

# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

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Domestic Violence & the Workplace: Risk Assessment and Risk Management Strategies

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# OUTLINE

Two parts:

- First: Presenting data from CSST – Quebec
- Second: Presenting qualitative data from the Health and Social Services Sector

The Invisibles of Health Report

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## THE EXCEPTION AND THE RULE

We particularly ask you  
When a thing continually occurs  
Not on that account to find it natural  
Let nothing be called natural  
In an age of bloody confusion  
Ordered disorder, planned caprice,  
And dehumanized humanity, lest all things  
Be held unalterable

Bertolt Brecht

# GENDER DIVISION OF LABOUR

- Gender division of labour is a central feature of gender inequality, wherein men are more likely to work in the public sphere, while women are relegated to the private, domestic sphere.
- This gender division is organized according to two principles:
  1. there is men's work, and there is women's work (the principle of separation);
  2. men's work is "worth" more than women's work (the hierarchical principle) (Kergoat, 2000)

# TOP 10 TRADITIONALLY FEMALE PROFESSIONS IN QUEBEC (2006)

Professions	Active female population (N)	Percentage by sex (%)
Secretary*	99 100	98,0
Salesperson	96 015	56,7
Cashier	70 425	86,1
Child Educator	57 340	95,9
Office Clerk	55 740	87,2
Nurse	54 945	91,0
Primary School Educator	46 130	87,1
Accounting Clerk	45 250	84,8
Waitress	41 600	76,4
Nursing Aid and Orderly	41 240	81,3

Note : \* Except Legal and Medical Sectors

Source : Institut de la statistique du Québec

# VIOLENCE

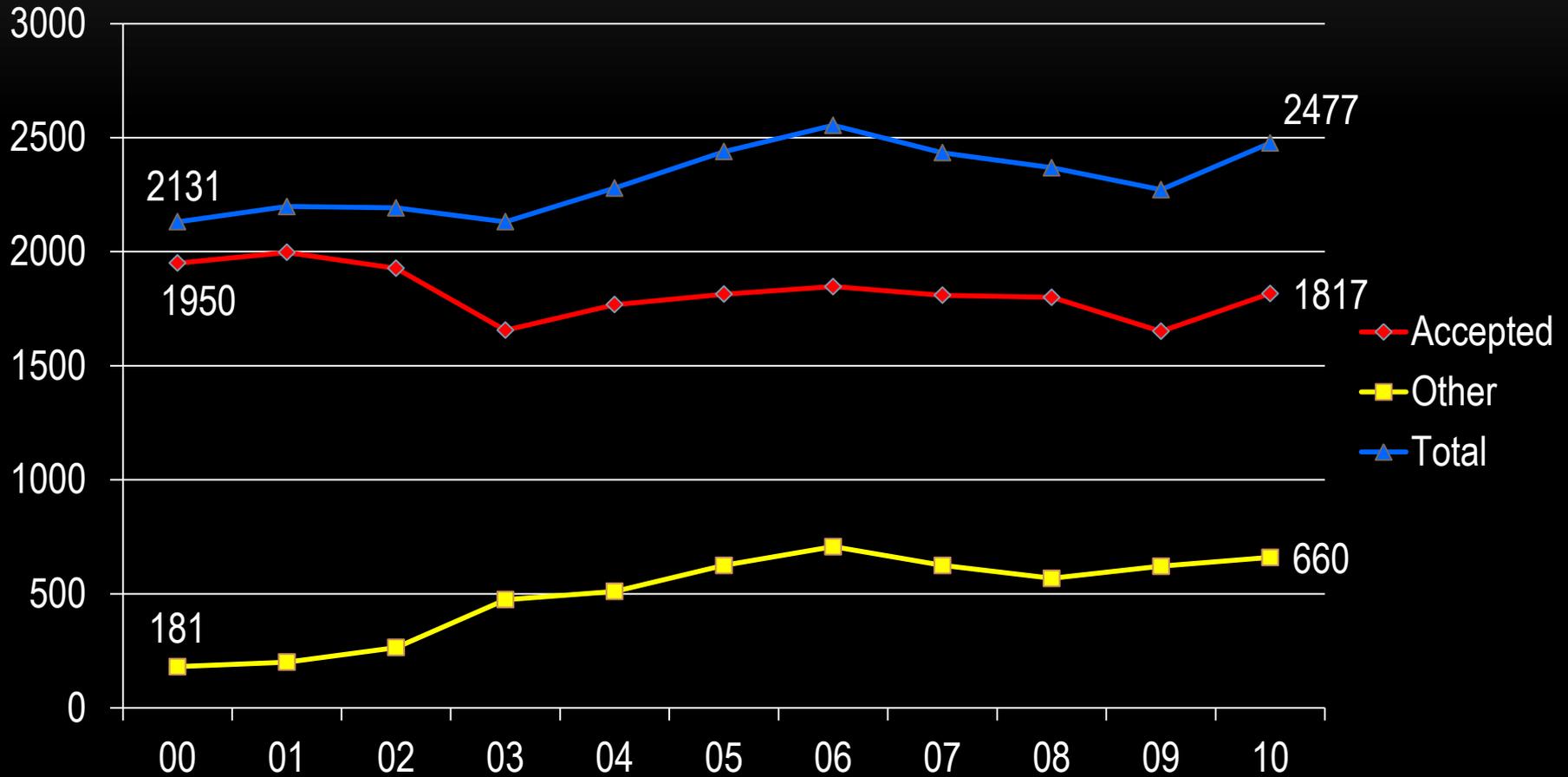
- Violence is not something simple, as Roland Barthes makes clear. Comprising different facets, it is often understood as the infliction of physical harm upon the human body through the application of force, and is evidenced in visible and quantifiable traces upon the body: injuries, bruises, dislocations. But violence is as difficult to define as it is easy to identify.

