

# Association of Teachers and Lecturers

## Press Release



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### **Half of education staff have faced aggression from students in the last year**

Over half (57%) of staff in state schools have faced aggression from a student in the last year, and over a quarter have experienced it from a student's parents or carers, according to a joint survey by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) and ITV regional news.

Almost half (45%) said the aggression from students took the form of physical violence; meanwhile 84% said they had been verbally insulted and 70% said they had been intimidated or threatened.

The most common forms of physical aggression experienced were pushing or shoving, using an object such as furniture to harm them, and being kicked or punched.

Overall, 52% said they feel the behaviour of students has got worse over the past two years. Fifty-one per cent believe that it has got worse over the past five years and 44% felt it has got worse over the past 10 years. Almost 80% believe student behavior has declined because society has become less respectful to people in front-line professional jobs.

Pam Harris, a supply teacher from East Yorkshire, said: "A pupil emptied the contents of a syringe (it turned out to be water) in my face and ran off. The pupil was in school the next day and wasn't even asked to apologise."

A head of department in an academy in London said: "Being sworn at seems to be relatively normal."

Dealing with students' aggression has caused 60% of staff who have experienced it to feel a loss of confidence in their work, over a third (34%) to have mental health issues, such as stress, anxiety or depression, and a third (33%) to refuse to teach the pupil concerned.

Sharon Lee, a primary teacher in an academy in Surrey, said: "In the past two years I have had two children permanently excluded from my class due to violent behaviour towards others. Both cases were linked to mental health issues, and it seems that we are experiencing more children struggling with these than ever before."

The survey also found that 40% of respondents have considered leaving the profession because of the poor behaviour of students.

On a more positive note, of those who have experienced and reported an incident of a student being aggressive towards them, 37% said they were totally happy with the way their school or

college dealt with the matter. And almost half reported that their school or college has risk assessments in place for particular students.

Over a quarter of education staff (27%) stated they have faced aggression from students' parents or carers in the last year. Forty per cent said they think the behaviour of parents or carers has got worse over the last two and five years.

Of those who have experienced aggression from the parents or carers of a student, 80% said it took the form of verbal insults, 60% said it was intimidation, such as threats, and 4% said they had faced physical violence. The most common forms of physical violence reported were pushing or shoving and using an object, such as furniture, to threaten or harm them.

Rebecca Binder, a primary teacher in a school in Surrey, said: "During a parents' evening a parent launched a verbal attack saying that I had made her children's lives a misery. I just had to carry on as if nothing happened. Soon after this I left teaching due to stress and depression, and my confidence was destroyed. I am teaching again now, at a different school, but still remember that awful time and the fact that I had no support."

Sixty-eight per cent of those who faced aggression from a parent or carer felt a loss in confidence working, and over a third (35%) said it had caused them mental health issues, such as stress, anxiety or depression.

A teacher in a primary school in Devon said: "You need to be a 'tough cookie' to deal with abusive parents. I found it a challenge to ask a father to leave because he was swearing at staff in front of nursery children, but the other parents stayed on to make sure I was OK and looked out for me."

A primary teacher in Northern Ireland said: "In the last year I've experienced parents telling lies and spreading untruths and believing their child is incapable of wrongdoing, even when it can be proved their child has been in the wrong. If it hadn't been for my principal standing behind me and supporting me fully I would have seriously questioned whether to return to my job in September."

Dr Mary Bousted, general secretary of ATL, said: "It is shocking that almost 60% of education staff have faced aggression from a student in the last year. No member of staff should be subjected to aggressive behaviour, in any form, while doing their job.

"Sadly, although the vast majority of students are well-behaved and a pleasure to teach, poor behaviour is now a daily reality for most staff. Many students have chaotic home lives that would cause most adults to lose their temper occasionally.

"As well as having to be experts in their own subject, teachers also need to be psychologists and behavioural experts. It's amazing that so much excellent work is done behind the scenes day in, day out, to help students stay on track.

"Schools need to have firm and consistent discipline policies and work with parents to keep schools and colleges safe places for students and staff alike."

ENDS

**Note to editors:**

- ATL surveyed 1,560 education staff in state schools in the UK between 15 July and 4 August 2014.
- The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) is an independent, registered trade union and professional association, representing approximately 170,000 teachers, headteachers, lecturers and support staff in maintained and independent nurseries, schools, sixth form, further and higher education colleges and universities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- ATL exists to help members, as their careers develop, through first rate research, advice, information and legal advice.
- ATL is affiliated to the Trades Union Congress (TUC), Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) and Education International (EI). ATL is not affiliated to any political party and seeks to work constructively with all the main political parties.

