



**Canadian Initiative on Workplace Violence  
Published Papers**

***The Canadian Initiative on Workplace Violence  
Toronto, Ontario***

***The National Labour Survey  
Executive Summary  
March, 2000***

***Survey Rational***

Although much has been written about workplace violence from a US perspective, little tangible data is available on the Canadian experience, leaving many to speculate about the nature of aggressiveness in this country. The Canadian Initiative on Workplace Violence launched a two-prong research project in late 1999 to ascertain the level and types of violence in Canadian workplaces. The initial phase of this project surveyed all labour organizations within Canada, which will be followed by a national survey of private and public sector organizations within the year. This is the first attempt to assemble knowledge from a truly Canadian perspective with a view towards best practices to ensure that Canadian workers are safe from the effects of workplace violence.

***Violence Defined***

There is growing recognition that "violence" goes far beyond the reach of physical acts, to include various forms of psychological violence. In keeping with the terms of reference of the International Labour Organization (ILO - 1998) who conducted a sweeping survey of international workplaces, "violence" is defined in this survey as:

***"any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work. These behaviours would originate from customers, co-workers at any level of the organization. This definition would include all forms of harassment, bullying, intimidation, physical threats/assaults, robbery and other intrusive behaviours"***

***National Labour Survey Interim Results***

The results reflect the view of a broad sample of labour organizations in Canada representing well over 2 million employees from various industrial sectors and geographic regions.

1. In comparing the Canadian experience with that in the US, 9% of organizational respondents said that in their view the Canadian experience was comparable to that of the United States

with respect to workplace violence. The remaining 91% of respondents said "No" to this comparison, however, they acknowledged that Canada was moving in a similar direction as the US.

- ***These findings suggest that those surveyed believe that there is a fundamental distinction between the experience of the US and Canada regarding workplace violence. There is however, the underlying concern that the Canadian experience could become similar to that of the US.***
- 2. There is a prevailing view, based upon tangible evidence, that violence has increased in Canadian workplaces over the past 5 years. 66% of organizational respondents have witnessed an increase in aggressive acts within their workplaces. 32% did not view violence as having increased, with the balance of respondents stating that they were unsure. In support of the view that workplace violence has increased, 82% of the respondents report an increase in both formal incident reports and grievances. The balance have arrived at this view by conducting their own workplace surveys.
- ***This finding supports the general view that violence has been trending upwards within Canadian workplaces. Only 10% of respondents base this view on a general impression, the remainder arrive at their view based upon concrete evidence in the form of incident reports and grievances which impact employees at every level of the organization.***
- 3. There is a difference between the reporting of psychological versus physical violence. Physical violence often being reported from sources exterior to the workplace in the form of customer, student and patient assaults to name a few. Psychological violence, although reported less frequently, remains a significant source of workplace tension. Although one might be at risk for physical assault from outside the workplace, employees report the hidden threat of internal harassment and bullying.
- ***These findings suggest that the workplace climate has a significant and unique influence on the development and expression of aggressive behaviours.***
- 4. The increase in workplace violence has prompted 78% of respondents to take concrete action in preventing or minimizing the impact of workplace aggression. Included in their initiative, respondents report drafting policies on workplace violence and harassment, as well as, increasing educational and awareness programs. Over 14% of respondents report taking steps to include appropriate initiatives in their collective agreements.
- ***These findings suggest that organized labour is keenly aware of the issues related to workplace violence and are striving to implement appropriate measures.***
- 5. When asked, 53% of respondents stated that their member's workplaces were not doing enough to address workplace violence. They suggest that employers should address the issue through the development of suitable policies (26%), training programs (32%), and employee awareness campaigns (31%) to name just a few of the initiatives required.
- ***These finding suggest that organized labour will continue to press employers for the implementation of suitable programs to address the issue of workplace violence.***

## **Who we are...**

The Canadian Initiative on Workplace Violence collects, organizes, and classifies information concerning workplace violence/aggression gained from Canadian corporations, service organizations, labour unions, and government. The assembly of this knowledge and the comparison made with violence intelligence globally makes this a unique contribution to the understanding of how workplaces function.