# VIOLENCE

- It is not always visible, as is the case in psychological violence, where bruises are “on the soul”. Emotional abuse is more subjective, and forcing the individual to act against his or her will constitutes a violation of their psychological integrity and human dignity. Furthermore, psychological violence is concurrently present all instances of physical violence, for any attack on the body affects the subjective self and social identity.
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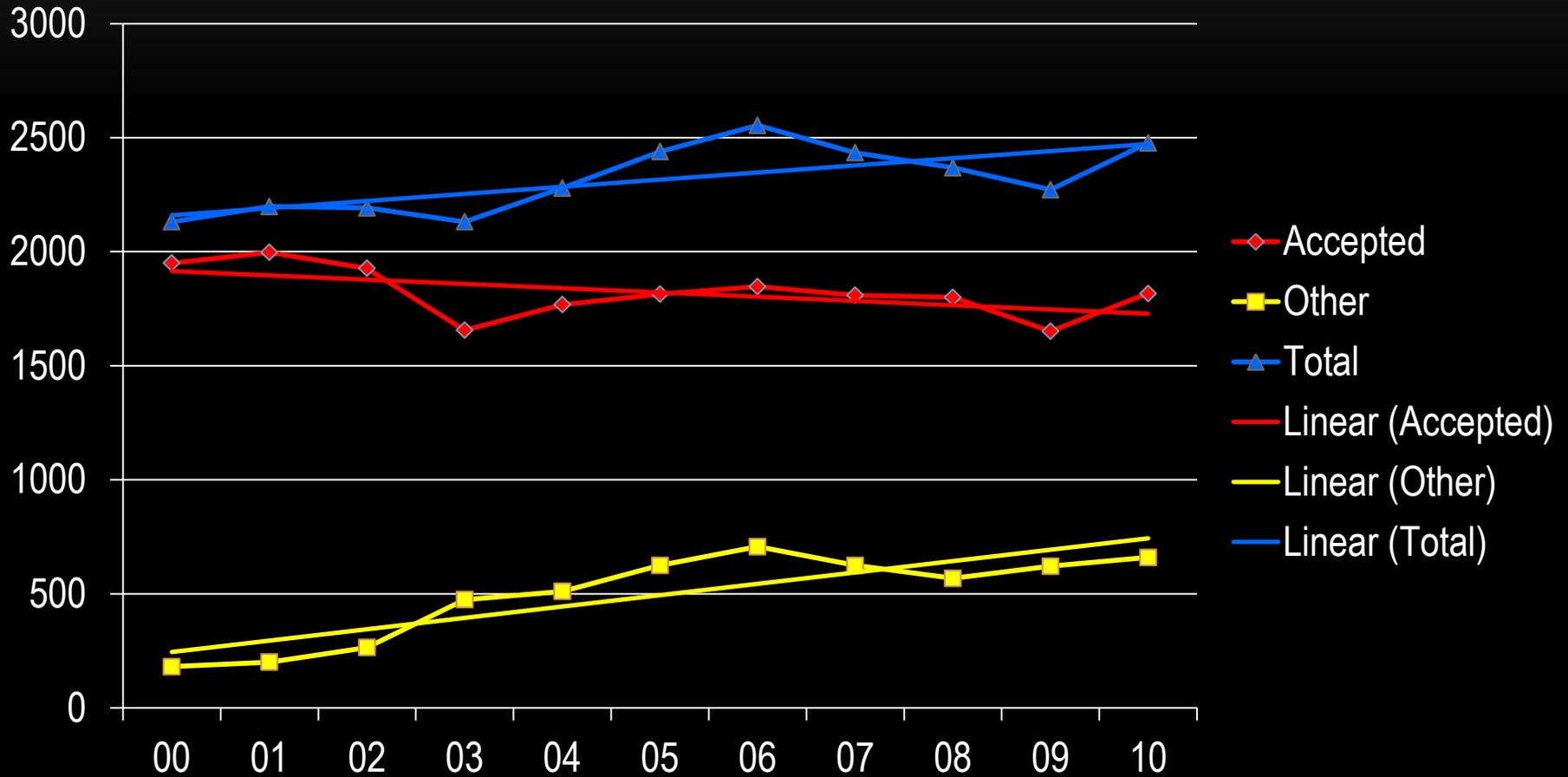
**WHAT DO OFFICIAL STATISTICS SAY ABOUT  
WORKPLACE VIOLENCE IN QUEBEC?**

# NUMBER OF INJURIES DUE TO WORKPLACE VIOLENCE - QUEBEC



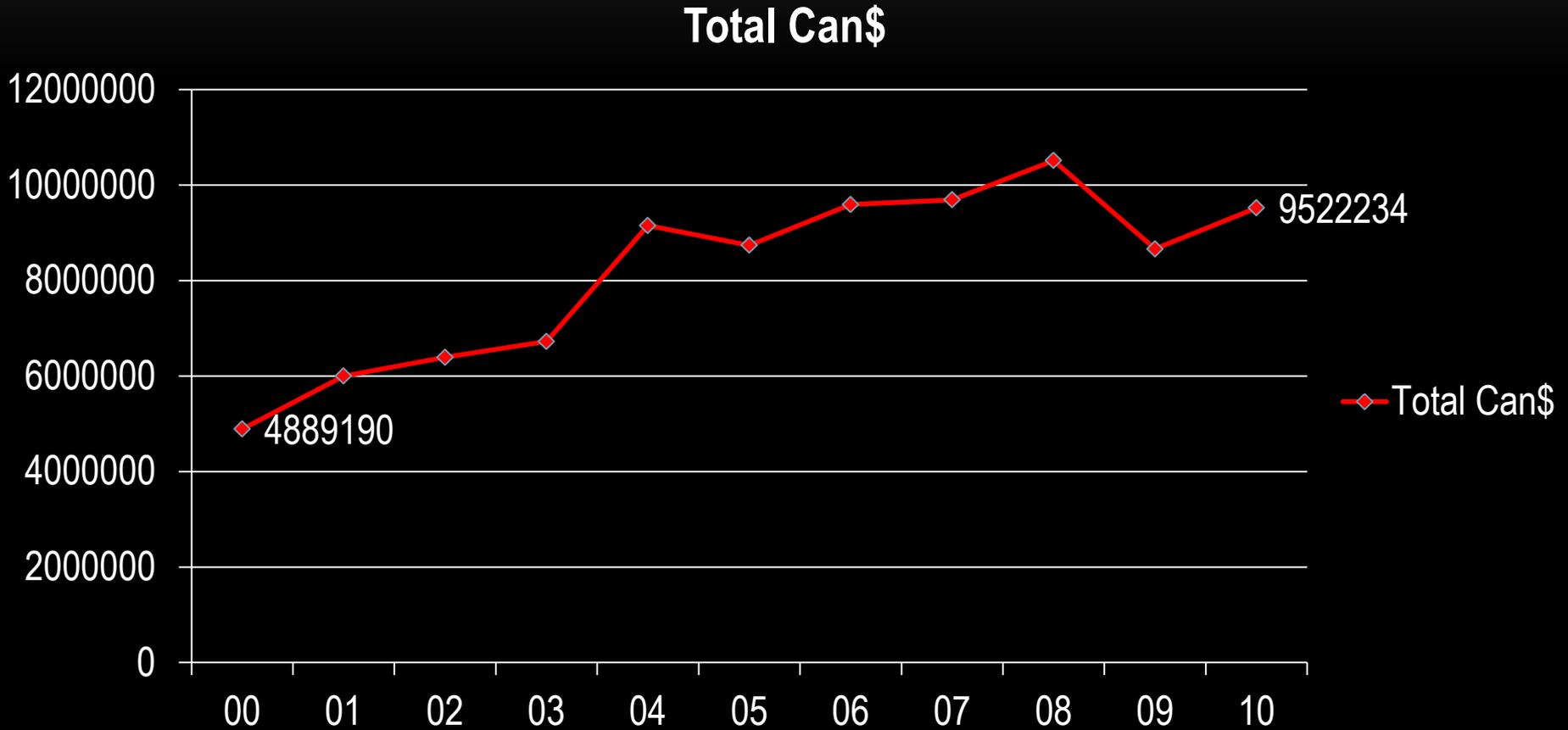
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# NUMBER OF INJURIES DUE TO WORKPLACE VIOLENCE - QUEBEC



