

How to tackle bullying in the workplace

Bachelor thesis

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Abstract

The background of this work is a growing awareness among both researchers and public that employees' health and well-being may be severely affected in situations where they are repeatedly exposed to offensive and intimidating behaviours.

The aim of my thesis was to investigate the issue of bullying and its consequences, and to try to outline possible options to tackle this problem. Furthermore, I tried to provide an up-to-date overview of what is known about bullying and information about best-practice programmes to enable employers to deal effectively with it.

Firstly, to be able to create effective strategies to tackle bullying, we must understand the nature of bullying and its effects on work environment. Therefore I focused on describing the nature of bullying and the way it influences the well-being of the people involved.

Secondly, to recommend effective steps to be taken to deal with bullies, we must know what caused bullying behaviours and how the possible indifference of colleagues and unwillingness of management can exacerbate the problem. Thus, a part of my thesis describes the various causes of negative workplace behaviour and the factors that can contribute to the occurrence of bullying.

Finally, having provided an insight into the problem by means of comparing various approaches in existing literature, I focused on strategies to deal with bullying at workplace and the difficulties of applying the theory into practice.

I have chosen to write this thesis in order to provide a summary of the last development in the field of workplace bullying by means of reviewing the existing literature dealing with this subject. I was especially interested in how bullying influences relationships in the workplace and what policy decisions can be taken to avoid it.

This work is intended to be a useful resource for all those who are interested in the issue of bullying and would like to know what could be done to prevent or minimize the effects of workplace behaviour.

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1. Introduction

Organisational relationships are almost inevitably characterised by inequalities in power and status. When a new employee joins an organisation, he or she becomes part of the company structure and must adapt to the norms and expectations within the workplace.

A new employee takes on a new role, new tasks and responsibilities. Workplace conflict occurs when an employee perceives that their interests are being prevented or negatively influenced by another person. The concept of workplace bullying refers to situations, where, over a period of time, an employee is repeatedly exposed to negative acts from colleagues and superiors (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002b). Research has indicated that exposure to bullying negatively affects the victim's health and well-being (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997; Niedl, 1996; Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2003, etc.). When being subjected to prolonged threats and negative behaviour, victims may develop profound anxiety, loss of self-esteem and self-worth, resulting in inability to cope with stressful situations.

Apart from personal misery as a consequence of being bullied, it also costs companies money. A victim of bullying can often end up being less productive at work through anxiety and discomfort. What is worse, a lot of people solve the workplace problems by simply leaving the job or being on sick-leave. So bullying takes its toll not only on personal lives of the employees, but also on the functioning of the organisation as a whole. The result of bullying for employers is underperforming staff or losing staff - both expensive options. In this thesis, I first provided an insight into the problem of bullying, its nature and its effects on workplace environment. Furthermore, I focused on explanatory theories of workplace violence and the factors that influence the growth of bullying. Finally, having described potential causes of bullying and the factors that may contribute to the occurrence of bullying, I concentrated on strategies to tackle bullying in the workplace and their effectiveness in practice.

2. What is bullying

2a. Defining bullying

Bullying is a very significant workplace problem affecting a large number of people.

Workplace bullying constitutes unwanted, offensive, humiliating, undermining behavior towards an individual or groups of employees (Rayner, Hoel, & Cooper, 2002). This abuse of power can cause such stress and anxiety that people gradually lose their self-confidence and ability to resist the attacks. Bullying can occur between managers and their subordinates, colleagues at the same department or sometimes a group chooses a person to bully.

In English speaking countries is the term 'bullying' being used, whereas in Europe is most in use the term 'mobbing' introduced by Leymann (1990, as described in Steensma, 2001). In Scandinavia the term mobbing is commonly used to describe the situation where a worker is systematically and repeatedly mistreated and victimised by fellow workers or superiors (Einarsen, 2000).

Workplace bullying affects not only individuals' health and attitudes but also their private lives. It is a gradually wearing down process which makes the individual feeling inappropriate and inadequate (Rayner *et al.*, 2002). People lose their self-esteem and selfconfidence.

