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### **CAS groups call for action now on worker safety recommendations**

(TORONTO, Ont.) A coalition of groups representing managers and employees of Children's Aid Societies (CASs) across Ontario is calling for the speedy implementation of recommendations from a recent safety survey that reveals troubling issues with workers encountering physically and emotionally unsafe circumstances on a regular basis.

Mary Ballantyne, Executive Director of the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) said: "We recognize the importance of moving swiftly to improve both worker safety policies and the consistency of their application. Child welfare workers, like other first responders in the community, provide essential and often very difficult services. They deserve to have close attention paid to their working conditions given their crucial role in protecting vulnerable children."

Over the course of their careers, 27 per cent of CAS workers reported experiencing assault, 45 per cent reported a threat to themselves or their families, 68 per cent reported verbal or written abuse against themselves or their families, and 49 per cent reported experiencing secondary trauma because of violence affecting a co-worker or child. In all, more than 75 per cent of CAS workers report experiencing at least one aspect of violence. Typically, in any given year up to 25 per cent of workers report concerns about their safety.

Warren (Smokey) Thomas, President of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU), which represents about 3,000 CAS workers in the province states: "These numbers confirm the alarm bells our members have been sounding loudly for years. This level of workplace violence would never be tolerated in any other sector of society. Thousands of workers are at risk and Queen's Park needs to act on this now."

The report, which is the first of its kind, was conducted by an outside consulting agency under the direction of a joint labour-management committee convened by the OACAS. It highlights the issues that have affected the ability of child care professionals to do their work.

Conducted this past February, the comprehensive child welfare worker safety survey revealed several disturbing trends faced by CAS workers. They include:

- Most aggression experienced by workers typically occurs inside a client’s home;
- Current CAS reporting systems are inconsistent in recording all incidents of violence, threats or verbal abuse experienced by employees;
- About one-third of violent acts take place when a caseworker is working alone;
- Approximately 12 per cent of workers who experienced violence reported that as a result they were more hesitant in performing their child protection duties;
- Findings revealed differences between how employees perceive violence on the job, and how organizational managers view their handling of the issue.

CUPE Ontario President, Fred Hahn, whose union represents more than 3,000 CAS workers, stressed the urgency of the situation and the need for rapid action. Said Hahn: “Ensuring the safety of families in crisis and children at risk is the reason CAS workers are in this field. But it’s impossible to accomplish this already challenging task when they themselves are at risk. That’s why the provincial government must act forcefully and immediately to prevent violence against CAS workers, who must be allowed to do their jobs without putting themselves at risk of violence.”

The report has 46 recommendations to improve safety in child-protection work. System-wide recommendations include: obtaining commitments to prioritize safety in client protection work; developing guidelines for working alone, and scheduling regular meetings with local law enforcement agencies to discuss safety risks in child protection.

To read the full report, please visit [CAS Workers at Risk](#).

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