

Report on Violence at Work Survey: Observations and Recommendations – May 2024

The following report presents findings from a survey conducted by UNISON Scottish Borders Public Services among its members working in Primary and Secondary Schools within Scottish Borders Council. The survey aimed to assess the prevalence of violence and aggression at work experienced by non-teaching support staff.

In our survey analysis, we delve into the intricate dynamics of work-related violence within educational settings, guided by the Health and Safety Executive's definition and legislative requirements. With a focus on ensuring the safety and wellbeing of staff and pupils, our analysis uncovers critical insights and proposes actionable measures to mitigate risks and foster a secure environment.

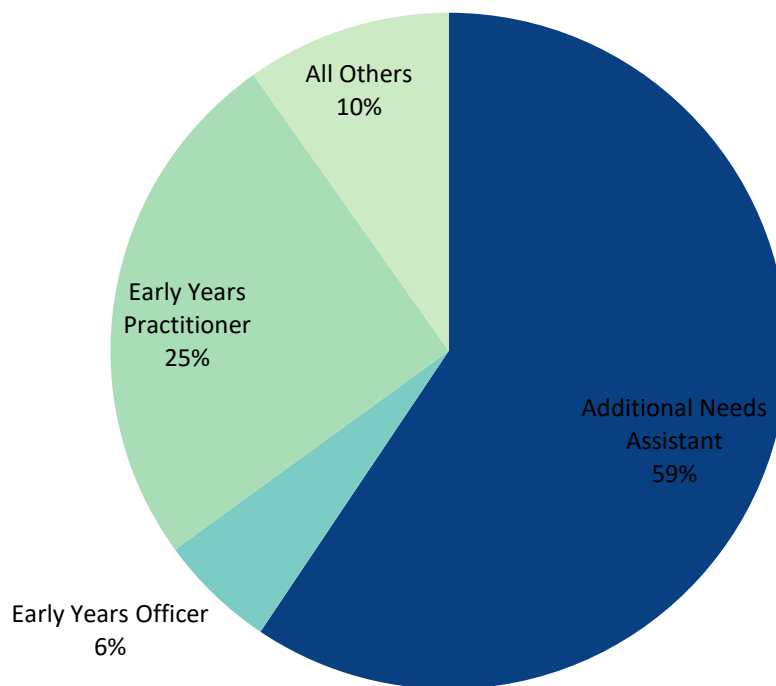
The survey findings shed light on the pressing issue of workplace violence within educational settings. While it's important to note that the survey may not capture the entire school workforce, the data paints a concerning picture, indicating ample room for improved outcomes for staff. These insights call for urgent action and collaborative efforts to cultivate a safer and more supportive work environment for all.

By dissecting key data points, we uncover critical areas needing attention and opportunities for targeted interventions. Through meaningful collaboration between employers, employees, and stakeholders, we can develop effective strategies to tackle workplace violence head-on. Together, we can foster a culture of respect, safety, and wellbeing, ensuring that every staff member feels valued and protected in their workplace.

UNISON Scottish Borders Branch has meticulously analysed the data below, drawing pertinent observations and offering actionable recommendations on behalf of its members. These insights are crucial for understanding the challenges faced by staff in educational settings and formulating strategies to address them effectively. As advocates for the welfare of our members, we aim to drive positive change and create safer, more supportive work environments for all.

1.What is your current job title? (if your job title is not listed, please write in the Other field below).

Additional Needs Assistants (ANAs) emerge as the predominant role, constituting 59.4% of respondents, indicating their vital role in supporting students with diverse needs. Following closely are Early Years Practitioners (EYPs) at 25.2%, with a varied mix of other positions making up the remaining workforce.

