

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Report Highlights Social Worker Challenges Within Canada's Troubled Child Welfare System

KJIPUKTUK (HALIFAX, NS) – Statistics released today in a report by the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW), a federal partner of the Nova Scotia College of Social Workers (NSCSW), paint a troubling picture of Canada's child welfare system.

This major research report on social workers in child welfare positions across Canada is titled ***Understanding Social Work and Child Welfare: Canadian Survey and Interviews with Child Welfare Experts***.

The concerning statistics include:

- 44% of social workers have experienced threats or violence on the job;
- 75% have unmanageable workloads as a critical issue in their practice;
- 45% of social workers who left the field did so due to stress and/or vicarious trauma;
- 72% say administrative responsibilities prevent them from spending adequate time with clients.

Alec Stratford, the NSCSW Executive Director/Registrar, said that Nova Scotia child protection social workers feel the same impacts.

"The safety of children and families in Nova Scotia remains compromised by a lack of adequate system resources to accommodate the demands," he explained.

The CASW report reflects how demanding caseloads, the complexity of issues faced by families and an unsupportive work environment lead to vicarious trauma, greater burnout and turnover.

These are all issues facing Nova Scotia social workers.

"The outcome is a reactive crisis driven system rather than a system that provides support to families and works to keep children in their homes before a family is in crisis," said Stratford.

Debbie Reimer, CASW Board Member and Executive Director of Kentville area Kids Action Program, said the child welfare system is particularly challenged in rural Nova Scotia where it can take families weeks to track down their social workers because of high turnover and vicarious trauma.

"I'm working with one family where the client talked to 8 different social workers over a period of 62 days in regards to her child," noted Reimer.

The NSCSW addressed these critical concerns with both the leadership and the Minister of the Department of Community Services (DCS).

“I remain hopeful that the DCS leadership will change their current trajectory and adopt an empathetic view of the current situation within our child protection system,” said Stratford.

“Our current system is creating trauma for vulnerable children, families and social workers. We need to see change now,” added Reimer.

The report does highlight how child protection can be an incredibly rewarding career as social workers reported satisfaction with the opportunities to practice the essence of social work such as building relationships and helping clients along their journey to change.

Both social workers and vulnerable families need the tools and resources to work together in solidarity to overcome tremendously challenging situations.

Social workers need mentorship, training opportunities and manageable caseload - not rigid bureaucratic processes focused on bottom lines.

Read the full report on the CASW website at <https://www.casw-acts.ca/en/social-work-and-child-welfare-new-report>

Nova Scotians can subscribe to receive updates related to Nova Scotia’s child welfare system at <http://nscsw.org/2706-2/>.

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The Nova Scotia College of Social Workers (NSCSW) serves and protects Nova Scotians by effectively regulating the profession of social work. We work in solidarity with Nova Scotians to advocate for policies that improve social conditions, challenge injustice and value diversity.

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