Workplace bullying can lead to sleeplessness, migraine, panic attacks and anxiety-depressive disorders (Rayner *et al.*, 2002). It is often difficult to detect bullying because it often takes place where no witnesses are present.

Lamplugh (2001, as described in Rayner *et al.*, 2002) points out to the fact that the stress created by bullying could lead to accidents and even to self-damage. Work performance in an atmosphere of fear and resentment tends to decrease, consequently affecting the productivity. It is estimated that millions of working days are lost each year because of bullying at work (Lamplugh, 2001, as described in Rayner *et al.*, 2002).

2b. Forms of bullying

Bullying is persistent unwelcome behaviour, mostly using unwarranted or invalid criticism, nit-picking, fault-finding, also exclusion, isolation, being singled out and treated differently, being shouted at, humiliated, excessive monitoring, having verbal and written warnings imposed, and much more. In the workplace, bullying usually focuses on distorted or fabricated allegations of underperformance (<http://www.bullyonline.org>).

Bullying is an inefficient way of working, resulting in disenchantment, demoralisation, demotivation, disaffection, and alienation. Bullies run dysfunctional and inefficient organisations; staff turnover and sickness absence are high, whilst morale, productivity and profitability are low.

A questionnaire was developed in Norway by Einarsen and Raknes (1997) to discover the most frequent forms of bullying behaviour. The negative behaviour most frequently reported (67%) by respondents was "someone withholding information which affects your performance". The second most reported behaviour was "having your opinions and views ignored", which was experienced by 57 % of respondents. The next two questionnaire items "being exposed to an unmanageable workload" and "being given tasks with unreasonable or impossible deadlines" were confirmed by more than 50% of the respondents. Generally, younger respondents reported more negative behaviours, and most frequently "reminders of jobs errors" and "given jobs outside job description". In contrast, respondents over 55 years of age scored highly on "hinting at quitting", which is not surprising.

2c. Facts and figures

The issue of workplace bullying has been gradually acquiring more and more attention from the public and media. In 1990 in Britain the BBC ran a documentary programme, where Andrea Adams introduced the topics and played taped interviews with people experiencing various forms of negative workplace behaviour (Rayner *et al.*, 2002).

Despite the fact that the programme was broadcast during non-peak listening time, it created a strong response on this topic. The BBC continued covering this topic and in 1994 asked Adams to consult on the production of a TV documentary programme. Andrea Adams then founded a trust for the victims of workplace bullying and for helping to reduce this problem.

Today, bullying has mainly been studied within the Nordic countries spreading further.

In Sweden was the late professor Heinz Leymann the most famous specialist on this issue.

During the 60s, a Swedish psychologist detected a special kind of long-term hostile behaviour in school children. He called this, using an English term, 'mobbing'. At the beginning of the 80s, professor Heinz Leymann found the same type of long-term hostile behaviour in workplaces (The Mobbing Encyclopaedia, <http://www.leymann.se>).

A few years later the research on this topic started in Norway and Finland. Stale Einarsen, currently the leading Norwegian researcher in workplace bullying, has written a number of publications on workplace bullying, its causes and consequences. In his article of 1994 he claimed that among 137 Norwegian victims of bullying and harassment at work, social isolation and exclusion, devaluating of one's work and efforts, teasing and insulting remarks were the most common negative experiences reported by the victims (Einarsen, Raknes & Matthiesen, 1994).

In a study of employees at an Austrian public hospital, 26,6% reported to be subjected to one or more hostile actions once a week during the last six months (Niedl, 1996). In a sample of 1137 part-time students at an English university 50% reported to have been bullied at work (Rayner, 1997). In her article Rayner (1997) claims that 27 % of the bullied left their jobs, 77 % of respondents reported having witnessed bullying at work.

A large proportion of bullies were in management positions (71%).

