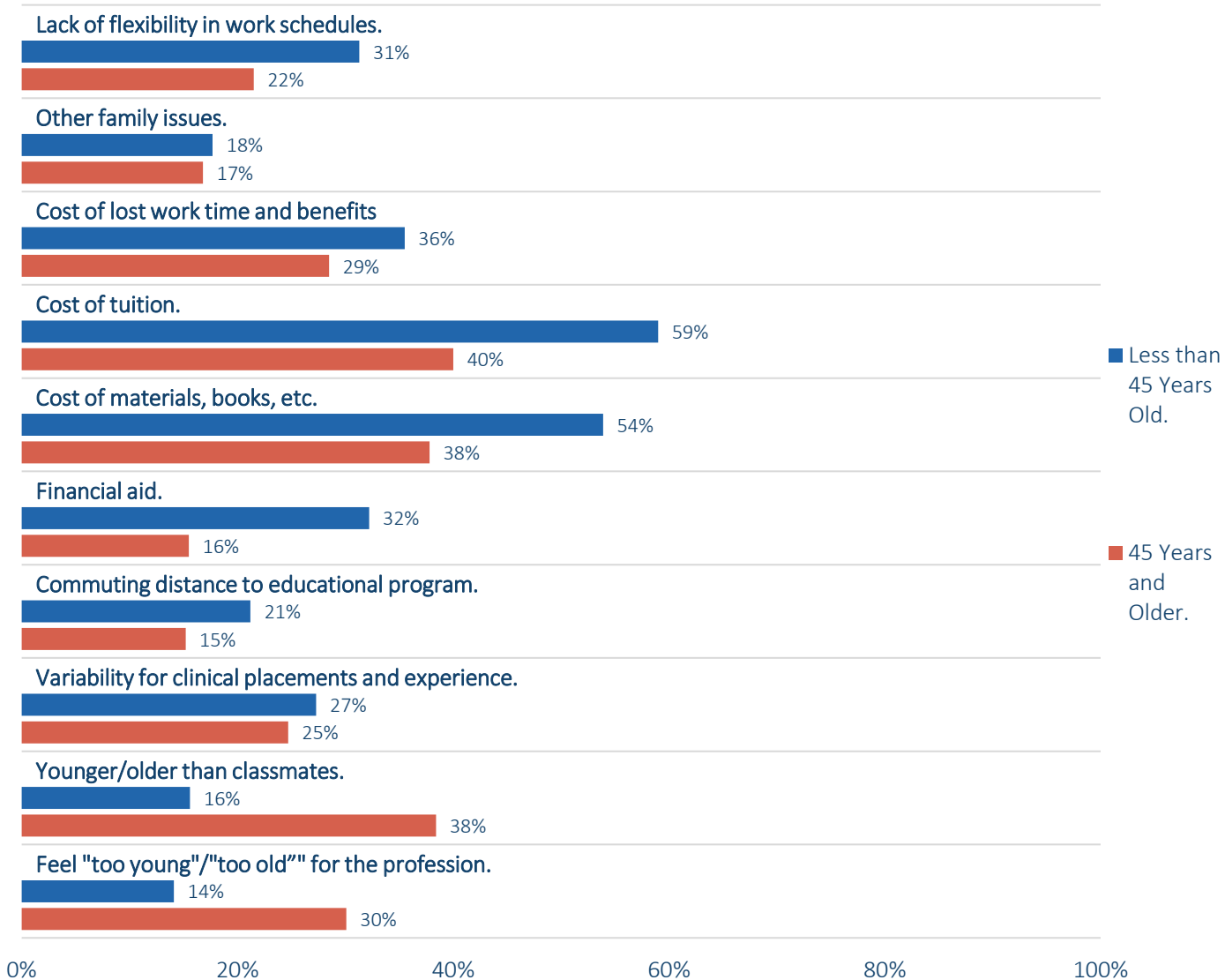
Unanticipated Barriers & Challenges While Pursuing a Nursing Degree

Unanticipated Barriers & Challenges While Pursuing a Nursing Education by Age

Nurses who have been practicing for less than three years who are less than 45 years old were statistically more likely to say that cost of tuition, cost of materials, books, etc., and financial aid were unanticipated barriers. Nurses 45 years and older were statistically more likely to say feeling older than classmates and feeling “too old” for the profession were unanticipated barriers.

Additional unanticipated barriers and challenges experienced by younger nurses include racial/ethnic disparities, learning difficulties and/or disabilities, childcare issues, pregnancy, student loans were not available/could not take enough out, limited access to learning or other online resources, and scheduling or education programs offered. Data for these categories was not available for nurses 45 years and older.