**Survey results:**

<b>Have you faced aggression from a student in the:</b>				
<b>If you answered 'No' to this question, please go to next question.</b>				
<b>Answer options</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Last year	56.8% (786)	42.3% (586)	0.9% (12)	1384
Last two years	51.4% (712)	43.3% (599)	5.3% (73)	1384
Last 5 years	43.9% (607)	44.3% (614)	11.8% (163)	1384
Longer than 5 years ago	39.9% (552)	42.3% (590)	17.5% (242)	1384
<b>answered question</b>				<b>1384</b>
<b>skipped question</b>				<b>176</b>
<b>If you answered 'Yes' to the previous question, what form did the aggression take? Please mark all that apply.</b>				
<b>Answer options</b>	<b>Response Per cent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>		
Verbal (insults, derogatory comments)	84.1%	919		
Intimidation (threats, shouting, being sworn at)	70.2%	767		
Intimidation via social media (Facebook etc)	4.3%	47		
Physical violence	44.9%	491		
Other (please specify)	4.5%	49		
<b>answered question</b>				<b>1093</b>
<b>skipped question</b>				<b>467</b>
<b>If you have experienced physical violence from a student, what form did it take? Please tick all that apply.</b>				
<b>Answer options</b>	<b>Response Per cent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>		
Pushing/shoving	67.6%	395		
Use of fists (punching)	30.0%	175		
Scratching	21.7%	127		
Spitting	26.7%	156		
Biting	19.0%	111		
Use of legs (kicking)	51.4%	300		
Use of an object (such as furniture)	46.6%	272		
Use of a weapon (such as a knife)	4.5%	26		
Other (please specify)	9.6%	56		
<b>answered question</b>				<b>584</b>

*skipped question*

976

**Has dealing with a students' aggression caused you any of the following? Please mark all that apply.**

<b>Answer options</b>	<b>Response Per cent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Taking leave from work	10.8%	65
Visit to the doctor	15.3%	92
Seek emergency medical attention	6.3%	38
Mental health problems (i.e. stress, anxiety, depression)	34.1%	205
Loss of confidence working in school/college	59.6%	359
Refusing to teach a pupil	33.1%	199
Other (please specify)	13.3%	80

*answered question*

602

*skipped question*

958

**Did you report any incident(s) of aggression from students to your school/college?**

<b>Answer options</b>	<b>Response Per cent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Yes	95.8%	1031
No	4.2%	45

*answered question*

1076

*skipped question*

484

**Were you happy with the way your school/college dealt with the incident(s) you reported?**

<b>Answer options</b>	<b>Response Per cent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Yes - totally	37.0%	399
Yes - partially	43.0%	464
No	19.9%	215

*answered question*

1078

*skipped question*

482

**Does your school/college have risk assessments in place for particular students?**

<b>Answer options</b>	<b>Response Per cent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Yes	46.0%	636
No	15.8%	218
Don't know	38.3%	530

*answered question*

1384

*skipped question*

176

**Do you think the behaviour of students has changed over:**

<b>Answer options</b>	<b>Better</b>	<b>The same</b>	<b>Worse</b>	<b>Don't know</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Past two years	6.5% (90)	35% (484)	52.1% (724)	6.2% (86)	1384
Past five years	4.7% (65)	30.6% (423)	50.9% (705)	13.8% (191)	1384
Past ten years	5.4% (75)	26.2% (363)	44.2% (612)	24.1% (334)	1384

*answered question*

1384

*skipped question*

176

**If you believe the behaviour of students has changed, why do you think this may be? Please mark all that apply.**

Answer options	Response Per cent	Response Count
Lack of clear behaviour policy in school/college	32.9%	360
Cut in local family support services	17.6%	193
Insufficient SEN support in LA	21.1%	231
Insufficient SEN support in school/college	21.3%	233
Clear behaviour policy in school/college	12.5%	137
Strong SENCO/behaviour support team	8.8%	96
LA support for the school/college	3.6%	39
Teacher bashing in the media	36.4%	398
Violence in the media	37.0%	405
Teacher bashing by Michael Gove and / or Sir Michael Wilshaw	26.9%	294
Society becoming less respectful to people in (front-line) professional jobs	79.0%	864
Exam results becoming more important/more pressure to get good exam results	26.8%	293
Parents/carers under the influence of alcohol or drugs	35.0%	383
Parents/carers with mental health issues	37.2%	407
Family breakdowns	64.4%	704
Parents/carers struggling to make ends meet/feeling under financial pressure	35.9%	393
Parents/carers being out of work	28.4%	311
Parents/carers being homeless	8.7%	95
Other (please specify)		169
<b>answered question</b>		<b>1094</b>
<b>skipped question</b>		<b>466</b>

**Have you ever considered changing profession because of the poor behaviour by ...?**

Answer options	Yes	No	Don't know	Response Count
Students	40.2% (556)	58.3% (807)	1.5% (21)	1384
Students' parents/carers	19.8% (275)	77.6% (1074)	2.5% (35)	1384
<b>answered question</b>				<b>1384</b>
<b>skipped question</b>				<b>176</b>

