

Bullying at Work: Research in Estonia using the Negative Acts Questionnaire Revised (NAQ-R)

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Abstract

This research presents the preparatory stage for the first study of bullying in Estonia. The aim of the research is twofold: to find out how bullying manifests itself in Estonia, and to develop a research method using the Negative Acts Questionnaire Revised (NAQ-R) in Estonia. The results indicate that bullying poses a serious problem for the respondents. We found that at least one negative act given in the questionnaire has been reported to have occurred "daily" by 16.4% of respondents and "weekly" by 28.3% of respondents. The results reveal that the negative acts presented using the NAQ-R method are understandable for the respondents, and therefore, suitable for use in Estonia. Nevertheless, to carry out the basic research, it is necessary to adjust the definition of bullying to make it easier to understand in the local cultural space.

Keywords: *bullying at work, Negative Acts Questionnaire Revised (NAQ-R), negative acts, individual-related factors, work-related factors*

JEL Classification: M12

Introduction

Bullying presents a serious problem in Europe: hostile work environments, hostile communication, persistent criticism and personal abuse cause substantial damage to workers, organizations and society as a whole (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf and Cooper, 2003; Leymann, 1990). The perspective on bullying at work was developed in Sweden, Finland and Norway during the late 1980s and early 1990s due to national work environment legislation in those countries supporting the rights of all workers to remain both physically and mentally healthy at work (Leymann, 1996). Unfortunately, the studies indicate that a lot of workers still have to suffer from psychological bullying at work and corresponding negative behaviour in their daily work (Di Martino, 2002; Hoel, Cooper, Faragher, 2001; Salin, 2003). The negative impact of bullying at work can range from lower productivity and motivation among workers to higher costs of health care and loss

of human resources in society as a whole (Leymann, 1996; Hoel and Cooper, 2001). Thus, it is a matter of utmost importance to study the factors causing psychological bullying at work and options for its prevention.

There are several reasons for investigating bullying in Estonia. First, bullying at work has not so far been dealt with in Estonia – its dispersal, causes and impact have not been studied. Likewise there is no special law concerning bullying or harassment in Estonia. The second reason is related to cultural context: the Estonian culture differs substantially from Scandinavian countries. The results of the study according to Hofstede's model reflect that masculine values dominate in Estonian culture and the need for achievement can be an essential motivator in Estonian organizations (Vadi and Meri, 2005). Therefore, workplace bullying and negative acts at work represent an interesting topic for exploring whether cultural context has any particular impact.

The present research is the first attempt to look into the problem of bullying in Estonia. The aim of the basic research is to find out how widespread bullying is, identify its causes and look into correlations between the causes and prevention of bullying. A prerequisite for the basic research is a pilot study to test the applicability of the internationally recognized research instrument, the Negative Acts Questionnaire Revised (NAQ-R), for studying bullying at work in Estonia.

The aim of the present research is twofold: on the one hand to find out how bullying manifests itself in Estonia, and on the other, to test the NAQ-R research method in Estonia with the view to using it to measure bullying. The specific objectives of the present research are the following:

- 1) to study whether NAQ-R is suitable for use in Estonia without any changes, or whether it is necessary to make the questionnaire easier for the respondents to understand, and
- 2) to obtain preliminary results on bullying in Estonia using the NAQ-R research instrument.

1. The theoretical framework for bullying and the measurement tool

1.1 What is bullying at work?

Bullying is a large problem in Europe. According to recent research on work conditions in Europe, 1 worker out of 20 (5%) was subjected to bullying in 2005 (Fourth European Working Conditions Survey, 2007). Bullying is defined as hostile and unethical communication that is directed in a systematic way by one or more persons, mainly towards one targeted individual who, due to bullying, is pushed into a helpless and defenceless position (Leymann, 1996). One-off instances such as conflicts between two equal parties, which are solved between the participants, are not considered bullying. Psychological bullying at work is defined as acts that occur at least once a week and over a long period – approximately six months. Hence, bullying at work refers to repeated and enduring negative acts (Einarsen, 2000). These actions are divided into two main groups:

