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# Violence and Harassment Against Education Sector Workers in Ontario

Dr. Chris Bruckert, Dr. Darcy Santor, and Darby Mallory

# Our talk today

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- State of the Research & Methodology
- Findings
  - What do we mean by violence & harassment?
  - What do we know about the issue?
  - What are the impacts?
  - What are the responses?
- How did we get here?
- What can be done?
- Q&A Session

*“With all the cutbacks it gets harder and harder to do our job. More for less is not a good thing in education. I feel we are just fire extinguishers going from one incident to the next.” (EA)*

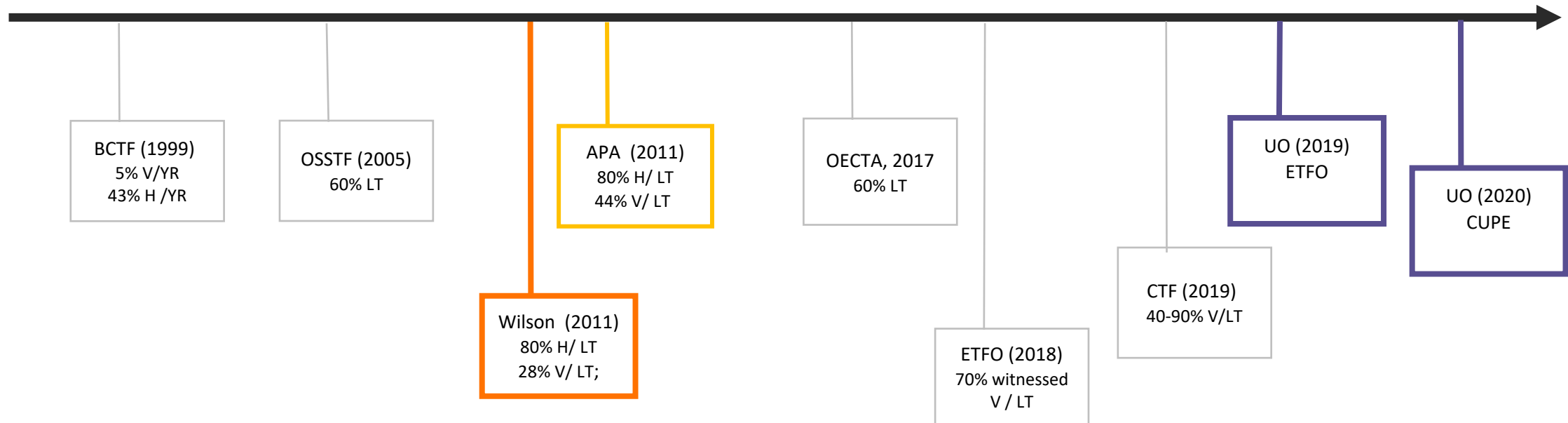
**DARBY**



# Section 1

## State of the Research & Methodology

# Researching Violence in the Education Sector



# The *Harassment and Violence against Education Workers Study*: Methodology

- Between February 3, 2020, and March 13, 2020
- 3854 CUPE Education Sector Workers (Ontario) participated in survey
- Participants were representative of CUPE Education Sector Workers in general, with respect to gender, age, years of service, region
- Surveyed a broad range of types of workplace harassment and violence (threats, attempts, and acts) from multiple sources examining overall frequency and worst incident in the past school year



**IN HARM'S WAY:**  
THE EPIDEMIC OF VIOLENCE AGAINST  
EDUCATION SECTOR WORKERS IN ONTARIO

*FULL REPORT*

*"With all the cutbacks it gets harder and harder to do our job.  
More for less is not a good thing in education.  
I feel we are just fire extinguishers going  
from one incident to the next."*

*~ Education Assistant, Elementary School*

Chris Bruckert, Darcy Santor and Brittany Mario  
University of Ottawa

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# Section 2A

What do we mean by violence and harassment?

# What do we mean by violence?

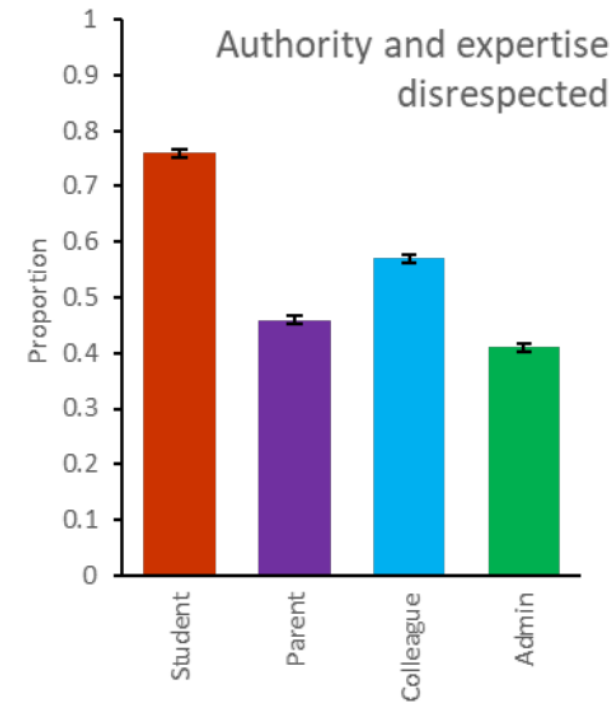
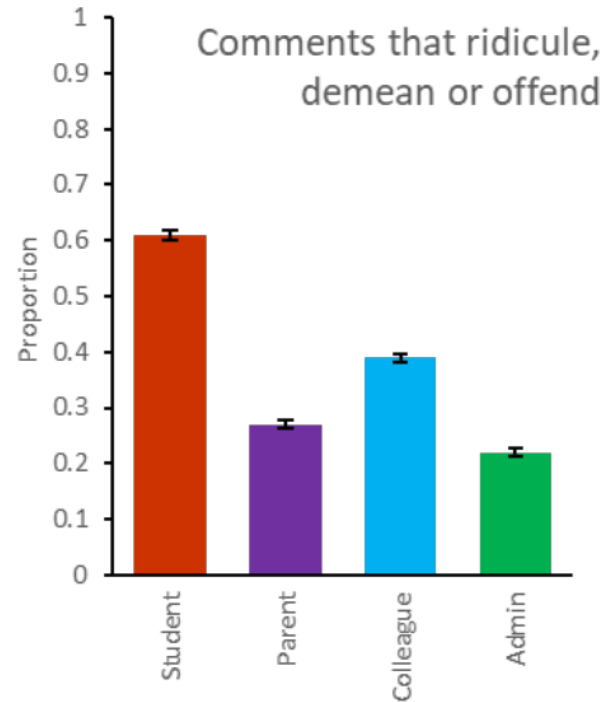
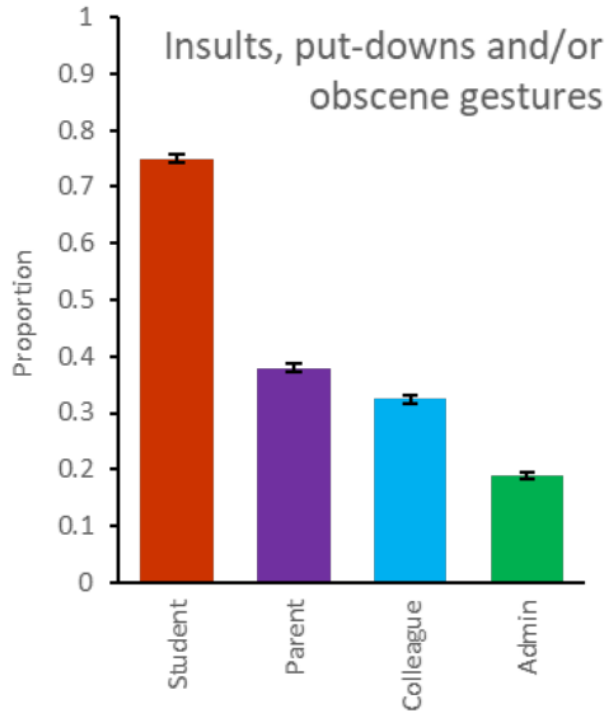
*“Having the class evacuated [and] being alone with a student and having that student throw objects at me such as scissors, chairs, books while telling me they will kill me.” (EA)*

