



# Bullying in the Workplace



A Survey of Ontario's Elementary and Secondary School Teachers and Education Workers  
by James Matsui and Lang Research

The study was commissioned by the: Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO), Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA), Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF)

## Executive summary – Based on OSSTF results

Three of Ontario's teacher unions – the Ontario Secondary Schools Teachers' Federation (OSSTF), the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) and the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA) – retained James Matsui Research, associated with Lang Research, to conduct a survey among their members.

One of the main objectives of the survey was to establish the overall incidence of the bullying of teachers and education workers across the province. Bullying is defined as "persistent or repeated verbal abuse, threats, insults or humiliation" that has the specific intent of hurting others. From the perspective of the individuals who are the targets of bullying, the bullies potentially are colleagues, administrators, parents or guardians or students. A second objective of the research is to describe the relevant aspects of the bullying that has occurred in Ontario's elementary and secondary schools by finding answers to the following questions.

- In what way have teachers and education workers in Ontario been bullied?
- When did the bullying start and is it still ongoing?
- Who was involved in the bullying?
- Was the bullying reported formally?
- What actions, if any, subsequently were taken?
- What were the personal consequences of being bullied – that is, the emotional, social, psychological and physical impacts of having been a target of bullying?

Of those who had not been bullied personally, the study also found out how many teachers and education workers had been exposed to bullying situations by witnessing bullying incidents of others. The two pieces of information together show how many teachers and education workers have been exposed to bullying either through being a target of bullying or by witnessing the bullying of others.

Finally, the study examines whether bullying incidents have escalated into incidents involving physical violence or assault. When violent incidents have occurred in schools, the research looks at the nature of the violence and the actions that were taken subsequently.

The telephone interviewing was subcontracted to BBM/ComQUEST. The interviewing took place during the first week of April 2005 from BBM/ComQUEST's computer assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) facilities in Toronto and Moncton. The telephone interviewing, supervision and verification were conducted according to the standards of the Canadian Association of Marketing Research Organizations (CAMRO). Given the sensitive nature of the research, a contact for each organization was provided to respondents if they wished to verify any aspect of the project.

At the conclusion of the interviewing, the responses for each organization were weighted according to the number of FTEs of each organization in order to produce a representative sample of elementary and secondary teachers in the public and Catholic systems across Ontario. The total sample of 1,156 teachers has a margin of error of  $\pm 2.9$  percent at the 95 percent confidence interval.

The subsample of OSSTF members (411 interviews) has a margin of error of  $\pm 4.8$  percent at the 95 percent confidence interval. The following findings and report are based on the subsample of OSSTF members.

Bullying of OSSTF members by students is more prevalent than any other form of bullying. Just over one of every three OSSTF members (36%) has been bullied by students. As reported previously, teachers are more likely to be bullied by students than support staff. Bullying by students is relatively widespread across the province and different groups of members given their demographic characteristics or attributes of their work experience.

Despite the widespread prevalence of bullying by students, there are some groups who are somewhat more likely to have been bullied. In particular, part-time teachers (61%) are much more likely to be bullied by students than full-time teachers (34%) or support staff (30%). Men (39%) are slightly more likely than women (35%) to have been bullied by students.

Bullying by students is highest in the Central region (43%) and in Toronto (40%). Alternatively, it is lowest in the Hamilton-Niagara region (22%) and Northern Ontario (29%). OSSTF members who work in small communities are equally likely to be bullied by students than those working in larger communities across Ontario.

Work experience has a curvilinear relationship with the likelihood that a person has been bullied by a student. By this we mean that the highest incidence of bullying by students occurs among members with mid-range experience (41% among members with 6 to 15 years experience, 40% among those with 16 to 20 years experience). The lowest incidence of bullying is found among those with the least work experience (36% among members with 5 or less years) or the most experience (36% with more than 20 years).

Of the OSSTF members who have been bullied by students, 82 percent have been subject to repeated workplace disruptions or repeated disrespectful behaviour. Part-time teachers (91% of those bullied by students) and teachers without a regular grade assignment (88%) are most likely to be subject to this particular kind of bullying. As well, OSSTF members working in the Central region (88%), in Northern Ontario (88%) and in towns and villages (89%) tend to be the targets of disruptive or disrespectful behaviour.

Thirty-eight percent of those bullied by students have had their personal belongings or property vandalized and 27 percent have been threatened or physically assaulted on more than one occasion. Men (49% of members bullied by students) and individuals working in Northern Ontario (63%) are likely to have their belongings vandalized by students. Threats of physical assault are highest among support staff (56%), those working in Northern Ontario (50%), the Hamilton-Niagara region (36%) or in schools located in suburban areas (38%).

Other forms of bullying by students include persistent verbal abuse (20%), repeated attempts at intimidation (16%) and repeated racial, sexual or religious slurs (14%).