those related to personal behaviour and those related to work-related behaviour. Personal behaviours are ignoring, excluding, public humiliation, insulting, spreading rumours or gossip, yelling, intruding on privacy, etc. Work-related behaviours are giving unachievable tasks, impossible deadlines, unmanageable workloads, meaningless tasks, withholding information deliberately or supplying unclear information, threats about job security, scapegoating, etc. (Beswick, Gore, Palferman, 2006). The definition of bullying does not comprise all potential acts, but it always involves behaviour or an attitude that causes the victim emotional harm and affects his or her mental and physical health.

The differences in the instances of bullying in different countries are remarkable – being very high in Finland and Holland (17% and 12% respectively), and the lowest in Italy and Bulgaria (2%) (Fourth European Working Conditions Survey, 2007). The differences are not so much related to different actual situations in these countries, but rather the awareness of bullying; cultural differences and traditions also influence the outcome. Bullying varies from sector to sector: it is lowest in agriculture and the construction industry, and highest in education, health care and the public sector. There are more women than men suffering from bullying (6% and 4% respectively), and the largest risk group is women under 30 years of age (8%) (Fourth European Working Conditions Survey, 2007). In terms of its spread, another important circumstance is that while bullying is aimed at an individual worker (the victim), his or her colleagues are also forced to witness the act, and therefore, also suffer. Due to bullying, the work climate in the organization deteriorates, and the negative impact it causes partly affects the victim's colleagues. Thus, the problem is significantly more extensive than indicated in surveys carried out by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions.

The negative influence of bullying on the individual mostly appears in the form of physical and mental health disorders (e.g. stress, depression, low self-esteem, self accusation, phobias, sleeping disorders, problems with digestive and bone and muscle systems), loss of social relationships, job or income. Bullying has a negative effect on the organization's performance and efficiency mostly for the following reasons: an increase in instances of sick leave and absenteeism with no valid reason, decreased turnover and returns, lower productivity and motivation, professional dissatisfaction, less drive and effort and a negative impact on the organization's reputation (Di Martino, 2002). The whole society is also negatively affected by bullying: increased cost of health care (incapacity for work, unemployment benefits), medical treatment expenses, possible loss of able workers and premature retirement. Bullying presents a serious problem in the work environment in Europe; it has caused substantial damage to workers, organizations and society as a whole.

In specialist literature, the causes of bullying at work are mainly divided into two large groups: work-related and individual-related factors. Leymann (1996), for whom the basic risk factors for bullying lie in the organization's work

environment, brings out four factors that are most likely to cause psychological bullying at work:

- 1) deficiencies in work-design;
- 2) deficiencies in leadership behaviour;
- 3) the victim's socially exposed position;
- 4) low departmental morale.

In addition, another reason may be poor conflict management combined with poor work administration in the organization. Conflict management is regarded by Leymann as an organizational rather than an individual-related problem. From the moment there is bullying in an organization, it is the organization's problem, and finding a solution to it is the management's responsibility. Leymann's theory supports the notion of interrelated frustration-aggression, which holds that frustration generates aggressive inclinations to the degree that they arouse a negative affect (Berkowitz, 1989). The presence of various stressors at work may constitute a generally stressful work environment, which may lead to feelings such as psychological discomfort or goal-blockage. Such stressful environments may give rise to aggressive behaviour by generating a negative affect in individuals. The correlation between work environment and bullying is demonstrated in an extensive study carried out in Norway where role conflict, interpersonal conflicts and tyrannical and *laissez-faire* leadership behaviour were found to be strongly related to bullying (Hauge, Skogstad and Einarsen, 2007).

