Violence and harassment at work: Risk Observatory report

Brussels 6-7/10/2009

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European Agency for Safety and Health at Work
European Risk Observatory

Topic Centre Risk Observatory
European Agency for Safety and Health at Work was established in 1996 in Bilbao to help improve working conditions in the European Union.

**European Risk Observatory: identifying emerging risks**

- providing an overview of safety and health at work in Europe
- describing trends and underlying factors
- anticipating changes in work and their likely consequences for safety and health
- stimulating debate
Aim: a comprehensive overview of the prevalence and awareness of violence and harassment at work in EU Member States:

- international and national statistics
- cultural definitions and norms
- methodology and data sources
- preventive measures

Timeframe: January 2008 to February 2009.
Workshop: October 2009.
Expert Forecast on Emerging Psychosocial Risks: violence and harassment identified as one of the main emerging risks (EU-OSHA, 2007).

Framework Agreement on Harassment and Violence at Work (Social Partners, 2007).

European legislation:
- Framework Directive
- Directive 2002/73/EC (against sexual harassment and discrimination)
Focal Point survey, March - May 2008

- National definitions and terms.
- Legislation, policies and initiatives.
- Statistics and research on third party violence and harassment.
- Acknowledgment of the problem.
- Management of third party violence and harassment in the workplace.
“Violence and harassment”

- **Third-party violence**
  Physical violence, verbal aggression, or threat of physical violence where the aggressor is not a work colleague, e.g. the person, customer, client or patient receiving the goods or services.

- **Harassment at work**
  Repeated, unreasonable behaviour directed towards an employee, or group of employees, by a colleague, supervisor or subordinate, aimed at victimising, humiliating, undermining or threatening them (*bullying, mobbing, or psychological violence*). Also sexual harassment.
“Violence and harassment”

National definitions and terms

- **Other terms than harassment to describe violent behaviours in the workplace:**
  - employee abuse, mistreatment, bossing, victimization, intimidation, psychological terrorization, psycho-terror, psychological violence, inappropriate treatment, unwanted behaviour.

- **Terms used at national level:**
  - harcèlement moral, harcèlement psychologique (French)
  - assédio no local de trabalho, assédio moral (Portuguese)
  - acoso moral, psicoterror laboral, maltrato psicológico (Spanish)
  - tormoz (Bulgarian)
  - kiusaaminen (Finnish)
  - mobbing (Italy, Poland and Germany)
  - bullying (UK)
Third party violence and harassment (sexual harassment) have different status in legislation

- **Third party violence**: in most countries, covered by criminal law. Finland: third party violence is mentioned specifically in the Occupational Safety and Health Act.
- **Harassment**: the legislation does not usually define the phenomena. It may refer to discrimination or sexual harassment only. In some countries, however, full definition of harassment is included.
Prevalence: third party violence

- Simple questions: “have you been subjected to physical violence or threats of physical violence at work?”
- Time limit: usually 12 or 6 months
- Frequency: “daily”, “weekly”, “once a month”
Physical violence at work, EU-27 (% yes)*

- Threats of physical violence: 6%
- Physical violence from colleagues: 1.8%
- Physical violence from other people: 4.3%

"Violence and harassment"

Physical violence by sectors*

Third party violence

- Belgium: 5.5% of workers exposed to violence in the last 12 months.
- Denmark: 8% of workers exposed to violence during last year.
- Finland: 7% of women and 4% of men reported being exposed to violence during last 12 months.
- UK: Estimated 16% of workers have been subject to violence during last three months. 87% reported verbal aggression, others reported grabbing/pushing, hitting/punching.
- France: 42% of workers who have contact with members of the public have experienced situations of tension.
Prevalence: harassment

- Different definitions
- Different methodology ("subjective" method vs. "operational" method).
- Cultural differences in experiencing harassment, level of awareness.
“Violence and harassment”

➢ Bullying/harassment at work, EU-27 (% yes)*

Prevalence of bullying/harassment and unwanted sexual attention among women and men*

“Violence and harassment”

Bullying/harassment in EU Member States (2005)

Bullying/harassment and unwanted sexual attention by sectors*

Belgium: 14% of workers faced bullying at work at some point during last 12 months.

Ireland: 13% of workers from public administration and defence and 12% from education reported being bullied.

Poland: A representative study showed that 17% of respondents claimed to be bullied by their supervisor during last 5 years, 6% reported being bullied by co-workers.