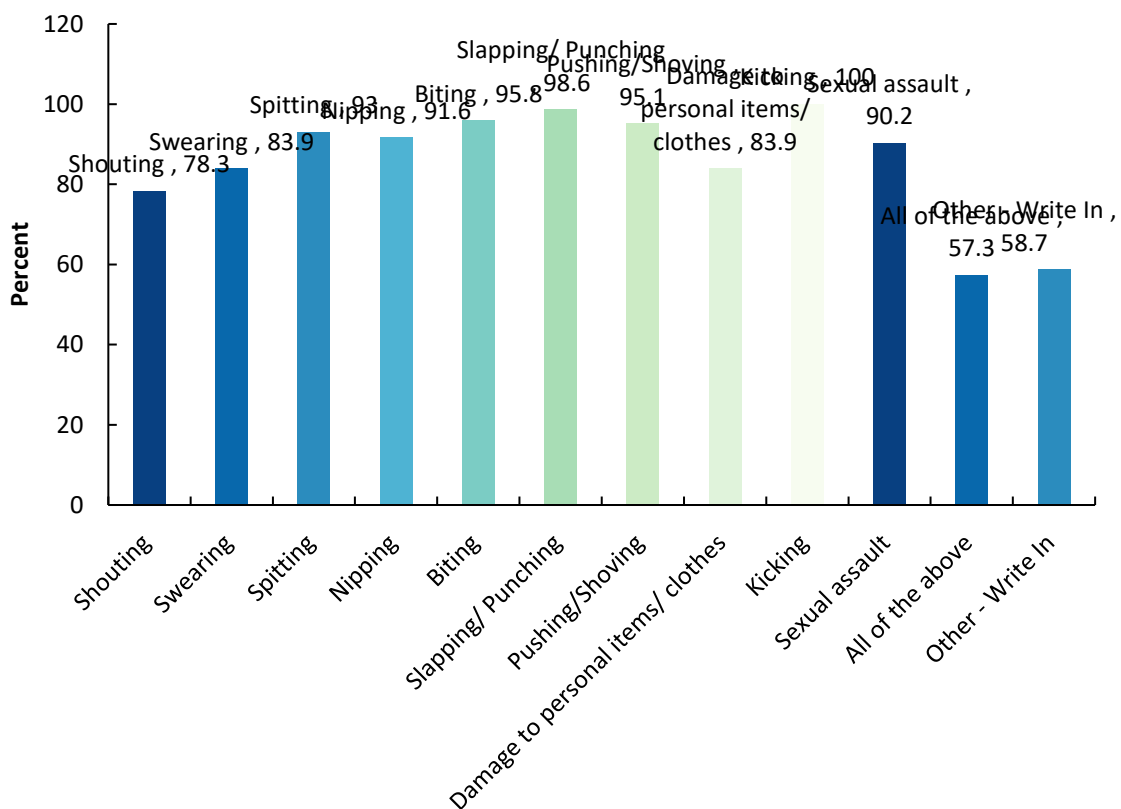


Value	Percent	Count
Additional Needs Assistant	59.4%	85
Admin Assistant	1.4%	2
Business Support Assistant	1.4%	2
Cook	2.8%	4
Cleaner	0.7%	1
Early Years Officer	5.6%	8

Early Years Practitioner	25.2%	36
School Technician	0.7%	1
Other - Write In	2.8%	4
	Totals	143