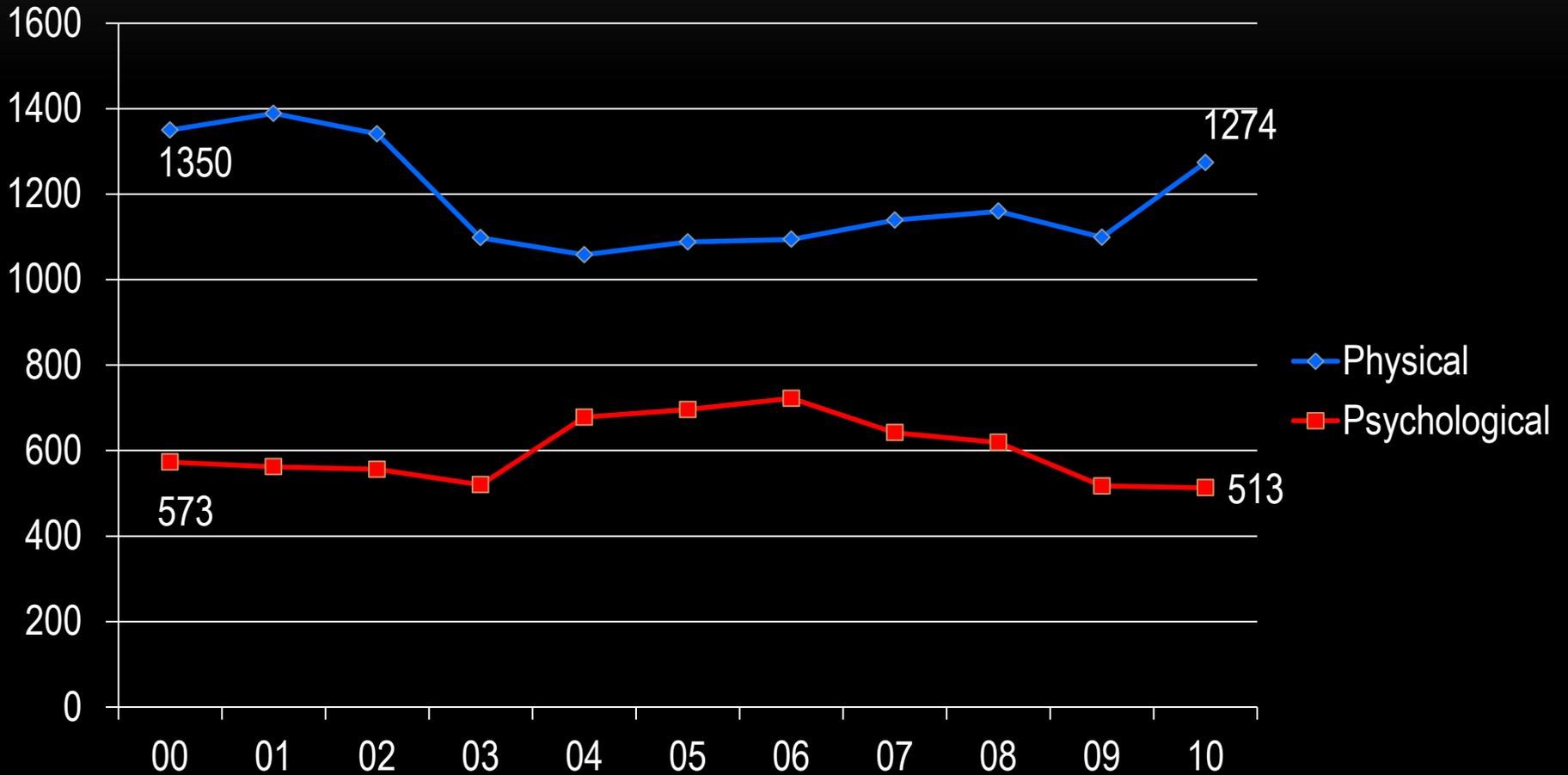
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# TOTAL PAY-OUT FOR INJURIES DUE TO VIOLENCE AT WORK - QUEBEC



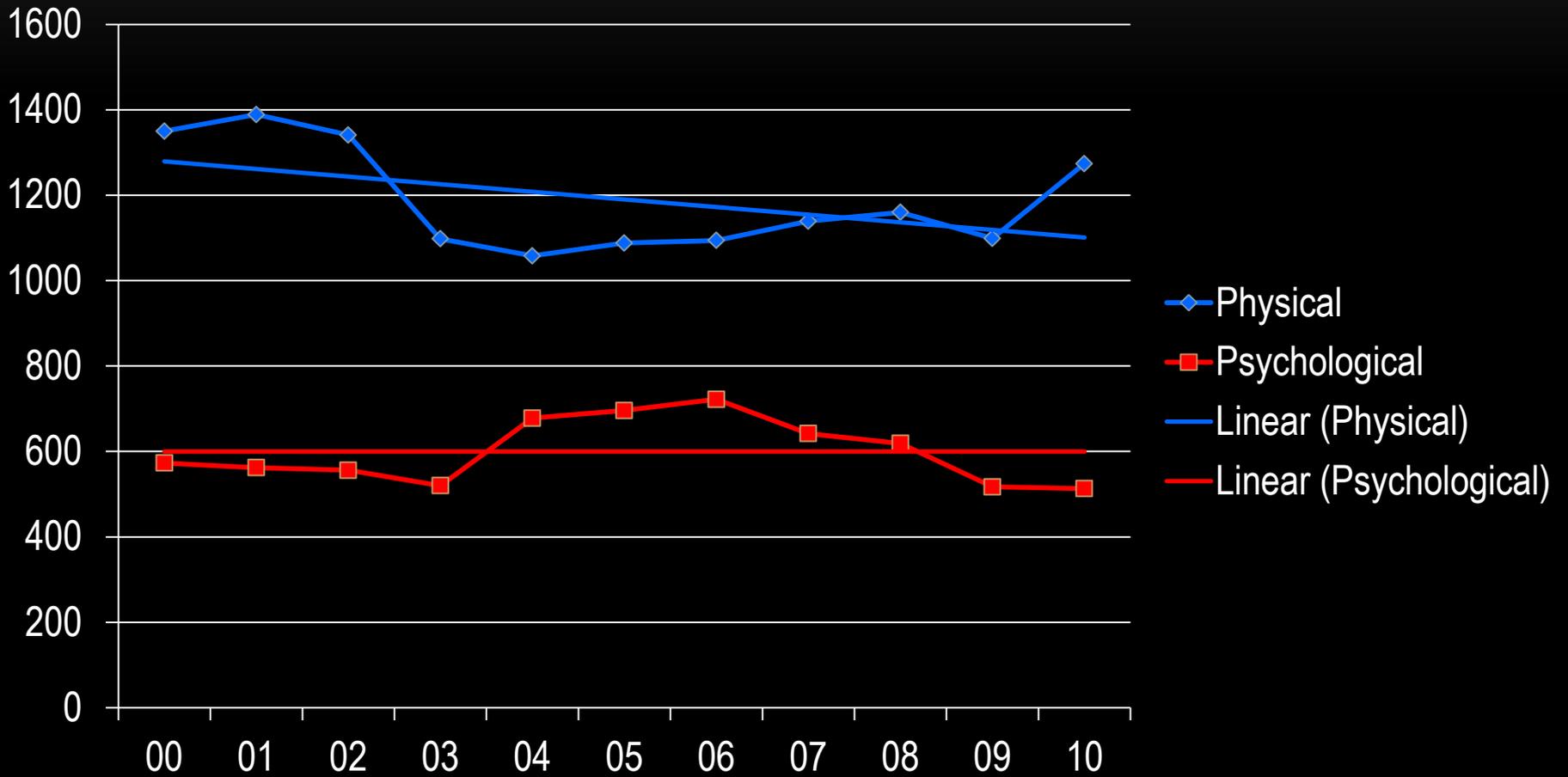
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# NUMBER OF INJURIES DUE TO WORKPLACE VIOLENCE (PHYSIQUE X PSYCHOLOGICAL) IN QUEBEC



