

Executive Summary

# Harassment and Violence in Canadian Workplaces: It's [Not] Part of the Job

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Between October 2020 and April 2021, nearly 4900 workers across Canada participated in a nationwide survey on their experiences with harassment and violence at work. The survey results are clear: Too many workers in Canada are experiencing harassment and violence at work. The results of this survey will help governments, employers, and unions take action to create safer work in Canada.

We found that...

**7 in 10 workers in Canada have experienced some form of harassment and violence at work.**

In more detail, the results showed that:

- Workers were subject to three main forms of harassment and violence:
  1. Harassment and violence that was not sexual in nature;
  2. Sexual harassment and violence; and,
  3. Online harassment and violence.
- In the past two years:
  - o **65%** of respondents reported experiencing a form of non-sexual harassment and violence.
  - o **43.9%** of respondents reported experiencing at least one form of sexual harassment and violence while at work.
  - o **26.5%** of respondents reported experiencing at least one form of work-related online harassment.

- Not all workers are equally targeted. Indigenous respondents experienced significantly higher rates of harassment and violence and sexual harassment and violence.
- The majority of perpetrators were either third-parties such as clients and customers (**28%**) or co-workers (**25%**).
- Almost **1 in 2 (43.3%)** of workers who experienced sexual harassment and violence and 1 in 3 (28%) who experienced harassment and violence reported consequences to their health and well-being.
- **70%** of workers who experienced sexual harassment and violence missed work because of the negative impacts of harassment and violence.
- **88%** of workers who experienced harassment and violence or sexual harassment and violence were “transferred, suspended, fired, or lost a shift” due to the harassment and violence.
- A majority of workers who reported said nothing changed after reporting and approximately **1 in 4** workers who chose to report found that **reporting made it worse**.

## About the study

The survey was made possible through a partnership between the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) and the Centre for Research and Education on Violence against Women and Children (CREVAWC). The principal investigators are Dr. Barb MacQuarrie, Dr. Adriana Berlingieri, and Dr. Sandy Welsh. The study consisted of two components: An online survey that ran from October 21, 2020 to April 21, 2021, and interviews with 34 survey participants. In total 4878 workers took part in the survey.

## What is harassment and violence?

Previous research suggests that workers who have experienced harassment and violence do not always label their experiences as such. To capture an accurate picture of what workers are experiencing, the survey did not provide a single definition of harassment and violence. Instead, respondents were asked to identify which behaviours or practices they had experienced at work. The research team later split these abusive behaviours and practices into 3 categories to better understand the specifics of what workers are experiencing. The three categories were:

- **Harassment and violence**, that was non-sexual in nature including behaviours and practices such as: verbal intimidation, unreasonable deadlines, threats, physical assault;
- **Sexual harassment and violence**, including behaviours and practices such as: sexual conversations, teasing based on sexual orientation or gender identity, sexual assault;
- **Online harassment and violence**, including behaviours such as: threatening emails, sexual images via work communication, aggressive comments or texts

## Who is most affected?

The survey showed that some groups of workers experienced higher rates of harassment and violence:

- Women and gender-diverse individuals were more likely to experience all forms of harassment and violence. This was most pronounced with sexual harassment and violence where **73%** of gender-diverse respondents and **46%** of women stated they had experienced sexual harassment and violence in the last two years.

- **2 in 3** workers with a disability (76%) experienced harassment and violence, **over half** (55%) of the respondents with a disability experienced sexual harassment and violence.
- Members of the 2SLGBTQI+ community also experienced higher rates of harassment and violence. **62%** of respondents who identified as part of the LGBTQ2S+ community reported experiencing sexual harassment and violence.
- Indigenous respondents experienced significantly higher rates of harassment and violence at **79%** and sexual harassment and violence at **47.8%**.

**In interviews, racialized workers described the need for intersectional approaches to addressing harassment and violence:**

**“The solutions aren’t intersectional...Like I don’t experience anti-Black racism separate from misogyny, separate from homophobia. I experienced them all the same. At the same time. Because I’m all of those things. And so, I think that the institutional responses are not cognizant of that and don’t have that response.”**

## What are the impacts on workers?

Workers who experienced harassment and violence indicated significant impacts on their ability to work, on their personal lives, and on their health.

The study found that:

- Almost **1 in 2** survey respondents (43.3%) who experienced sexual harassment and violence and **1 in 3** (28%) who experienced workplace harassment and violence experienced consequences to their health and well-being such as disturbed sleep;
- **70%** of workers who experienced sexual harassment and violence stated it caused them to miss work, arrive late or leave early;
- **88%** of respondents who experienced some form of harassment and violence lost a shift, were suspended, transferred, or fired because of the harassment and violence.

## Who are the perpetrators?

Survey respondents indicated that two main groups were responsible for the majority of the harassment and violence:

1. Third-parties, including customers, patients or students (28%).
2. Co-workers and other employees (25%).

Understanding who the perpetrators are is key to creating effective prevention strategies and effective workplace policies to deal with harassment and violence when it occurs. The results of this survey show that more work needs to be done to prevent harassment and violence between co-workers and harassment and violence that is coming from third-parties.

## Gender of perpetrator

The results show that both men (41%) and women (29%) commit harassment and violence that was not sexual in nature. However, almost two-thirds (65.6%) of workers who experienced sexual harassment and violence indicated that their harasser was a man compared to 13% who reported their harasser was a woman with the next highest category being a mix of genders (9%) or two or more men (8%).