2. Which of the following do you consider violent behaviour? (tick all that apply)

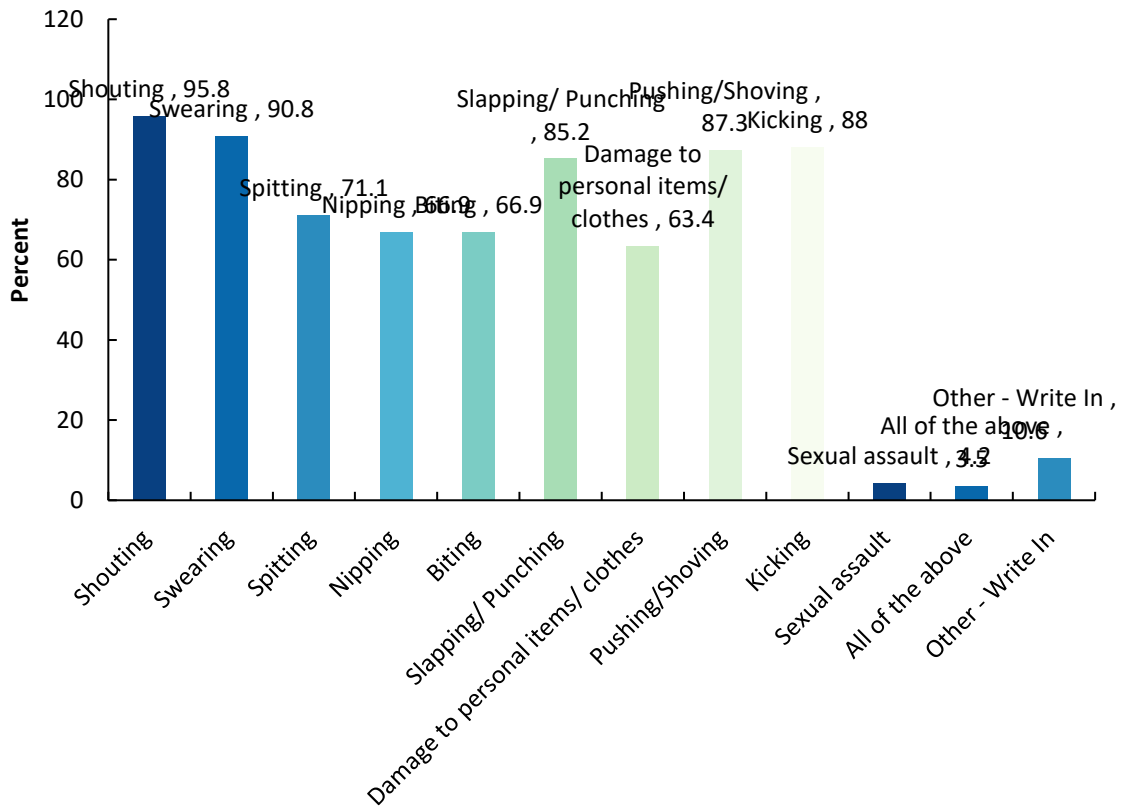
While a significant proportion of respondents perceive incidents like shouting (78.3%) and swearing (83.9%) as common occurrences, the reality is far more alarming. Over 95% report experiencing or witnessing physical violence, ranging from slapping and pushing to more severe acts like kicking and punching, highlighting the pervasive nature of violence in schools.



Value	Percent	Count
Shouting	78.3%	112
Swearing	83.9%	120
Spitting	93.0%	133

Nipping	91.6%	131
Biting	95.8%	137
Slapping/ Punching	98.6%	141
Pushing/Shoving	95.1%	136
Damage to personal items/ clothes	83.9%	120
Kicking	100.0%	143
Sexual assault	90.2%	129
All of the above	57.3%	82
Other - Write In	58.7%	84

3.Which of the following have you experienced/ witnessed at work? (tick all that apply)

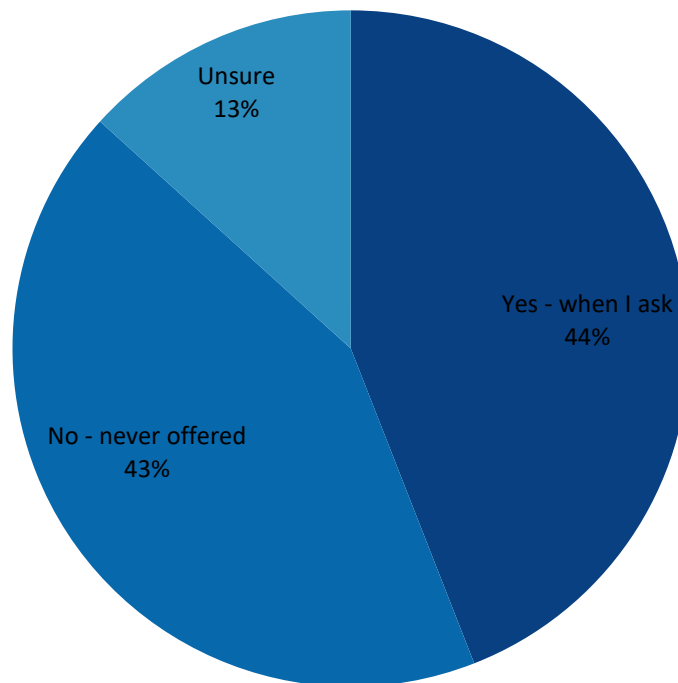


Value	Percent	Count
Shouting	95.8%	136
Swearing	90.8%	129
Spitting	71.1%	101
Nipping	66.9%	95
Biting	66.9%	95
Slapping/ Punching	85.2%	121
Damage to personal items/ clothes	63.4%	90
Pushing/Shoving	87.3%	124

Kicking	88.0%	125
Sexual assault	4.2%	6
All of the above	3.5%	5
Other - Write In	10.6%	15

4. Do you get the chance to review Risk Assessments at your school / setting?

Despite the prevalence of violence, a concerning gap exists in proactive measures. Only 44.1% of respondents review risk assessments regularly, indicating a lack of proactive risk management. Furthermore, 47.2% report incidents, suggesting a significant underreporting phenomenon, potentially fueled by fear of reprisal or a perceived lack of action from authorities.

