



# **UNITE AGAINST VIOLENCE** TO CREATE MORE POSITIVE AND CARING WORKPLACES

Summary of Basic Knowledge About Workplace Violence

If a member of an organization intentionally causes harm, by their words or actions, to another member or to the organization, their work behaviour is said to be anti-social.

There are three types of work-related anti-social behaviour directed at individuals: workplace violence, harassment and incivility.

## Definition of workplace violence (WV)

### WORKPLACE VIOLENCE IS:

- conduct of a member or former member of an organization
- that violates this organization's current standards
- and that causes harm or coerces another member.

Please note that an accident may sometimes be considered workplace violence (Courcy and Savoie, 2009).

# Distinguishing violence from conflict

According to Poitras (2009), a conflict is “usually an emotional process caused by a real or perceived difference (in interests, values or opinions) between two or more interdependent and interacting parties.”

A conflict is not fundamentally harmful; it all depends on how it is managed. For example, it is quite possible to disagree with one's colleague and openly express one's opinions without violence. If the actors involved adopt positive resolution strategies (e.g. open discussion, compromise), the conflict can be quickly resolved and even enable individuals to subsequently have more positive interactions. Conversely, workplace violence may emerge from inappropriate strategies that promote the escalation of conflict.

## Types of workplace violence

Workplace violence may take various forms. It may be verbal (psychological), physical, sexual and/or financial (Courcy, Savoie and Brunet, 2004).

### PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE

Violence whose main target is the victim's self-esteem and self-confidence.

Example: A few minutes before making an important presentation to your department's team, your boss criticizes your clothing.

### PHYSICAL ABUSE

Violence whose main target is the victim's physical integrity.

Example: When you are in line at the cafeteria at lunchtime, a colleague who does not like you bumps you.

### SEXUAL ABUSE

Violence whose main target is the victim's sexual integrity.

Example: During a meeting, your boss strokes your thigh without your consent.

### FINANCIAL ABUSE

Violence resulting in financial loss for the victim.

Example: After a long day of work, you see three colleagues vandalizing your car.

# Sources of violence

Based on the relationship between the perpetrator and victim, there are four sources of violence: criminal, occupational, domestic and organizational violence (Courcy, Savoie and Brunet, 2004).

## CRIMINAL VIOLENCE

Act of violence committed by a criminal in an illegal act. The perpetrator knows little or nothing about their victim.  
Example: An individual hijacks a bank.

## OCCUPATIONAL VIOLENCE

An act of violence committed by a beneficiary or client against an employee acting in the course of duty. Example: An individual waiting in the emergency room squeezes a nurse's arm.

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

An act of violence committed by a spouse or former spouse against a member of the organization for reasons related to the relationship they have outside the work setting.  
Example: A woman comes to visit her spouse at work. A fight breaks out and she starts slapping him.

## WORKPLACE (organizational) VIOLENCE

Behaviour of a member or former member of an organization who contravenes the norms of their workplace and who tries to coerce or harm another member.  
Example: Two colleagues fight during a meeting.



# Harassment

Like violence, harassment may be psychological, physical, sexual or financial. What distinguishes them? According to the CNESST, five criteria must be met in order to be considered harassment. The behaviour must:

- **BE VEXATIOUS**

- .Vexatious conduct
- .Humiliating, offensive, abusive, hurtful, unreasonable conduct.

- **BE REPETITIVE**

- .Repetitive nature
- .In general, harassment is characterized by repetitive actions that may seem trivial when isolated.
- .Their accumulation causes harm to the victim. However, a single serious action may be considered harassment if the impact on the victim is long-lasting.

- **BE HOSTILE OR UNWANTED**

- .Unwanted or hostile words, actions or behaviour
- .The victim's perception determines whether the behaviour is hostile or unwanted. However, when it comes to sexual misconduct, the victim does not need to clearly express their refusal in order to be considered sexual harassment.

- **HARM DIGNITY OR INTEGRITY**

- .Harm dignity or integrity
- .Harassment has a negative impact on the victim, who may feel diminished, devalued, denigrated, both psychologically and physically as well as professionally or personally.

- **MAKE THE WORKPLACE HARMFUL FOR THE VICTIM**

- .Harmful workplace
- .Harassment makes the workplace harmful for the victim, who may, for example, be isolated from colleagues.

**There are different types of harassment: mobbing, bullying and stalking.**

## **MOBBING**

Form of harassment committed by several perpetrators against one victim (Heames and Harvey, 2006).

## **BULLYING**

Form of harassment that includes physical abuse (Moreno, Beltrán, Tsuno, Inoue and Kawakami, 2013).

## **STALKING**

Form of harassment that leads the victim to fear for their safety by invading many areas of their life (Kropp, Hart and Lyon, 2008).

# Incivility

## DEFINITION OF INCIVILITY

**Low-intensity deviant behaviour that is harmful to others (Anderson & Pearson, 1999).**

Incivility differs from workplace violence by:

- The ambiguous nature of the perpetrator's intention to harm.
- The low intensity of their attacks, similar to a lack of consideration for others.
- The non-repetition and non-systematization of the act against a victim.

An individual's incivility does not usually stem from ill intentions. Although this cannot excuse their deviant behaviour, their lack of courtesy and manners is sometimes the result of a misunderstanding of social norms. For example, showing little interest in or paying little attention to an individual's opinion could be considered incivility.