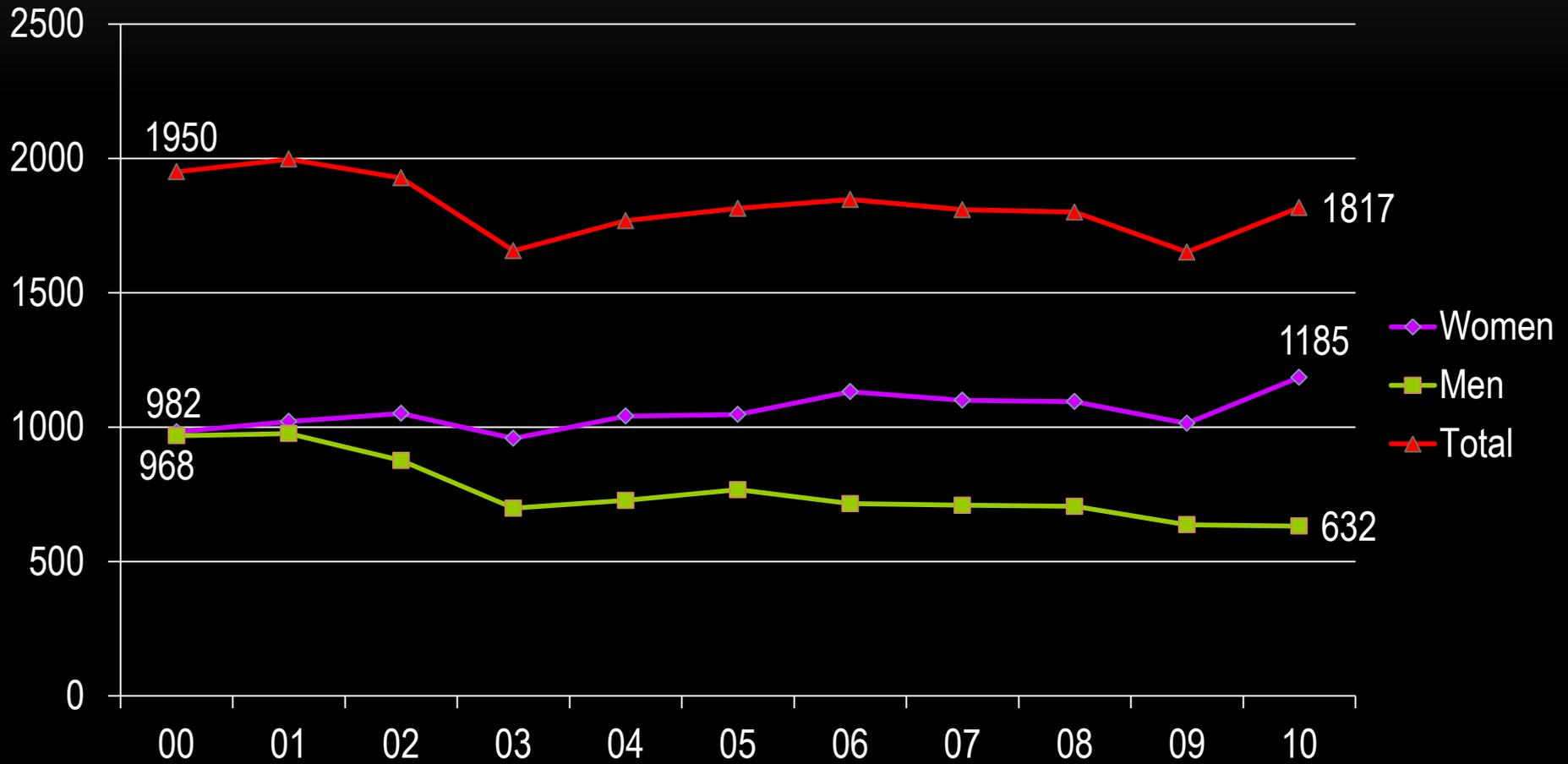
Source: CSST

# NUMBER OF INJURIES DUE TO WORKPLACE VIOLENCE (PHYSIQUE X PSYCHOLOGICAL) IN QUEBEC



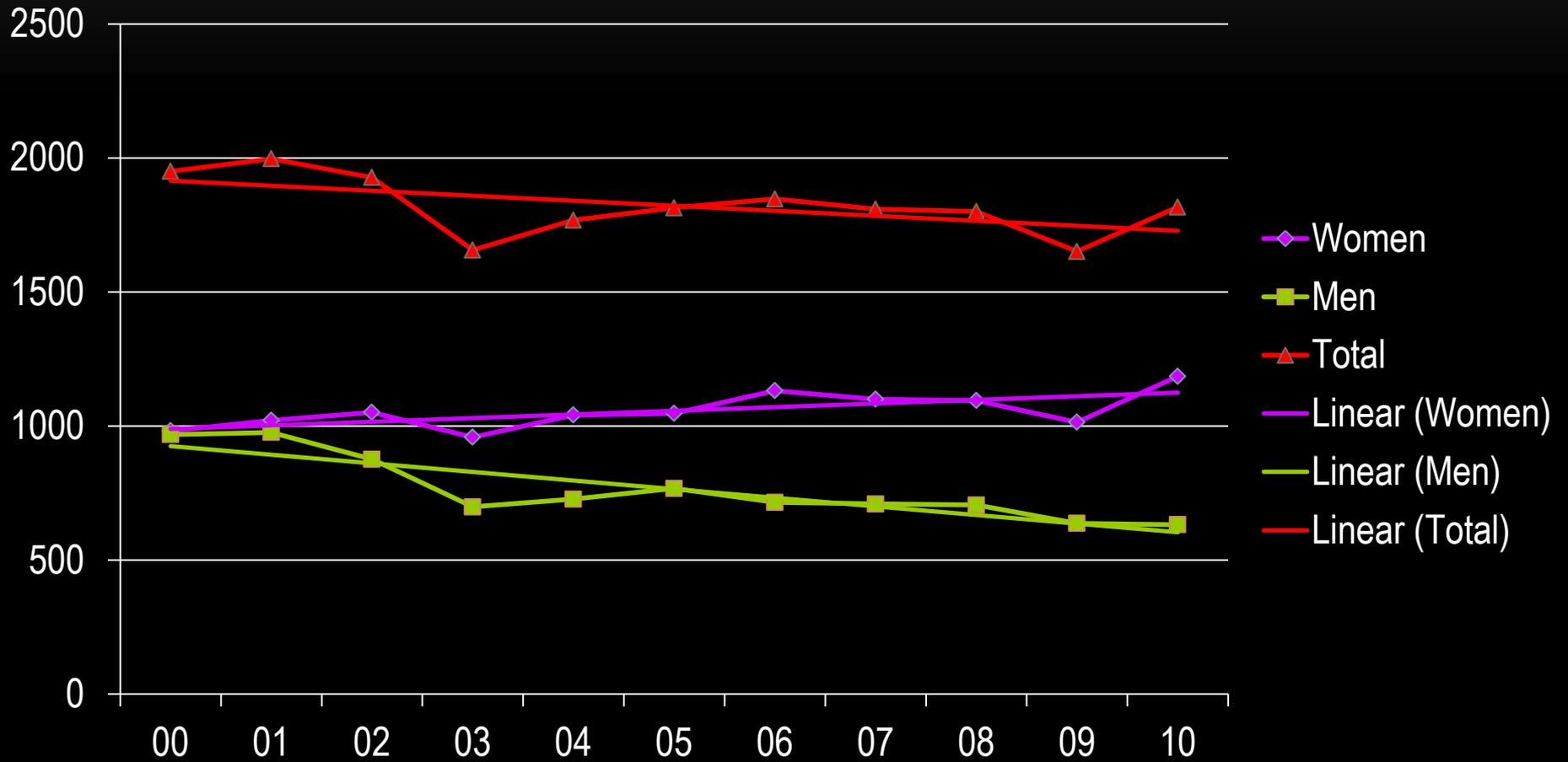
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# NUMBER