

Safe Schools for Whom? A review of policy, austerity, and
'workplace violence' in Ontario's elementary schools

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Abstract

Education workers, unions, and federations have been raising concerns about workplace violence in schools since the early 2000's. A document analysis of Ontario's elementary school legislation (2000-2020) documents how the Ministry of Education has accounted for student-on-teacher harm. While the Government of Ontario and the Ministry of Education have not yet acknowledged workplace violence in schools, the Ministry of Labour acknowledged issues of workplace violence in schools in 2018. This work demonstrates debates over defining and measuring rates of violence in Ontario schools and reflects on how academic attention on the issue has been divergent. My research highlights the prevalence and impacts of workplace violence, emphasizes the intersectional and gendered nature of the issue, and considers the concerns of conceptualizing elementary student behaviour as 'violent.' An anti-carceral approach to addressing workplace violence is discussed and recommendations for future research are presented.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Understanding the ‘issue’

It is generally assumed that occupations dominated by men, including policing, correctional services, and firefighting, experience the highest rates of workplace violence. In the last three decades, however, scholars have demonstrated that women are at a higher risk of experiencing workplace violence, including Lanthier, Bielecky, and Smith (2018) who found that Canadian women were at more than twice the risk of workplace violence compared to men. Other scholars have engaged in reviewing workplace violence in women-dominated fields – including healthcare, sex work, and education – where they have found concerning high risks of workplace violence (see Perreault, 2015; Chen et al., 2018; and Shannon et al., 2009; Santor, Bruckert and McBride, 2021).

According to the Ontario Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development, everyone should have a safe and healthy workplace. Within policies on school violence, the Ministry of Education (2018) accepts the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* definition of workplace violence as “the exercise, attempt, or threat of physical force by a person against a worker, in a workplace, that causes or could cause physical injury to the worker” (p. 6). Emerging research demonstrates the gendered dynamics of workplace violence in women-dominated professions. According to Statistics Canada (2014), more than one third of all workplace incidents occur in the fields of education (18%) and health (15%), despite only representing 12% and 6% of the working population, respectively (Perreault, 2015). Further, Chen et al. (2018) found that women working in Ontario’s education sector are four to six times more likely than their male counterparts to require time off work because of being physically assaulted on the job. Understanding these rates help us contextualize

the way we think of workplace violence, the types of workplaces where violence occurs, and the employees who are disproportionately affected by workplace violence.

To date, most research on violence in schools remains centered on student-on-student violence (see Wilson-Simmons, 2006; Borton, 2013; and Creason, 2005). While there is a small body of existing research on violence against teachers, it has been almost entirely American literature (see Wei et al., 2013; McMahon, S., Martinez, A. et al., 2014; Gerberich et al., 2014; and Espelage et al., 2013). Despite urgent calls for researchers and academics to examine the issue further, very limited literature has emerged. Espelage et al. (2013) describes violence directed against teachers as “a serious problem that demands the immediate attention of researchers, providers of teacher pre-service and in-service training, school administrators, community leaders, and policymakers” (p. 75). The Workplace Safety and Insurance Board reported that teaching assistants had the greatest number of workplace violence events resulting in time off work due to injury compared all other occupations (273 in 2014, 397 in 2016 and 665 in 2018) (Public Services Health and Safety Association, 2021). In fact, teaching assistants reported higher numbers of workplace violence resulting in time off than police officers and correctional services officers (Public Services Health and Safety Association, 2021). While elementary school educators reported significantly less workplace violence injuries requiring time off work than teaching assistants, they remained 6th on the list in terms of prevalence of workplace violence and reported significantly higher rates of workplace violence than secondary school teachers (Public Services Health and Safety Association, 2021). These findings have broadly informed the analysis which follows in proceeding sections.

While the general lack of conceptual literature on the subject, both qualitative and quantitative, remains concerning, equally concerning is how little attention policy makers have paid to the issue. The debate over meaning and rates of violence in Canadian schools and academic literature on violence and safety in schools is highly complex. My research has revealed that existing policy and literature on the issue of workplace violence, and violence in schools more broadly, has mobilized a range of definitions of what constitutes violence. The following thesis thus contextualizes the issue of workplace violence against education sector workers via a feminist-informed analysis of Ontario's education legislation.

Focus and scope of the project

Education workers, unions, and federations have been raising concerns about classroom violence and the need for both attention and action since the early 2000's. By 2019, there was a notable increase in public attention to classroom violence by both public media sources and education worker unions (including, but not limited to, three CBC articles published in 2019, one CTV articles published in 2019, as well as numerous ETFO, OECTA, and CUPE online publications in more recent years). The literature and media reports remain small, but they do demonstrate a growing concern for what is happening in our school. Violence in these instances has included a wide range of behaviours, including experiencing acts of physical violence and threats to cause physical harm, verbal harassment, property destruction and more. Further, existing research on the prevalence of teacher-directed violence has largely referred to secondary school settings, or both elementary and secondary schools together. Little to no research disaggregates these contexts. Given this study's interest in workplace violence in elementary schools, this

thesis examines Ontario's education legislation over the last twenty years using document analyses involving a content and thematic analysis. The official sources were accessed online through Provincial Government open access pages.

There are important limitations to the proposed methods. Most notably, my analysis is limited in the narrow focus on elementary schools in Ontario; thus, it is not generalizable to other workplaces and legislative contexts. Indeed, it is the specificity of the elementary school context that is key to making sense of workplace violence framings for this context. Ultimately, my thesis opens the possibility for us to better understand the context that informs and underlies the current experiences of education workers in Ontario.

This project has two specific goals: (1) examine Ontario's education legislation over the last twenty years with an eye to how, if at all, education legislation, policies and programs have attended to the issue of teacher-directed violence in classrooms, and (2) consider the broader context for understanding how to define, measure, and respond to teacher-directed student behaviours at the elementary level. Notably, this project began to answer the question of whether and how have provincially mandated educational legislation, policies, and programs accounted for and sought to address the experiences of violence as experienced by gendered, racialized, disabled and LGBTQ+ teachers. As the project developed, however, a second question emerged regarding how best to acknowledge emerging research about harmful student-teacher relations while also questioning the framing 'violence' in the elementary school context.

This project is limited to considering workplace violence against Ontario elementary school teachers due, in part, to time constraints and in response to findings presented by Santor, Bruckert and McBride (2019) that almost 70% of elementary school

educators feel that levels of harassment and inappropriate behaviour in the classroom have increased significantly over the last ten years. To date, neither the Provincial Government nor the Ministry of Education have acknowledged or attempted to address the topic of workplace violence in schools. The only response from the Provincial level thus far has come in the form of a Ministry of Labour report, “Workplace Violence in Schools: A guide to the law” in 2018. Ultimately, the goal of this project is to provide insights on the contextual factors that have contributed to the state of education sector worker-directed violence at publicly funded elementary schools in Ontario. While a gender divide in education drives this study, the thesis is attentive to the need to think about workplace violence via an intersectional lens. Considering if and how education policies acknowledge educators varied and intersecting social identities, as well as how their social positioning affects their experiences of violence in schools informs this project’s aims and analysis.

Situating myself in the research

During my undergraduate degree, I worked under the supervision of Dr. Bruckert during the first iteration of the research project investigating student-on-teacher violence in Ontario’s elementary schools. As a research assistant on the “Harassment and Violence Against Educators Project,” I was involved in the data collection, analysis, and development of reports documenting the experiences of elementary school educators in Ontario. Undoubtedly, my experience participating in the qualitative research component, which included dozens of educators sharing troubling experiences of physical violence at the hands of students, has shaped the way I understand and research the issue. While I feel knowing about the lived experiences of educators has enabled me to think about the profoundness of the issue, I am conscious that my experience has equally led me to develop

assumptions going into this work that have influenced my analysis in important ways. I reflect on the possible implications, and other limitations of my work, in Chapter 5.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of Chapter 2 is to present literature and studies related to workplace violence in schools, violence against teachers, and school violence more broadly. This chapter will provide a summary of relevant scholarship and a review of existing gaps in the literature. The chapter will conclude with a description on how the proposed study seeks to address some of these gaps.

In recent years, some media exposés have shed light on student-on-teacher violence in Ontario's elementary school classrooms (see Burke, 2017; Smol, 2017; Pan, 2017; De Angelis, 2017; Montgomery, 2019; Hsieh and Shannon, 2019; MacLeod, 2018; Alphonso, 2019; Miller, 2019; Goldfinger, 2020). Despite seemingly growing public recognition about the issue, academic literature has been relatively limited. Reddy et al. (2018) conducted a systematic review of teacher-directed violence literature from 1988 to 2016 which identified only one Canadian article in just 32 articles on violence against educators. Of the 28 articles identified that reported school level violence, 40% of educators worked in high schools/secondary schools, 31% in middle schools/junior high schools, 21% in elementary schools/primary schools, and 8% in in other types of schools (Reddy et al., 2018). Further, a review of those articles that included elementary schools revealed that only two considered exclusively elementary schools, while the remaining articles included elementary schools in some combination with junior, middle, or high schools.

The sole Canadian study until very recently was a review of the prevalence and consequences of student violence against teachers by Wilson, Douglas, and Lyon (2011). In total, they collected surveys from 731 teachers in British-Columbia, Canada (71.5% of whom were women). Employing a broad definition of violence to account for both covert

and overt acts, threats, and attempts of violence, they found that 10.4% of educators had experienced attempts, threats, or acts of overt violence (i.e., physical violence) in a single school year and 80% of participants experiencing violence at the hands of students at least once during their career (Wilson, Douglas, and Lyon, 2011). Further, they found that covert violence was the most frequently reported type of violence (75.2%) and that ‘personal insults and name calling’ were the most prominent form of covert violence reported (60.7%) (ibid.). These rates are comparable to the 2006-2007 National Center for Educational Statistics (US) report that 6% of teacher respondents indicated they had been threatened, 4% were physically attacked without a weapon, and 1% was physically attacked with a weapon (Dinkes, Kemp, and Baum, 2009).