## “Ordinary” violence

**According to Courcy, Savoie and Brunet (2004), some behaviour may seem trivial, whereas it is in fact workplace violence. The following are the most common examples of everyday violence:**

- Speaking behind someone's back
- Laughing behind someone's back
- Giving someone a disapproving look
- Belittling someone in their absence
- Ignoring someone
- Ignoring ideas
- Criticizing in front of others
- Stop talking to someone
- Bickering
- Making compromising comments
- Making sarcastic comments (e.g. about clothing)
- Blaming without a valid reason
- Insulting a person
- Refusing to specify what one has against someone
- Refusing to respond to a justified request
- Undressing someone with their eyes
- Avoiding contact with a person
- Over-monitoring
- Giving overly tight deadlines for work
- Not disagreeing with a false rumor

# Main individual, interpersonal and organizational risk factors

Various risk factors may contribute to the emergence or worsening of workplace violence. These risk factors may be individual, interpersonal or organizational.

## INDIVIDUAL RISK FACTORS

- Individual reactions to the environment: frustration, stress, dissatisfaction

## INTERPERSONAL RISK FACTORS

- Perceived quality of supervision
- Conflicts
- Supervisor's conflict management style

## ORGANIZATIONAL RISK FACTORS

### **Work organization**

- Lack of autonomy
- Overly strict hierarchical organization
- Frequent changes
- Role conflicts
- Monotony
- Job insecurity
- Employment precarity
- Underutilization of workers' abilities
- Interdependence among colleagues
- Complexity of tasks
- Excessively heavy workload
- Lack of control over the work pace
- Environmental conditions (e.g. heat, humidity)

**Climate, culture and organizational justice: strongly associated with workers' perceptions about how they are treated and managed.**

- Relationship with superiors and colleagues
- Trivialization of violence
- Sense of organizational justice



# Courses of action for various actors (victim, perpetrator, witness, organization)

When workplace violence is reported, the individuals involved may play three roles: victim, perpetrator or witness. Under all circumstances, it is crucial to intervene as quickly as possible in order to put a stop to these behaviours and limit their impact. To prevent or respond to workplace violence, the next section presents courses of action for these three actors and organizations.

## DO YOU THINK YOU ARE A VICTIM?

- Ask for support from someone you trust
- Break the silence and report acts of violence
- Do not hesitate to seek therapeutic follow-up

In an ideal world, violent situations would be immediately defused. If you feel comfortable in the situation, here are some key phrases to help the perpetrator to understand that their words or actions are causing you harm:

*"When you told me that yesterday, it made me feel bad all day. What was your intention?"*

*"I didn't like when you grabbed my hips without asking me. I don't want you to do that again."*

*"I don't like when you make comments about my appearance. I think it's inappropriate. "*

However, as a victim of violence, it is rare to feel confident and safe enough to stand up to the perpetrator. Here are some key phrases to use to break the silence and get help from someone you trust:

*"You were present earlier. What did you think of our colleague's actions?"*

*"For some time now, I've been afraid of running into my boss. I don't know how to deal with the problem."*

*"I'd like to report what happened to me. Would you like to come with me?"*

## DO YOU THINK YOU ARE A PERPETRATOR?

- Be aware of the impact of your actions
- Admit your mistakes, in all humility, even if your action was not ill-intentioned
- Do not hesitate to seek therapeutic follow-up

Most of the time, victims of violence just want to receive an apology from their abuser. Here are some key phrases that could change everything:

*"I noticed you weren't comfortable just now when I told you that. I'm sorry, I just wanted to make you laugh."*

*"I understand that my behaviour wasn't appropriate. I didn't want to hurt you."*

*"I'm sorry. I won't do it again."*



## DO YOU THINK YOU ARE A WITNESS OF VIOLENCE?

- Break the silence
- Offer support to the victim
- Discreetly report acts of violence
- Victims usually perceive passive witnesses to be complicit in the violence

In an ideal world, violent situations would be immediately defused. If you feel comfortable in the situation, here are some key phrases to help the perpetrator to understand that their words or actions are causing you harm:

Are you unsure of how to address violent behaviour without making the situation worse? Here are some key phrases you can use.

### What to say to the victim:

*"I saw what just happened; it's not trivial. I'm here if you want to talk about it."*

*"I think it's unacceptable what just happened to you. Would you like me to go with you to get help?"*

### What to say to the perpetrator:

*"I don't think your joke is funny. Did you think about how our colleague might have felt?"*

*"I don't think you realize the impact of your actions."*

## WHAT CAN YOUR ORGANIZATION DO?

- Establish clear prevention and intervention policies
- Provide victims and perpetrators with support in a variety of ways (e.g. by preventive withdrawal and gradual reintegration into the workplace)

You may not feel equipped to deal with violent situations in your organization. As an employer, you have certain obligations to maintain a violence-free workplace. Depending on your situation, you can consult various resources.

- To learn about your obligations and the law, consult the CNESST (Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail)
- If the situation warrants it, speak with your employees' union
- Do not hesitate to call on a consultant or an organizational psychologist to analyze the problematic situation. This professional can then help you identify and implement appropriate measures to prevent and address workplace violence.

# Violence against a superior, employee or colleague

No one is immune to workplace violence in organizations. It may arise at all hierarchical levels and in all job categories. There are certain characteristics depending on the hierarchical position of the individual or group of individuals who are perpetrators of workplace violence (Thomas & Burk, 2009).