In European Union suffer yearly about 6 millions of employees from bullying. Graves (2003, see the consulted internet pages) writes that a study of 3,500 UK workers by Mercer Human Resource Consulting found that one in five had been bullied at work at least once during the past year. Almost one in 10 reported bullying on more than one occasion, with two per cent saying they have been bullied five or six times. In the UK the most recent figures available showed that 1.3 million people had been attacked at work during one year (Graves, 2003, see the consulted internet pages).

In the US workplace, there are two million violent victimisations a year including assaults, rapes and robberies; and an average of 1,000 workplace murders a year, according to The National Crime Victimization Survey in the early 1990s, the most recent figures available (Graves, 2003, see the consulted internet pages).

In Australia estimates on 'harassment' in the workplace range from 400,000 to two million workers affected each year, affecting between up to five million workers at some point during their working lives (Beyond Bullying Association 2001, <http://www.bullyonline.org>).

According to the research carried out by the Czech agency GFK (Svidmochova 2003) about 20% of employees have experienced bullying in their workplace.

3. Causes of bullying

Bullying is rarely a single incident and tends to be an accumulation of many small incidents, each of which, when taken in isolation and out of context, seems trivial.

Vartia (1996, as described in Steensma, 2000) did a research about reasons for bullying. The 95 respondents had given the following reasons:

- Jealousy, antipathy 63%
- Weak leadership 42%
- Competition concerning tasks 38%
- Competition concerning the will to please the boss 34%
- Insecurity (e.g. of losing the job) 23%
- Age 22%
- Stereotypical or boring work 7%

Statistical analyses show that leadership, role conflict and work control are the factors most strongly related to workplace bullying. A high degree of ambiguity or incompatible demands or expectations around role, task responsibilities may create a high degree of frustration and conflict within the group (Einarsen *et al.*, 1994).

Quality of work and the structure of an organisation are crucial factors that influence bullying. The low quality of work increases the chance that bullying can occur. High work pressure, little room for autonomy and decision making and existence of role conflicts can result in bullying. Also leadership style, especially the liberal one with a laissez-faire attitude of leaders, can attribute to the occurrence of undesired workplace behaviour patterns. In departments where the leader uses social-emotional style is relatively less being bullied (Hubert, Furda, & Steensma, 2001).

Leymann (1990, as described in Einarsen, 2000) divided the actions involved in bullying at work into five categories including the manipulation of: (1) the victim's reputation, (2) their possibilities of performing the work tasks, (3) the victim's possibilities to communicate with colleagues, (4) their social circumstances and (5) threat of physical assaults. Once again, among 137 Norwegian victims of bullying at work, social isolation and exclusion, devaluation of one's work and exposure to teasing, insulting remarks were the most commonly experienced negative acts (Einarsen *et al.*, 1994).

3a. Explanatory theories and models

Some researchers have pointed out to the fact that group processes influence the creation of bullying. Hubert (1997) distinguishes between two models of group dynamic processes that explain the creation of workplace violence:

1) Competition model

In some groups there are people who are more aggressive than their colleagues. This person struggles to obtain certain privileges in the group. He or she often tries to engage other colleagues in bullying the victim. If it wasn't this victim, the aggressor would choose somebody else to ventilate his aggression on. If the aggressor, however, is not present, bullying decreases or stops.

2) Norm-maintaining model

In every group exist a hierarchy and a set of norms. If a (new) person doesn't try to adapt to and obey these rules and norms, the other group members begin to feel irritated. Here it's usually more people that begin with bullying, not one single aggressor. If the victim wasn't there, there would also be no bullying.

After some time these two processes tend to merge. Its because the victims of these two processes gradually start to show similar characteristics. In the competition model the victims become stigmatised which is similar to the impact on the victims in the normmaintaining model who cannot adapt to norms of the group. The results of bullying on both the two types of victims are supposed to be the same - insecurity, stress and decrease of productivity.

The above described models of the group processes influence on bullying are applicable on situations where bullying takes place between colleagues. However, the manager or another superordinate can be the aggressor or can support bullying behaviour. From her research Hubert (1997) claims that in 75% of bullying were also the managers involved.

In my opinion, these two models stress mainly group dynamic processes whereas other factors such as leadership, stress and personality might seem to be of less importance.