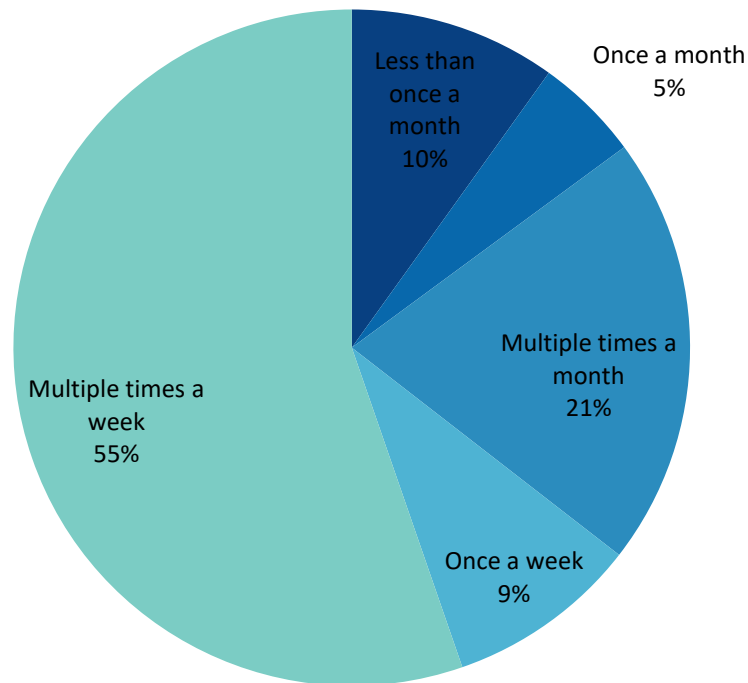


Value	Percent	Count
Yes - when I ask	44.1%	63
No - never offered	42.7%	61
Unsure	13.3%	19
	Totals	143

5.How frequently do you experience/witness violence at work?

The majority (55.3%) report experiencing violence multiple times a week, emphasising the chronic nature of the issue.

Only a small percentage (9.9%) experience violence less than once a month, indicating a persistent challenge in maintaining a safe work environment.

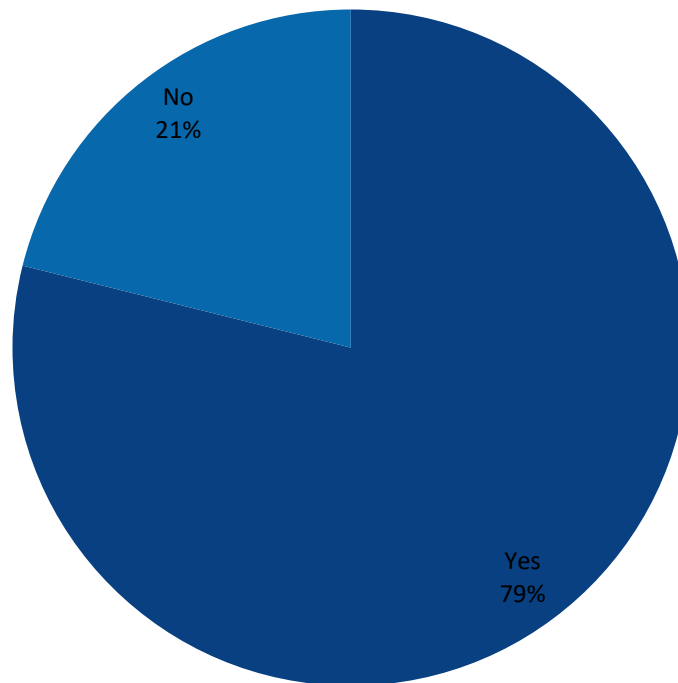


Value	Percent	Count
Less than once a month	9.9%	14
Once a month	5.0%	7
Multiple times a month	20.6%	29
Once a week	9.2%	13
Multiple times a week	55.3%	78
	Totals	141

6. Do you know your employer's process for reporting a violent incident?

A majority (78.9%) are aware of their employer's process for reporting violent incidents, suggesting a basic level of knowledge.