ORIGIN	DESCRIPTION AND CHARACTERISTICS
<b>Against a superior</b>	<p>Potential unequal power relationships (e.g. several individuals united against one manager)</p> <p>Potential sabotage</p> <p>Example: After the announcement of an unpopular decision, employees get together and cover their superior's house with toilet paper.</p>
<b>Against an employee</b>	<p>Potential abuse of power</p> <p>Fewer options for victims</p> <p>Example: A manager uses the annual performance evaluation to falsely attribute a bad performance to an employee they do not like.</p>
<b>Against a same-level colleague</b>	<p>Greater equality of power (unless several individuals gang up against another)</p> <p>Example: A worker parks his car every morning in a colleague's parking space in order to force him to park far away from the door.</p>

# Prejudices, stereotypes and discrimination

Some forms of workplace violence are directed at individuals due to their personal characteristics and association, whether true or not, with a group of people (e.g. police, Jews, bisexuals, women, French).

They may stem from a **prejudice**, that is, an attitude that elicits an emotional response to an individual who belongs to a group. Prejudices may or may not be favourable to an individual or a group (Leyens, Yzerbyt & Schadron, 1996).

- Example: A worker who has an immigrant colleague says, "I can't relate to people whose names I can't pronounce" (prejudice against people from another cultural community).

**Stereotypes** are a specific shared view about a certain group of individuals (McGarty, Spears & Yzerbyt, 2002, Leyens, Yzerbyt & Schadron, 1996).

- Example: Thérèse says about her boss: "Alexandre must be gay, because he always dresses fashionably and wears pink" (stereotype about homosexual individuals).

**Racism, sexism and heterosexism** are ideologies and attitudes that favour one group at another group's expense.

- Example: A worker says to his colleague: "You really have women's handwriting" (sexism).
- Example: Near the coffee machine, some workers are talking about one of their colleagues who has just left on paternity leave: "Obviously, a child needs a father and a mother; two men can never replace maternal love" (heterosexism).

When opinions lead to hostility and fear of others, it may be a "**phobia**" such as xenophobia, homophobia, etc.

- Example: An employee says to her boss: "I don't want to hire immigrants; they'll end up stealing our jobs" (xenophobia).

When ideas and opinions lead to treatment that advantages or disadvantages individuals based on their personal characteristics, it is called discrimination (Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse).

- Example: An employer says, "I refuse to hire women. They don't want a job that requires them to sacrifice their personal lives, especially if they want children" (discrimination against women).

# Additional resources available

**There are various resources to help the actors involved in workplace violence (victim, perpetrator and witness), including:**

- la Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité au travail  
<https://www.cnt.gouv.qc.ca/accueil/index.html>
- l'Association paritaire pour la santé et la sécurité au travail  
[www.apssap.qc.ca](http://www.apssap.qc.ca)
- Éducaloi  
<https://www.educaloi.qc.ca>
- La Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse  
<http://www.cdpcj.qc.ca>
- Your organization's union (if applicable)
- Your organization's employee assistance program (if applicable)

## Sources

Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse (2018). Discrimination. Repéré à <http://www.cdpcj.qc.ca/fr/droits-de-la-personne/pratiques/Pages/discrimination.aspx>

Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité au travail. (2018). *Harcèlement psychologique*. Repéré à : <https://www.cnt.gouv.qc.ca/en-cas-de/harcèlement-psychologique/index.html#c84>

Cortina, L. M., Magley, V. J., Williams, J. H., & Langhout, R. D. (2001). Incivility in the workplace: Incidence and impact. *Journal of occupational health psychology*, 6(1), 64-80

Courcy, F., Aubé, C., Daignault, G., & Larouche, L. (soumis). Comportements antisociaux au travail : un état des lieux. Dans J. Douesnard (Éd), *Enjeux humains et psychosociaux du travail*. Québec, QC : Presses de l'Université du Québec.

Courcy, F., Brunet, L., & Savoie, A. (2004). *Violences au travail*. Presses de l'Université de Montréal.

Damant, D., Dompierre, J., Jauvin, N., Brisson, L., & Hébert, D. (1997). *La violence en milieu de travail*. CRI-VIFF.

Heames, J., & Harvey, M. (2006). Workplace bullying: A cross-level assessment. *Management Decision*, 44(9), 1214-1230.

Kropp, P. R., Hart, S. D., & Lyon, D. R. (2008). *Guidelines for stalking assessment and management (SAM): User manual*. ProActive ReSolutions Incorporated.

Leyens, J. P., Yzerbyt, V., & Schadron, G. (1996). *Stéréotypes et cognition sociale*. Bruxelles : Éditions Mardaga.

McGarty, C., Spears, R. & Yzerbyt, V., Y. (2002). Stereotypes as explanations: The formation of meaningful beliefs about social groups. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.

Merchant, J. A., & Lundell, J. A. (2001). Workplace Violence Intervention Research Workshop. *American journal of preventive medicine*, 20(2), 135-140.

Moreno, M. P., Beltrán, C. A., Tsuno, K., Inoue, A. & Kawakami, N. (2013). Assessing psychological violence and harassment at work: Reliability and validity of the Japanese version of the inventory of violence and psychological harassment (INAPT) comparing NAQ-R and LIPT. *Journal of Occupational Health*, 55(2), 108.

Petitcollin, C. (2006). *Victime, bourreau ou sauveur : comment sortir du piège?*. Saint-Julien-en-Genevois : Jouvence.

Poitras, J., Lemelin, M. & Coll., « Prévenir et gérer les conflits », dans Bourhis, A. & Chênevert, D. (2009). *À vos marques, prêts, gérez, la GRH pour gestionnaires*, Montréal : ERPI, p. 425-458.