Lithuania: 68% of workers from public administration reported being bullied.

Slovakia: 66% of respondents had at least one experience of sexual harassment in the workplace.
Harassment

Perpetrators

- In Norway co-workers and supervisors equally often

- In Sweden and Finland colleagues more often than supervisors

- In UK and Ireland supervisor or manager more often
A problem with sexual harassment occurs commonly in private and public companies, particularly in small towns where it is difficult to find employment. Women most often subjected to sexual harassment were those in subordinate positions: secretaries, waitresses, sales assistants.
Focal Point survey

- Acknowledgment of the problem
- Management of third party violence and harassment in the workplace
“Violence and harassment”

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Is the level of acknowledgement of third-party violence appropriate in the country?

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Is the level of acknowledgement of harassment appropriate in the country?
“Violence and harassment”

The number of selected main reasons why the level of acknowledgement of third-party violence is not in the appropriate level

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of awareness</td>
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<td>Low of prioritisation of the issue</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Specific regulation on the subject are limited or lacking</td>
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<tr>
<td>There are no appropriate tools/method for assessing and managing the issue</td>
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“Violence and harassment”

Nation-wide or sector-orientated initiatives to address harassment /third-party violence have been organised in my country

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“Violence and harassment”

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For each of the following issues, please tell me whether it is of major concern, some concern or no concern at all in your establishment:

- Dangerous substances
- Accidents
- Noise and vibration
- Musculoskeletal disorders
- Work-related stress
- Violence or threat of violence
- Bullying or harassment, i.e. abuse, humiliation or assault by colleagues or superiors
**Methodology**

**Universe and unit of analysis**

The statistical population comprises all establishments that have ten or more employees in the 31 participating countries, covering all sectors of economic activity except for agriculture, forestry and fishing (NACE A), households (NACE T) and extraterritorial organisations (NACE U). The relevant statistical unit of analysis is the establishment, defined as comprising the activities of a single employer at a single set of premises (e.g. a single branch of a bank, a car factory or a school).

The 31 participating countries comprise all 27 European Member States, as well as two Candidate Countries (Croatia and Turkey), and two EFTA countries (Norway and Switzerland).

**Respondents**

In each establishment surveyed, the highest-ranking manager responsible for health and safety at work will be interviewed. Additionally, an interview with the workers' health and safety representative will be carried out in those establishments where a management interview has been completed; there exists a formally designated representative with specific responsibility for the safety and health of workers; and permission for the interview has been granted by the management respondent.

**Sampling strategy**

In order to ensure that the survey results are cross-nationally comparable, it is essential that the sampling strategy result in the same type of units being surveyed in each country. The quality of the available address registers varies across the participating countries in terms of coverage (especially the sectors of activity included) and in terms of the availability and accuracy of the necessary background information (such as the sector of activity and number of employees). Existing address registers are not cross-nationally comparable, therefore considerable efforts have been made to build samples that provide the necessary quality and ensure cross-national comparability. This work has been carried out in collaboration with the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound).

Stratification of the sample is based on a major sector of activity (or, in the case of a sector) and five size classes (10-19 employees, and so on). The sampling strategy used by Eurofound in its European Survey of Working Conditions (ESW) was used for the strata for size classes 10-19 and 20-24 (Eurofound, 2010).

**Questionnaire development**

The questionnaire, designed and developed by the ESENER team, follows the same structure in each participating country, but is accompanied by country-specific questions, which have been agreed upon by the foresight panel of experts and stakeholders at the national level.
Conclusions

- Need for actions to improve awareness at national and organisational level.
- Common definitions and classifications as well as systematic strategies to assess the prevalence of work-related violence are needed at European level.
- Need for education and training programmes.
- Need for (promoting?) appropriate tools/methods for assessing and managing third party violence and harassment.
- Prevention should be sector oriented.
- Preventive measures have to be cultural and context dependent.
Points for discussion

- Should third party violence and psychological harassment be more visible (directly mentioned) in national legislation?

- How to promote problem with violence and harassment in those countries where awareness is low?

- Experience with Framework Agreement on Harassment and Violence at Work – employers and workers perspective
“Violence and harassment”

- European Agency for Safety and Health at Work: 
  http://osha.europa.eu/

- European Risk Observatory
  http://riskobservatory.osha.europa.eu

Thank you for your attention!