*“A student spit in my face while I was fixing a broken window.” (Custodian)*

*“A student was extremely defiant, oppositional, hostile and hit/punched/kicked/bit me almost daily. This student doesn't have special needs.” (EA)*

*“I was often left by myself in a padded room with an extremely violent grade four boy. I have permanent nerve damage in my leg.” (EA)*

# What do we mean by harassment?



*“Typically, I would be harassed in person or over the phone by parents; it always made me feel inadequate like I am ‘just a woman’ or ‘just a secretary’.” (Clerical)*

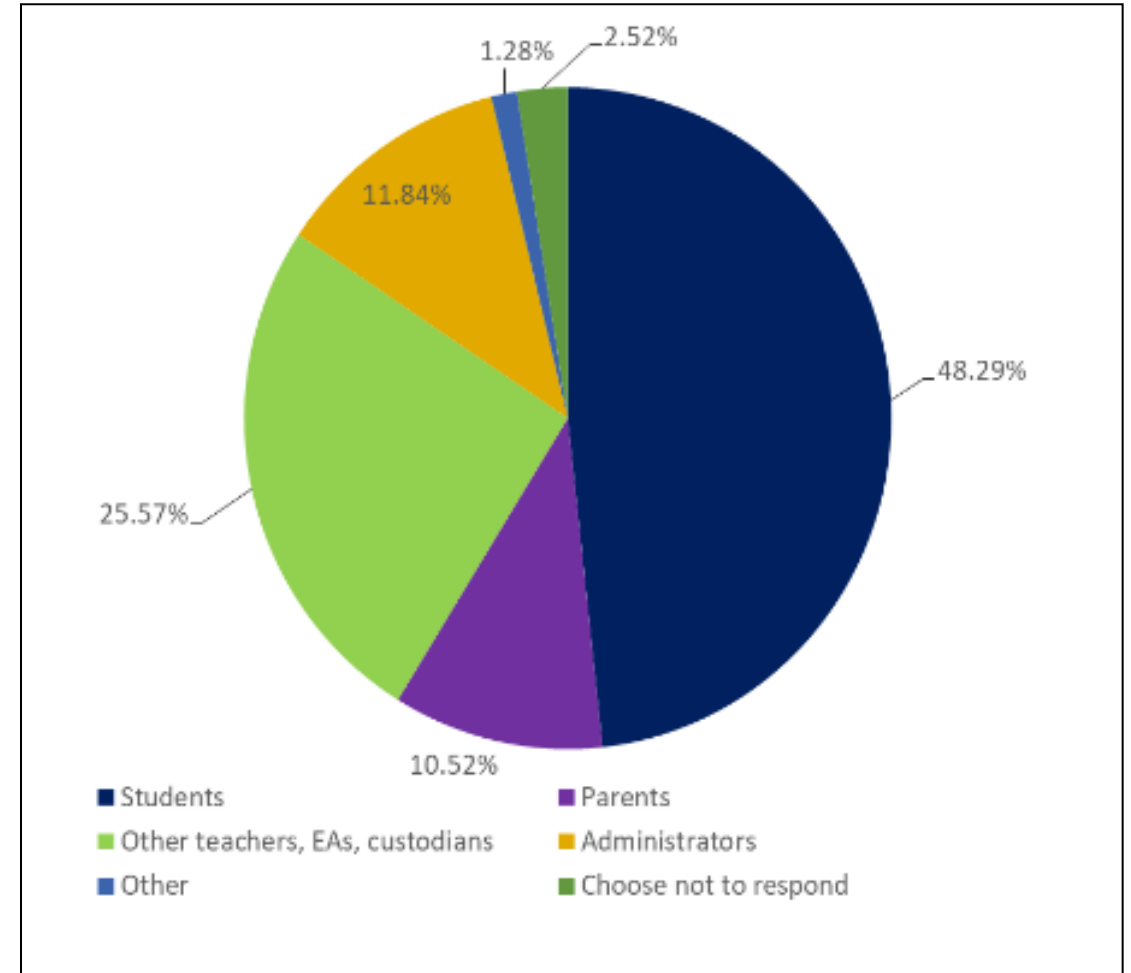


# Section 2B

What do we know **about** violence and harassment against education sector workers?