International research on the topic of student violence against teachers includes a 2007 Slovakian study of secondary schools (Duzka and Dalbert, 2007). Prior to this report, only two other published reports existed – one study in Great Britain (see Terry, 1998) and another in the United States (see Elliot, Hamburg, and Williams, 1998). Duzka and Dalbert’s (2007) work aimed to document the prevalence of student violence and the impact of violence on teachers’ well-being. The study conducted by Duzka and Dalbert (2007) included a questionnaire collected from 364 educators from 50 schools in both rural and urban areas. Most published studies on school violence asked teachers about their experiences over a single school year, or two; however, the research by Duzka and Dalbert (2007) asked teachers to report on their experiences of violence in the past 30 days. Even with the significantly smaller timeframe, their study revealed that about half of the Slovakian teachers surveyed had experienced at least one violence student act in the last 30 days, while they reported that harmful verbal behaviours were the most prominent.

Duzka and Dalbert (2007) mobilized methods and theories rooted in psychology to evaluate if, and how, experiences of student violence impact teachers' well-being. Their assessment found a strong correlation between victimization and well-being – noting that “more violence the teachers had experienced in the last 15 days, the less satisfied they were with life, the less often they experienced positive affect, and the more often they experienced negative affect” (Duzka and Dalbert, 2007, p. 257). Namely, they found that educators who experienced higher instances of violence were found to have less life and workplace satisfaction.

A substantial body of American literature on the topic has emerged since the American Psychological Association (“APA”) Board of Educational Affairs Task Force released a ground-breaking report on student-initiated violence against educators in 2011. The APA Report results revealed that 80% of teachers reported at least one victimization during a single school year, and of these, 94% of those reported being victimized by students (McMahon et al., 2014). In the context of McMahon et al.'s (2014) research, they include a wide range of behaviours as ‘victimizations’ – including, harassment (i.e., obscene remarks, obscene gestures, verbal threats, and intimidation); property offenses (i.e., theft of property, damage to personal property); and physical offenses (i.e., physical attack, weapon pulled, and objects thrown). Again, the rate of victimization in this sample is exceptionally high, however, the very broad range of behaviours that are included in the definition of victimization impact the prevalence. Nonetheless, they did further disaggregate the data to demonstrate that 44% of educators had reported a physical attack which is four times higher than the prevalence documented by Wilson, Douglas, and Lyon (2011). As I have demonstrated to be a limitation with other literature as well, McMahon

et al. (2014) analyzed a sample that included both elementary and secondary school teachers; however, most respondents worked in grades K-8 (67.8%) and only 22.2% worked at the secondary school level.

Drawing on data related to both threats and attacks of physical violence, Curran, Viano, and Fisher (2017) found that one in twelve (8%) teachers (across elementary, middle, and high school) reported being threatened by a student in the previous twelve months and another 4% reported being physically attacked by a student in the same time frame. These findings appear relatively consistent with those documented by Wilson, Douglas, and Lyon (2011) and Dinkes, Kemp and Baum (2009) (within a 1% difference); however, sample sizes varied significantly between the two studies - Wilson et al. (2011) surveyed 731 educators while indicators presented by Dinkes et al. (2009) included data drawn from numerous national surveys with no clear sample size. Nonetheless, the findings by Curran, Viano, and Fisher (2017) did echo those by Dinkes et al. (2009) in that their analysis showed that teachers who reported being assaulted by students were more likely to be teaching in elementary settings than middle or high school settings.

In addition to attempting to measure rates of violence, emerging studies demonstrate statistically significant differences in experiences of educators from different types of communities. Notably, 10% of teachers in city schools experienced threats of injury from a student, compared to only 5% of teachers in both town schools and rural schools (Dinkes, Kemp, and Baum, 2009). While these results represent data collected in the United States and we cannot draw comparisons directly to the student makeup in Canada, the findings suggest considerations should be made about the significance of the broader environment (including, school environment, type of school, and community type).

There are limitations to the above noted studies of prevalence rates. While they demonstrate rates of prevalence that suggest more work is needed to understand educators' experiences of violence in the workplace, these studies include both elementary and secondary school teachers within the statistical analysis. The findings by Wilson, Douglas, and Lyon (2011) demonstrate that three-quarters of educators experienced covert violence throughout their career (75.2%) (e.g., personal insults or name-calling, rude gesture, remarks made to harm reputation, and intimidation) while just more than one quarter experienced overt violence throughout their career (27.6%) (e.g., threats, attempts, or acts of physical violence with or without a weapon, stalking, or sexual harassment). While it is significant that over one quarter of educators' experience violence, arguably their supposition that 80% of participants experience violence at the hands of students at least once during their career does not adequately distinguish between covert and overt forms of violence. While both verbal and physical violence in the workplace have the potential to cause serious implications for educators, whether student swearing or calling their teacher a bad name constitutes 'violence' is questionable.

Further, another limitation among the existing literature is the use of almost exclusively quantitative surveys which limits the findings to rates of prevalence and provides no way of knowing the specifics about educators' experiences, as well as how harmful or serious they felt the incident(s) to be. While existing contributions from the field of psychology on this topic should not be understated, a multidisciplinary approach to this research is needed to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the construction, experience, and responses to student-teacher workplace violence involving

under 12-year-olds and whether and how this should be understood in relation to studies with high-school students.

The existing body of literature on workplace violence has focused almost exclusively on theories and methods based in psychology. To date, several scholars have looked the psychological impacts of school violence, as well as the relevant contextual factors (i.e., school environment, community size, etc.) relative to both student-on-student violence and student-on-teacher violence (see De Cordova et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2018). In their work, Yang, Qin, and Ning (2018) conducted a cross-national study on school violence and teacher professional engagement. The researchers considered how both violence in schools and teacher-directed violence associated with teacher turnover and negative emotional well-being (Yang et al., 2018). These considerations are particularly relevant to considering why it is a topic that requires further investigation because the literature across both American and intersectional studies do suggest that there are significant impacts (for educators, school communities, and the school environment) when violence occurs in schools. While the psychology-based literature is helpful in important ways to document the prevalence or impacts, there are other factors, theories, and methods that have remained excluded from the analysis

As many studies have deployed psychology-based and quantitative methods, few studies have considered if, and how, educators' demographic features are associated with experiences of violence. The report published by the APA examined the relationship between offense type and demographic variables – teacher gender, teacher race/ethnicity, and school community setting (McMahon et al., 2014). Overall, they found that male teachers and teachers in urban settings reported higher victimization, and African

American teachers reported lower victimization. In contrast to these findings, Curran et al. (2017) found that female teachers reported more physical attacks than their male counterparts; while Black teachers were more likely than white teachers to report experiencing assaults and threats. Further, Santor, Bruckert, and McBride (2019) found that workers who identified as having a disability or belonged to a racial minority were susceptible to increased rates of student-initiated violence (ibid.). Further, the small sample of BIPOC survey respondents indicated significantly higher rates of reprisals from administrators for reporting instances of harassment or violence (ibid.). An important consideration is that the APA report by McMahon et al. (2014) represented a sample of American educators, while both Curran et al. (2017) and Santor et al.'s (2019) work were Canadian.

Mobilizing an intersectionally-informed lens is relevant to consider the way workplace violence in schools is gendered in similar ways to other women-dominated fields. Santor et al. (2019) reported that women experienced higher rates of violence and equally, appeared to note more impacts from these experiences of violence. This finding is equally supported by Youngusband (2009) who found that “female teachers are twice as likely as male teachers to experience abuse and harassment by students, and teachers in general are three times as likely to be attacked as students on a per capita basis” (p. 48). In their examination of incidents of workplace violence that resulted in injuries from 2002-2015, Chen, Smith, and Mustard’s (2019) research described the “pronounced increase in workplace violence injury rates in the education sector” (p. 3). These findings were echoed as virtually all educators who participated in the survey by Santor, Bruckert, and McBride (2019) felt that levels of harassment and violence have increased in the past ten years –

with over 70% saying they had increased *a lot*. Given the lack of comparable research on the topic, it is difficult to identify whether workplace violence in schools is *increasing* or simply that educators *perceive* it to be (considering, for example, debates about the ‘snowflake’ generation). While the research around rates of student violence directed towards teachers is mixed at best, it is difficult to speak directly to changes in prevalence and risk of violence given that this issue has garnered such limited scholarly attention and has been the focus of so few reports.

Drawing comparisons among the existing literature related to school violence is challenging, as there are significant differences in the definitions, methodologies, and theories used by scholars researching workplace violence in schools. For example, some scholars considered experiences of both harassment and violence (Bruckert, Santor and McBride, 2019; Wilson, Douglas, and Lyon, 2011), while others looked exclusively at acts of physical violence (Youngusband, 2009; Chen, Smith, and Mustard, 2019). Even further, some scholars considered threats or attempts of violence, whereas others considered only acts of violence that have already been perpetrated. Other important distinctions are noted between the way scholars have collected data on educators’ experiences of violence. For example, much of the early research asked educators about their experiences of violence and/or harassment throughout their career (Wilson, Douglas, and Lyon, 2011), whereas others asked educators about their experiences during one single school year (Bruckert, Santor, and Mario, 2021; Santor, Bruckert, and McBride, 2019) and another asked educators to speak to their experiences over the previous and current school years (McMahon et al., 2014). Having a range of differing timeframes used across the

literature makes difficult to develop a representative timeline of the prevalence and rates of workplace violence in elementary schools.