Unanticipated Barriers & Challenges While Pursuing a Nursing Degree by Age



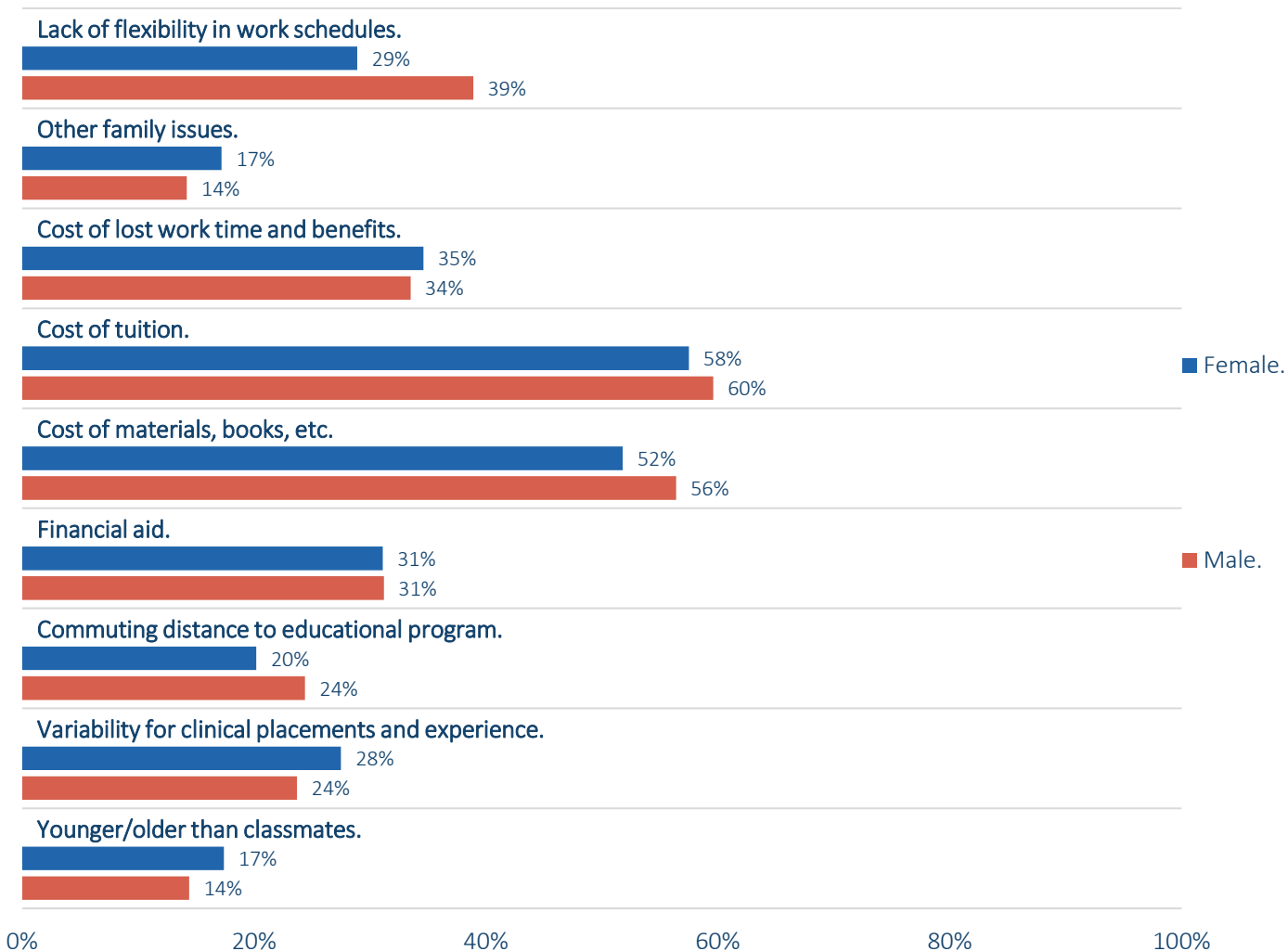
Unanticipated Barriers & Challenges While Pursuing a Nursing Degree

Unanticipated Barriers & Challenges While Pursuing a Nursing Education by Gender

Nurses, regardless of gender, indicated that cost of tuition and cost of materials, books, etc. were the main unanticipated barriers they experienced. There were no statistically significant differences between female and male nurses. Due to the suppression rule, data were not available for nurses who identified as gender non-binary, gender non-confirming, genderqueer, transgender, or any other gender identity.

Additional unanticipated barriers and challenges experienced by female nurses include English as a second language (2.2%), racial/ethnic disparities (4.0%), learning difficulties and/or disabilities (8.4%), childcare issues (12.2%), pregnancy (5.6%), student loans were not available/could not take enough out (13.2%), limited access to learning or other online resources (4.2%), and scheduling or education programs offered (11.3%). Data for these categories was not available for male nurses.

Unanticipated Barriers & Challenges While Pursuing a Nursing Degree By Gender



Conclusion

The findings from the Survey of Michigan Nurses highlight that nurses with less than three years of experience face a range of unanticipated barriers while pursuing their nursing education, with financial challenges emerging as the most prevalent. Costs associated with tuition, materials, and lost work time were consistently reported across all demographics, with younger nurses and LPNs disproportionately affected. Additionally, disparities related to race, ethnicity, age, and geographic access further compound these challenges.



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For additional information related to the 2025 Survey of Michigan Nurses results, past years' reports and data produced from Michigan's nurse licensure data, please visit MiNurse.org. For questions or comments related to the content presented in this report, please contact Casey Klein, ONP section manager (kleinc7@michigan.org).

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