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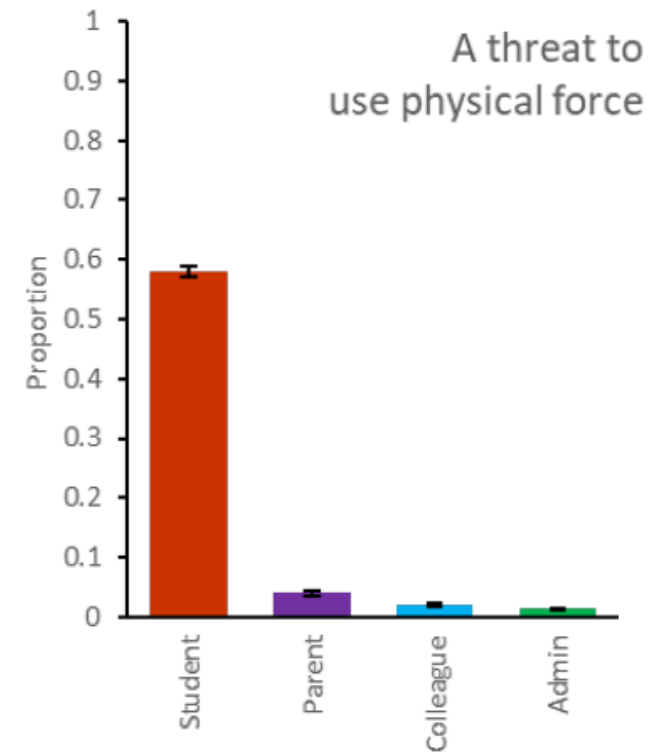
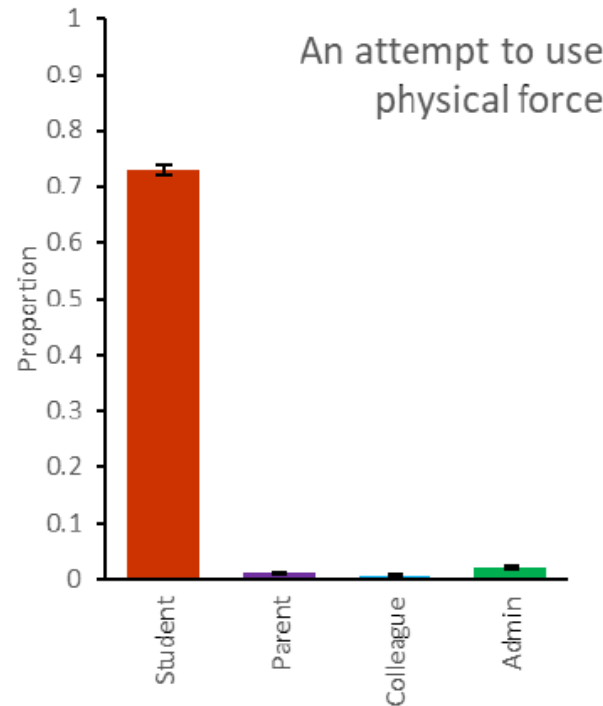
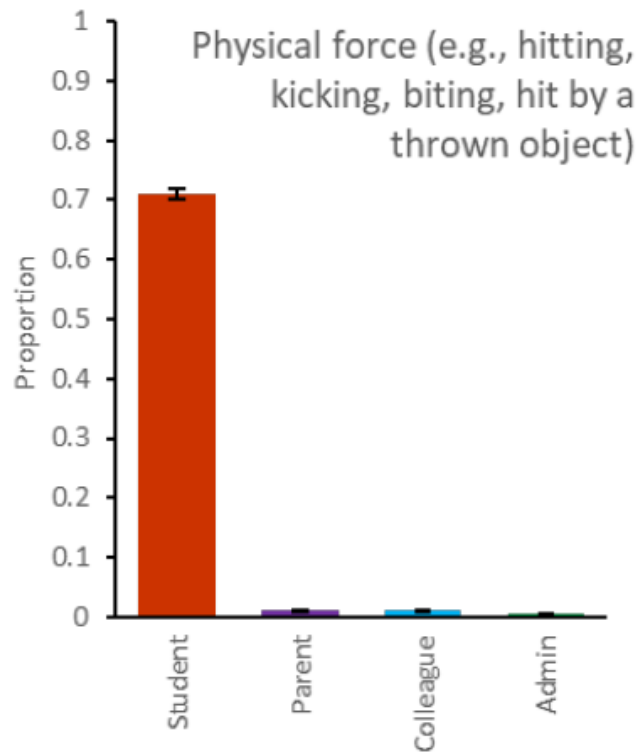
## What do we know about harassment against education sector workers?



# What do we know about violence against education sector workers?

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Rates of violence experienced by education assistants, early childhood educator and school support staff



# WSIB Data

**Table 6:** The top twenty highest count of workplace violence events resulting lost time due to injury in 2014, 2016, 2018 and 2020.

Occupations	2014	2016	2018	2020
ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHER ASSISTANTS	273	397	665	318
POLICE OFFICERS (EXCEPT COMMISSIONED)	269	284	354	327
NURSE AIDES AND ORDERLIES	236	279	318	389
COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL SERVICE WORKERS	197	293	252	177
CORRECTIONAL SERVICE OFFICERS	145	191	367	169
REGISTERED NURSES	150	158	258	218
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AND KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS	87	145	268	123
BUS DRIVERS AND SUBWAY AND OTHER TRANSIT OPERATORS	65	100	168	121
REGISTERED NURSING ASSISTANTS	84	99	48	135
OTHER AIDES AND ASSISTANTS IN SUPPORT OF HEALTH SERVICES	21	16	218	71
AMBULANCE ATTENDANTS AND OTHER PARAMEDICAL OCCUPATIONS	31	50	66	66
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS	25	45	55	29
FAMILY, MARRIAGE AND OTHER RELATED COUNSELLORS	24	34	54	35
SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS	33	30	59	22
SOCIAL WORKERS	12	20	50	46
SECURITY GUARDS AND RELATED OCCUPATIONS	12	13	47	37
SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AND ADMINISTRATORS OF ELEMENTARY AND SECON	14	23	37	22
VISITING HOMEMAKERS, HOUSEKEEPERS AND RELATED OCCUPATIONS	30	30	19	1
BY-LAW ENFORCEMENT AND OTHER REGULATORY OFFICERS, N.E.C.	8	10	18	10
PROBATION AND PAROLE OFFICERS AND RELATED OCCUPATIONS	17	12	7	6

Data Source: The Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) Enterprise Information Warehouse (EIW) Claim Cost Analysis Schema, April 2021 data snapshot for all years.