Only months before I concluded my research, a new article focused on workplace violence and harassment against Ontario's educators emerged. The article by Del Riccio (2021), titled "Classrooms in Crisis: Workplace Violence and Harassment Experienced by Educators in Ontario," draws heavily on research by Santor, Bruckert, and McBride (2019). This recent work is the first, and only, literature that discusses legislation as it related to student-teacher violence in Ontario. Del Riccio's (2021) work considers how Ontario's educators' experience of workplace harassment and violence differ from the prevalence of violence and harassment in Ontario workplaces in general (Del Riccio, 2021). Del Riccio (2021) found that the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* is the primary piece of legislation that addresses workplace violence and harassment and that there are four factors which have led to the rise in prevalence of violence and harassment against educators:

decades of public education defunding, particularly in the area of special education; declining mental health amongst Canadian youth; a restricted statutory right for educators to refuse unsafe work; and widespread underreporting of violent incidents as a result of complex reporting procedures, lack of support from school administrators, and socio-emotional factors. P. 29

Finally, in considering the interconnection of multi-faceted issues that have shaped the current state of Ontario's elementary school system, Del Riccio (2021) proposes legislative reforms to address the issue of rising violence and harassment against educators, a supposition that is considered more closely and critically in Chapter 4's discussion of the limits of punitive legislation for addressing student behaviour. Nonetheless, Del Riccio's

(2021) work signifies an important contribution to a very limited body of research in Ontario. Ultimately, my decision to examine whether and how Ontario's relevant education legislation acknowledges and addresses the issue of student-teacher violence in elementary schools seeks to expand the existing conversation and facilitate further discussion by key stakeholders-- including policymakers, unions and federations, school boards, and academics—regarding whether legislation is needed to respond to the issue of workplace violence in Ontario's elementary schools and what legislative frameworks might look like.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Defining ‘workplace violence’

As is described in my literature review, the existing literature on workplace violence in schools have all mobilized different definitions and understandings of violence – some considering exclusively physical violence (Wei et al., 2013) or verbal violence (Alonso et al., 2009), others including threats, attempts, and acts all as violence (Casteel et al., 2007), and even fewer considering both violence and harassment (Santor, Bruckert, and McBride, 2019; Bruckert, Santor, and Mario, 2021). The wide range of definitions, behaviours, and actors named as violence pose a challenge in developing trends and understanding the broader context of school violence. For instance, when we consider the terms ‘teacher-directed violence’ or ‘violence against educators’ we fail to account for the experiences of early childhood educators (ECEs), educational assistants (EAs) and other school workers – many of whom work in proximity with students on a regular basis. Similarly, when we lump together under twelve-year-olds with those between 13 and 18, we run the risk of applying concepts, such as violence, where other terminology may be more appropriate. This research therefore acknowledges the complexities of naming, defining, and measuring violence for any consideration of how to better understand educators’ experiences and young students’ vulnerability and culpability.

Notably, definitions and framings of workplace violence rest on broad definitions that allows for the multitude of experiences to be considered. For instance, *Ontario’s Occupational Health and Safety Act’s* definition considers threats, attempts, and acts of violence occurring within or outside the school property. While this may potentially lead to overstating the actual numbers of violent incidents that occur, there is research indicating significant underreporting of violence in schools (see Ramsankar et al., 2018;

Montgomery, 2019). For example, Ramsankar et al. (2018) highlighted a Canadian Teacher's Federation report which found that teachers "underreport violent incidents out of concern for their students and also because they fear it may reflect poorly on their worth as an educator" (n.p.). Further, Martin, Mackenzie, and Healy (2012) describe that "teachers are often sympathetic to young people and seek to understand their behaviour. In addition, some teachers believed that the types of violence they experience, particularly low-level violence were viewed as part of the job" (p. 410). This raises questions about the accuracy, value, utility and even the harms of a 'workplace violence' framework for making sense of student-teacher interactions that teachers describe as harmful to their physical and mental health. Despite growing recognition that teacher-directed violence is an increasing problem globally, the issue of workplace violence in schools not only remains understudied, but it is also arguably lacking in nuance, so the concept of workplace violence has itself become a focus of analysis for my study.

Originally, this thesis sought to narrow the definition of violence to an examination of physical violence in elementary schools and the policies and legislation related to it, suggesting that emotional and psychological violence fell outside the scope of this work. Throughout the course of this research, however, I have been challenged to think critically about the harms experienced by teachers at the hands of young students. While I mobilize the term 'workplace violence' to signal that students' physical behaviours against educators is first and foremost contextualized by the work environment, I also raise questions about the applicability of using the concept of violence to describe acts by young children. This work has equally sought to emphasize the need to consider the broader social, political, and environmental contexts that surround and give rise to student-teacher harm.

Workplace and slow violence

To contextualize educators' experiences of workplace violence within broader social structures and processes, my thesis project draws on Nixon's theory of slow violence. (2011). Slow violence is best understood as violence emerging from government. Nixon (2011) articulates slow violence as "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (Nixon, 2011, p. 3). According to Nixon (2011), slow violence exemplifies the "slow and long-lasting calamities that patiently dispense their devastation while remaining outside our flickering attention spans" (p. 6). Slow violence is "unobserved, undiagnosed, and untreated" (p. 6) and is not characterized by acts of aggression or physical violence, but rather, as decisions made, or changes undertaken that lead to harm or violence (ibid.). Further, slow violence is inherently *slow* – it is not violence that reflects immediate harm but rather, damage occurring years or decades later because of decisions made long ago (ibid.).

Theories of slow violence helps us understand how small and seemingly unnoticed legislative changes, gaps, and framings accumulate over time to create the context for the varying types of harms and violence we see in schools. In conceptualizing slow violence as a theory, Nixon (2011) describes "slowly unfolding environmental catastrophes" (p. 2). In "Slow violence and toxic geographies: 'Out of sight' to whom?" Davies (2019) mobilizes a lens of slow violence to describe the gradual environmental crises that have accrued over time, resulting in a concept of violence as deferred harm – harm "to a Global Future" (Davies, 2019, p. 2). While slow violence has been used by both Davies (2019) and Nixon (2011) to consider aspects of the climate crisis, the concept is relevant to understanding the violence experienced in classrooms. Similar to the way we can

understand many of the climate issues we are facing today as resulting from (in)action decades ago, understanding experiences of workplace violence in schools requires us to consider how changes in Ontario's education legislation have accumulated to create the conditions for harm.

Workplace and structural violence

In the present thesis, the issue of workplace violence will be considered both through a lens of slow violence, as well as structural violence. As Davies (2019) argues, slow violence (Nixon, 2011) and structural violence (Galtung, 1969) are “two conceptualizations of systemic brutality [that] are irrevocably linked” (p. 3). Structural violence as best defined as “violence exerted systematically” (Farmer, 2004, p. 307). The term, first coined by Galtung (1969), was introduced to capture the idea that structures, not only individuals, can be violent. In contrast to the traditional ways that violence is understood, structural violence differs in that there is not an identifiable perpetrator (Galtung, 1969). Thus, structural violence can be understood as violence that is “built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances” (Galtung, 1969, p. 171). Mobilizing theories of both slow and structural violence enables us to consider the way broader structural and systemic changes over the past two decades have shaped the way elementary schools operate today.

The lens of structural violence enables us to consider how routine, mundane changes to Ontario's education legislation impact educators within the walls of their classrooms. Theories of structural violence allow us to understand how social structures can be violent as a result of actions taken by no one perpetrator, even sometimes inadvertently. As is discussed in my analysis, legislation and policy related to safe schools,

zero tolerance policies, and policing in schools has been linked to systemic racism and classism that leads to disproportional numbers of suspensions, expulsions, and arrests of students of colour. It thus begs considering how educational and broader systemic policies impact students, educators, and teaching staff and whether and how this context informs attempts to make sense of harms enacted by students against teachers and school staff. This work posits that broader social and communal sentiments are reflected in the experiences of educators within their classrooms and schools at large and that structural violence is not experienced equally by all subjects. As Davies (2019) argues, slow violence is “built on the bedrock of social inequality, with those people lacking resources [becoming] the principal casualties of slow violence” (p. 6). As some literature has demonstrated as well, certain educators are more vulnerable to experiencing workplace violence as a result of their social identities.

This thesis sets out to consider whether and how Ontario’s education legislation over the last twenty years has conceived of, mitigated, and responded to workplace violence within the educational context. Structural and slow violence are used here to understand how education bills, policies, procedures, and practices regarding workplace violence during the last 20 years have made sense of and impacted education sector workers’ experiences within their schools. Given what some have referred to as the violence of neoliberal changes that are “caused by decisions that are made in parliamentary chambers and government offices” (Cooper and Whyte, 2017, p. 1), these frameworks offer a way to contextualize and make sense of any study of workplace violence in the educational context.

An intersectional analysis

The current project is interested in contextualizing workplace violence in schools in relation to students' and educators' intersecting identities to understand whether and how policy differentially impacts the construction of their behaviour and their experiences as that of workplace violence. Part of this thesis involves mobilizing an intersectional lens to unpack how multiple axes of oppression intersect to construct students as violent and to condition educators' vulnerability to workplace violence. First coined by Crenshaw (1989), intersectionality defines the mutually constitutive relationship between various identity categories (i.e., gender, race, age, class, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation) (Hill Collins, 2015). An intersectional lens of analysis enables us the ability to evaluate the way interlocking social, political, and economic systems impact educators' experiences of workplace violence.