One work environment risk factor is leadership style. Dissatisfaction with leaders constitutes one of the strongest factors that cause bullying at work (Einarsen, Raknes and Matthiesen, 1994). The risk factors for bullying at work refer to the work environment and the organizational climate: the poor flow of information, an authoritative way of settling differences of opinion and poor opportunities for influencing matters concerning and affecting one self (Vartia, 1996). Bullying does not necessarily reflect the abuse of power; it may rather result from weak leadership or the lack of authority.

However, there are different approaches to bullying in an organization. Brodsky (1976) claims that aggressive conduct may be the result of an individual's natural disposition and bullying is a result of human interaction, and therefore, it is impossible to entirely eliminate bullying at work. Brodsky also maintains that the influence of organizational factors are combined with individual factors, and claims that although the majority of victims suffer from either neuroses or personality disorders, the incidents of bullying take place in an environment that allows or favours this kind of behaviour. Brodsky's theory is in line with the theory of social interaction (Felson, 1992, Felson and Tedeschi, 1993), which holds that negative events affect people's behaviour and indirectly cause aggressive behaviour in an organization. For example, a miserable or worried worker may not meet expectations, annoys others, behaves less professionally or even ignores social norms (Felson, 1992), and this way they may cause aggressive behaviour in the people they interact with. In research among university employees, workplace

bullying was most often attributed to envy, and competition for position and status, and the victims felt uncertain about the degree to which personality features were important (Björkqvist, Österman and Hjelt-Bäck, 1994). Hence, individual factors might also be substantial antecedents of workplace bullying.

Figure 1 presents a theoretical framework of bullying at work. This framework summarizes different theoretical approaches about the causes, actions and consequences of workplace bullying. As seen above, the causes and also the actions and consequences of bullying are divided into two large groups: work-related and individual-related factors. The consequences may influence the actions and the causes of bullying.

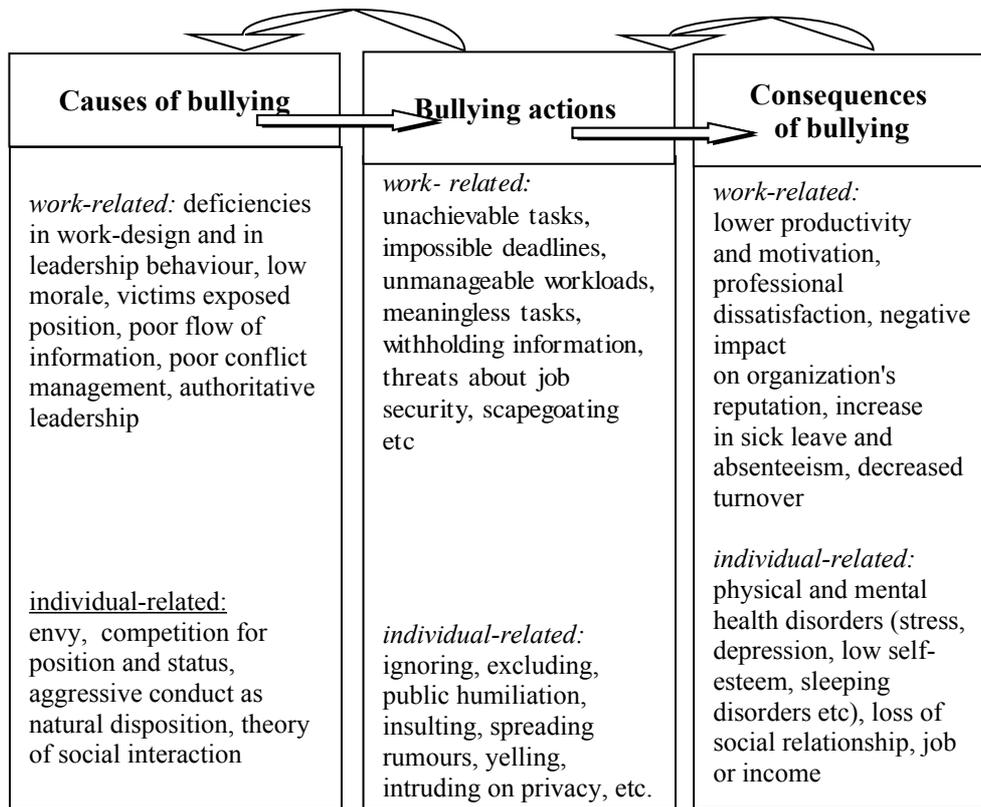


Figure 1 A theoretical framework of bullying at work
(compiled by the author on the basis of the literature)