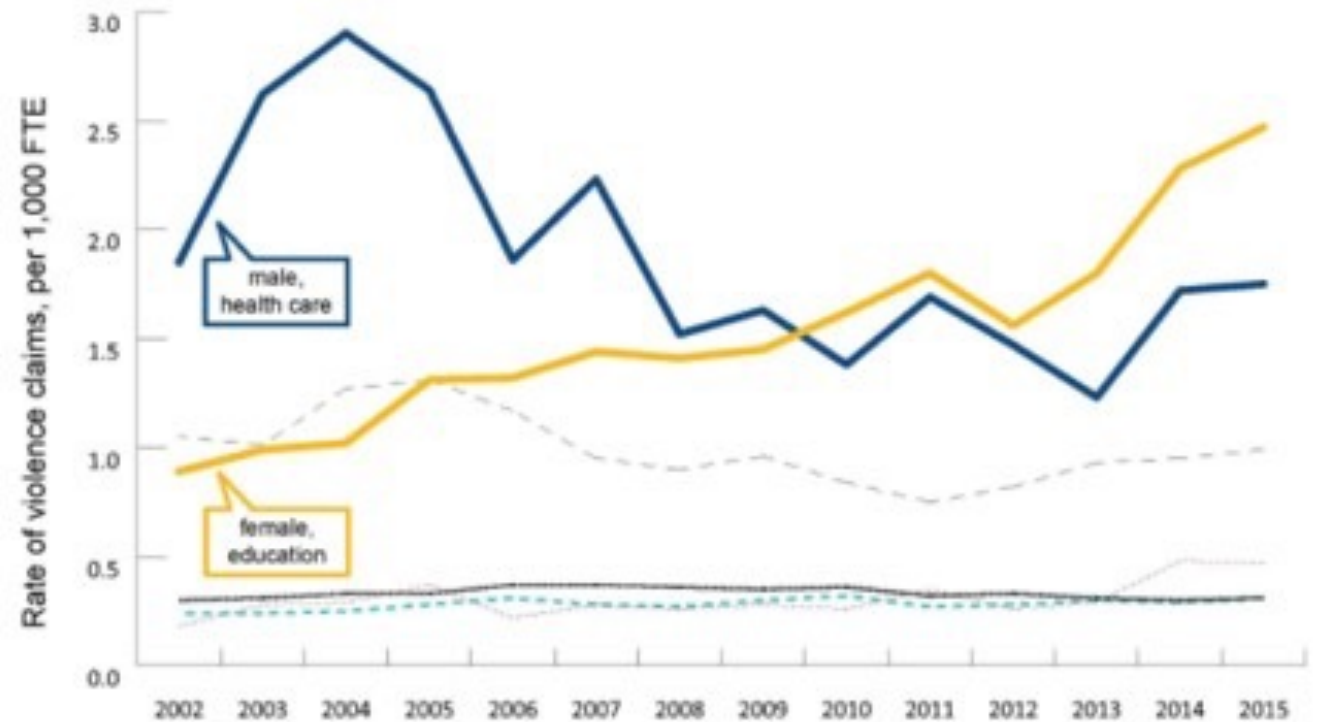
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# Rates are going up...

*“Violence in the education system is becoming an epidemic and the problem is constantly being swept under the rug. [...] Violence and evacuations are becoming the norm for students. That is disheartening.” (ECE)*