Mobilizing intersectional feminist analyses has helped reveal, a person's gender, disability, race, age, and sexual orientation not only affect their vulnerability to certain experiences but condition their responses to and understanding of the experience. Bruckert and Law (2019) highlight the way workplace violence and harassment can be sexual, gendered, racist, and conditioned by class. Vulnerability, resistance, and responses to workplace violence are intersectional given the ways that existing systems of oppression condition experiences. Given that women workers, in general, experience higher levels of workplace sexual harassment than men (Hango and Moyser, 2018), education sector workers' experiences of workplace violence are likely conditioned by workers' intersecting identities, including gender, race, sexual orientation, and class. At the same time, children and youths' intersecting identities come to mark some as more deviant, as lacking, and thus

as less worthy of sympathy and institutional and structural support. Intersectionality thus allows us to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how experiences of workplace violence are defined and experienced. Indeed, according to the existing literature, workplace violence is profoundly gendered, classed, and racialized in significant ways.

Austerity and workplace violence

To further contextualize this work, I consider the relevance of austerity policies to the idea and experiences of workplace violence in elementary schools. Austerity describes “a period of fiscal discipline in which governments make significant cuts to public expenditure as a means of reducing public debt” (Whyte and Cooper, 2017, p. 4). Austerity rhetoric is often used by governments as means to justify slashing spending to public investments, including education. According to Whyte and Cooper (2017) the trope that “we are all in it together” is frequently used in conjunction with the implementation of austerity policies (p. 10). The reality is, however, far more complicated as “austerity policies have been designed in such a way that target the most vulnerable and marginal groups in society, hitting them harder than any other income group” (Whyte and Cooper, 2017, p. 10-11). As will be discussed in Chapter 4, this political trope is especially problematic when considering the workplace violence involving children as well as experiences of education sector workers who are not educators – for example, Education Assistants and Early Childhood Educators who hold under-paid and precarious jobs in schools (Schofield et al., 2019). Undeniably, many of the changes and cuts to Ontario’s education legislation over the last 20 years—including budget cuts as well as safety policies and measures-- have been made in the name of austerity or as a means of managing its

effects. The rhetoric ‘it’s just too expensive’ is used to justify budget cuts and the removal of some resources from schools while adding other, such as police “school resource officers”. Unfortunately, as this paper will explore, the cost of such cuts and developments is far more costly, in numerous senses of the word, for both individuals and our government in the long run.

Methods

Drawing on the above-mentioned concepts and theories, my thesis puts my original qualitative analysis of Ontario’s education legislation in conversation with the existing body of academic literature documenting educators’ experiences of workplace violence. In doing so, my project seeks to understand the way legislation operates not only at the macro/political level, but also – and perhaps more importantly – at the embodied micro-level (de Leeuw, 2016). This project involves a qualitative content analysis of a selection of Ontario’s education legislation between the years 2000 and 2020. The project focuses on the education legislation in Ontario specifically because Canada’s education systems are provincially governed. Additionally, a thorough review of the Government of Ontario and Ministry of Education’s websites was conducted to identify and download any legislation, policy, or program that related to workplace violence. The research used key words (i.e., violence in schools, teacher-directed violence, violence, harassment, workplace violence, school violence, etc.) to develop a list of relevant educational policies. Any regulations, policies and programs, and memorandums which did not discuss violence in schools, workplace violence, or educator-directed violence excluded from analysis. Any document which pertained exclusively to student-on-student violence was excluded from the analysis, and only included existing education policies (including but not limited to

policy statements, directives, and memos) that defined school practices from 2000 up to 2020. This work focuses specifically on the past two decades because of the documented changes that Ontario's education system underwent in the late 1990's and into the early 2000's under Conservation Premier, Mike Harris. My research is specifically interested in investigating how policies tending to workplace violence have changed in light of what appears to be increasing attention the issues of violence in schools (including, union mobilization, media reports, and academic literature).

This work project uses content and thematic analysis of relevant policies and programs to investigate trends in Ontario's education system over 20 years. This method is most appropriate for my work because it is a type of design which does not require preconceived themes or codes to be established. Given the limited existing theory and research literature on the topic, this method is suitable for allowing "the categories and names for categories to flow from the data" (ibid., p. 1279). Data analysis involves a thorough reading of selected legislation, followed by an initial analysis of key words, thoughts, and concepts. The second reading is where "labels for codes emerge that are reflective of more than one key thought" (ibid.). The legislation reviewed in this paper was analyzed and thematically coded, and subsequently inputted into a timeline dated 2000 through to 2020.

The advantage to deploying a conventional approach to the content analysis is that information gained from the legislation is done so without the imposition of preconceived notions from the researcher. One disadvantage of this method is, however, that the development and description of the lived experience is limited. To address this, this project

puts findings from the content analysis of Ontario's education legislation in conversation with the literature to demonstrate findings and limitations.

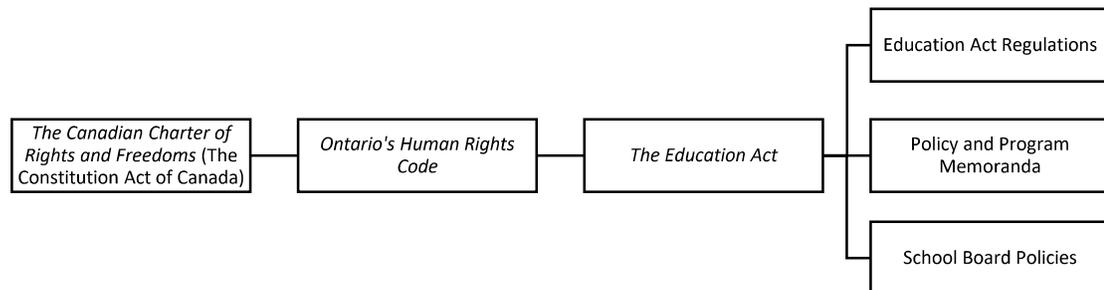
Chapter 4: Policy Analysis and Discussion

Section One: Overview of Ontario's Public Education System

This section includes a summary of Ontario's public education system structure.

Addressing the proposed research questions involves understanding the bodies of governance that oversee Ontario's education system. As part of engaging with the questions about how Ontario's education system has changed over time, a thorough understanding of this system is necessary. Ontario's public education system is governed at three key levels: the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, *Ontario's Human Rights Code*, and *Ontario's Education Act* (Figure 1).

Figure 1: *Ontario's Public Education System Structure*



The Constitution

At the highest level, Ontario's public education system is governed broadly by the rights and laws in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Section 93 of the *Constitution Act, 1867* gives the provincial governments the jurisdiction to govern education (Zuker, 2013). As such, provincial governments are independently responsible for regulating and administering all levels of education, from funding to legislation.

Ontario's Human Rights Code

The *Ontario Human Rights Code* is a key piece of legislation that defines Ontario's education system more broadly because it provides overarching governance on education. Both the *Ontario Human Rights Code* and the *Education Act* provide the legislative framework for equal access to education for all students in Ontario.

The Education Act

The *Education Act* (the "Act") is the main statute governing public education in Ontario. The Education Act, governed by Ontario's Ministry of Education, was first enacted in 1980. The *Education Act* provides a high-level summary of the provincial priorities for all levels of public education in Ontario. The *Education Act* details the roles and responsibilities of all key stakeholders, including the Ministry of Education, school boards, principals, and teachers.

Policy and Program Memoranda

Ontario's Ministry of Education equally creates policy in the form of statements, directives, guidelines, and memorandums to define procedures and practices. PPMs are used by the Ministry to provide directions and they are presented and revoked regularly based on provincial priorities.

Section Two: Content Analysis

While this project focuses on the timeline between 2000-2020, the Progressive Conservative government of 1995 to 2002 implemented critical changes to Ontario's education system. As part of their platform, Mike Harris and the PC Party promised zero tolerance for bad behaviors in schools and cut education funding by 400 million dollars in 1996 alone (MacLellan, 2009; Rose, 2002). During two consecutive terms in office, Harris introduced several education reforms, including the elimination of grade 13, the

introduction of standardized testing in grades 3 and 6 (EQAO), as well as literacy testing in grade 10 (MacLellan, 2009). It is important to note that a great deal of controversy surrounded the changes that Harris' government enacted on the structure of Ontario's public education system. The measures legislated by the PC Party were followed by massive strikes and widespread dissent which ultimately led to the Liberal government's election in 2002.

In 2000, under Harris' government, the Minister of Education introduced a student "Code of Conduct" which was followed by the introduction of the *Safe Schools Act, 2000*. The Code of Conduct provisions gave teachers the power to suspend and imposed mandatory consequences where a student threatens or causes bodily harm requiring medical attention, threatens to inflict serious harm, or swears at any authority figure. And finally, students were expected to "show respect for themselves, for others, and for the community" and "refrain from engaging in behaviour which might endanger the safety of others" (Munõz, 2019, p. 667). Teachers and staff were tasked with, among other, maintaining the standards of behaviour under the Code.

Statistics Canada (1998) reported that only 9% of violent incidents committed by youth occurred on school property. Statistics Canada (2006) findings indicated that 13% of students reported engaging in violent behaviours on school property in 2006. Between 1995 and 2002, Harris' government introduced strict, zero tolerance policies for student misbehaviour at schools, a move that Statistics Canada (2006) suggested "may increase the likelihood that violent offences that have taken place during school hours will be reported to police" (n.p.). While no clear conclusions can be made with the limited data available, student violence increased from 2000 to 2006 or the reporting of violence increased. While

these numbers provide a general idea of the prevalence of violence in schools, the only available data about violence in Canadian schools pertains to all forms of violence on school property (see Statistics Canada, 2009; Statistics Canada, 1997). Neither of the available datasets mentioned above is segregated by type of violence (e.g., student-on-student or student-on-teacher) or school levels (i.e., elementary, middle, or high schools).

