



Workplace violence in the public sector in Nova Scotia

Conducted April 27-May 8, 2006

A survey for the

Nova Scotia Teachers' Union
Canadian Union of Public Employees
Nova Scotia Nurses' Union
Nova Scotia Government and General Employees' Union

Half have been victims of workplace violence

Half the public employees in the province (51%) in the new survey for the NSNU, CUPE, NSGEU and NSTU have been victims of intimidation, threats or other forms of violence on the job in the past two years.

The poll's scientific, random sample of 400 employees was drawn from membership lists representing 43,000 public employees in Nova Scotia.

Intimidation is the most prevalent kind of workplace violence in the province's public sector - more than a third of public employees have experienced intimidation in the past two years.

Actual assaults and intentional property damage are unusual: 7% experienced those acts of violence in the previous two years. One in three employees (29%) reports experiencing verbal threats, ridicule or harassment in that period.

Intimidation and verbal threats, however, could lead to physical harm, and thousands of employees go to work in fear, as the poll shows.

In the past two years have any of the following kinds of violence or dangerous behaviour happened to you at work?

Public employees experiencing acts of violence at work					
	Total	NSNU	NSGEU	CUPE	NSTU
Intimidation	37%	39%	35%	19%	51%
Verbal threats, ridicule or harassment	29%	32%	26%	20%	39%
Harmful or malicious gossip	20%	16%	21%	26%	18%
Bullying or unwelcome teasing	18%	14%	16%	13%	28%
Physical assault	7%	12%	5%	5%	12%
Intentional property damage	7%	2%	3%	5%	19%

Teachers are more likely to report four of the six types of workplace violence covered by the new study - intimidation, threats, bullying and property damage. For details see pages 19-20, 41-42, 63-64, 85-86, 109-110, and 131-132 in the computer analysis.

Compared with 29% of the public employees overall who experienced verbal threats or ridicule, 39% of the NSTU members polled report experiencing that form of violent behaviour at work.

- Teachers are 10 points more likely than average public employees to report that they were victims of bullying or unwelcome teasing.

In all, 16% of the employees represented by the four unions, according to the poll, experienced at least one incident of workplace violence in the past two years, and 12% experienced two episodes or incidents. Another 22% have been victims of three kinds of violence at work.

For details see pages 161-162 in the computer analysis.

There is no discrimination in workplace violence. Minorities suffer workplace violence as much as but not more than other employees.

- Some 14% of the members in the four unions are minorities¹ and 12% of employees who have suffered workplace violence in the past two years are minorities. (In some cases the employee would not be known to co-workers and members of the public as a minority.)

About half the men and half the women in the four public sector unions have been workplace violence victims, but because women are more prevalent in public sector jobs (74% in the study are female), women have endured most of the violent incidents. Some 77% of the attacks,

¹ Gay, homosexual, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, aboriginal, persons of colour, persons with a disability. See pages 157-158 in the computer tables.

incidents of property damage, intimidation, bullying and so on have women as the victims.

For details see pages 160 and 161 in the computer tables.

Do workers know NS has no workplace violence laws?

In the April 27-May 8 poll of public sector workers across the province fewer than one in six knew that Nova Scotia has no legislation to deal with violence or harassment in the workplace. For details see pages 1-2 in the computer tables.

To begin, before this interview were you aware that Nova Scotia does not have legislation to prevent or deal with violence or harassment in the workplace?

	Total	NSNU	NSGEU	CUPE	NSTU
Yes, aware	18%	31%	14%	18%	18%
No, not aware	82%	68%	86%	79%	82%
No opinion	0%	1%	0%	3%	0%

Is violence at work inevitable in some jobs?

Nine out of 10 public sector employees surveyed in the new province-wide poll say there is no excuse for violence at work.

- 85% reject the suggestion that there is no need for legislation because in certain jobs the risk of violence "is just part of the job."

For details see pages 1-2 in the computer tables.

Which of the following two statements is closer to your point of view?

Risk of violence at work	
Some people say that in certain jobs the risk of violence at work is just part of the job, so there is no need for legislation to prevent it while . . .	6%
Some people say there is no excuse for violence at work in any type of job, so there is a need for legislation to prevent it	85%
Neither	8%
Depends	1%
No opinion	1%

Most work where there is no anti-violence policy

Fewer than half the public sector workers sampled in the provincial poll in late April and early May say there is a policy on preventing workplace violence where they work.

Only 20% of the province's public school teachers say there is a policy. But more than half the members in the Nova Scotia Nurses' Union and the Canadian Union of Public Employees say there is a policy to deal with violence where they work.

For details see pages 5-6 in the computer tables.

Does your place of employment have a workplace violence prevention policy or not?

	Total	NSNU	NSGEU	CUPE	NSTU
Has a policy	42%	57%	45%	55%	20%
No policy	32%	27%	35%	30%	28%
Don't know/no opinion	26%	16%	20%	15%	52%

One in three had workplace violence training

A third of the public sector workers in the province who are represented by the four unions in the Vector Poll™ have received training to deal with workplace violence.

Nearly half the CUPE and NSNU members surveyed have been trained. For details see pages 7-8 in the computer tables.