Nevertheless, the organization and its management are responsible for intervening in cases of interpersonal conflict and bullying caused by factors at individual, organizational and societal levels (Hoel and Cooper, 2001; Zapf, 1999). There is one point that the researchers dealing with bullying strongly agree upon: bullying can arise and spread only in an organization where it is tolerated. Leymann (1992) and Einarsen, Raknes and Matthiesen (1994) have found that conflicts may develop into psychological violence if an appropriate strategy of

intervening or conflict management is not applied. Research also confirms that 95% of the reasons for the spread of bullying come down to the organization tolerating bullying and failing to intervene: the bullies are not stopped and the victims are afraid to report harassment, or submit a complaint (Rayner, 1998). Bullying is likely to prevail in stressful working environments and situations where the immediate supervisor avoids intervening in and managing such stressful situations (Hauge, Skogstad and Einarsen, 2007).

Thus, according to the literature, the risk factors of bullying are connected with a number of different factors at personal and organizational levels. As bullying arises and spreads first and foremost in the environment where it is tolerated, it is important to focus on studying bullying at the organizational level.

1.2 Measuring bullying at work

The research on bullying has mostly used quantitative research methods and various questionnaires. The most frequently used instruments are the *Leymann Inventory of Psychological Terrorization* (Leymann, 1990), *Negative Act Questionnaire* (Einarsen and Raknes 1997) and *Work Harassment Scale* (Björkqvist and Österman, 1992). Questionnaires make it possible to obtain data on the dispersal, reasons and duration of work-related bullying, and also differentiate the occurrence of bullying in terms of gender, age, education level, field of activity and other parameters. Questionnaires can also be used with other questionnaires if we are looking for correlations between bullying and organizational culture or resilience to stress. The advantages of the questionnaire method are that the researcher can collect large amounts of data in a relatively short space of time; also, the anonymity of the participants can be assured. It is easy to carry out statistical analysis of a range of factors (Cowie, Naylor, Rivers, Smith and Pereira, 2002). However, there are also disadvantages of questionnaires. If no definition is given and the questionnaire relies exclusively on the occurrence of negative or aggressive acts, it may not be clear that the imbalance of power criterion is satisfied. Also, there may be difficulties in relying on memory for defined periods such as 6 months or a year, and the questionnaire format makes it difficult to gain detailed information regarding the processes and dynamics of bully or victim situations. It is inflexible in its structure and thus non-responsive to the rich details of particular instances and to the potential for uncovering radically new findings (Cowie, Naylor, Rivers, Smith and Pereira, 2002). Thus, a questionnaire allows us to collect a large amount of data, to make general conclusions and find correlations with other variables, but we have to keep in mind that the results obtained do not allow deep insights into the problem, as they do not reflect the bullying process in detail.

The Danish researcher Eva Mikkelsen and Norwegian researcher Stale Einarsen suggest on the basis of their extensive research of bullying in Danish work-life that researchers should use a combination of self-reported exposure to bullying and exposure to negative acts to provide information on both self-reported victimization from bullying as well as exposure to specific bullying behaviours

(Mikkelsen and Einarsen, 2001). A subjective evaluation of bullying at work and evaluation of the occurrence of various negative acts may yield different results. If a questionnaire comprises both subjective self-reporting of bullying at work and responses about occurrences of negative acts, it is possible to get a more comprehensive overview of the problem. In a subjective self-report, a respondent may take into account different negative acts that have occurred just once. However, only situations where a specific act is repeated regularly are regarded, and cases where the target is subjected to different acts are left out (Salin, 2001). Thus, it is important that a questionnaire should comprise questions about negative acts without using the term *bullying*. As a result, it is possible to measure the frequency of the behaviour in question. The respondent's self-reported exposure to bullying can be identified on the basis of a subjective evaluation of bullying at work.