The first government document to acknowledge both students and teachers' rights to safety in schools came in the form of the Safe Schools Action Team review of safe schools' provisions of the *Education Act* in 2005. The taskforce (2005) report recommends "enhancing safety" (p. 7) and recognizes that "safety is a precondition for learning" (p. 5), yet does not discuss teachers, support staff and other school workers' safety. The vagueness of this 'safety' language and the failure to include the experience of school staff within the broader school environment is a key limitation of this report.

Defining and measuring 'violence'

Among the research that has considered violence in schools, there has been a range of definitions of violence and/or misbehaviour mobilized – from vandalism and property theft to physical assault and harassment. The lack of concise definition of what constitutes workplace violence or teacher-directed violence across the literature and policy is a core issue my research has identified. Definitions of violence that emphasize physically violent behaviour, and which are then applied to elementary students requires thoughtful reflection about how we understand childhood behaviour, how we conceptualize and define violence, as well as what we constitute as 'safe' schools.

In many ways, framing a push or kick from an elementary school student as 'physical violence' is problematic because it constructs an image of workplace violence

that is at best disingenuous and at worst detrimental to all involved (e.g., surveilled and punished children and disempowered/infantilized teachers). At the same time, there are problematic incidents of physical violence by young students that were revealed in the work by Santor, Bruckert, and McBride (2019) as Ontario's elementary school educators spoke of:

receiving death threats against themselves and their families; being threatened with knives, scissors, glass shards, razors, school supplies, furniture, and fists; they wrote about being punched, elbowed, pushed, slapped, bitten, hit, kicked, spat on, chased, grabbed, shoved, scratched, headbutted, kneed, pinched, tripped, knocked down, jumped on, and stabbed; they also described having objects – furniture, scissors, toys, shoes, books, binders, whiteboards, water bottles, sticks, backpacks, and rocks, thrown at them. P. 11

It is not difficult to imagine the impacts that educators might face considering experiencing any one of the above student-initiated incidents. I am persuaded by both the qualitative and quantitative data revealed by Santor, Bruckert and McBride (2019) to say there are highly problematic incidents of teacher-directed violence that are being documented in Ontario's elementary schools. At the same time, I am reflective of the fact that students under 12 vary in size, strength, and maturity in ways that may have an impact on the severity and potential consequences caused and on developing a full understanding of the issue.

Within the contexts of elementary schools, mobilizing a definition of violence that is too broad is potentially problematic because physically violent, and potentially harmful, acts are grouped together with more minor and common acts of more frustrated child behaviour. It is important here, however, to acknowledge the tension here between

‘normal’ and ‘common’ acts of childhood behaviour. There is apprehension on my part to frame certain child behaviors as ‘normal/appropriate’ and others as ‘abnormal/inappropriate.’ The complexities of naming and defining violence will be discussed in depth throughout the next chapters; however, this tension needs to be acknowledged. In some of the literature, researchers have grouped together a wide variety of child behaviours (such as naming calling, swearing, or yelling) with other forms of what is traditionally considered ‘violent’ behaviour (including kicking, biting, hitting). In theory, the act of experiencing a threat or attack from a student has the potential to cause more *direct harm* (i.e., physical) than name calling or swearing so it is important to consider the complexities that exist when all types of behaviours are grouped in together. Nonetheless, the repeated nature of more indirect forms of harm (including swearing, name calling, and more) need to be critically examined as well given the very real potential harms of normalizing and/or accepting these behaviours. Moreover, additional contextual factors, including differences in size, strength, mental development between under 12s, middle school students (12-14 years old) and high school students (14- to 18-year-olds) will affect a teacher’s experiences of student-teacher relations. At the same time, routine physical violence from young students can be harmful, can cause injuries, and does impact educators – whether physically, mentally, or emotionally. Whether the potential impacts and injuries caused by students 4 to 12 years old should be conceptualized and responded to in the same way across age demographics necessitates further examination. Arguably, referring and responding to a young person (12 years or younger) as violent potentially contradictory to other legislative acts, including Canada’s Youth Criminal Justice Act (2002) which defines childhood culpability differently for those under 12 and those 13 and over. Key to this

research then, is how to take seriously the issue of school and workplace safety and student-teacher harms while also remaining cognizant of the problematic nature of labelling children under 12 as ‘violent’.

Swearing can be an inappropriate behaviour in certain contexts (i.e., in the classroom), but the pervasiveness of swearing in our current culture should give us pause before naming this as inherently inappropriate behaviour. The current research understands swearing as an act of incivility, rather than violence, given that we are considering workplace violence within a definition that is limited to physical acts or threats of violence. In their research, Santor, Bruckert and McBride (2019) found that “seemingly ubiquitous cursing as well as other defiant and disrespectful behaviour by students was by far the most frequent form of incivility noted by participants” (p. 9). This finding is important because it suggests that while swearing may generally not be cause for alarm, increasing levels of incivility in schools and that this impacts the level of violence that educators experience (see Santor, Bruckert and McBride, 2019; Espelage et al., 2013; Huang, Eddy, and Camp, 2017). So, while disrespect and swearing in and of themselves may not constitute ‘violence’ they nevertheless pose a challenge for teachers that significantly negatively impacts their workplace satisfaction.

The limited existing data I reviewed seems to indicate increasing rates of both violence and harassment among educators in Ontario, however the lack of both scholarly and political attention to the issue makes it difficult to understand the full extent of the potential issue. Nonetheless, it does appear that physical violence by elementary students can, and does, cause both short-term and long-term consequences for educators. My research has revealed both the profound impact on educators who experience physical

violence at work, while also revealing the ways in which carceral responses (i.e., mandatory reporting, legislation, and police intervention) have the potential to further aggravate the issue. I have settled on workplace violence to describe these experiences given that they are so inherently shaped by the nature of the workplace. More is needed to consider how we frame and understand this issue since we do not want to problematize or legislate harms caused by young kids in ways that further perpetuate systemic harm. While I have equally considered terms, such as harm, I think the body of research documenting educators' experiences calls us to consider this as a serious issue of workplace safety.

Policing student behaviour

Despite what we have seen as the need for a multidimensional and meaningful approach to addressing school violence, much of Ontario's existing education legislation has focused heavily on secondary schools and the role of discipline, including suspensions and expulsions, and police interventions. Indeed, the 2012 revisions of Policy/Program Memorandum No. 128 state that "police play an essential role in making our schools and communities safer" (p. 7). This despite growing concern from many key stakeholders across North America, including academics and activists, that police presence in schools is problematic (see Nance, 2015; Harwin and Blad, 2017) and around the world (see Joseph-Salisbury, 2020). The Safe Schools Act in 2000, passed by the conservative government under Mike Harris, mandated police be involved in schools despite growing evidence that zero tolerance policies disproportionately negatively impact racialized students and students with disabilities (Harvard Civil Rights Project, 2000). In response to these reforms, the Ontario Human Rights Commission ("OHRC") (2003) released a report concluding that 'zero tolerance' policies had "disproportionate impacts on racial minority

students, particularly Black male students, and students with disabilities” which was supported by interviews with youths that “confirmed that there was a widespread perception of “discrimination—direct and systemic” by police authorities” (Mills and Stair, 2021, n.p.).

The Provincial Model for a Local Police/School Board Protocol (“Provincial Model for Police Protocol”) continues to be used as a policy directive for school boards to establish a protocol for contacting police services and investigating school incidents. A review of the amendments between the 2011 and 2015 demonstrates the addition of violence-prevention strategies. The Provincial Model for Police Protocol (2015) states that mandatory notification of police must be made in the event of a physical assault causing bodily harm requiring medical treatment, while discretionary notification of police can be made in the event of threats of serious physical injury. The broad language used would indicate that ‘threats’ or acts of ‘violence’ against any school staff have the potential to result in mandatory or discretionary police involvement. While the data by Santor, Bruckert, and McBride (2019) indicates that nearly half of educators who responded to their survey did not report their worst incident, others who did report had the potential for subjecting youth to police intervention in the name of workplace safety despite the fact that there is substantial evidence to suggest that police interventions with children are highly problematic.

Data publicly available on the Toronto District School Board’s (“TDSB”) website provides evidence that racialized students at both the elementary and high school levels are suspended and expelled at significantly higher rates rather than white students. Black students, who accounted for 11% of the TDSB student population in the 2016-2017 school

year, accounted for 36.8% of all suspensions that same year (TDSB, 2020). Similarly, the data demonstrates that “Indigenous, Middle Eastern and Mixed students were overrepresented in suspensions/expulsions [...] and White students were under-represented in the suspensions/expulsions in all four school years [2016-2017 to 2019-2020]” (TDSB, 2020, p. 9). Unfortunately, the data available by student’s ethno-racial background is not further segregated by student grades or reason for suspension/expulsion making it difficult to draw conclusions directly to my work. However, data regarding the number of suspensions between elementary schools and high schools is similar, with the number of suspensions only slightly higher at the high school level (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: *Suspensions in TDSB Elementary and Secondary Schools, from 2016-2017 to 2019-2020*

School Type	School Year	Number of suspensions
Elementary Schools	2016-2017	1,809
	2017-2018	1,750
	2018-2019	1,502
	2019-2020	1,707
High Schools	2016-2017	1,981
	2017-2018	1,710
	2018-2019	2,006
	2019-2020	1,842

Source: TDSB, Caring and Safe Schools (2020)

This data represents only the suspension rates across one single school board, TDSB, and does not include any data from the Toronto Catholic School Board which is estimated to account for approximately 25% of students in the Toronto Metropolitan Area (Statistics Canada, 2007). And while the data from 2019-2020 seems to demonstrate an optimistic decline in suspensions from the year before, it is important to note that this data represents

that year only up to March 16, 2020, as were subsequently closed to in-person learning because of Covid-19.