OF WORKPLACE INJURIES DUE TO VIOLENCE BY GENDER



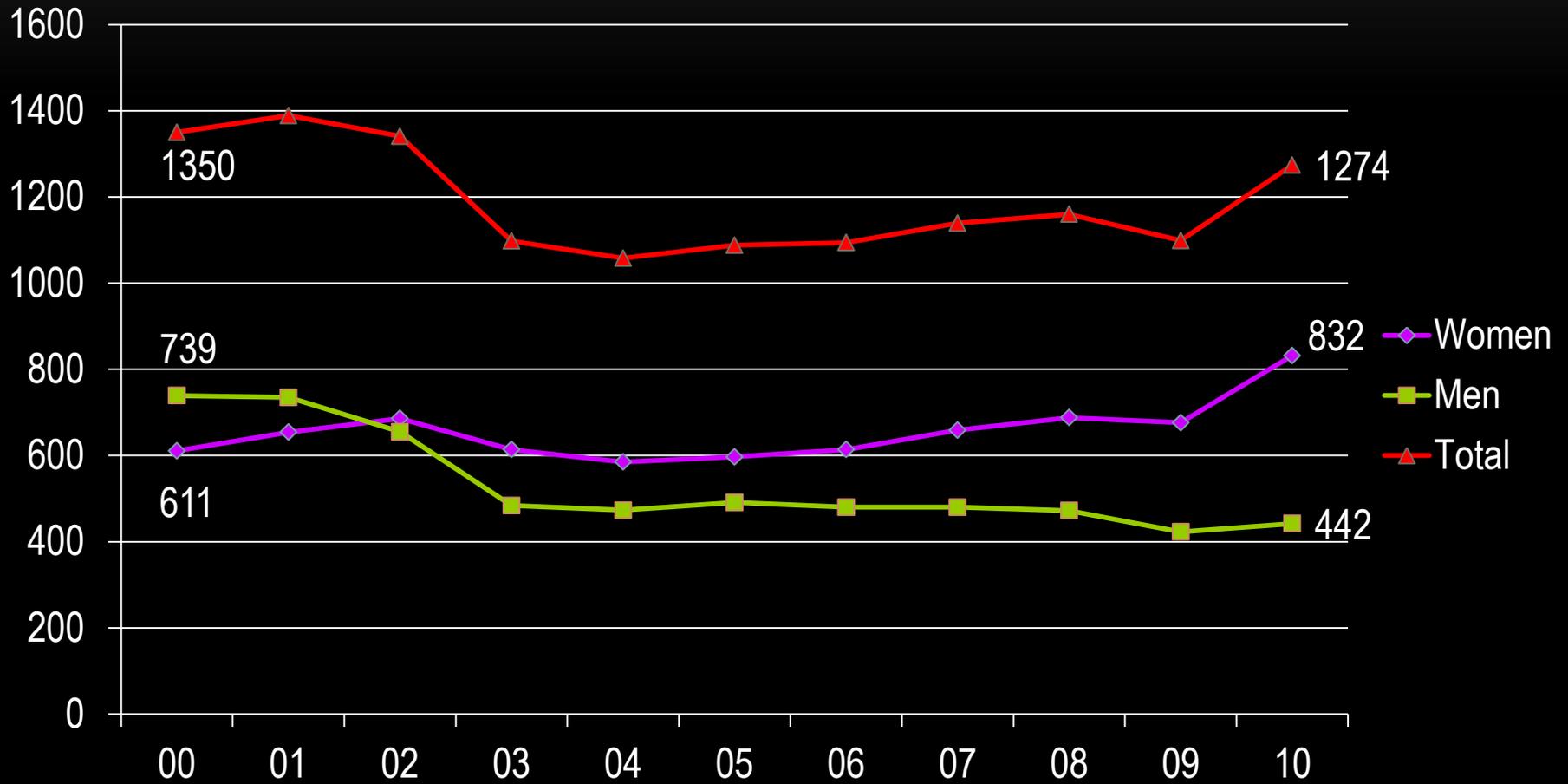
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# NUMBER OF WORKPLACE INJURIES DUE TO VIOLENCE BY GENDER