An internationally standardized questionnaire for studying bullying that includes both a list of negative acts and a chance to give a subjective self-report is the Negative Acts Questionnaire Revised (NAQ-R). The NAQ is a research inventory developed for measuring perceived exposure to bullying and victimisation at work (Einarsen and Raknes, 1997). The questionnaire, which is based on studies of literature and accounts given by victims of long-lasting harassment, consists of 22 items, each written in behavioural terms with no reference to the term *harassment* or *bullying*. The NAQ measures both exposure to specific bullying behaviour as well as feelings of victimisation, the scale measures how often the respondent has been subjected to a range of negative acts and potentially harassing behaviours during the last six months. In its original Norwegian version, the NAQ consisted of 21 items. In a revised English version it consists of 29 items describing different kinds of behaviour, which may be perceived as bullying if they occur on a regular basis (Einarsen and Hoel 2001). Based on the original Norwegian version and the English version of the NAQ, a revised version of the NAQ was developed. This new version called NAQ-R was then used in a representative survey of 4 996 UK employees recruited from 70 UK organizations representing 1 million employees (Einarsen and Hoel 2001).

In conclusion, the NAQ-R is a valid and reliable measure of exposure to workplace bullying. So far no standard measure of workplace bullying exists in this field; therefore, this instrument permits better comparisons of survey results from different national cultures and organizational settings (Einarsen and Hoel 2001).

2. Method

2.1 Sample

The survey was carried out from February to March 2009. The sample for the survey consisted of customers of the Estonian Labour Market Board. On 28 February people were surveyed at the Tallinn office of the Labour Market Board and on 4 and 10 March in Tartu among the participants of further training commissioned by the Labour Market Board. As we were testing the questionnaire, an important criterion for conducting the survey was to ensure that respondents should be permitted to contact the person administering the survey if they failed to

understand the questions or the instructions for filling in the questionnaire. This being a pilot research, it was equally important to obtain information on whether the respondents had additional questions and if they did, what kinds of questions were they. It was also necessary to observe how long it took to fill in the questionnaire. Both at the Labour Market Board office and at the further training, immediate contact between the respondent and the person administering the questionnaire was possible.

Conducting the survey among the customers of the Labour Market Board was well-grounded, as based on the objective of the research, an appropriate sample would be characterized as follows: 1) having had work experience in different organizations; and 2) belonging to a bullying risk group. The existence of respondents who had worked or are currently working in different organizations provides the research with as extensive a feedback as possible, and shows whether and how the questionnaire was understood by respondents from different backgrounds. It also makes it possible to obtain a preliminary picture of the situation in Estonia, which is important information in preparing for further research.

Bullying may result in unemployment, and the loss of a job is one of the serious consequences of bullying at work. So the unemployed belong to a bullying risk group. It is important to test such risk groups in a pilot research because the likelihood of finding bullying is higher, as is its frequency. This makes it possible to test negative acts and their translations presented in the questionnaire in a more efficient way, and to find out whether the statements in their present form are understood in the Estonian cultural space. As the respondents are unemployed and/or are currently looking for work, it meets the requirement that the questionnaire is first tested in a bullying risk group and among respondents with different work experience.