Thomas, S. P., & Burk, R. (2009). Junior nursing students' experiences of vertical violence during clinical rotations. *Nursing outlook*, 57(4), 226-231

# SCENARIOS

## CONTEXT

In the text that follows, two work situations are described: they illustrate violent situations in a company. Following these descriptions, you will be asked some questions so that you can reflect on the experience of the various actors in these situations of workplace violence as well as potential solutions that can be implemented by each actor.

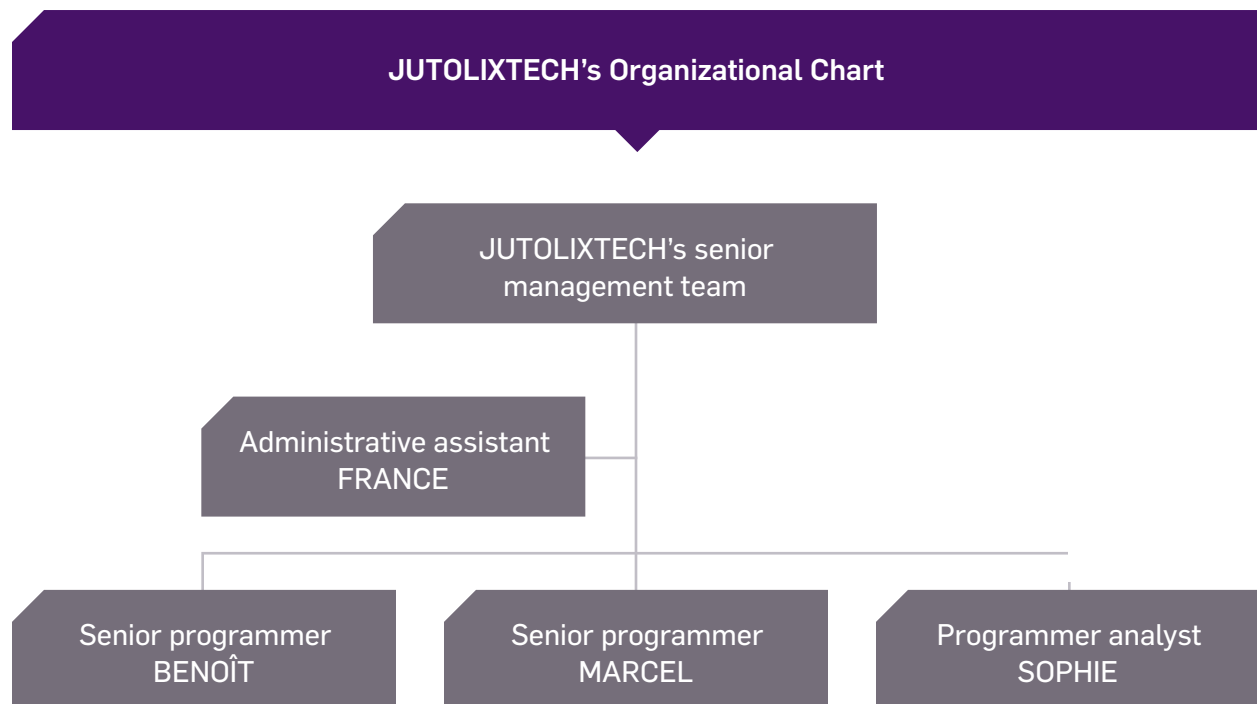
## WHO ARE THESE SCENARIOS INTENDED FOR?

- Workforce
- Organizations concerned about their organizational health
- Anyone who wants to better understand workplace violence

## SCENARIO GOALS:

- To make the workforce aware of workplace violence issues
- To learn to identify subtle forms of workplace violence
- To better understand the viewpoints of various actors concerning workplace violence
- Develop ways to respond to workplace violence cases

## INDIVIDUALS INVOLVED IN THE SITUATION



## BENOÎT

Benoît has been working at JutolixTech for over 10 years and his leadership on the technology development team is widely recognized by his peers. Good-natured, Benoît likes to laugh with his colleagues and has good relations with everyone. For him, a collegial spirit is essential in order to create a pleasant workplace climate.

## MARCEL

Marcel is an excellent programmer who has been on the job for 5 years now. His health has taken a hit in recent years. He recently found out that he has high blood pressure. He decided to change his lifestyle, including a healthy diet and plenty of sports. One of his guilty pleasures is to have a less "healthy" lunch on Friday. It's his way of staying motivated.

## SOPHIE

A recent graduate, Sophie completed her computer engineering degree with honours. She's brilliant; that's why the organization hired her right after she graduated. She had been on the job for two days at the time of the incidents. Sophie takes her job seriously and feels the need to stand out in order to be accepted in this predominantly male environment.

## FRANCE

France is Benoît's assistant. She knows him well, and they have learned over the years to complement each other. France also has a sense of humour and is used to working in a male environment. She enjoys this collegial climate. One of her favourite sayings is that you have to be able to laugh at yourself.



## SITUATION #1

Following a tense working meeting between senior management and the technology development team, France, Marcel and Benoît head to the cafeteria for lunch.

Once at the order counter, Marcel is pleased to finally be able to order his Friday poutine, which he enjoys so much. Although he changed his diet to improve his health, his Friday poutine is still sacred!

Staring back and forth between Marcel's round belly and the plate of poutine on his tray, France asks him: "Are you sure you wouldn't prefer the salad bar?" Then she laughs heartily. She goes on to say, "Hey, it looks like your shirt's tighter than usual! Whatever—enjoy your lunch my dear!"