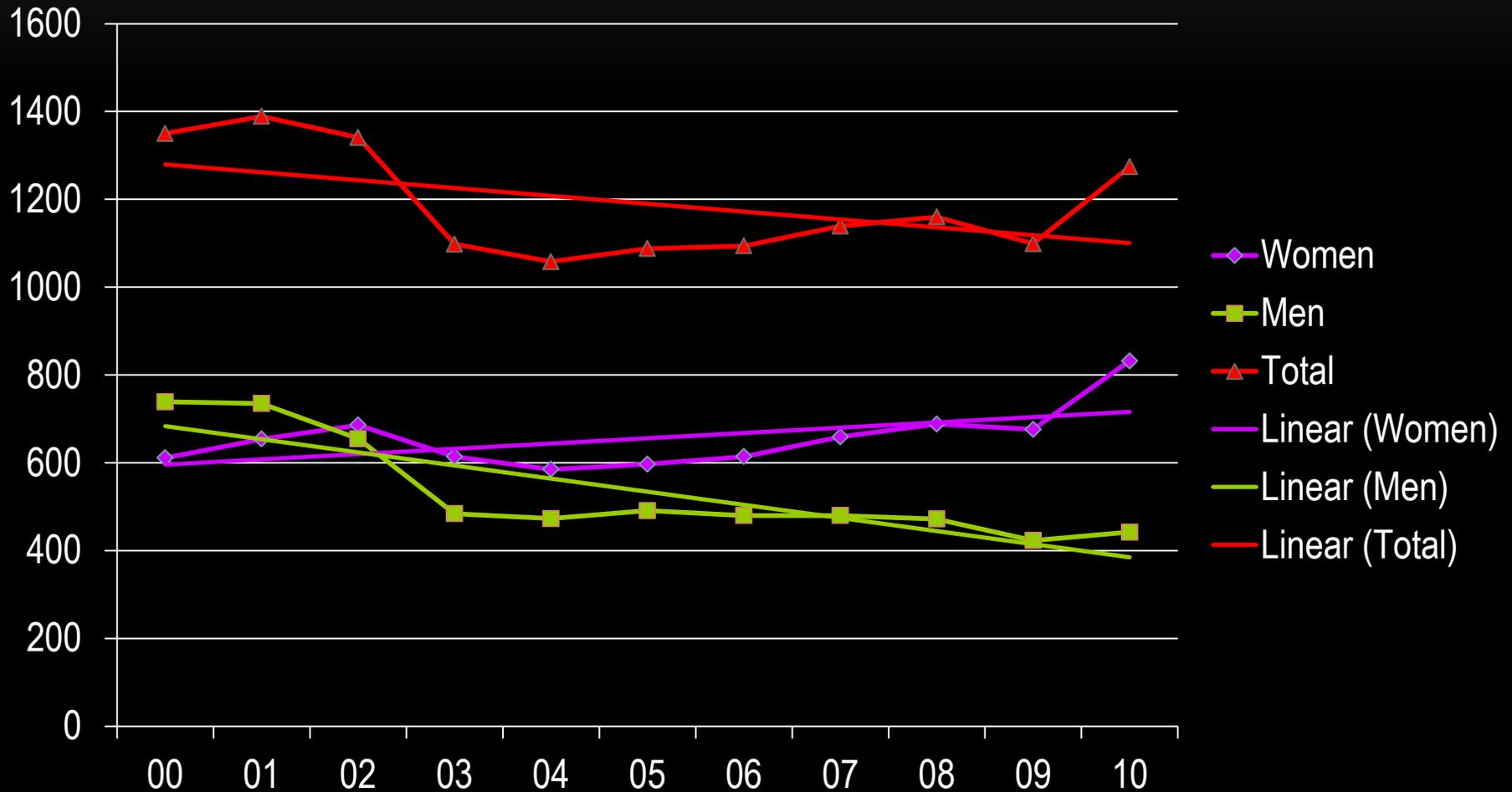
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# NUMBER OF INJURIES DUE TO PHYSICAL VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE BY GENDER



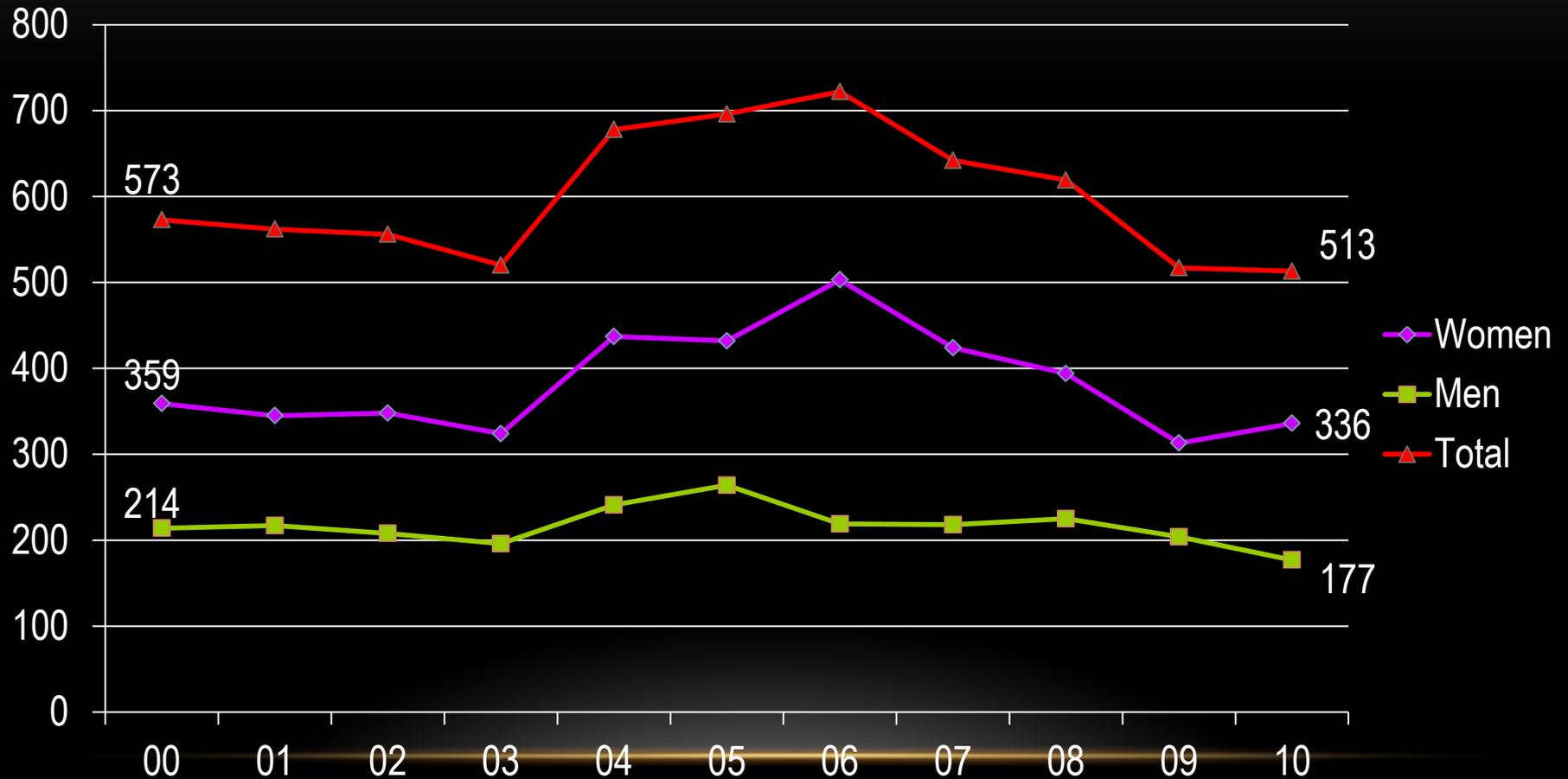
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# NUMBER OF INJURIES DUE TO PHYSICAL VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE BY GENDER