Have you received any training in dealing with workplace violence or harassment, such as identifying, assessing, controlling or eliminating workplace violence?

	Total	NSNU	NSGEU	CUPE	NSTU
Yes	34%	48%	32%	48%	26%
No training	62%	51%	66%	50%	66%
Don't know/no opinion	3%	1%	2%	2%	8%

Nine out of 10 employees who have received any training in dealing with workplace violence received their training from their employer. For details see pages 9-10 in the computer tables.

Did you receive this training from ...?

	Total	NSNU	NSGEU	CUPE	NSTU
Current employer	89%	92%	94%	77%	81%
Union	4%	0%	3%	17%	0%
College program (volunteered)	2%	2%	3%	0%	0%
Previous employer (vol.)	1%	2%	0%	2%	4%
Other courses	2%	0%	0%	2%	12%

Employees know what workplace violence means

Nearly all the nurses, teachers and other public service employees sampled for the new study are aware that workplace violence includes not only physical assaults but also threats, intimidation, bullying and other types of behaviour intended to frighten.

For details see pages 11-12 in the computer tables.

Before this interview were you aware that workplace violence includes not only physical assaults but any act at work in which a person is abused, threatened, intimidated, bullied, assaulted or experiences fear?

	Total	NSNU	NSGEU	CUPE	NSTU
Aware	88%	100%	85%	90%	88%
Not aware	11%	0%	15%	10%	10%

One in 4 workers fears violence by a member of the public

An estimated one in four public sector workers is concerned ("extremely" or "rather" concerned) about violence at work by a member of the public.

To put a human face on the statistics, with one percentage point in the poll standing for 430 employees, the 24% in the sample who are worried about violence from a member of the public stand for 10,320 employees.

For details see pages 13-14 in the computer tables.

Where you work, how worried or concerned are you about possible violence in your workplace by a member of the public? Are you extremely worried, rather worried, not too worried, or not worried at all?

Concerned about possible violence at work from a member of the public					
	Total	NSNU	NSGEU	CUPE	NSTU
Extremely/rather	24%	25%	23%	18%	29%
Not too/not at all	76%	75%	77%	81%	70%

Nearly 10% worried about violence by a co-worker

Nearly one in 10 workers surveyed in the poll is concerned or worried about violence by a co-worker.

For details see pages 15-16 in the computer tables.

And where you work, how worried or concerned are you about possible violence in your workplace by a co-worker or other employee? Are you extremely worried, rather worried, not too worried, or not worried at all?

Concerned about possible violence at work from a co-worker					
	Total	NSNU	NSGEU	CUPE	NSTU
Extremely/rather	8%	11%	10%	8%	3%
Not too/not at all	91%	89%	90%	92%	96%

Fear of violence by managers, supervisors

In the new poll on violence at work in Nova Scotia's public sector, 7% of the nurses, teachers and other unionized workers sampled are worried about violence by a manager or supervisor where they work.

For details see pages 17-18 in the computer tables.

Where you work, how worried or concerned are you about possible violence in your workplace by a manager or supervisor? Are you extremely worried, rather worried, not too worried, or not worried at all?

Concerned about possible violence at work from a supervisor					
	Total	NSNU	NSGEU	CUPE	NSTU
Extremely/rather	7%	12%	7%	3%	5%
Not too/not at all	93%	88%	93%	97%	94%

Employees who have not been victims of workplace violence tend not to worry about the chance it will happen to them in the future. For example, among employees who have not experienced violence at work in the past two years from a co-worker or other employee, 98% have no worries about violent behaviour on the job.

But among employees who have been victims of violence at work, 14% are "extremely" or "rather" worried about violence on the job by a co-worker (page 16 in the computer tables).

What employers are doing about workplace violence

Workplace violence costs emotionally and financially in family life and lost work time.

The poll shows, for example, that 8% of the employees enduring malicious gossip at work in the past two years have lost time from work as a result. And 9% of the employees who suffered an assault have required treatment or counseling as a result of the incident.

For each incident of workplace violence, interviewers asked the respondent if a manager, client, patient, parent, student, family member or co-worker was involved.

For each instance of workplace violence, interviewers also asked the employee whether a woman or man was involved. (Nova Scotia Teachers' Union members used a mail survey with the identical questions covered in the phone study.)

Respondents also reported whether they lost time from work as a result of the incident, required medical treatment or counseling assistance as a direct result of the incident and whether the incident had a negative effect on the employee's home life or family life.

To make the poll as thorough as possible, interviewers also asked if the target of the violence had reported the incident to someone from the union or to the employer or someone in management.

Finally, interviewers asked whether - for each incident - the employer took steps or measures to protect the victim from possible violence or abuse in the workplace.

The computer printouts have details on all these aspects of violence at work in the past two years in the province's elementary and secondary schools, hospitals, and other public sector workplaces.

Between a quarter and nearly half the employees who were victims of workplace violence say, depending on the type of incident, that it had a negative effect on their home life or family life.