All in all we surveyed 75 people, 8 questionnaires proved invalid, and the total number of valid questionnaires was 67. The sample consisted of 62.6% men and 37.4% women. The mean age was 42.4 years, with ages ranging from 21 to 64. As much as 40.3% of the respondents defined themselves as unemployed, 10.4% named transport as their current field of work, 8.9% administration, 7.5% industry and 6% health care; the remaining respondents were divided between other pre-set fields of activity. The type of organization where the respondents are either currently working or where they last worked was noted by 59.2% as the private sector, by 26% as the public sector and by 14.8% as neither. As much as 10.4% of the respondents were members of a trade union.

2.2 Instruments

In the present research we used the Negative Acts Questionnaire Revised (NAQ-R) method to measure bullying. The NAQ consists of two parts. First, the respondents were asked via 22 items how often they had been exposed to particular negative behaviour in the workplace during the last 6 months. Response categories were: never, now and then, monthly, weekly and daily. Second, the respondents

were asked how often they had been bullied during the previous 6 months. The response categories were: no, yes but only rarely, yes, now and then, yes several times per week and yes almost daily. When answering that question, the respondents were asked to take into account the following definition of bullying: *A situation where one or several individuals persistently over a period of time perceived themselves to be on the receiving end of negative actions from one or several persons, in a situation where the target of the bullying has difficulty in defending him/herself against these actions. A one-off incident is not bullying.* Bullying was measured on the basis of the definition as the respondent's own perception and subjective feeling.

The following socio-demographic information was also gathered about the respondent: age, gender, marital status, education, current area of work, current employment status, type of organization, number of employees, at which level in the organization the respondent works and if he or she is a trade union member. The responses were given in the form of multiple choices.

In the research we used the English version of the NAQ-R questionnaire translated into Estonian and Russian, the content and meaning of the questions were not changed. The translation process consisted of three phases. First, a preliminary version of the translation was sent to several PhD students who made corrections and comments. On the basis of the feedback the second version of the questionnaire was compiled, which was sent back to the students, and thirdly, after improvements, the final translation was composed. No questions were added or excluded.

3. Results

The aim of the research was to administer the NAQ-R questionnaire for the first time in Estonia in order to measure the dispersal, frequency and intensity of bullying. The internal stability of the NAQ-R scale is high – Cronbach's alpha is 0.91.

According to the structure of the NAQ, the results are given in two parts. First, the prevalence of bullying is evaluated according to 22 negative acts. At least one negative act given in the questionnaire was reported to have happened "daily" by 16.4% of the respondents and "weekly" by 28.3% of the respondents. Secondly, the self-reported exposure to bullying was measured. Respondents were given the definition of bullying and they were asked whether they had experienced any bullying. The question: "Have you been bullied at work over the past six months?" was answered in the affirmative by 19.4% of the respondents of the test. Out of these 14.9% reported "yes, but only rarely" and 4.5% reported "yes, now and then". None of the respondents defined themselves as victims of bullying that had a frequency of several times per week or almost daily.

As much as 21.4% of the men and 16% of the women defined themselves as having been bullied according to the definition. The fact that men in general report a higher frequency of exposure to negative behaviour compared to women

may suggest that the male work environments are more hostile (Hoel, Cooper, Faragher, 2001). On the other hand according to the negative acts, more women were exposed to bullying (Table 1).

Demographic indicators for the victims of bullying

Table 1

Negative acts	Gender male/ female (%)	Mean age	Marital status married/ single/ other (%)	Education		Area of work		Organisation form private/ public/ other (%)
				1- grade school 2- high school 3- trade school 4- undergraduate degree 5- master's degree (%)		1- transport 2- administration 3- manufacturing 4- unemployed 5- other (%)		
Withholding information	78/22	37.4	66.7/33.3/0	1- 11.1 3- 44.4 5- 11.1	2- 22.3 4- 11.1	1- 22.2 3- 11.1 5- 0	2- 11.1 4- 55.6	66.6/0/ 33.4
Excessive monitoring	25/75	45.1	50/37.5/12.5	1- 0 3- 12.5 5- 0	2- 62.5 4- 25	1- 12.5 3- 12.5 5- 50	2- 25 4- 0	75/25/0
Unreasonable targets or deadlines	50/50	46	66.7/33.3/0	1- 0 3- 0 5- 16.7	2- 50 4- 33.3	1- 16.6 3- 50 5- 33.4	2- 0 4- 0	66.7/33.3/0
Unmanageable workload	20/80	45.8	60/0/40	1- 0 3- 0 5- 20	2- 40 4- 40	1- 0 3- 20 5- 20	2- 40 4- 20	20/60/20