Benoît, just behind them, exclaims: "France! You're always clowning around!"

Marcel blushes, feigns a laugh, then sits down in the cafeteria with his colleagues as if nothing had happened.

### THE SITUATION FROM MARCEL'S PERSPECTIVE

Marcel felt guilty about France's comment. He had just bought his new shirt two sizes smaller than his old ones and he was wondering if he looked ridiculous eating his Friday poutine.

---

### THE SITUATION FROM BENOÎT'S PERSPECTIVE

Benoît saw Marcel's face turn red. He wondered how he must have felt in the situation, but he didn't dare go ask him. He knows France well and realizes that she was just joking around.

---

### THE SITUATION FROM FRANCE'S PERSPECTIVE

To reduce the tension caused by their meeting with senior management, France thought that humor would be the best way to lighten the mood at lunchtime. Besides, she loves joking with her colleagues, including Marcel. She appreciates the rapport she has with him. Besides, he doesn't hesitate to tease her back.



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS > SITUATION #1

*The elements in italics are suggested answers to the questions.*

### IN THIS SITUATION, WHAT ARE THE ELEMENTS OF VIOLENCE?

- *France's comment about Marcel's diet*
- *France's comment about Marcel's clothing*
- *France's staring at Marcel's round belly and poutine, alluding to his food choice.*

In this case, it is psychological abuse, since France's behaviour undermines Marcel's self-esteem and self-confidence.

### IN THIS SITUATION, WHO COMMITTED AN ACT OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE?

- *France, since she uses words that undermine Marcel's self-esteem.*

### IN THIS SITUATION, WHO IS THE VICTIM OF VIOLENCE?

- *Marcel, since France made vexatious comments about him.*

### IN THIS SITUATION, WHO IS THE WITNESS OF VIOLENCE?

- *Benoît, since he has not committed any violent behaviour, but he is a spectator. He is neither the victim nor the perpetrator.*

### MEASURES THAT THE ORGANIZATION CAN IMPLEMENT IN ORDER TO:

#### A) Prevent this type of situation

*Here are some examples of possible solutions:*

- *Establish a clear prevention and intervention policy for cases of workplace violence*
- *Promote a culture of respect for individuals that does not tolerate acts of violence (e.g. managers set an example by respectfully treating their employees)*
- *Provide awareness sessions on workplace violence*
- *Provide employees with training on relational skills*

For example, in this situation, these measures would have enabled employees to understand that France's comments were inappropriate and subject to sanctions by the organization.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS > SITUATION #1

*The elements in italics are suggested answers to the questions.*

### B ) Respond to such a situation

- *Provide employees with resources to help them in workplace violence cases (e.g. organizations, resource persons at work, etc.)*
- *Provide support to victims, perpetrators and witnesses in various ways (e.g. preventive withdrawal and gradual reintegration into the workplace)*
- *Establish an employee assistance program so that they can receive help when needed.*

It is not always easy to realize that a behaviour is violent when it occurs. Once the violent behaviour has been identified, actions can be taken by:

#### - THE VICTIM:

- Ask for support from someone you trust
- Break the silence and report acts of violence
- Do not hesitate to seek therapeutic follow-up

**Here are some key phrases that the victim can say to help the perpetrator understand that their words or actions are causing harm:**

*"When you told me that yesterday, it made me feel bad all day. What was your intention?"*

*"I didn't like when you grabbed my hips without asking me. I don't want you to do that again."*

*"I don't like when you make comments about my appearance. I think it's inappropriate. "*

However, as a victim of violence, it is rare to feel confident and safe enough to stand up to the perpetrator. Here are some key phrases to use to break the silence and get help from someone you trust:

*"You were present earlier. What did you think of our colleague's actions?"*

*"For some time now, I've been afraid of running into my boss. I don't know how to deal with the problem."*

*"I'd like to report what happened to me. Would you like to come with me?"*

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS > SITUATION #1

*The elements in italics are suggested answers to the questions.*

### - THE WITNESS:

- Break the silence
  - Offer support to the victim
  - Discreetly report acts of violence
- \* Victims usually perceive passive witnesses to be complicit in workplace violence.*

**Here are some examples of key phrases that the witness can say:**

#### **What to say to the victim:**

*"I saw what just happened; it's not trivial. I'm here if you want to talk about it."*

*"I think it's unacceptable what just happened to you. Would you like me to go with you to get help?"*

#### **What to say to the perpetrator:**

*"I don't think your joke is funny. Did you think about how our colleague might have felt?"*

*"I don't think you realize the impact of your actions."*

### - THE PERPETRATOR:

- Be aware of the impact of your actions
- Admit your mistakes, in all humility, even if your action was not ill-intentioned
- Do not hesitate to seek therapeutic follow-up

**Most of the time, victims of violence just want to receive an apology from their abuser. Here are some key phrases that could change everything:**

*"I noticed you weren't comfortable just now when I told you that. I'm sorry, I just wanted to make you laugh."*

*"I understand that my behaviour wasn't appropriate. I didn't want to hurt you."*

*"I'm sorry. I won't do it again."*

## SITUATION #2

While Sophie is working on a file with France, Benoît passes in front of her office. Since he has not yet met Sophie, but has heard that she is a talented engineer, he takes the opportunity to say hello: "You're the young recruit? I heard about you! No one told me you're so beautiful. You don't look like a computer girl!"