Intimidation	
Lost time	8%
Required treatment or counselling	6%
Negative effect on employee's home life or family life	42%
Reported to the union	20%
Reported to the employer	57%
Employer took steps to protect the employee BASE: employees who reported incidents to their employer	55%

Assaults, verbal threats and intentional property damage are the incidents most likely to be reported to employers. But fewer than half the employees who suffered malicious gossiping reported it to their employer.

Bullying or unwelcome teasing	
Lost time	6%
Required treatment or counselling	5%
Negative effect on employee's home life or family life	48%
Reported to the union	13%
Reported to the employer	54%
Employer took steps to protect the employee BASE: employees who reported incidents to their employer	41%

Employees are much less likely to report violence at work to their unions than to the employer. Only 11% suffering verbal threats or

harassment, for example, reported the incident to their union while 62% reported the problem to their employer.

Physical assaults are the most likely incidents to be reported to employers - 85% of the employees who suffered an assault reported it to their supervisors.

Verbal threats, ridicule or harassment	
Lost time	3%
Required treatment or counselling	4%
Negative effect on employee's home life or family life	36%
Reported to the union	11%
Reported to the employer	62%
Employer took steps to protect the employee BASE: employees who reported incidents to their employer	61%

But employers are not responding consistently to complaints about violence, according to the poll. Two thirds of the incidents of verbal threats (in the past two years) were reported to supervisors, employees say. But only 61% of the employees who reported it to management say their complaint led to steps by the employer to protect the victim.

Intentional property damage	
Lost time	7%
Required treatment or counselling	3%
Negative effect on employee's home life or family life	26%
Reported to the union	0%
Reported to the employer	59%
Employer took steps to protect the employee BASE: employees who reported incidents to their employer	54%

Harmful or malicious gossip	
Lost time	8%
Required treatment or counselling	7%
Negative effect on employee's home life or family life	40%
Reported to the union	16%
Reported to the employer	42%
Employer took steps to protect the employee BASE: employees who reported incidents to their employer	59%

Physical assault	
Lost time	7%
Required treatment or counselling	9%
Negative effect on employee's home life or family life	34%
Reported to the union	16%
Reported to the employer	85%
Employer took steps to protect the employee BASE: employees who reported incidents to their employer	66%

Method

The findings in the poll are based on telephone interviews with CUPE, NSNU and NSGEU members conducted by Vector Research + Development Inc. and a mail survey with NSTU members tabulated by Vector Research from April 27 through May 8, 2006, with 400 employees represented by the four unions throughout the province.

The sample of phone numbers was drawn by recognized probability sampling methods to ensure that every name on the lists supplied by the unions had an equal chance of being included in the poll.

The overall data were weighted proportionately to reflect the size of each union's membership.

In sampling theory, in 19 cases out of 20 (or 95% of all samples), the results based on a random sample of 400 will differ by no more than ± 4.9 percentage points in a population or universe of 43,000 employees.

This means you can be 95% certain that the survey results do not vary by more than 4.9 percentage points in either direction from results that would have been obtained by surveying all the members in the NSTU, NSNU and NSGEU and in the nine local unions of CUPE in Nova Scotia that participated in the study.

The error margins for subgroups such as gender are larger. For each union 100 respondents were surveyed. The margin of sampling error for samples of 100 is 9.7 points up or down at a confidence level of 95%.

To get error margins for any subgroup use the calculator at www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm.

Samples of any size have some degree of precision. Larger samples are generally more precise but sometimes not. The important rule in sampling is not how many respondents are selected but how they are selected.

One method to guarantee that all members of a population have a known chance of being polled includes dialing phone numbers randomly. Another is to dial the number again and again when no one answers to ensure that people often away from home are sampled.

The margin of error refers only to sampling error. Even in true random samples, precision can be compromised by factors such as the wording of questions. The order in which questions were asked may lead to different results.

Pages 13-18 in the computer analysis show the mean and standard deviation for the question on concern about violent acts by members of the public. The S.D. embraces the range where 68% or approximately two-thirds of the respondents would fall if the distribution of answers is a normal bell-shaped curve.

For example, page 13 in the computer analysis shows the level of concern about violence at work by a member of the public. Among all members in the four unions, the mean or average level of concern (on a scale of 4 to 1) is 2.06 with 4 meaning "extremely worried" and 1 "not worried at all."

On page 17 are the data for concern about violence at work by a manager or supervisor. The mean or average level of concern is 1.38 on the 4-1 scale. Employees are less worried about violence by a supervisor than by a member of the public.

The standard deviation, however, reveals more. For violence by a member of the public, the S.D. is 0.80 and for violence by a supervisor, 0.66. The higher standard deviation tells you there is a wider range of opinions - meaning less consensus - about fear of violence by a member of the public than by a manager or supervisor.

The standard error (S.E.), or standard error of the estimate, is shown below the S.D. The S.E. is a measure of how different the respondents

are from each other in their answers. The S.E. is a measure of confidence or reliability, roughly equivalent to the error margin cited for sample sizes. The S.E. measures how far off the sample's results are from the standard deviation.

The smaller the S.E. the greater the reliability of the data. In other words, a low S.E. indicates that the answers given by respondents in a certain group such as males or females do not differ much from the probable spread of the answers predicted in sampling and probability theory.

- Marc Zwelling
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