More recently, there has been an increase in the number of schools boards who have made decisions to remove school resource officers (“SROs”) (armed, uniformed police officers) from schools. The Toronto District School Board was the first to do so in 2017 and since then, the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board removed SROs in 2020 and the Ottawa Carleton District School in 2021. Despite a push for reform broadly, Ontario’s schools continue to implement the Provincial Model for a Local Police/School Board Protocol which informs schools when they must notify police of an ‘incident.’ But again, the issue remains about how to define or constitute an ‘incident.’ Without data available on the number of instances where police were involved and why they were involved, it is difficult to evaluate how SROs manage or mitigate teacher-directed violence. This gap is important because I am interested in the critical conversations about what constitutes ‘violence’ at the elementary level, including what kinds of incidents necessitate a police response. I am concerned that students who are facing mental health crises or students with disabilities who express frustrations, angers, or trauma in physical ways (i.e., kicking a teacher or destroying a classroom) might be subject to police interventions. It remains unclear to me the extent of which police officers, under the guise of School Resources Officers, are present in Ontario’s elementary schools because the legislation governing police officers in schools relates both to secondary and elementary schools, which along with the fact that there is no consolidated database with a list of schools with officers, makes it difficult to know how many elementary schools specifically have SROs in their hallways.

As recently as January 2022, Global News reported on a provincial announcement that they will investigate a recent incident at a Kitchener Catholic school in which Waterloo Regional Police officers removed a four-year-old Black student from school (Nielsen, 2022). According to the article, police were called by the school's administrator in November 2021 to "deal with a student in crisis, who was said to be acting violently" (ibid., n.p.). In response to the incident, Education Minister Stephen Lecce stated that "under no scenario should police be called to remove a four-year-old student from a school in this province" to which the Waterloo Region District Catholic School Board responded that "the actions taken on this situation followed provincially established policies and procedures" (ibid., n.p.). While my research indicates that the WRDCSB response did in fact follow Provincial Model for Police Protocol policy, the Ministry's response seems to indicate a clear disjuncture. The review of Ontario's legislation of workplace violence has enabled me to identify that most Ministry of Education policies legislate policies equally across all grades levels in both elementary and high schools. This blanket approach to legislating schools – applied across all levels – is highly problematic because it treats threats and acts of violence by a 4-year-old the same as threats or acts of violence by a 17-year-old. My argument is not that the police should be called on the high school student, however, the significant difference in intentionality and possible impact for behaviour between elementary school students and high school students should be acknowledged in these policies.

The intersectional nature of violence

Educators' experiences of violence are conditioned by intersecting factors including gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, and more. This reality ultimately

shapes the experiences of not only women educators, but also educators who work part-time or as substitutes, as well as those who identify as belonging to a sexual or race-based minority group (i.e., LGBTQ+ or BIPOC). Given that 85% of elementary school teachers are women (Statistics Canada, 2014), I examined if, and how, legislation considered workplace violence against elementary school educators as gendered.

Limited literature exists about sex, gender, and race differences among educators' experiences of workplace violence. Research by Wei et al. (2013) among nearly 5,000 elementary and secondary school teachers in Minnesota found that the rate of physical workplace violence was higher for female-identifying educators, as well as higher for Hispanic educators. In terms of non-physical violence (i.e., threats, sexual harassment, verbal abuse, and bullying) Wei et al. (2013) found that female-identifying educators had higher rates compared to their male counterparts. Findings later presented by Santor, Bruckert, and McBride (2019) provide similar insights into intersectionality and educators' vulnerability to violence. In their research, they examined rate differences for racialized individuals, individuals with disabilities, women, and individuals who identify as LGBTQ (ibid.). Overall, they found that rates of student violence were statistically higher among educators who identified as racialized, disabled, LGBTQ, or women (Santor, Bruckert, and McBride, 2019). However, these findings are contradicted by some scholars who found that teachers who were white or male reported more victimization (McMahon et al., 2014; Martinez et al., 2016). Both reports, however, were national surveys of American teachers that included middle and secondary school teachers, in addition to elementary school teachers (ibid.). In contrast, Santor, Bruckert, and McBride's research is particularly

relevant to this project because it examined the specific experiences of Ontario's elementary school educators.

While these findings demonstrate a wide range in reasons why almost half of educators chose not to report incidents of workplace violence or harassment, there were equally some educators who chose not to do so for concerns about potential career repercussions (6.12%) (Santor, Bruckert, and McBride, 2019). Further, Santor, Bruckert, and McBride (2019) found that almost 12% of educators reported experiencing a reprisal in relation to their worst instance of harassment and nearly 6% in the case of physical violence. This, despite that the *OHSA* prohibits all levels of supervisors and school boards from penalizing workers for obeying the law and/or exercising their right to a safe workplace. While it is outside the scope of the current research project to consider the issue of workplace harassment, these rates of reprisals against educators who reported incidents of workplace harassment and/or violence are cause for concern.

The Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association ("OECTA") (2017) published a novel report on workplace violence and harassment against teachers. The report was the first survey I could identify that engaged in evaluating the experiences of workplace violence specifically among Ontario educators. The data in the OECTA (2017) survey found that over 60% of teachers had experienced violence in their schools. Similarly, research by the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario ("ETFO") (2018) indicated that 70% of elementary teachers had experienced or witnessed teacher-directed violence. Only a few years later, the research lead by Drs. Bruckert and Santor provided more comprehensive information to contextualize the prevalence, severity, and impacts of both workplace violence and harassment (see Bruckert, Santor, and Mario, 2021; Santor,

Bruckert, and McBride, 2019). Further, Santor et al.'s (2019) research is the first Ontario study of educator violence which documented the intersectional nature of educators' experience of violence. While more research is needed, including larger sample sizes of racialized, disabled, and other minorities of educators, the preliminary findings of these works highlight the need for a carefully critical analysis of workplace violence in schools.

Occupational Health and Safety and the Ministry of Education

Ontario's *Occupational Health and Safety Act* is the predominant piece of legislation that governs workplace health and safety for educators because of the nature of schools being a place of work. In accordance with *OHS*A regulations, all employers are required to develop policies regarding workplace violence and workplace harassment and are responsible for reviewing them at least once a year (*OHS*A, 32.0.1(1)). However, it remains unclear in the legislation whether the Ministry of Education or individual school boards are responsible for developing and maintaining the policies mandated by *OHS*A.

While Policy/Program Memorandum 120 demonstrates that there are province-wide mandatory reporting requirements, the literature indicates that there are real impediments within the existing reporting process and as a result, the provincial data trends may demonstrate significantly lower instances of violent incidents. OECTA (2017) found that 31% of educators had never filled out the Safe Schools Reporting Form after experiencing physical assault and 53% have never filled out the form after experiencing an attempted physical assault. According to research by Santor, Bruckert, and McBride (2019), nearly half of Ontario educators who responded to the survey did not report their worst incident of workplace violence during the 2017-2018 school year. They found that most educators did not report their worst incident of violence because the incident was too

minor to warrant a report (24.69%), while some educators noted a lack of time to complete reporting due to routine workplace demands (18.67%) or because of the demands associated with the incidents (13.67%) (ibid.). In this case, there is a tension that exists between Santor, Bruckert and McBride (2019) claim that there is a significant underreporting of the issue which begs the question of if it's too minor to report, should it be considered or conceptualized as workplace violence.

There needs to be more research undertaken to evaluate the prevalence of workplace violence in Ontario's elementary schools. While the reporting requirements (Appendix A) are very possibly overly burdensome, the lack of clarity around what we understand violence to be, as well as if, and how, to report these instances poses a significant challenge. Equally, it is important to consider the very real possibility that BIPOC students would be negatively impacted by increased reporting demands in light of what we know to be systemic bias against marginalized students.

In 2016, the Ministry of Education released the "Ontario Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Program Requirements" (OS). The only mention of violence comes in the form of a reference to PPM 120 which emphasizes school boards' responsibility to report annual data on incidents of violence to help support the development of policies to mitigate violent incidents. In theory, this policy/program memorandum is particularly relevant to conversations around workplace violence; however, the evidence is questionable about how the existing data is being used considering the clear lack of policies on the issue. There appears to be a clear disconnect between recent findings on the prevalence of teacher-directed violence and the very narrow legislative attention on the

issue, particularly with regards to what Santor, Bruckert, and McBride (2019) argue is clear underreporting of the issue.

In the first Provincial document to acknowledgement of workplace violence in schools, the Ontario Ministry of Labour (2018) published a guide entitled “Workplace Violence in School Boards: A Guide to the Law” (“The Guide”). This document represents an important acknowledgement of a growing proportion of educators’ experiencing workplace violence in schools. However, to date, neither the Province of Ontario nor the Ministry of Education have acknowledged or attempted to address the topic of workplace violence in schools. The Guide (2018) by the Ministry of Labour recognizes that all students and education professionals are equally entitled to a safe working environment. While other provincial documents have made broad suggestions about educators’ right to work in safe schools (i.e., Safe Schools Action Team Reports 2005 and 2008), the Guide was the first provincial document to acknowledge the breath of workplace violence that educators and other education-sector workers experience.

