

Education workers experiencing disturbing normalization of workplace violence

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Newly released research reveals the alarming extent to which violence in the workplace is a disturbing reality for education workers in Ontario, with almost nine in ten enduring physical violence while almost all

experience harassment.

Nearly 4,000 members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) participated in the Harassment and Violence against Education Workers (Ontario) Survey that asked classroom-based workers (educational assistants, designated early childhood educators, child and youth workers) and school support staff (clerical, custodial, IT, and maintenance) about workplace harassment experiences (including slurs, insults, and put-downs) and threats, attempts, and acts of physical aggression (such as hitting, kicking, pushing) in the 2018-2019 [school year](#).

Here is a summary of the key findings from the research led by a team at the University of Ottawa's Faculty of Social Sciences:

- 95 percent reported at least one type of harassment from one or more sources during the 2018-2019 school year;
- 89 percent reported at least one act/attempt/threat of physical force from one or more sources (students, parents, colleagues, administrators);
- Women reported higher levels of harassment from students and parents compared to [male counterparts](#); women worked more overtime, had higher workload increases, less ability to meet workplace demands, and greater familial impacts;
- BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People Of Color) participants reported higher rates of reprisals for reporting instances of harassment or violence;
- Participants with a disability reported higher levels of harassment from colleagues and administrators than educators who did not identify as disabled;
- 18 percent of educational assistants would be designated with PTSD following their worst incident of harassment;
- Replacing time lost to workplace [harassment](#) or violence is

conservatively estimated to cost Ontario at least \$3.5 million per year.

One education [worker](#) said that "my negative work experiences impacted every aspect of my life. I struggled with sleeping, anxiety, panic, [and] my stomach would get so bloated from the stress. I was emotional and reactive when I went home, and I was preoccupied with the level of dysfunction that I could not escape from. It impacted my ability to be happy and enjoy life."

"This is not about bad or violent kids," said Dr. Chris Bruckert, Full Professor, Department of Criminology, University of Ottawa. "This is a crisis that has emerged because of a lack of funding, which means that there are not enough support workers to address the needs of students. In real terms, this means children are not getting the support they need. The system is overburdened and under resourced."

Laura Walton, President, CUPE's Ontario School Board Council of Unions, representing 55,000 education workers in Ontario, concludes that "education workers were struggling with an epidemic of violence long before COVID took hold, and the situation has only worsened. As this report makes plain, the impacts—physical, mental and emotional—that will be felt for years, beyond the individuals themselves to their families, other students and communities. We see trauma and burnout, education workers quitting their jobs and school boards that can't recruit enough workers to ensure services. It's the result of years of normalized abuse and our work over the next months is to make sure there's a plan to end it."

More information: Full report: [storage.googleapis.com/wzukuse ...
7a78eddc4f3845d4e/In
%20Harm's%20Way%20-%20Full%20Report%20November%202021.
pdf](https://storage.googleapis.com/wzukuse...7a78eddc4f3845d4e/In%20Harm's%20Way%20-%20Full%20Report%20November%202021.pdf)

Provided by University of Ottawa

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