



VIOLENCE AT WORK: IT'S **NOT** PART OF THE JOB!

OPSEU survey reveals serious risks of working in social services and related professions

The Community Services Divisional Council represents more than 11,500 members in developmental services, children's aid societies, child and family services, child care, community agencies, corrections, and child treatment centres.

Our members provide services in diverse settings such as: day treatment programs, group homes, youth custody settings, early years centres and child care centres, women's shelters, client's homes, supervised access centres, community outreach programs, and schools, among other work environments.

Workers in this sector are vulnerable to workplace hazards including physical and verbal abuse. They generally feel that they are not adequately protected. Threats and violence are traditionally, and wrongly, considered 'part of the job.' They are told 'You signed up for this – deal with it.'

Every worker has a right to be safe at work and to come home healthy and whole.

Violence in the workplace is epidemic. In a recent survey of 500 members, commissioned by OPSEU and conducted by Oraclepoll in February 2008, we found that:

- Almost half (43 per cent) of our members have personally been a victim of violence at work over the past year.
- Of these, more than 90 per cent have been threatened, and almost three-quarters have been subjected to physical attacks.
- Almost half (48 per cent) of workers have witnessed a violent act against a co-worker over the past year.

Who is doing this – and why?

- In the past year, of those who experienced violence, 93 per cent of members have experienced violence from clients, 29 per cent from co-workers and 25 per cent from a supervisor.
- According to most workers, staffing issues (understaffing, government underfunding and heavy workloads) have an underlying effect on fostering this trend to workplace violence, bullying and harassment.
- 55 per cent of overnight staff and 61 per cent of rotational shift workers experienced violence as compared to 33 per cent of workers who work the day shift.

What can be done to effect change?

- More than four-fifths of respondents think the Occupational Health and Safety Act must be changed to prevent violence in the workplace and protect workers.