The Guide (2018) mobilizes the *OHSA* definition of workplace violence, which includes the exercise, attempt, or threat of physical force by a person against a worker, in a workplace, that causes or could cause physical injury to the worker. This definition of workplace violence, which was equally mobilized by Santor, Bruckert, and McBride (2019) in their work, recognizes that workplace violence can be the result of a single, one-time occurrence, or repeated behaviours over time. According to the OHSA, “a person does not need to have the capacity to understand that their behaviour could cause physical injury to a worker to be workplace violence” (The Guide, 2018, p. 9). This understanding of workplace violence is exceptionally broad and encompasses a wide range of behaviours

that students could possibly engage in daily. Whether or not this definition is the most suitable framework for understanding the behaviour of young children remains to be evaluated. However, the Guide (2018) provides insightful recommendations to school boards on how to define, mitigate, and manage workplace violence in schools.

In its entirety, the Guide provides strategies for “developing violence policies and procedures, assessing and re-assessing risks of workplace violence, developing student safety plans, reporting violent incidents, and sharing of information with workers so they may recognize and be protected from workplace violence” (Ministry of Labour, 2018, p. 3). While the Guide provides no new legislation or policy/program memoranda, it does provide an overview of existing legislation that supports school staff’s rights to and responsibilities for a safe workplace. Much of the legislation reviewed and recognized through the Guide has been discussed at length throughout this chapter; however, the document remains a key addition to the legislative timeline. The Guide (2018) makes very clear the complex nature of the issue – recognizing the complexity of navigating various reporting requirements, confidentiality concerns, workplace policies, and government programs. While the publication of the Guide in 2018 signifies an important first step in expanding the conversation around workplace violence in schools by providing a definition, measuring opportunities, and reporting requirements, it fails to recognize the nuanced nature of the issue. While perhaps it should be the case that threats or attempts at physical violence by young students *could* be considered examples of workplace violence, more research is needed to say if it *should* be. I do recognize the serious implications of threats, attempts, and acts of physical violence against educators, but am equally

considerate about how framing the behaviours of young students as violence is equally problematic.

Healthy versus safe schools

From the late 1990's into the early 2000's, Ontario's education system saw a reduction in its budget of \$400 million under Mike Harris' governance (MacLellan, 2009). Almost 20 years later, Doug Ford's conservative government has enacted a similar style of reducing public expenditure through austerity measures. Within his first year in education alone, the Ford government cut the budget for school repairs by \$100 million, as well as significantly limited grants available for afterschool programs, tutors in classrooms and leadership programs for racialized students (Alexander, 2021). Perhaps most concerning of all, Ford's government increased class sizes across almost all grade levels which is estimated to result in the loss of almost 3,500 teaching jobs over the next four years (Alexander, 2021). In the past twenty years, our public education system has seen ongoing removal of resources and supports for both teachers and school staff, as well as students. The significant changes in the very structure of the system (i.e., removal of special education supports, integration of classrooms, budget cuts, increases in classroom sizes, etc.) has the potential for altering the very nature of classrooms, as well as the relationships that exist among school workers, teachers, and support staff and their students.

This research situates the nuanced issue of workplace violence at a unique intersection of workplace violence within classroom and structural violence within the institution. It is possible there is legislative value in talking about violence in schools but the absence of actionable insights on the issue of workplace violence in legislation for over twenty years demonstrates a clear example of structural violence. Thinking about the

potential use of terms like workplace harm or unhealthy workplaces to better conceptualize the fact that experiences of educators are first and foremost, conditioned by their position within the workplace and secondly, that there are a wide range of behaviours that may be challenging, inappropriate and/or harmful and each of these instances may have a wide range of impacts. I believe there is value in moving away from the framing of student behaviours as violence because it recognizes that these are exceptionally young students who, often unintentionally, act in inappropriate or harmful ways. It equally acknowledges that there are a wide range of behaviours that can impact educators' work environment which are not limited to just physical altercations - recognizing the potential emotional or mental health issues educators face in light of threats, insults, or harassment from students.

Section Three: Discussion

This work has examined how educators' experiences of violence in schools has been addressed within Ontario's education legislation. The findings have shown that, despite some attention in the form of the Guidebook, there has been no provincial legislation amendments or enactments between 2000 to 2020 which acknowledged or addressed student-on-teacher harm at the elementary level. These findings are particularly interesting when put in conversation with recent work by Santor, Bruckert, and McBride (2019) who have demonstrated exceptionally high rates of violence against elementary educators in Ontario and given that teachers and their respective unions have been calling attention to workplace violence as early as 2005.

It is difficult to conceptualize why issues of schools as workplaces have remained largely absent from legislative, policy-base conversations about school safety and school violence broadly. I argue that there are two very distinct reasons why this topic has

remained relatively unaddressed at the governmental or legislative levels. First, it is possible that the Provincial Government has not responded to calls from unions, federations, and media to address this issue because the lack of comprehensive research (until more recently) made it difficult to understand the breadth of the issue. The second possibility is that this has been purposefully left out of the legislative agenda because, while student-on-teacher harm is concerning and affects workplace health, they may not consider it an issue of violence or a safety concern at the elementary school level. While I do believe there are significant limitations and criticisms about a legislative approach to the issue that focuses on punishment, rather than prevention, I am equally critical of the complete lack of attention to this issue from both the Provincial Government and the Ministry of Education.

Despite the lack of clear conceptualization about what defines or constitutes workplace violence in schools, as well as what the best response may be, there does appear to be growing concern in our communities about violent incidents in schools. As discussed, many of the key changes to the Ontario education system's approach to developing safer schools have involved amendments to the *Education Act* and subsequent Policy/Program Memorandums – the vast majority pertaining only to student-on-student violence. As we have seen in recent years, education unions have continued to mobilize around issues of workplace violence, calling attention to what is perceived as inaction on the part of the Ministry of Education.

The case of student-on-teacher harm lies at an interesting intersection between direct violence and structural violence. Many educators and school staff in Ontario experience a variety of challenging student behaviours, including physical acts, threats, or

attempts of violence. In Ontario specifically, there has been limited literature that has documented this complex problem. Santor, Bruckert and McBride (2019) mobilized a definition of violence from the Ontario Ministry of Labour which defined physically violent and threatening behaviour as “the exercise, attempt, or threat of physical force, or a statement or a behaviour that could reasonably be interpreted as a threat to exercise physical force” (ibid., p. 6). In response, they found that as many as 7 in 10 classroom-based school workers had experiences one or more act of physical force from a student during a single year. These findings do demonstrate that there should be some level of concern for the issue of teacher-directed harm. However, the limited academic literature on the topic of workplace violence in elementary schools make it difficult to understand the full extent of which teachers may be experiencing varying levels of unhealthy and/or unsafe workplaces.

In 2020, the Canadian Teacher’s Federation (CTF) conducted a mental health check-in survey to gauge Canadian teachers’ wellbeing during the Covid-19 pandemic. While these experiences are important to consider, this survey is specifically relevant because it demonstrates the teacher mental health and well-being is a cause for concern. The CTF (2020) survey found that teachers are incredibly stressed, struggling to cope, and increasingly feeling unhappy as 46% of respondents were concerned about their own mental health and well-being. While the survey did not specifically engage with the question of workplace violence, I would argue that ongoing and unaddressed violence at schools has the potential to further impact teachers’ mental health and well-being negatively. These findings indicate that teachers are facing growing personal challenges considering increasing workloads, and decreasing resources and supports (CTF, 2020).

While it is difficult to understand the full extent to which teacher-direct harm or violence is present in Ontario's elementary school classrooms, the research documents the wide-range of challenges that educators are facing in the classroom – from daily disruptions to more exceptional cases of physical violence from students.

And, if the prevalence of mental, emotional, and physical impacts caused by workplace violence is not sufficient cause for concern, the economic costs of these incidents further demonstrate the immense impacts of workplace violence to our economy. According to the OECTA (2017) survey of its members, 26% of Catholic teachers had to take time off work because of mental health issues from experiences of student violence. Similarly, 19.2% of individuals who experienced an incident of physical violence during the 2017-2018 school year reported taking time off work as a result and the annual costs of replacing these educators is conservatively estimated at upwards of 3 million dollars (Santor, Bruckert, and McBride, 2019). There would equally be costs associated with any physical and mental health interventions or treatments required, as well as the potentially high costs associated with decreased staff retention because of workplace violence. In all these cases, we see that workplace violence not only impacts the mental, emotional, and physical well-being of school staff who are victimized and other students who are witnesses, but there are also financial costs.

Galtung's (1969) theories of structural violence are of particular interest in this narrative about the perspective and experiences that are left out of critical policy discussions about school safety to date. Structural violence enables us to consider how broader structures and systems condition the experiences of education sector workers in schools. Most importantly, structural violence is often a violence with no identifiable

perpetrator and often, without intent (Cooper and Whyte, 2017). This theory is relevant to consider the way both the 2005 and 2008 Safe School Action Team Reports fail to consider teacher and school staff safety as a key measure of maintaining safe schools more broadly. While it is impossible to determine the intent, the outcome of leaving educators' experiences out of the conversation is substantial in many ways. Both the 2008 and the earlier 2005 Safe School Action Team Reports prioritize the importance of developing and maintaining school safety. Much of the strategies and recommendations put forth in these reports focus on supporting and empowering students through conflict resolution and restorative practices, as well as encouraging school boards to promote prevention and early intervention strategies for students (Safe Schools Action Team Report, 2005; Safe Schools Action Team Report, 2008). While these recommendations may in fact be relevant to the concern of student-on-student violence, the message remains vastly unclear about how these recommendations can support school staff safety. Considering the findings by OSSTF in 2005, it would have been expected that the Safe Schools Action Team Report of the same year, or the later edition in 2008, would have provided a response to what appears to be a growing concern among education sector workers' unions and federations about bullying and violence against their members.