Rates of WSIB lost-time claims due to workplace violence, from 2002 to 2015



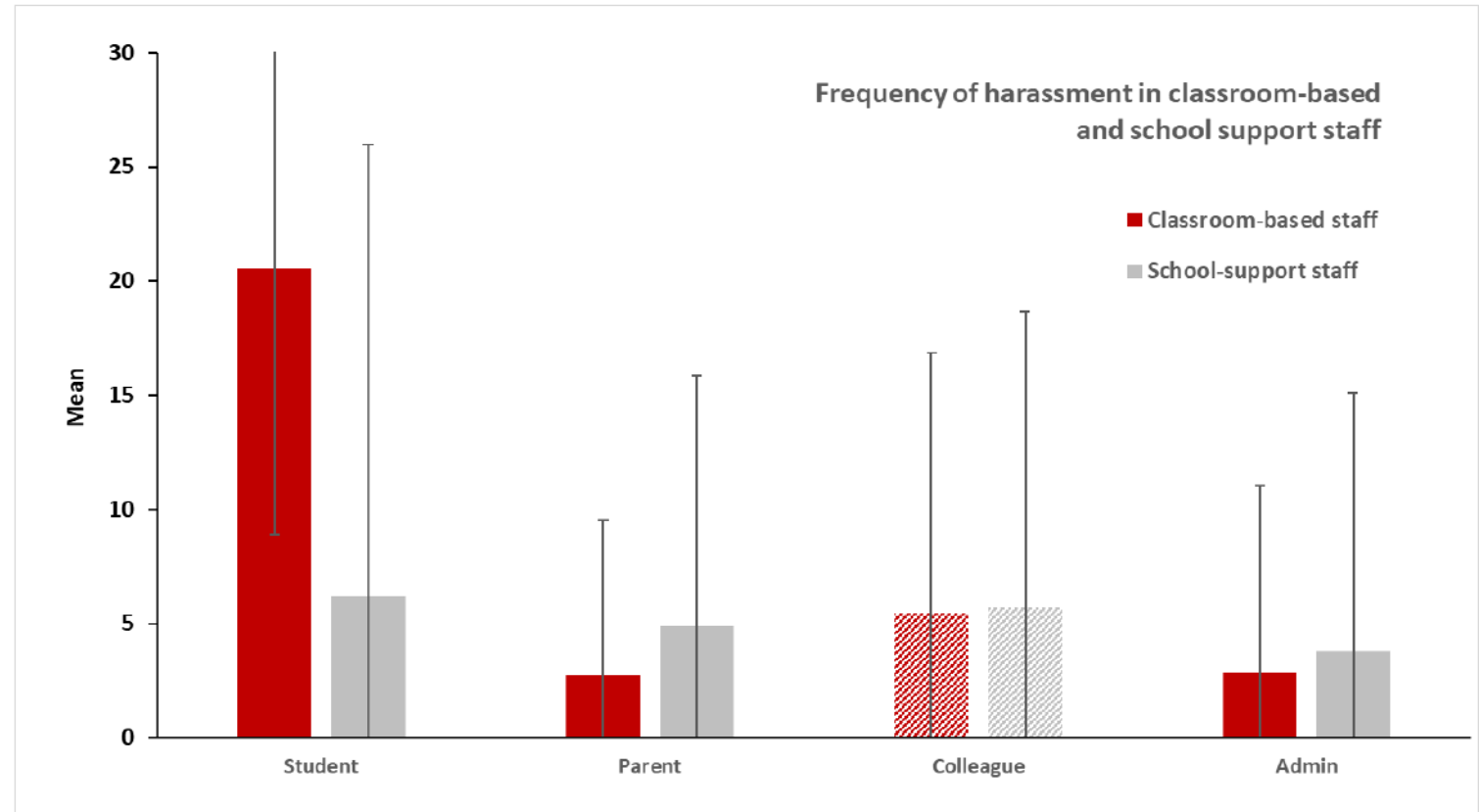
Claims rates by gender and sector



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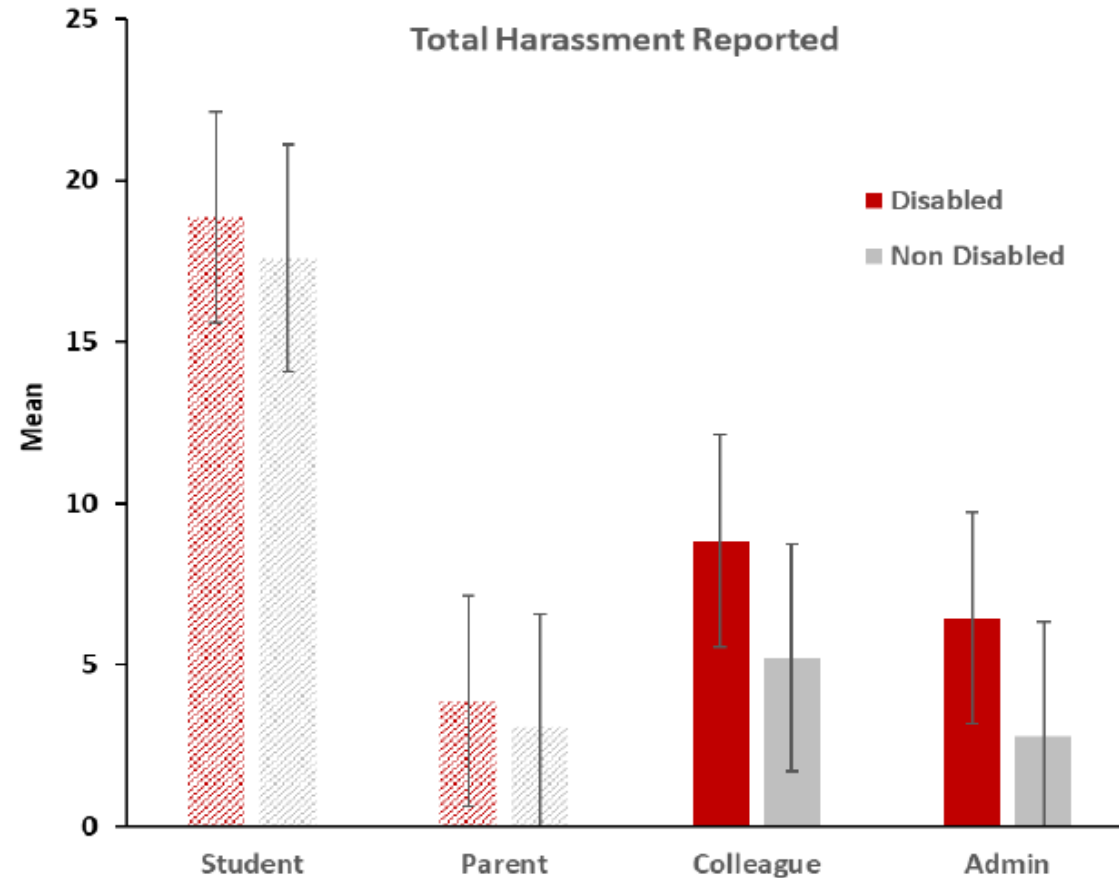
# Not all workers are equally vulnerable to harassment: *Occupation*

*“Typically, I would be harassed in person or over the phone by parents; it always made me feel inadequate like I am ‘just a woman’ or ‘just a secretary’.”*  
(Clerical)



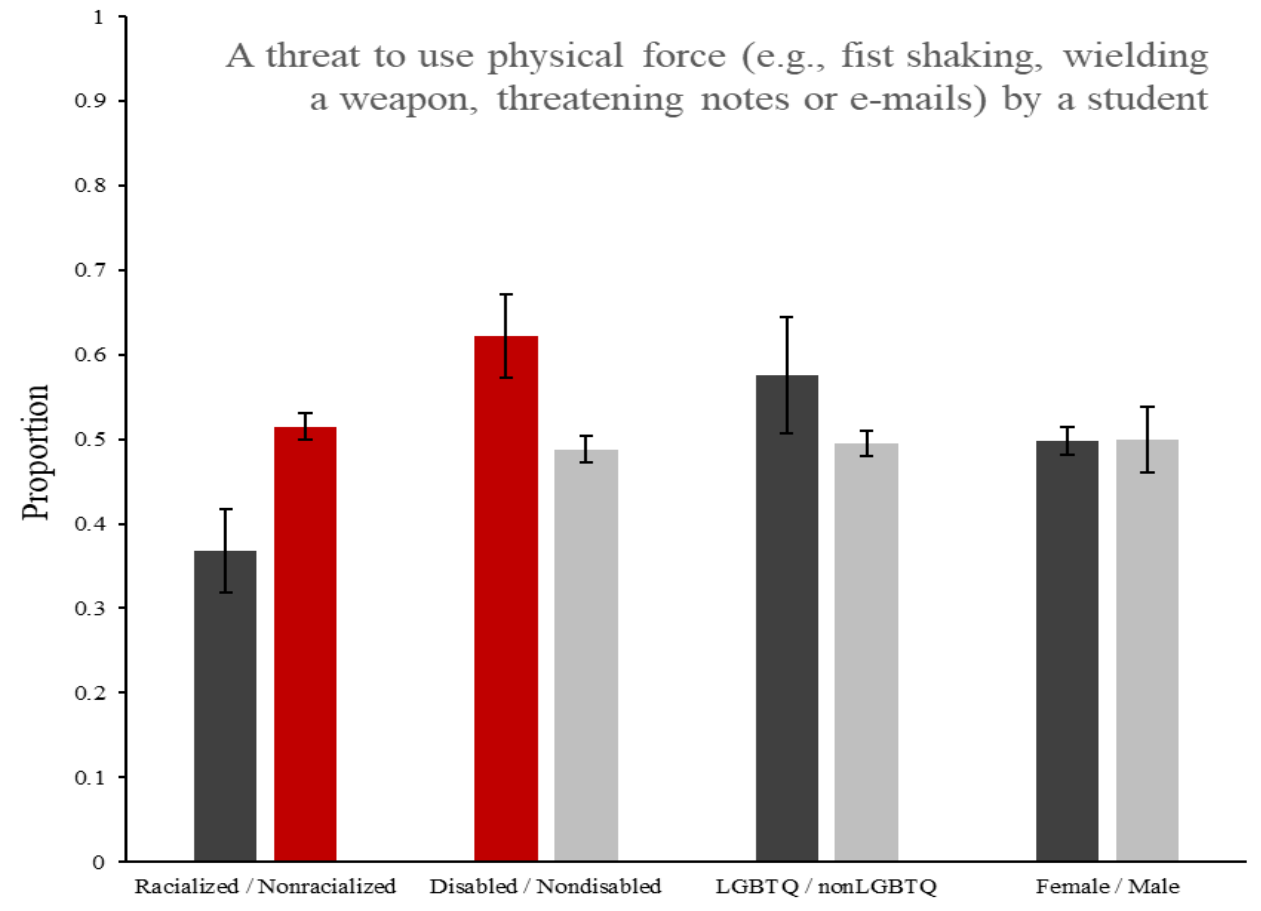
# Not all workers are equally vulnerable to harassment: *Disability*