Sophie smiles politely, greets him, then continues her work with France.

### THE SITUATION FROM SOPHIE'S PERSPECTIVE

After her interaction with Benoît, Sophie, both flattered and very uncomfortable receiving this comment, does not know how to react. Since she has just arrived on the job, she feels the need to make a good impression in front of her colleagues.

---

### THE SITUATION FROM BENOÎT'S PERSPECTIVE

Benoît believes that the best way to break the ice with someone is to tease them. So he thought that by addressing Sophie in this way, he would make her feel welcome on the team.

---

### THE SITUATION FROM FRANCE'S PERSPECTIVE

France is used to joking with her colleague Benoît. She figured that since Sophie had just arrived, it might have been a little inappropriate on her second day. Not wanting to create a sense of unease, she decided not to say anything.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS > SITUATION #2

*The elements in italics are suggested answers to the questions.*

### IN THIS SITUATION, WHAT ARE THE ELEMENTS OF VIOLENCE?

- *Benoît's comments about Sophie's appearance*
- *Benoît's innuendo about Sophie's ability to be in IT, given her beauty*

By making comments about Sophie's appearance, Benoît is committing sexual violence, which undermines her sexual integrity. Also, by implying that Sophie cannot have engineering qualifications, Benoît undermines her self-esteem and self-confidence, which is also psychological abuse.

### IN THIS SITUATION, WHO COMMITTED AN ACT OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE?

- *Benoît, since his comments undermine Sophie's sexual integrity and self-esteem.*

### IN THIS SITUATION, WHO IS THE VICTIM OF VIOLENCE?

- *Sophie, since Benoît made vexatious comments about her.*

### IN THIS SITUATION, WHO IS THE WITNESS OF VIOLENCE?

- *France, since she has not committed any violent behaviour, but she is a spectator. She is neither the victim nor the perpetrator.*

### MEASURES THAT THE ORGANIZATION CAN IMPLEMENT IN ORDER TO:

#### A) Prevent this type of situation

*Here are some examples of possible solutions:*

- *Establish a clear prevention and intervention policy for cases of workplace violence*
- *Promote a culture of respect for individuals that does not tolerate acts of violence (e.g. managers set an example by respectfully treating their employees)*
- *Provide awareness sessions on workplace violence*
- *Provide employees with training on relational skills*

For example, in this situation, these measures would have enabled employees to understand that Benoît's comments were inappropriate and subject to sanctions by the organization.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS > SITUATION #2

*The elements in italics are suggested answers to the questions.*

### B ) Respond to such a situation?

- *Provide employees with resources to help them in cases of workplace violence (e.g. organizations, resource persons at work, etc.)*
- *Provide support to victims, perpetrators and witnesses in various ways (e.g. preventive withdrawal and gradual reintegration into the workplace)*
- *Establish an employee assistance program so that they can receive help when needed.*

It is not always easy to realize that a behaviour is violent when it occurs. Once the violent behaviour has been identified, actions can be taken by:

#### - THE VICTIM:

- Ask for support from someone you trust
- Break the silence and report acts of violence
- Do not hesitate to seek therapeutic follow-up

**Here are some key phrases that the victim can say to help the perpetrator understand that their words or actions are causing harm:**

*"When you told me that yesterday, it made me feel bad all day. What was your intention?"*

*"I didn't like when you grabbed my hips without asking me. I don't want you to do that again."*

*"I don't like when you make comments about my appearance. I think it's inappropriate. "*

However, as a victim of violence, it is rare to feel confident and safe enough to stand up to the perpetrator. Here are some key phrases to use to break the silence and get help from someone you trust:

*"You were present earlier. What did you think of our colleague's actions?"*

*"For some time now, I've been afraid of running into my boss. I don't know how to deal with the problem."*

*"I'd like to report what happened to me. Would you like to come with me?"*

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS > SITUATION #2

*The elements in italics are suggested answers to the questions.*

### - THE WITNESS:

- Break the silence
- Offer support to the victim
- Discreetly report acts of violence

*\* Victims usually perceive passive witnesses to be complicit in workplace violence.*

**Here are some examples of key phrases that the witness can say:**

#### **What to say to the victim:**

*"I saw what just happened; it's not trivial. I'm here if you want to talk about it."*

*"I think it's unacceptable what just happened to you. Would you like me to go with you to get help?"*

#### **What to say to the perpetrator:**

*"I don't think your joke is funny. Did you think about how our colleague might have felt?"*

*"I don't think you realize the impact of your actions."*

### - THE PERPETRATOR:

- Be aware of the impact of your actions
- Admit your mistakes, in all humility, even if your action was not ill-intentioned
- Do not hesitate to seek therapeutic follow-up

**Most of the time, victims of violence just want to receive an apology from their abuser. Here are some key phrases that could change everything:**

*"I noticed you weren't comfortable just now when I told you that. I'm sorry, I just wanted to make you laugh."*

*"I understand that my behaviour wasn't appropriate. I didn't want to hurt you."*

*"I'm sorry. I won't do it again."*



# QUESTIONNAIRE

## INTRODUCTION TO THE USERS' QUESTIONNAIRE

The following questionnaire contains short scenarios that take place in the workplace. The questionnaire aims to demystify the signs of workplace violence and to raise awareness about the various forms it may take. In these situations, you will be asked to take turns playing the roles of three characters: the witness of a violent incident, the victim, and the perpetrator. You will then have to decide whether or not the acts committed are considered workplace violence. For each of the situations described, a brief explanation provides an expert opinion, which will help you with your reflection.