To date, the Ontario Government and/or the Ministry of Education have only published one comprehensive document that acknowledges and attempts to address student-on-teacher harm. The guide, "Workplace Violence in Schools: A Guide to the Law," provides important insights into the need to develop and maintain safe working conditions for Ontario's school staff. However, the key message relayed through the guide is that school boards and schools are required to comply with the *Occupational Health and*

Safety Act which entitles all school staff to a safe working environment. The Ministry's attention to the issue of workplace violence through this guide should not be understated, but the lack of direct attention to the issue remains concerning.

The legislative review demonstrates that there is no clear understanding or articulation about what constitutes a safe and healthy workplace for teachers and school staff more broadly. While the Guide acknowledges all school staff are entitled to safe working environments, through the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, the lack of definition or recommendations for creating safer work environments makes it difficult to fully address workplace violence. As Nixon (2011) articulates, slow violence often affects individuals and communities at a pace so slow it becomes difficult to assign blame. We see this clearly in discussions about the issue of workplace violence in schools because it requires a highly complex and nuanced way of considering that the direct violence in classrooms is the outcome of decades of slow and structural violence enacted through legislative, economic, and governmental disruptions to Ontario's education system.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Despite what appears to be concerningly high rates of violence against Ontario's elementary educators, questions remain about how violence is conceptualized and framed in the elementary school context. While Ontario's education legislation does consider topics such as inappropriate student behaviours, swearing and disrespect, and bullying, the classification of these behaviours as violence, necessitating a workplace violence response is up for debate. Nevertheless, the fact that workplace violence in schools remained largely nonexistent in legislation or other provincial documentation until 2018 demonstrates a problematic lack of attention to workplace health and safety. Despite the Guide (2018) by the Ministry of Labour acknowledging the harms of workplace violence against educators in Ontario, the Ministry of Education has yet to acknowledge or address these issues. While my thesis has demonstrated the tensions around how to name and frame violence in the context of acts by young children, the violence educators are experiencing in the workplace requires action on the part of Ontario's Ministry of Education. Whether or not legislation could have, or would have, mitigated workplace violence in schools is unclear. While it is not my recommendation that the Ministry of Education propose legislative and punitive responses for students, the complete lack of acknowledgement of the issue is highly problematic.

While we cannot draw any precise conclusions, we can consider whether the omission of workplace violence and/or student-on-teacher harm from Ontario's guiding education legislation has created the condition for structural violence to seep into the walls our classrooms or indeed has mitigated that given the long history of punitive policies and

responses to student misconduct, including zero tolerance and police in school policies which disproportionately target minority and vulnerable students.

Workplace violence in elementary schools is a highly complex issues that requires a critical and close analysis of what we mean by and how we ought to respond to violence, particularly when it involves children under the age of 12. Such an analysis ought to be informed by an intersectional-feminist lens. Further research is needed to evaluate whether the omission of workplace violence from legislation is problematic or provides a unique opportunity for stakeholders to develop a comprehensive, anti-carceral approach to addressing the issue.

It is important to acknowledge that the issue of workplace violence in schools is highly complicated by the very nature that our elementary school are filled with young children. While it is not possible to evaluate the extent to which workplace violence in schools is the result of intentional or unintentional harm caused by students, it is important to acknowledge that educators and education-sector workers' experiences of harm are very real. Indeed, the reality for our educators is that the violence they do experience, even at the hands of very young children, can cause both physical and psychological harms. In this way, this thesis has attempted to apply a nuanced lens of analysis to take seriously the experiences of workplace violence but also acknowledge that these are young kids.

My findings clearly demonstrate that education legislation has failed to acknowledge the complexity and prevalence of workplace violence in Ontario's elementary schools, specifically with an intersectionally-informed lens. Within this conversation, I have been deliberately attentive to the problems of framing elementary school students as perpetrators of violence. At the same time, we do need to acknowledge

the seriousness of educators who are experiencing inappropriate physical behaviour from their students during the course of a workday. My research demonstrates that ongoing austerity measures contribute to creating structural violence, which turns into direct violence.

It is recommended that attention be put towards supporting both students and school staff in more meaningful and practical ways, such as increasing education funding, adding more substantial resources to classrooms, hiring more teachers and other specialized school support staff, and decreasing classroom sizes to manageable ratios. Providing adequate resources for both students (i.e., specialized support programs, access to mental health services, and regular educational support staff) and for staff (i.e., training and intervention programs to prevent and address workplace violence, emotional and psychological health services, and adequate resources in schools) has the potential to be a critical step in managing and mitigating workplace violence in schools.

Slow violence challenges us to expand our traditional understanding of what constitutes violence. I argue that while students are causing direct harm to educators at some level, slow violence and structural violence are the pervasive forms of violence impacting our educators. The case of workplace violence against Ontario's elementary educators is structural violence because the nature of the direct violence they face in the classroom is preventable harm caused by unequal or limited distribution of resources. At the same time, the cumulative impact of structural changes to Ontario's education system and systemic inaction on the part of key legislative governance demonstrates the slow violence that has subtly crept into the very structure of our education system over the past twenty or more years. Given the complex nature of workplace violence in schools, it is

imperative to recognize the importance of a comprehensive and collective approach to address violence in schools. Not only do our teachers need access to more resources and supports to succeed in their work, but our students do too.

Limitations and future research

This project did not include a review of school board policies in light of project constraints. This is a significant limitation of this work given that school boards across Ontario may have specific policies about violence in the workplace. This is an important aspect of the work that remains to be done because employers have specific duties with respect to workplace violence according to the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA) (e.g., establishing a policy on workplace violence) (R.S.O. 1990, c. O.1). Further considerations need to be made about whether the responsibility to maintain safe workplaces falls on the provincial Minister of Education or on individual school boards.

There are equally some challenges with policy analyses which serve as noteworthy limitations to this work. Namely, there is currently no consolidated database or webpage with all archived education legislation in Ontario. Research on broader sources enabled me to find many; however, it is possible that there are some other revoked policy/program memorandums which were unintentionally excluded from this analysis as a result. My findings suggest that more research is needed to understand what is happening in the classroom, whether legislative responses are needed, and what are the actual interactions happening with students/teachers, and what theories will help us reveal about the lack of legislative discussion.

Finally, it is important to consider the way that my previous experience working on a project about harassment and violence against educators shaped my research in

significant ways. My own experience leads me towards the assumption that violence was the correct framing for making sense of student-teacher harm in the elementary school context. However, in developing my work further, I have considered that other words might have been helpful to include within the analysis (i.e., safety, health, harm, etc.). Inevitably, my assumptions going into the project narrowed the scope of your study and potentially affected my analysis. Nonetheless, I am persuaded that the reflections I have developed throughout provide insightful contributions to an issue which has received such limited attention to date.

Concluding remarks

School violence is a complex issue that involves stakeholders at all levels in our communities and governments. Perhaps what is most complicated about the issues of school violence is that it is a problem that manifests from varying sources, including our schools and broader school systems, ever-evolving communities, changing parental relationships, increasing access to technology, changing social and community structures, as well as individual student characteristics. Simply put, it is impossible to identify the specific reason why school violence appears to be increasing.

It remains unclear the full extent to which school violence has increased considerably over the last two decades. The findings from recent research presented throughout (see Bruckert, Santor, and Mario, 2021; Santor, Bruckert, and McBride, 2019), in addition to the prevalence of workplace violence injuries presented by the WSIB (Public Services Health and Safety Association 2021) seem to indicate trends of workplace violence against elementary school educators, support staff, and education-sector workers are increasing at concerning rates. However, the lack of comprehensive and comparable

data on instances of school violence across the provinces has made it difficult to determine the extent to which students are causing perceived and actual harms to educators.

The current research has highlighted the nuance of workplace violence in schools by acknowledging the prevalence and impact of workplace violence and equally expressing hesitation in the ways we conceptualize elementary student behaviour as ‘violent.’ I want to conclude by saying that I am convinced by both the literature and emerging research that’s Ontario’s educators are facing more needs in the classroom than ever before and with limited supports and resources available to them, elementary students are engaging in, perhaps unintended yet still harmful, behaviours in schools. I am, however, not convinced that framing these experiences as ‘violence’ is the best way to grasp the true complexity of these instances – for both students and for educators. While there are important considerations about how to frame this issue, I believe workplace violence is the more accurate way to describe the experiences of educators in a way that takes seriously their experiences and moves away from framing students as violent. The use of workplace violence as a term, however, is limited in some ways as it may not properly encapsulate the significant impacts of workplace violence which extend beyond the classroom, including physical, emotional, and psychological impacts, as well as broader impacts that ripple into the lives of educators outside of the classroom.

In considering the literature and legislation about violence in Ontario’s elementary schools, I have considered, and re-considered, how violence is framed within the conversation and what our responses to this issue should be. I have been challenged to question how we can take seriously the very real harms happening against elementary school teachers, while equally bringing to the forefront that these are exceptionally young

children – some with special needs and many others with no intent to harm. This intersection has been a difficult place to situate my work in as both require critical conversations about how we understand violence in the workplace, the impacts and intersectional nature of this violence, and the broader relevance of childhood behaviour and age-appropriate responses along the way.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Workplace violence reporting process in Ontario school boards