*“[My] principal ridiculed my anxiety and PTSD from a work-related injury. She laughed about it and spoke to other staff. [She] complained about accommodating me and caused tension with other staff as their duties changed due to my accommodations.” (EA)*



# Not all workers are equally vulnerable to violence: Intersecting factors

*“A student tried to pull on my hijab from the back, choking me while I was engaged in teaching another student. When the teacher tried to get him off, he tried to scratch and bite both her and me. He also tried to insert his hand under my shirt to scratch me.” (EA)*





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# Violence and Harassment is repetitive and ongoing

	Student			Parent			Colleague			Admin.		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Insults, put-downs, gestures	3865	8.47	8.73	3863	1.22	3.29	3854	1.37	3.73	3854	0.70	2.71
Jokes or innuendo that demean	3864	5.44	7.68	3868	0.77	2.52	3867	1.68	4.10	3862	0.76	2.81
Authority, expertise disrespected	3868	8.36	8.59	3874	1.82	4.22	3866	2.97	5.46	3854	1.94	4.58
Being 'ganged up' on	3815	1.02	3.47	3816	0.13	1.03	3812	0.61	2.53	3810	0.36	2.03
Threats of false accusations	3821	1.91	4.83	3822	0.73	2.75	3822	0.73	2.75	3816	0.35	1.92
Actual false accusations	3816	1.05	3.48	3815	0.28	1.36	3814	0.67	2.55	3816	0.35	1.99
Use of physical force	3117	8.64	8.89	3121	0.01	0.14	3122	0.03	0.60	3123	0.02	0.43
An attempt to use physical force	3117	9.14	8.98	3121	0.02	0.52	3121	0.02	0.42	3121	0.01	0.37
A threat to use physical force	3117	6.52	8.46	3122	0.06	0.77	3123	0.06	0.76	3119	0.04	0.71

# Section 2C

What are the **impacts** of harassment and violence against CUPE education sector workers?

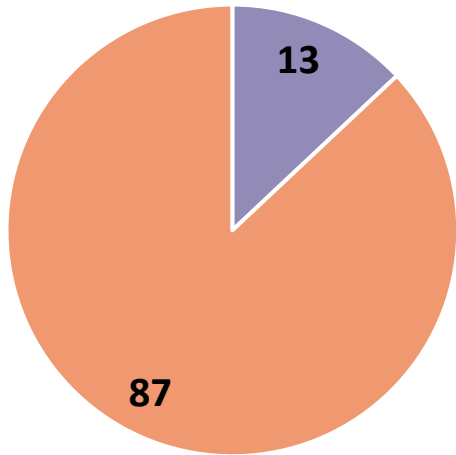
## Impacts on Physical Wellbeing

*“I was attacked by a student. Several punches to the head. I had a concussion, kidney trauma, a sprained ankle, major swelling, bruising, and bite marks on my leg.” (CYW)*

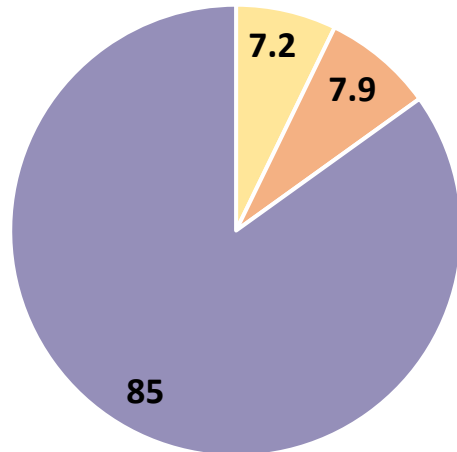
*“I was punched in the face by a grade 12 student. I went to hospital and he had shifted my jaw. He was suspended for a week but I was off for two weeks because of the pain.” (EA)*

# Impacts on Mental Wellbeing

Proportion designated as suffering with PTSD



Proportion with burnout or elevated risk for burnout



Association between PTSD, Burnout and measures of wellbeing and workplace functioning

	Symptoms of PTSD following a worst instance of harassment	Symptoms of PTSD following a worst instance of violence	Total degree of burnout experienced
Overall wellbeing	-0.28	-0.30	-0.58
Overall commitment to work	-0.15	-0.17	-0.40
Not able to meet demands of the job	0.15	0.20	0.48
Time off work after experiencing an instance of harassment	0.43		0.21
Time off work after experiencing an instance of violence		0.42	0.15

# Impacts on Mental Wellbeing

About the same as firefighters

**Table 4.** Frequencies of Positive Screens for Recent Mental Disorders Based on Self-Report Measures by Public Safety Personnel Category.

	% (n)						
	Total sample	Municipal/provincial police	Royal Canadian Mounted Police	Correctional workers	Firefighters	Paramedics	Call centre operators/dispatchers
PTSD (PCL-5)	23.2 (1304)	19.5 (288)d	30.0 (430)a	29.1 (225)a	13.5 (120)b	24.5 (190)c	18.3 (51)d
Major depressive disorder (PHQ-9)	26.4 (1419)	19.6 (278)b	31.7 (435)a	31.1 (235)a	20.2 (170)b	29.6 (213)a	33.2 (88)a
Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD-7)	18.6 (975)	14.6 (203)b, c	23.3 (313)a	23.6 (172)a	11.7 (97)b	20.5 (144)a	18.0 (46)a, c
Social anxiety disorder (SIPS)	15.2 (783)	10.0 (136)b	18.7 (247)a	18.3 (130)a	11.0 (90)b	20.0 (138)a	16.9 (42)a
Panic disorder (PDSS-SR)	8.9 (439)	5.9 (76)b	12.0 (151)a	12.2 (84)a	5.1 (40)b	10.3 (70)a, c	7.6 (18)b, c
Alcohol use disorder (AUDIT)	5.9 (292)	5.8 (76)c	3.9 (49)a	6.8 (47)b, c	8.0 (63)b	6.1 (40)b, c	7.2 (17)b, c

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## Impacts Members of the School Community

*“Although I am not directly impacted physically, it is wearing emotionally and mentally to see what is happening in the schools with student violence and the incapacity to help the staff member who is being physically assaulted by a student.” (Clerical)*