However, a notable minority (21.1%) lack awareness, indicating a need for improved communication and training on reporting procedures.

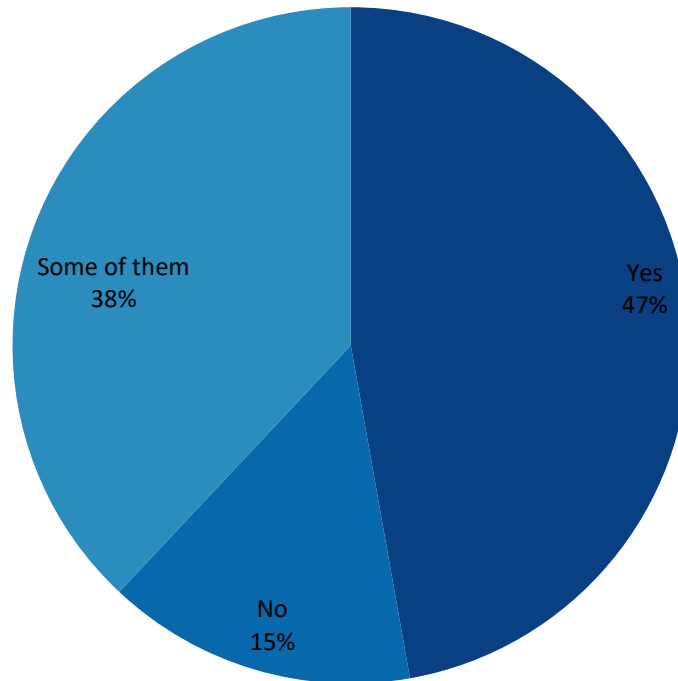


Value	Percent	Count
Yes	78.9%	112
No	21.1%	30
	Totals	142

7. Did you report the incidents you experienced / witnessed?

Less than half (47.2%) of respondents report incidents they experience or witness, indicating potential underreporting.

Fear of reprisal or perceived inaction may contribute to this underreporting phenomenon.

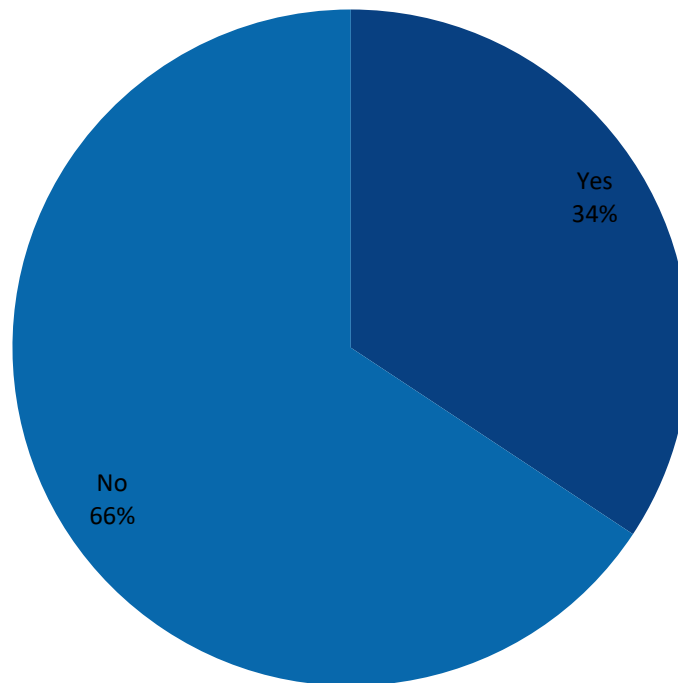


Value	Percent	Count
Yes	47.2%	67
No	14.8%	21
Some of them	38.0%	54
	Totals	142

8. Did the employer give you feedback after reporting the incident?

The majority (65.7%) do not receive feedback from their employer after reporting incidents, suggesting a lack of communication and follow-up.