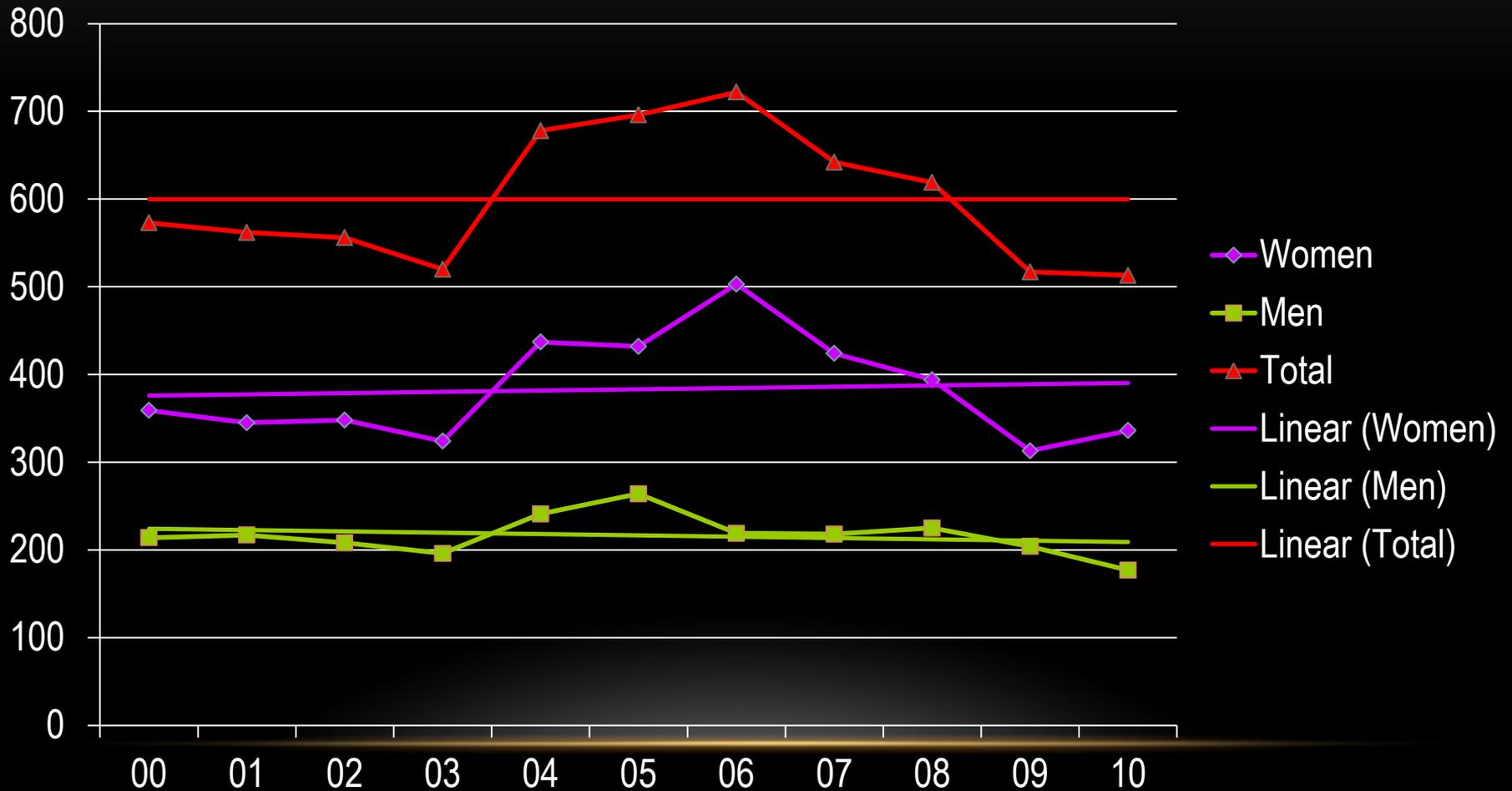
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# NUMBER OF INJURIES DUE TO PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE BY GENDER