*“We see huge increases in anxiety as well as school and social phobias for children who witness violence repeatedly and yet little is done for them” (EA).*



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# Impacts the Personal Lives of Education Sector Workers

*“I have nothing left for my family. I don't feel like engaging with them because of the extremely difficult days of violence and dysregulation in the children that I support. IT IS EXHAUSTING!! I am mentally done! I'm not sure how much longer I can do this job, and I'm only 35. I hate that I have nothing left to give to my own children and husband. My patience is shot, and I just want to be left alone. It's a horrible feeling.” (ECE)*

# Economic Impacts

## Missed Days of work and associated costs

### Worst case of harassment:

Of the 2293 individuals who reported a significant incident of harassment in the 2018-2019 school year, 687 individuals **(30%) reported taking time off.**

The mean number of days off work for the 2293 individuals was **6.34** (SD=7.00). Using the per diem rate of \$185.29, the cost associated with hiring a replacement teacher is **\$1,175.12.**

### Worst case of physical violence:

Of the 1971 individuals who reported a significant incident of physical violence in the 2018-2019 school year, 553 individuals **(28%) reported taking time off.**

The mean number of days off work for the 135 individuals was **5.47** (SD=7.32). Using the per diem rate of \$185.29, the cost associated with hiring a replacement teacher is **\$1,013.57.**



# Summary and Comments

In our survey, approximately **70%** reported that they experienced *a worst incident* of physical violence and some **72%** reported that they experienced *a worst incident* of harassment or verbal violence.

Let's assume a low rate of exposure to harassment and violence - just 10% (less than one seventh). That would still involve some **10,000 education sector worker in any given year.**

If we assume that 30% of those take time off, then 3000 educators would be expected to take an average of 6.34 days of work at a cost of \$1,175.12, amounting to about **\$3.5 million dollars in costs associated with days off work.**

*It is important to keep in mind that this estimates a very low rate of exposure to just harassment and only estimates the costs associated with just a single incident in a single year.*

# Section 2

d. What are the **responses** to harassment and violence against education sector workers?

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## Normalization and Inaction

*“Why does the board ‘normalize’ these incidents? There's NOTHING NORMAL about going to work every day and getting hit, scratched, kicked, punched, pushed, and having your hair pulled.” (EA)*

*“I have brought the issues to my administrator who is aware of the environment that I work in but does NOTHING to improve that environment. It's like talking to a brick wall.” (EA)*

## Blame and Shame

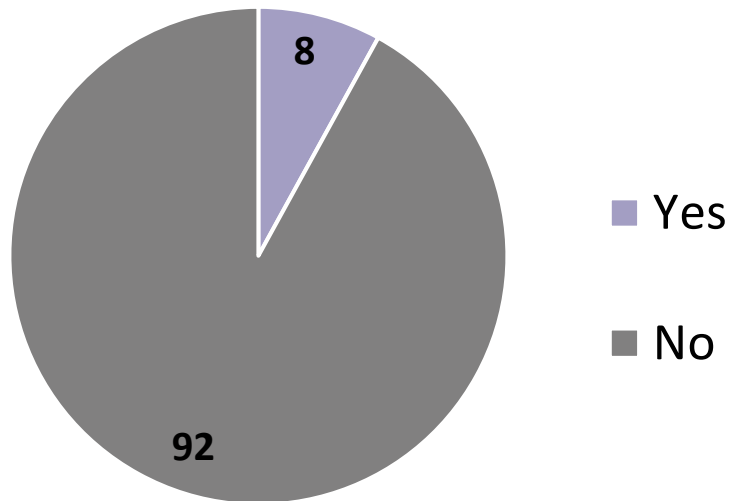
*“I can attest to the damage that hundreds of daily minor incidents can do to mental and physical well being. There is no light at the end of the tunnel. It’s demoralizing. The constant day to day blame and lack of support adds up.” (EA)*

*You ask for help or speak to admin only a few times; then you just stop. They are not helpful and ask, “what did you do to set him off.” (ECE)*

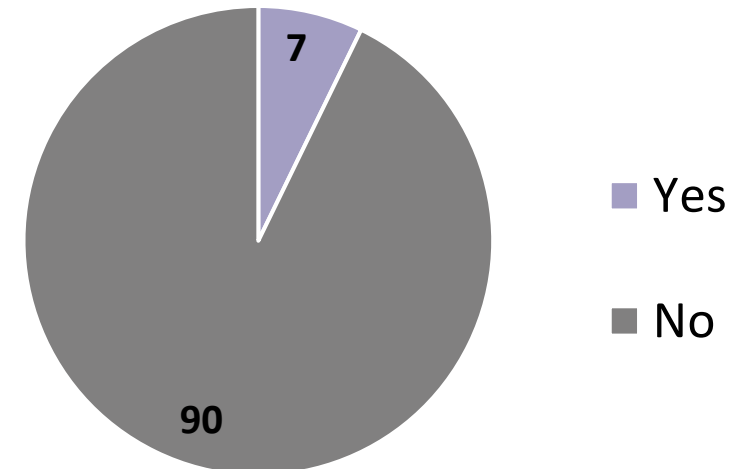
*I was asked what I did to provoke the student.” (EA)*