Feedback is crucial for validating concerns and fostering trust between employees and employers

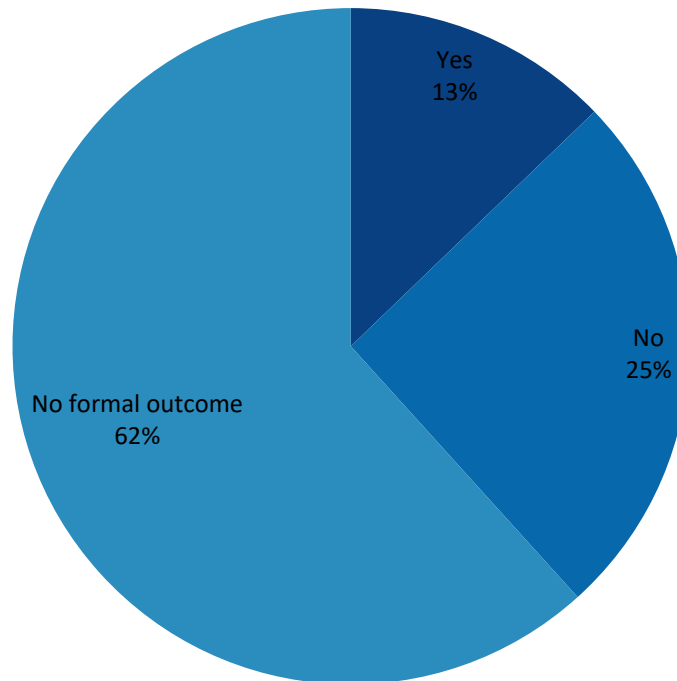


Value	Percent	Count
Yes	34.3%	23
No	65.7%	44
	Totals	67

9. Were you satisfied with the employer outcome after you reported an incident?

A significant portion (61.7%) report no formal outcome after reporting incidents, indicating a potential gap in resolution processes.

Only a small percentage (12.8%) express satisfaction with the employer's outcome, highlighting areas for improvement in addressing employee concerns.

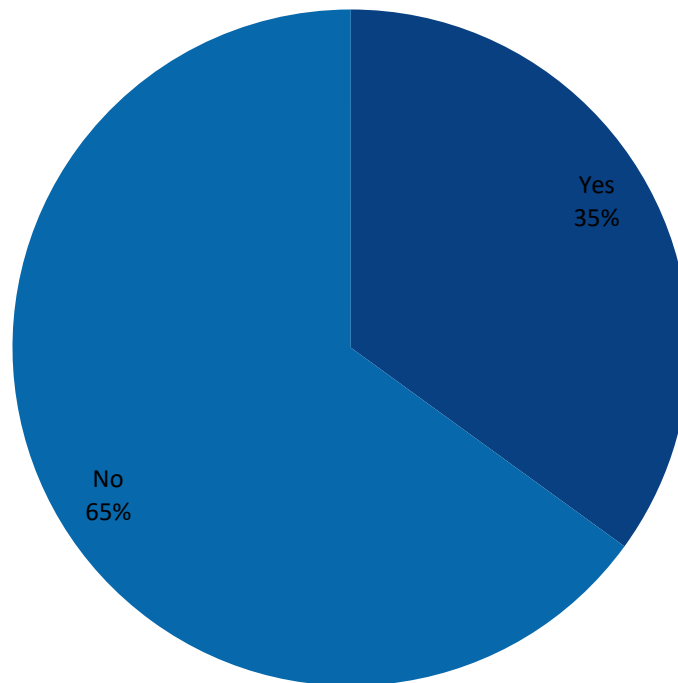


Value	Percent	Count
Yes	12.8%	18
No	25.5%	36
No formal outcome	61.7%	87
	Totals	141

10. Do you feel your employer takes violence at work complaints seriously?

A majority (65.0%) feel that their employer does not take violence at work complaints seriously, signaling a lack of confidence in organizational responses.

Building trust and demonstrating proactive measures are essential to addressing employee perceptions.