It should be noted that expert opinions are not universal and that situations of workplace violence are often complex and nuanced. For example, if you consider a case to be workplace violence and the questionnaire response says that it is not violence, this does not mean that the actions in question are acceptable or that they are not violence under all circumstances. The aim of this questionnaire is educational and has no legal value.

For more information, please visit this page, which provides further details on workplace violence.

## QUESTIONNAIRE – IS IT CONSIDERED WORKPLACE VIOLENCE?

**In your opinion, are the situations described in the following scenarios considered workplace violence?**

**#1.** When you are in line at the cafeteria at lunchtime, a colleague who does not like you bumps you and sarcastically says, "Well, it's just an accident."

This is workplace violence. In this situation, you are a victim of physical violence. By bumping you with potentially ill intentions, your colleague is undermining your physical integrity.

---

**#2.** While you are at the computer, your boss looks at your screen to review your work. She asks you some questions while lightly massaging your shoulders.

This is workplace violence. You are a victim of a form of sexual violence. By touching you without your consent, your boss is undermining your sexual integrity.

## QUESTIONNAIRE – IS IT CONSIDERED WORKPLACE VIOLENCE?

**In your opinion, are the situations described in the following scenarios considered workplace violence?**

**#3.** Your colleague's wife rushes to his cubicle. You hear screams, then the sound of a slap. Your colleague stands up holding his sore cheek.

This is domestic violence. In this situation, you have witnessed an act of physical violence committed by your colleague's spouse. Although it happened in your workplace, the reason for this action is related to the relationship they have outside the work setting, so it is not really "workplace" violence.

---

**#4.** You are on the nursing team on a hospital's psychiatric ward. A patient is having a crisis and is pushing you. Realizing the situation, your colleagues are deliberately taking more time than they should to help you.

This is workplace violence, since you may be a victim of physical violence. By failing to quickly help you, as warranted by the situation, your colleagues are giving the patient more time to push and hit you, posing a serious threat to your physical integrity.

---

**#5.** A few minutes before making an important presentation to your department's team, your boss looks at your clothes disapprovingly, as if wondering whether that's what you're really planning to wear.

This may be workplace violence. In this case, you may mainly be a victim of psychological abuse. The potentially judgmental look from your boss may hurt your self-esteem and self-confidence. However, it's a delicate situation. Is there a dress code for this type of situation? Does your clothing deviate from the usual dress codes in your field?

---

**#6.** It's 4:45 pm and you are about to leave your organization when your boss comes to see you. To your surprise, he puts a pile of documents on your desk and tells you that he wants a full report on these files the next morning at 9 a.m., which is not a regular practice in the organization.

This may be workplace violence. Under these circumstances, you may be a victim of psychological abuse. Since the workload is too high and the deadline too short, your boss puts you in a situation that may have a negative impact on your psychological well-being. The action may be violent in a context in which this situation is abnormal, as opposed to a workplace where overtime and working under pressure is normal.

## QUESTIONNAIRE – IS IT CONSIDERED WORKPLACE VIOLENCE?

**In your opinion, are the situations described in the following scenarios considered workplace violence?**

**#7.** Your colleague has a difficult relationship with his weight and is recently making a great effort to lose some extra pounds. At the Christmas party, you are beside him in the buffet line and you make a comment about the amount of food on his plate.

This is workplace violence. In this situation, you are committing an act of psychological violence against your colleague. By making comments about a sensitive subject for your colleague, you may be undermining his self-esteem and self-confidence.

---

**#8.** Your former life partner, with whom you recently broke up, shows up at your workplace and threatens you.

This is domestic violence. In this situation, you are a victim of an act of violence committed by your former partner. Although you are in your workplace, the reason for this action is related to the relationship that you have outside the work setting, so it is not "workplace" violence.

---

**#9.** After receiving a poor annual performance evaluation, you spread a rumor that your boss is having an affair with his secretary.

This is workplace violence. In this situation, you are committing a form of psychological and sexual violence. By starting a rumor that may or may not be true, you are undermining the reputation and sexual integrity of the individuals concerned.

---

**#10.** You see a colleague violently slam the door and leave his boss's office while swearing.

This may be workplace violence. In fact, you may have witnessed a form of psychological violence, since violently slamming the door and using foul language can contribute to a climate of insecurity for that individual or for certain witnesses present.

---

**#11.** After a long day of work, you see three colleagues near your car. They quickly leave as soon as they spot you. When you arrive at your vehicle, you notice that the car body was scratched in several places with a key mark.

This is workplace violence. In this situation, you are a victim of financial and psychological abuse. In fact, damage to your vehicle may incur undue expense. In addition, it is upsetting to realize that your colleagues do not respect you and are willing to cause you harm with impunity.

## QUESTIONNAIRE – IS IT CONSIDERED WORKPLACE VIOLENCE?

**In your opinion, are the situations described in the following scenarios considered workplace violence?**

**#12.** You are working late at night and are at a store's checkout. A woman wearing a mask comes with a knife in her hand. She demands the cash register's contents.

This is criminal violence. In this case, you are a victim of an act of violence committed by a criminal who is not a member of the organization. Although you are in your workplace, it is a criminal act, so it is not really "workplace" violence committed by another member of the organization.

---

**#13.** As you climb the stairs to head to your office, you hear your colleague, who is standing right behind you, saying that she "won't hurt you."