Of the bullied victims, the majority (69.2%) worked in the private sector. Just one victim of bullying was a member of a trade union. The negative acts which most of the respondents experienced at least once a week were the following:

1. Someone withholding information which affects your performance (13.4%);
2. Excessive monitoring of your work (12%);
3. Being given tasks with unreasonable or impossible targets or deadlines (9%);
4. Being exposed to an unmanageable workload (7.5%).

The 22 acts presented for evaluation can be divided into two groups: acts related to work or performing work tasks (8 acts) and acts related to the personality of the respondent (14 acts). It turned out that the four acts that the largest number of respondents reported to have occurred “daily” and “weekly” all belong to the first group, i.e. questions about work or about performing a work task.

Table 1 highlights the demographic indicators of the victims of bullying, the respondents who have experienced bullying at least weekly concerning the most frequent negative acts.

4. Discussion

The aim of the research was to find out how bullying manifests itself in Estonia, and develop a questionnaire in the local cultural space to find out the potential need to adjust the NAQ-R. The results obtained in the course of the pilot research enable us to implement any changes in the research instrument that may be necessary both in terms of content and language.

The results of the research indicate clearly that the risk group studied in Estonia suffers from bullying. At least one of the negative acts presented in the questionnaire was reported to have happened “daily” by 16.4% of the respondents and “weekly” by 28.3% of the respondents. The research proved that the negative acts that the largest number of respondents reported to have experienced “daily” or “weekly” were all related to work or performing work tasks. According to the theoretical framework (Figure 1) presented previously, Figure 2 highlights the main negative acts and characteristics of the victims according to the results of the study, and also presents the relationship between the potential causes and consequences of bullying. Compared to other research, we find very similar results (Salin, 2003; Hoel and Cooper, 2000) for the most frequent reports of respondents’ experience of work-related negative acts.

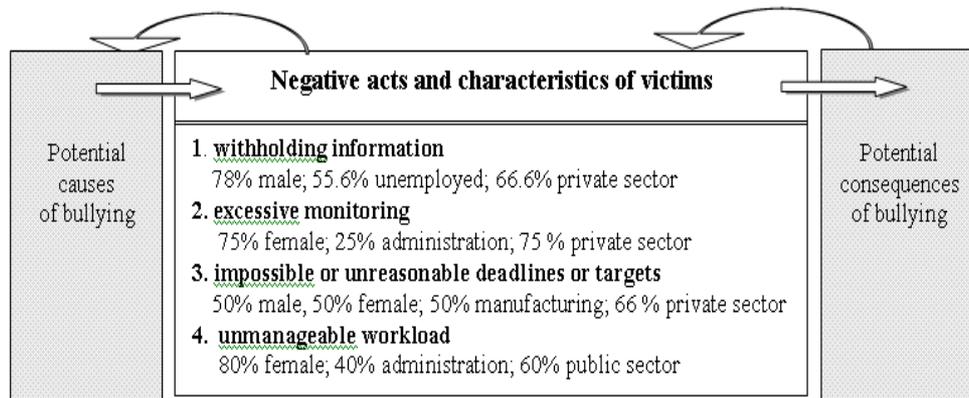


Figure 2 The actions of the bullying and characteristics of victim

The strong dominance of work-related harassment over personality-related harassment indicates that bullying still tends to be connected directly with work. The results may refer to the fact that masculine values generally prevail in the Estonian cultural space, and that achievements at work are highly valued (Vadi and Meri, 2005). At the same time, the dominance of work-related negative acts indicates that in spite of problems existing at work, the capacity to keep personal and work related subjects separate exists.