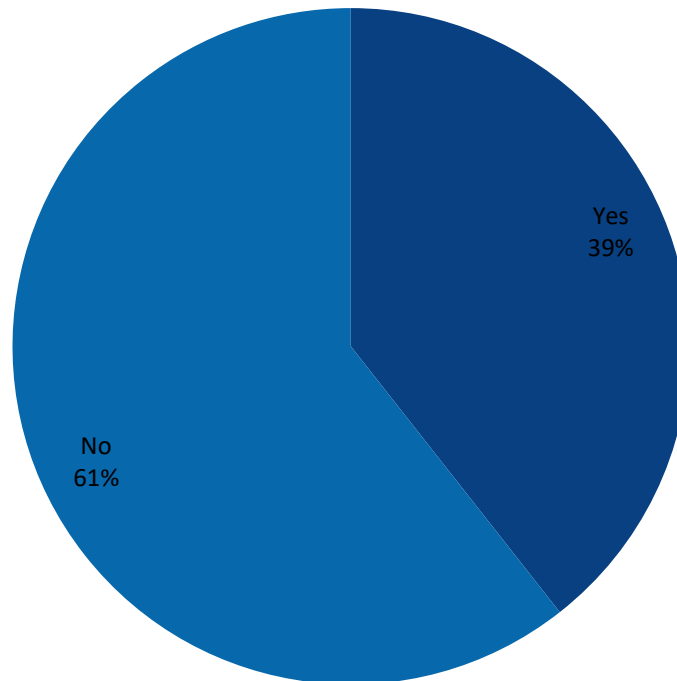


Value	Percent	Count
Yes	35.0%	49
No	65.0%	91
	Totals	140

11. Do you feel teachers are better supported following a complaint of violence / aggressive behaviour?

A significant majority (60.6%) feel that teachers are better supported following complaints of violence/aggressive behaviour, suggesting disparities in support mechanisms.

Ensuring consistent support across all staff members is essential for fostering a cohesive and safe work environment.

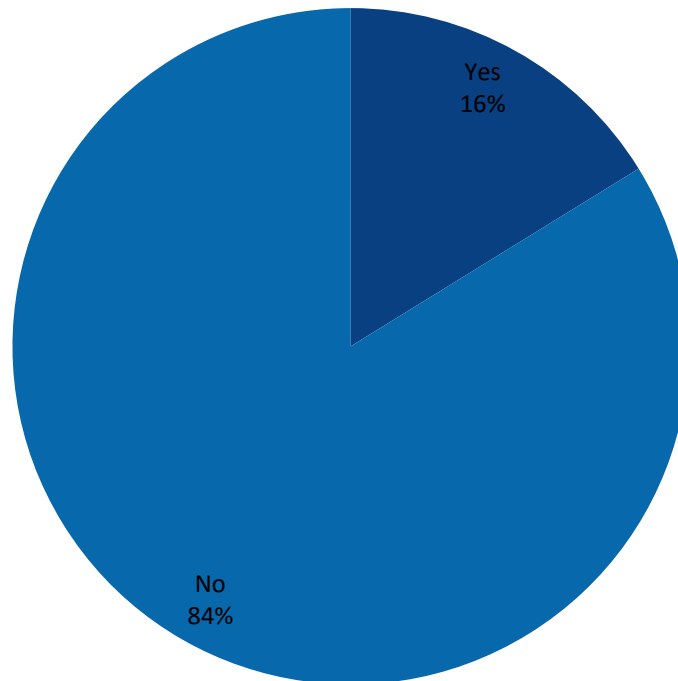


Value	Percent	Count
Yes	39.4%	56
No	60.6%	86
	Totals	142

12. Have you had to take time off work as a result of an incident involving violence & aggression?

A notable minority (16.2%) have taken time off work due to incidents involving violence and aggression, underscoring the significant impact on employee wellbeing.

Addressing the root causes of violence is crucial for minimizing absenteeism and promoting staff health.