## What about reporting?

The report found a significant gap between the number of workers who had experienced harassment and violence and the workers who chose to report.

- Workers who experienced harassment and violence that was not sexual in nature were significantly more likely to report to their union (77%) than workers who experienced sexual harassment and violence (31%).
- Workers who experienced harassment and violence that was not sexual in nature were significantly more likely to file a formal report (51%) than workers who experienced sexual harassment (24%).

## Barriers to reporting

Survey respondents who did not report identified several barriers to reporting. The top three were:

1. Did not think the incident was serious enough to report;
2. Did not think reporting would make a difference;
3. Fear that reporting would result in negative consequences.

These barriers indicate the need for further training on harassment and violence and the importance of early intervention and they also underscore the loss of trust workers have in the reporting processes.

## Satisfaction with the outcome of reporting

The survey found that a significant number of workers were not satisfied with the reporting outcome. Approximately half of workers who chose to report said that reporting either made no difference and **1 in 4 workers said that reporting made it worse**. This result is nearly identical across the three reporting avenues (see figure 1 below).

## Conclusion

The troubling results of this survey indicate that there is a significant amount of work yet to be done to address harassment and violence for workers in Canada.

The rate and prevalence of harassment and violence demonstrate an urgent need for prevention strategies that address third-party and co-worker harassment and violence. These prevention strategies need to be cognizant of the disproportionate impacts on women and gender-diverse workers and those who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. We also heard from workers that the current reporting processes are not keeping workers safe and workers do not feel safe to report.

The results of this survey may be difficult to hear but are also an opportunity for unions to take stock of our current efforts to prevent and address harassment and violence and work together to decide what changes need to be made.

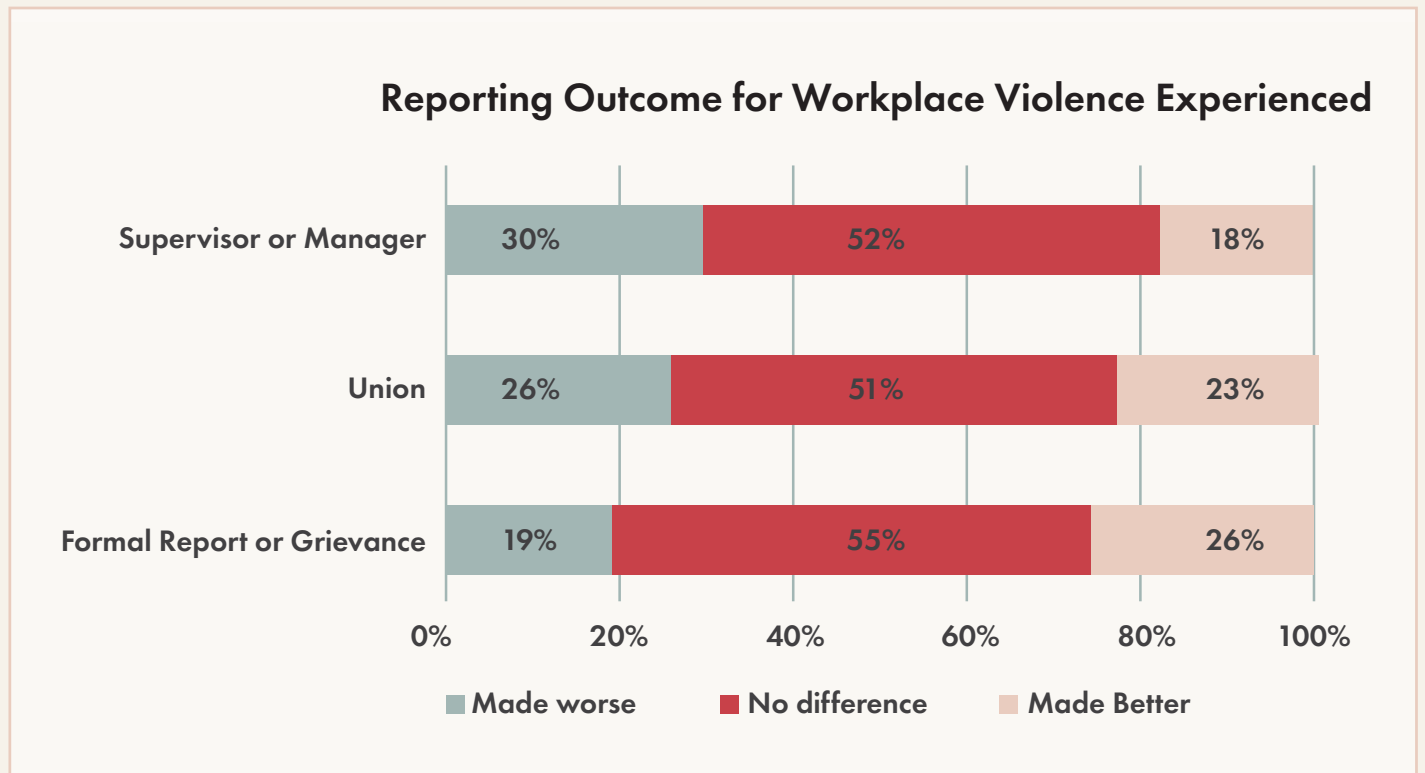


Figure 1.