In the case of the present pilot study we cannot dismiss the fact that the sample consisted of customers of the Labour Market Board, whose work-related

problems are currently more acute. This raises the question of whether the respondents were unemployed as a result of workplace bullying or rather because they have problems coping with work tasks. However, further study of the causes and consequences is necessary to determine other possible risk groups of bullying in Estonia.

According to Leymann's criterion, bullying at work is defined as incidents with an occurrence of once a week or more over the past six months (Leymann, 1996). On this point, the research reveals different results. The responses indicate that a large number of respondents have experienced negative acts at work at least once a week and even once a day. On the other hand, the respondents did not admit to a daily or weekly bullying experience if they were given the term bullying and its definition. For comparison, we can look at results from research that used similar methods for measuring bullying. Research carried out in the UK demonstrated that when adding together all those who labelled their experience as bullying independently of the frequency of their exposure, 10.6% of respondents reported having been bullied during the last 6 months. At the same time, a total of 9.2% were "occasionally bullied" and 1.4% "regularly bullied" (Hoel, Cooper, Faragher, 2001). Research shows that the results also vary significantly depending on the method of measurement and the self-reported exposure to bullying is noticeably lower.

The difference between the results of the research obtained using two measurement methods – self-reported exposure to bullying and exposure to negative acts – raises the question of the origin of the difference. If the respondents were asked directly about their bullying experiences and the definition was added, the respondents tended to underestimate their experience compared to evaluations given in the negative acts questionnaire. There may be a number of reasons for this. First, there may be a psychological explanation: it was humiliating or offensive for the respondents to identify themselves as victims of bullying. Presumably, one reason for this is that many victims reject the victim role, given that this role implies weakness and passivity – personal attributes that most people would feel do not fit their usual self-image (Einarsen, Raknes & Matthiesen, 1994). The second reason may be connected with information. The negative acts presented in the questionnaire were familiar to the respondents – they had encountered them, and they also admitted so in their responses. But bullying as a term was unfamiliar to the respondents, and they were tackling the definition of bullying for the first time – they did not have any prior information about what bullying was. Where bullying as a phenomenon was unknown to the respondents, they did not identify themselves with it.

Compared to previous studies of workplace bullying, the different prevalence rates of victims supports the argument that workplace bullying has different meanings in different organizations, populations, countries and even professions. The lack of a standardized definition and method to measure bullying and cultural differences regarding the concept of bullying can be considered among the prime factors leading to the differences in the rates (Moayed, Daraiseh, Shell

and Salem, 2006). So the rates of bullying depend on the method and definition in addition to the meaning of workplace bullying for the respondents. Therefore, the term and definition of bullying should be clear to the respondent to ensure reliable data.

5. Conclusions

The present pilot study of bullying reveals that in the risk group, customers of the Labour Market Board, bullying presents a serious problem. Negative acts experienced by the respondents are most frequently work-related, and least frequently person-related.

The Negative Acts Questionnaire as a measurement tool is generally suitable for use in Estonia. The negative acts presented in the NAQ-R method are understandable for the respondents and appropriate for research in Estonia. At the same time, the results reveal a variation between the first and second part of questionnaire: the research clearly reveals the occurrence of bullying once per day and week, but does not reveal the same frequency of occurrences of the problem when the term and definition of bullying is given. The results of the pilot study confirm the results of earlier research carried out in other countries: a subjective evaluation of workplace bullying and evaluation of occurrence of various negative acts yielded different results.

For further study of bullying using the NAQ-R method it is important to consider that bullying as a term is unknown to respondents in Estonia – they are dealing with the definition of bullying for the first time and do not have any prior information about it. Therefore, it is necessary to adjust the definition of bullying and make it more straightforward and easy to understand in the local cultural space.

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