# Reprisals

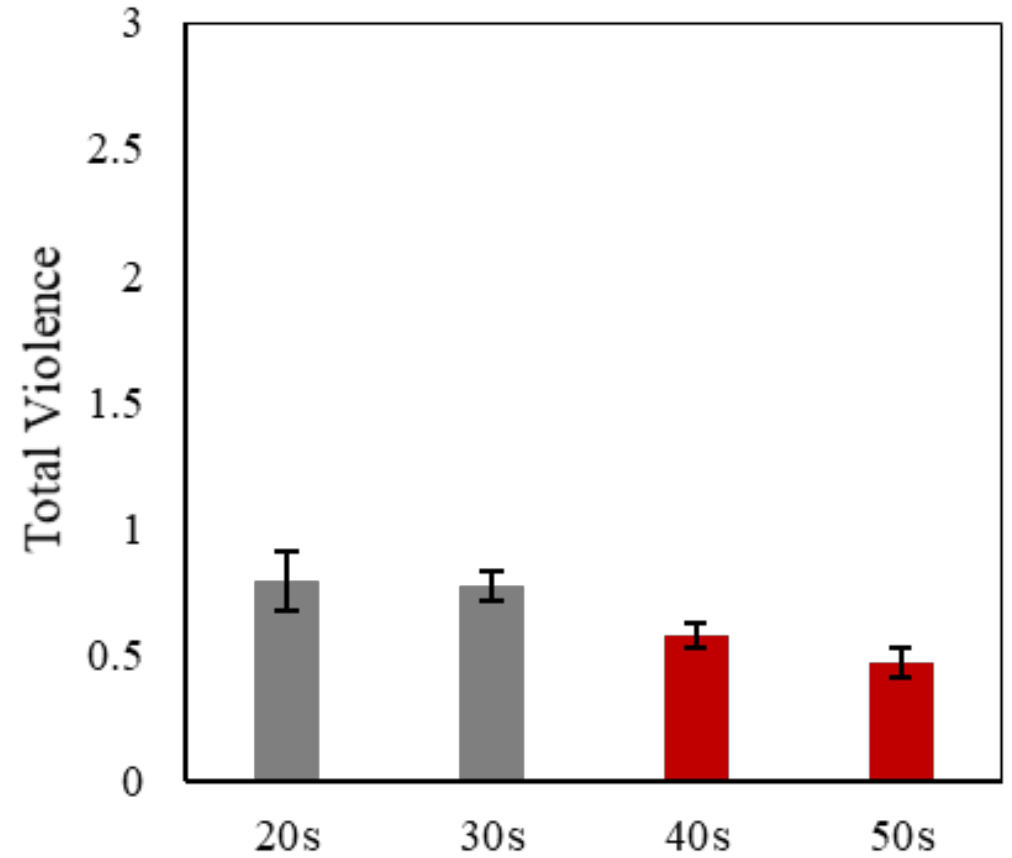
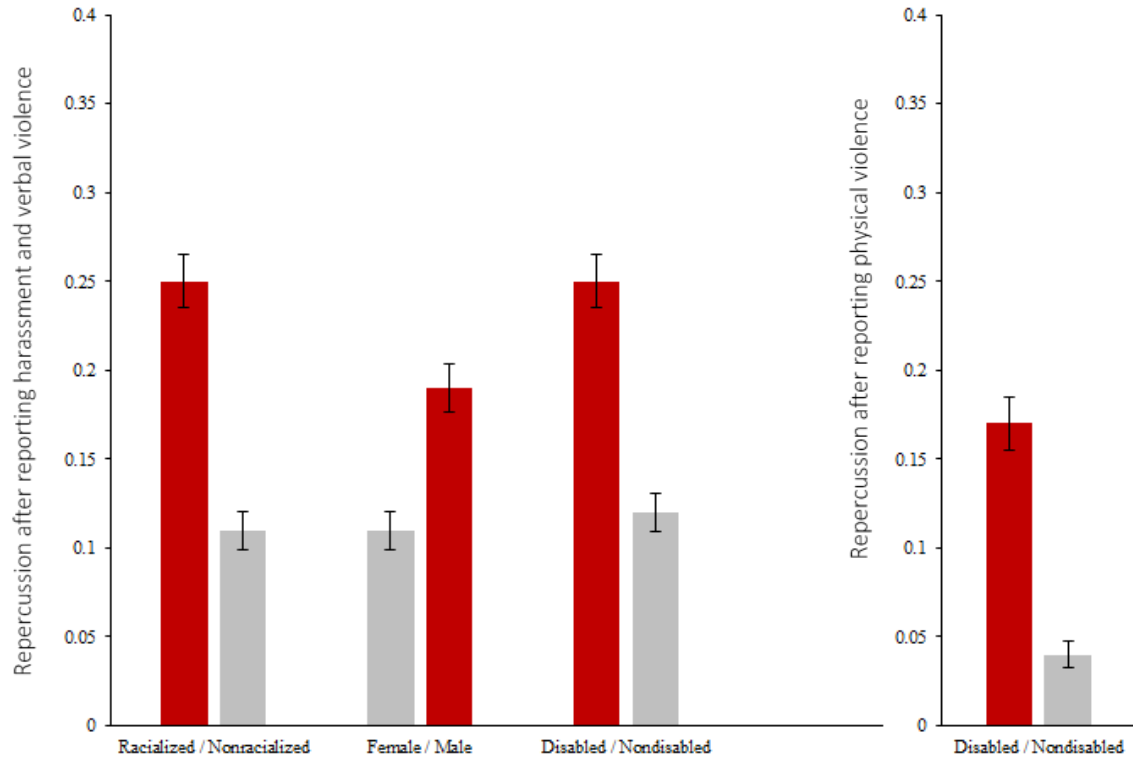
Did you experience any reprisals or sanctions from administrators (e.g., principal, vice-principal, supervisor)?



Did you experience any reprisals or sanctions from colleagues (e.g., EAs and teachers)?



# Reprisals: Conditioned by Intersecting Factors



Proportion of individuals in racialized and non-racialized, female and male, disabled and non-disabled groups reporting reprisals following instances of harassment and violence that were experienced and subsequently reported.

## Summary and Comments

Rates of violence are extremely high – **over 70% in the last year.**

Education sector workers face multiple sources of harassment – **students, parents, colleagues, and administrators.**

Forms of harassment are evolving – **“ganged up on” & “false accusations.”**

The experience of violence and harassment **is not isolated, but ongoing.**

Higher rates among designated groups – **e.g., disabled, racialized.**

The impacts are significant – **physical and mental health, job performance, time off, family, students**

There is a tendency to **blame rather than support.**

There are significant and systemic barriers to reporting a substantial failure to report (**e.g., fear or reprisal, lack of support, not seen as significant**).

**The impact of harassment and violence are equitable.**

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# Section 3:

## How did we get here?



# Mapping the Crisis

**Increased challenges + greater expectations + decreased health support + inadequate education funding + structural pressures = violence**



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# After thirty years of austerity...

*“There has been a decrease in the amount of EAs to a school. We are asked to support multiple students who are entitled to individual EAs. And students who are suspected to have a special need but are not diagnosed will be piggy backed onto a student who has an EA. Sometimes multiple students are placed in one EA’s care. This can result in an increase of behaviours and safety concerns.” (EA)*



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# Section 4:

## What can be done?

# Advocate for more resources

*“I am usually able to de-escalate a situation before it gets out of control. Having said that, I am only able to de-escalate a student or prevent an aggressive episode when the appropriate supports are put into place. When we [the staff] are stretched between students then we are unable to provide the support needed to keep students actively engaged, appropriately challenged, and in control of their behaviours.” (EA)*

# Recommendations moving forward

Mental Health Support & Treatment for **Education Sector Workers**

Mental Health Support & Treatment for **Students with Difficulties**

Exposure Reduction (contact with fewer students)

**System Level Training** on how to manage inappropriate behaviour

**Individual Training** on how to manage inappropriate behaviour

Identify & target resources to **groups at heightened risk.**

Document and report harassment and violence

# Thank you!



More information about the research available at [educatorviolence.ca](https://educatorviolence.ca).