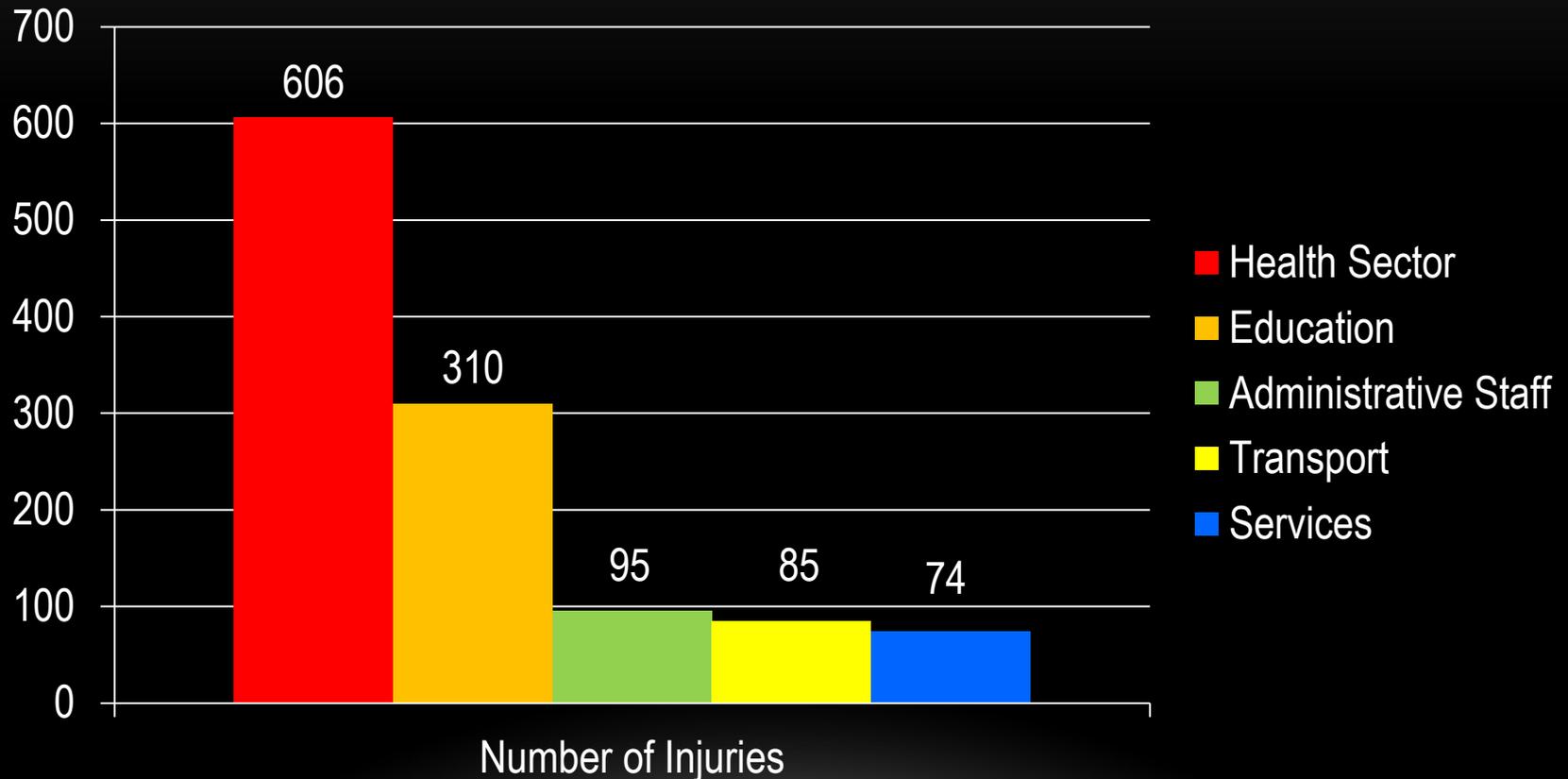
Source: CSST

# NUMBER OF INJURIES DUE TO PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE BY GENDER



Source: CSST

# NUMBER OF INJURIES ACCORDING TO THE ECONOMIC SECTOR - 2010



# THE INVISIBLES OF HEALTH SECTOR

- Qualitative Study n= 30 different workers in Quebec Health and Social Services Sector (NOT including, Nurses and Physicians)

## VIOLENCE AT WORK

- Among the different forms of violence in the health and social services sector, we may distinguish between physical and psychological violence. Indeed, physical violence is the easiest to observe and quantify and is often the most likely to be considered because of the lethal risks it may entail. From simple bruising to serious corporal trauma, one may find all the degrees of injury that could jeopardize the life of the victim or cause serious and disabling consequences. Assault and battery is one immediately visible form of physical violence:

## PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

- Physically it hits you hard ... But violence is common: scratches, kicks, punches ... It's usual, because contact is always difficult. There is one section - as I said, it's divided into four - this section, team 2, it's clear that in that team there are people who ... there is no way to stop it, it's right there, it's present. Every day now, I can tell you that the majority of staff, or orderlies, are hit or scratched. (Richard, nursing assistant, Quebec)

## VERBAL ABUSE

- “You damn nutcase, damned bitch, you work badly,” yes. That's really the unpleasant part of our job. If you look around here everyone will tell you...and still me, I'm lucky, for a few years on the floor where I work, it must be about two or three years that I haven't had any aggressive patients that hit me. (...) she had Alzheimer's, and once I washed her and she got angry, “you crazy bitch,” and she spat in my face.” (Claudette, nursing assistant, Quebec)

# VIOLENCE FROM THE PATIENT'S FAMILY

- “I call that violence. I'll give you an example. I have a man here who was so evil that he gave me a punch at one point, I fell backward, easily from here to the wall, there was a guy who was holding him and the guy escaped - we knew that the man could be aggressive and we had to give him a suppository - so we suspected something would happen, and I remember that at the “multi” meeting with the family ... and the man sometimes he pees in the bed, and we had two or three girls on CSST because of him, he had a mania for grabbing thumbs and ... so we had girls who had to go to orthopedics, and the family would answer “well, it's ok that he reacts like that, it means that my father is still alive!” I don't need to tell you more. So it's not much fun when you try to do everything you can and you get answered that way, you want to jump the family, but you can't...” (Claudette, nursing assistant, Quebec)

# BULLYING AT WORK

- We met with workers who had experienced psychological harassment at work, humiliation, and contempt. For example, in one case the violence began with sexual harassment from a doctor. The worker filed a complaint and won because there were witnesses who saw the doctor's action, but the employer kept the two people involved in the case working in the same department! This constitutes a primary error in the management of such a case. Sexual harassment transformed into psychological harassment, and when we met with the worker, she was going to retire early after a long leave of absence after the bullying experience.

## BULLYING AT WORK

- There is violence at work, that's for sure. That's one case I experienced, but there are others who experience it. I don't want to hide it. There's a lot of violence, and it came out at the management level in relation to employees. We have a lot of complaints of bullying against the employer. People who try to control our people, people who are very mean. (Cecilia, laboratory technician, Quebec).

## SEXUAL HARASSMENT

- He was not from our country, he came from another country, but grabbing women's behinds, it was normal...in his country it was done, but here it isn't. So I told him to stop, stop, but he didn't stop (...) I wanted the management to warn him (Chantal, hospital janitor, Quebec).

## DESENSITIZING VIOLENCE

- So that's why I tell you, if twice in one year there's a man who grabs my breast or tries to give me a slap on the behind, I will easily manage him, while being polite and saying, "no, if you don't mind we'll stop that," rather than to get a kick or a punch, or to be spit in the face (Claudette nursing assistant, Quebec).

## DESENSITIZING VIOLENCE

- We ask them to file accident reports regularly. “I will not report an accident because he hit me!” - Yes. Because when you sit in the Joint Committee to discuss violent clients, I have to say I don’t have any! The guy said, “He gave me a slap” – “You're going to pass for a sissy!” - No, that will allow us to get statistics and the statistics will allow us to create case files and tell the employer, look, it's there. And yes, regularly. (Richard, union orderly, Quebec).

## CONCLUSION

- We can affirm that violence is part of the daily life of workers in the health and social services sectors in Quebec. The worrying statistics of the CSST are just the tip of a much larger iceberg. This violence remains invisible through its trivialisation, but also through its increased presence in the workplace, which eventually desensitize workers who end up not reporting it

## CONCLUSION

- One must understand that violence also have an impact on witnesses and others who were not even present. Violence has the effect of contaminating the workplace, the coworkers, the family of the victim, and the community in which they live.
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## CONCLUSION

- Violence invisibility is also reflected in the non-recognition and trivialisation of violence at work; either through official data that underestimates its occurrence, through workers who feel overwhelmed by violence and end up believing that it is part of the job; through a desensitization to violence in the face of constant exposure such that the worker ends up having to rationalize the lesser of two evils between being spat upon or being touched sexually. It should be noted that we tried to obtain data on workplace violence and gender, for example the types of accident or exposure, or the professions involved. The CSST refused our request for access to this information.

## CONCLUSION

- No! Violence in all its forms should never be part of the work environment. Unions and organisations must be very vigilant and ensure that violence does not become invisible through trivialization or desensitization, and ensure a healthy and decent workplace for employees.
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## THE EXCEPTION AND THE RULE

You have heard and you have seen

You have seen what is common, what continually occurs

But we ask you:

Even if it's not very strange, find it estranging

Even if it is usual, find it hard to explain

What here is common should astonish you

What here's the rule, recognize as an abuse

And where you have recognized an abuse

Provide a remedy!

Bertolt Brecht

**Thank you very much - Merci Beaucoup  
Questions?**

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