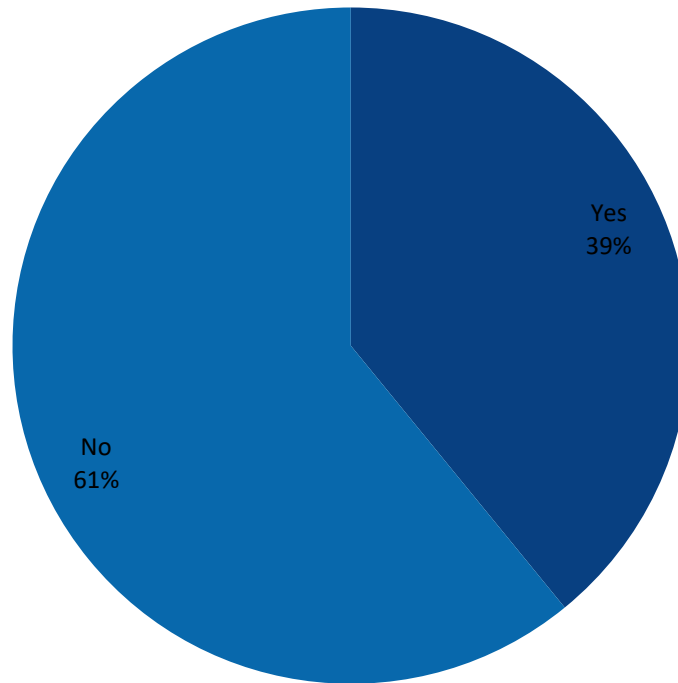


Value	Percent	Count
Yes	16.2%	23
No	83.8%	119
	Totals	142

13. Did you feel safe and supported to return to work after the incident?

Less than half (39.1%) feel safe and supported to return to work after incidents, indicating a lack of confidence in workplace safety measures.

Creating a supportive environment is essential for facilitating employee recovery and preventing further incidents.



Value	Percent	Count
Yes	39.1%	9
No	60.9%	14
	Totals	23

Key Findings and Implications

Definition and Legal Framework:

Work-related violence encompasses a spectrum of behaviours, from verbal abuse to physical assault, as defined by the Health and Safety Executive. The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety Regulations mandate employers to assess and manage risks effectively.

Responsibility for Safety:

As employer and unions both UNISON and the council share a commitment to providing a safe environment, acknowledging the duty to protect staff, pupils, and the public from distressing and challenging behaviors. This underscores the importance of implementing robust systems and procedures to minimise the risk of violence.

Understanding and Mitigating Risks:

The survey highlights the diverse triggers and forms of violence, including distressing behavior, misunderstood communication, and attempts to obtain or avoid tasks. Recognising these nuances is essential for developing tailored training, guidance, and risk assessment frameworks across different sectors within the education estate.

Emotional and Psychological Impact:

Beyond physical harm, work-related violence can inflict emotional distress and anxiety, emphasising the need for supportive policies and interventions to mitigate psychological harm and provide guidance for staff and pupils.

Collaborative Risk Assessment:

Effective risk assessment must involve staff at all levels to ensure the identification and mitigation of foreseeable risks. This collaborative approach fosters a common understanding of behaviors and promotes consistency in reporting and response mechanisms.

Supportive Reporting Culture:

Staff should feel supported and encouraged to report incidents of violence without fear of blame, recognising that investigations serve to learn, prevent future occurrences, and inform training needs. Incident data also offers valuable insights for early intervention and continuous improvement.

Recommendations for Action

Enhanced Training and Guidance:

Develop staff training and guidance materials to equip staff with the skills and knowledge to recognise and report incidents of violence effectively. All employees must be aware of how to report incidents and encouraged to do so.

Feedback Mechanisms:

Improve the feedback mechanism to acknowledge and update employees on the resolution status of reported incidents. Regular communication can enhance transparency and employee confidence.

Strengthened Risk Assessment Practices:

Implement comprehensive risk assessment frameworks, including behavior plans and individual care management plans, to proactively identify and mitigate risks across educational sectors.

Cultivating a Supportive Culture:

Foster a supportive reporting culture where staff feel empowered to report incidents and contribute to ongoing improvement efforts without fear of reprisal. There is a perception that the employer does not take violence at work complaints seriously. Addressing this perception is crucial for fostering a supportive and protective workplace culture.

Cultural Shift:

Initiate campaigns to foster a culture of zero tolerance for workplace violence. CEC leadership should actively communicate the organisation's commitment to addressing and preventing violent incidents.

Continuous Learning and Improvement:

Utilise incident data and management information to inform targeted interventions, identify training needs, and drive continuous improvements in work practices.

Sign up to UNISON's Violence at Work Charter

UNISON's Violence at Work Charter sets forth essential standards that employers must meet to create a safe and supportive work environment. By committing to these standards, employers demonstrate their dedication to protecting staff and fostering a culture of zero tolerance towards violence and aggression at work. Signing up to the charter would not only protect employees but also contribute to the delivery of local services beyond education in a safe and secure manner.

Conclusion

Addressing violence and aggression at work is essential for creating a safe and supportive environment for school staff. By implementing the recommended measures and fostering collaboration between unions and employers, Scottish Borders Council can take proactive steps towards mitigating the impact of violence and promoting staff wellbeing. It is imperative to prioritise the safety and welfare of staff members to ensure a conducive learning environment for students.