This is workplace violence. In this situation, you are a victim of sexual violence. By making suggestive comments, your colleague is undermining your sexual integrity.

---

**#14.** Near the coffee machine, you're chatting about summer holidays that are just around the corner. One of your colleagues starts to cry and quickly leaves. You learn a few hours later that her husband recently passed away and that her holidays have been ruined.

This is not workplace violence. In fact, this is a common topic of conversation and you did not have the information that would have enabled you to realize that your comments would trigger a distress reaction. Under these circumstances, although the consequences are serious for your colleague, it is just a misstep by you.

---

**#15.** Your colleague has not spoken to you for more than one month for no apparent reason, whereas he used to often speak to you.

This is workplace violence. In this situation, you are a victim of psychological violence. Stopping all communication with someone (also called the "silent treatment") may undermine their self-esteem and self-confidence. Contrary to what some people believe, this is not an effective way to deal with a disagreement or conflict.

---

**#16.** You recently joined a large company as a trainee. During the first meeting you attend, a member of the executive addresses you by swearing repeatedly.

Depending on the standards in your workplace, this may or may not be workplace violence. If you work at a company where swearing is commonplace, it's not really considered violence. Nevertheless, this may be a lack of civility. However, if swearing is rare and is intended to upset you, this may be a form of psychological violence.

## QUESTIONNAIRE – IS IT CONSIDERED WORKPLACE VIOLENCE?

**In your opinion, are the situations described in the following scenarios considered workplace violence?**

**#17.** On the weekend, you run into your employee in a mall. He clearly gives you a dirty look.

This is workplace violence. In this situation, you are a victim of psychological violence. By giving you this look, your employee may have an impact on your well-being and self-confidence. Although you are not in your workplace, the relationship you have with that person is associated with the work setting.

---

**#18.** You had a small argument with your boss three weeks ago. Since then, when the schedules come out, you always have four hours less work.

This may be workplace violence. More specifically, you may be a victim of financial abuse. In fact, by reducing the number of hours without good reason, your boss's action could cause you to lose income.

---

**#19.** Your boss tells you on Friday that you have to work on Saturday, whereas you normally only work from Monday to Friday.

This may be workplace violence. You may be a victim of power abuse, since your boss is using his legitimate authority to impose unusual and inappropriate working conditions. Nevertheless, the reasons for this change must be considered. Do special circumstances require your help? Should absences be replaced?

---

**#20.** Your colleague saw on Facebook that you recently participated in a gay pride parade. On several occasions during the following weeks, your colleague makes off-colour jokes about sexual orientation in general, without referring to you.

This may be workplace violence. In this situation, you may be a victim of sexual violence. Although he is not directly referring to you, your colleague may be undermining your sexual integrity by repeatedly and inappropriately referring to and denigrating the sexual orientation of certain groups of individuals.

---

**#21.** Your colleague has had a conflict with your boss ever since his project failed about one year ago. Unable to control his anger in the presence of his boss, he has intentionally avoided him for more than six months.

This may be workplace violence. You may be a witness of psychological violence. Stopping to speak with someone and trying to avoid them may undermine the individual's self-esteem and cause severe stress. Although your colleague is trying to control his anger, he may be doing harm, since this does not resolve the conflict and subjects his boss to the silent treatment.

## QUESTIONNAIRE – IS IT CONSIDERED WORKPLACE VIOLENCE?

**In your opinion, are the situations described in the following scenarios considered workplace violence?**

**#22.** Your manager is known to tell all his employees that they are “numbers,” that they are all replaceable and that they can “leave anytime.”

This is workplace violence. In this situation, you are a witness or victim of psychological violence. With these hurtful comments, your boss may potentially undermine the self-esteem and trust of his employees.

---

**#23.** You and your colleagues did not appreciate the comments that a janitor made about your team. So, just before the beginning of his shift, you are contriving to make the bathroom really dirty.

This is workplace violence. In this situation, you and your colleagues are committing psychological violence against the janitor. By ganging up to sabotage an individual's work plan and making more work, you may have a negative impact on their well-being and performance.

---

**#24.** In the staff room at lunchtime, your colleague comes to see you out of breath. He tells you that in recent months, his boss began to very closely check his work for no reason and asks to validate each document he produces, which he does not do with other employees.

This may be workplace violence. In this situation, you may be a witness of psychological abuse. A manager who excessively and unusually monitors the work may be undermining the employee's self-esteem and creating a climate of insecurity. In addition, in this situation, monitoring is conducted without just cause (e.g. administrative measure following a negative performance evaluation). However, it is important to ensure that no valid reason supports this practice.

---

**#25.** In the emergency room, you see a patient grasping and holding your nurse colleague's arm firmly, angry for having to wait hours to see a doctor.

This is occupational violence. In this situation, you witness physical violence against a nurse who is acting in the line of duty. The patient is attacking the nurse because he is angry with the health care system. Therefore, this is not “workplace” violence.



# Authors

---

**Thomas Aubin**, Ph.D. student in Organizational Psychology

**Marie-Pier Boivin**, Ph.D. student in Organizational Psychology

**Marielle Bourguignon-Cyr**, Ph.D. student in Organizational Psychology

**Philippe Desmarais**, Ph.D. student in Organizational Psychology

**Joanie Dubé**, Ph.D. student in Organizational Psychology

**Félix Guay-Dufour**, Ph.D. student in Organizational Psychology

**Julie Lavoie**, Ph.D. student in Organizational Psychology

**Sarah Leblanc**, Ph.D. student in Organizational Psychology

---