**Have you faced aggression from the parent/carer of a student in the: If you answered 'No' to this question, please go to next question.**

Answer options	Yes	No	N/A	Response Count
Last year	26.8% (418)	71.4% (1114)	1.8% (28)	1560
Last two years	24.8% (387)	67.9% (1060)	7.2% (113)	1560
Last 5 years	25.4% (397)	62.8% (979)	11.8% (184)	1560
Longer than 5 years ago	24.7% (385)	60.4% (942)	14.9% (233)	1560
<b>answered question</b>				<b>1560</b>
<b>skipped question</b>				<b>0</b>

**If you answered 'Yes' to the previous question, what form did the aggression take? Please mark all that apply.**

Answer options	Response Per cent	Response Count
Verbal (insults, derogatory comments)	80.0%	637
Intimidation (threats, shouting, being sworn)	59.8%	476

at)		
Intimidation via social media (Facebook etc)	6.3%	50
Physical violence	4.1%	33
Other (please specify)	5.0%	40
<b>answered question</b>		<b>796</b>
<b>skipped question</b>		<b>764</b>

**If you have experienced physical violence from a parent/carer, what form did it take? Please tick all that apply.**

Answer options	Response Per cent	Response Count
Pushing/shoving	43.8%	28
Use of fists (punching)	7.8%	5
Scratching	3.1%	2
Spitting	9.4%	6
Biting	3.1%	2
Use of legs (kicking)	6.3%	4
Use of an object (such as furniture)	20.3%	13
Use of a weapon (such as a knife)	3.1%	2
Other (please specify)	39.1%	25
<b>answered question</b>		<b>64</b>
<b>skipped question</b>		<b>1496</b>

**Has dealing with a student's aggressive parent/carer caused you any of the following? Please mark all that apply.**

Answer options	Response Per cent	Response Count
Taking leave from work	7.8%	30
Visit to the doctor	8.8%	34
Seek emergency medical attention	1.3%	5
Mental health problems (i.e. stress, anxiety, depression)	35.3%	136
Loss of confidence working in school/college	68.3%	263
Refusing to teach a pupil	16.9%	65
Other (please specify)	16.4%	63
<b>answered question</b>		<b>385</b>
<b>skipped question</b>		<b>1175</b>

**Did you report any incident(s) of aggression from students' parents/carers to your school/college?**

Answer options	Response Per cent	Response Count
Yes	87.2%	697
No	12.8%	102
<b>answered question</b>		<b>799</b>
<b>skipped question</b>		<b>761</b>

**Were you happy with the way your school/college dealt with the incident(s) you reported?**

Answer options	Response Per cent	Response Count
Yes - totally	43.1%	311
Yes - partially	37.4%	270
No	19.5%	141
<b>answered question</b>		<b>722</b>
<b>skipped question</b>		<b>838</b>

**Does your school/college have risk assessments in place for particular parents/carers?**

Answer options	Response Per cent	Response Count
Yes	20.4%	319
No	22.4%	349
Don't know	57.2%	892
<b>answered question</b>		<b>1560</b>
<b>skipped question</b>		<b>0</b>

**Do you think the behaviour of students' parents/carers has changed over:**

Answer options	Better	The same	Worse	Don't know	Response Count
Past two years	63	642	616	239	1560
Past five years	50	561	629	320	1560
Past ten years	65	406	622	467	1560
<b>answered question</b>					<b>1560</b>
<b>skipped question</b>					<b>0</b>

**If you believe the behaviour of students' parents/carers has changed, why do you think this may be? Please mark all that apply.**

Answer options	Response Per cent	Response Count
Lack of clear behaviour policy in school/college	18.3%	195
Cut in local family support services	17.2%	183
Insufficient SEN support in LA	11.9%	127
Insufficient SEN support in school/college	9.9%	106
Clear behaviour policy in school/college	8.2%	87
Strong SENCO/behaviour support team	6.4%	68
LA support for the school/college	3.0%	32
Teacher bashing in the media	56.2%	599
Violence in the media	21.7%	231
Teacher bashing by Michael Gove and / or Sir Michael Wilshaw	49.2%	524
Society becoming less respectful to people in (front-line) professional jobs	88.7%	946
Exam results becoming more important/more pressure to get good exam results	31.7%	338
Parents/carers under the influence of alcohol or drugs	38.6%	412
Parents/carers with mental health issues	42.4%	452
Family breakdowns	55.9%	596
Parents/carers struggling to make ends meet/feeling under financial pressure	38.6%	411
Parents/carers being out of work	28.9%	308
Parents/carers being homeless	7.0%	75
Other (please specify) and please give any further comments		111
<b>answered question</b>		<b>1066</b>
<b>skipped question</b>		<b>494</b>