I think we should not underestimate these factors when designing explanatory models, because they substantially contribute to the occurrence of bullying.

Hubert and her colleagues however, pointed in another publication (Hubert *et al.*, 2001) also to the above mentioned factors that can contribute to the occurrence of bullying. The authors admit that stress and other workplace factors can influence group dynamic processes. Their model is partially inspired by Job-Demand-Job Control model by Karasek (Karasek, 1979, as described in Hubert *et al.*, 2001). This model demonstrates how the mental strain created by the interaction between job demands and job control together with little autonomy and work pressure result in high strain job.

From what has been written about bullying (Berkowitz, 1993; van der Meer, 1997, both described in Steensma, 2000; see also the reference to internet pages) some people start with bullying to release their problems - they choose somebody to ventilate their anger and frustration. If we take this reason into consideration, this possible cause of bullying doesn't fit in the above mentioned models.

I would therefore suggest the third model called "Personality model" to point out to the fact that sometimes bullying is not a question of group dynamic processes, norms or leadership, but rather primarily of the personality of the bully and the victim. This view is namely supported by a famous researcher in this field Dan Olweus, who studied bullying among school children. He came to the conclusion that there are specific personality characteristics typical for the bully and also for the victim. Child bullies have been found to be self confident, impulsive and to display a general tendency to react with aggression in many situations (Olweus, 1993). However, another researcher in this field, Heinz Leymann, states that personality traits are not relevant to the study of bullying, which is a matter of the work conditions (Leymann, 1992, as described in Einarsen *et al.*, 1994).

In my opinion, neither of these approaches should be considered isolated, it seems to me that both are mutually interdependent. Each person has a different level of tolerance to stress and negative external influence. Each person reacts differently to stress and negative circumstances, the tolerance threshold is unique and individual. Some people may be more prone to react earlier to stress, others may be able to tolerate frustration for a longer time.

As described in the previous sections, bullying is about verbal and sometimes even physical aggression, so there must at least exist a character trait of these people which would point out to the tendency towards aggression and emotional instability. Psychological literature has reflected a number of models related to adult offenders, for instance an authoritarian personality (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950, as described in Einarsen, 2000), the abrasive personality (Levinson, 1978, as described in Einarsen, 2000), the petty tyrant (Ashforth, 1994, as described in Einarsen, 2000) and also the above mentioned findings of Olweus. These theories of personality traits are perceived as controversial, but one cannot help wondering that they might be right.

As far as the above described competition model is concerned, Hubert (1997) claims that the main effort of the bully is to obtain privileges in the group. I think that some people may act aggressively from various other reasons – they might be frustrated in their private lives, or they might want to attract attention by behaving in a way that is not in accord with accepted rules. Furthermore, if somebody tries to attract attention, it can be an indirect call for help.

With the norm-maintaining model Hubert (1997) claims that the problem situation arises if the new person doesn't try to adapt to the norms at the workplace. However, maybe the person is trying to adapt to the norms, but these norms are not clearly defined, so the new employee does not have anything to stick to. The new person might have tried to adapt to the norms and rules if these norms and rules had been clearly given. If there are no clear and defined guidelines, it is difficult to understand and fulfil what is expected from you.

Furthermore, often the 'original' group members are not aware of the fact that the norms might be unclear to new group members so they still keep blaming the newcomer.

3b. Bullies and their targets

Bullying is a form of abuse, and bullies - and unenlightened employers - often go to great lengths to keep their targets quiet, using threats of disciplinary action, dismissal, and gagging clauses. What bullies fear most is exposure of their inadequacy and being called publicly to account for their behaviour and its consequences. The purpose of bullying might be to hide inadequacy, and people who bully to hide their inadequacy are often incompetent.

Bullying might even be obsessive and compulsive; the bully has *to have* someone to bully and appears to be unable to survive without a current target (<http://www.bullyonline.org>).

From two decades of research on bullying among school children Olweus (1991, as described in Einarsen, 2000) concluded that the typical victim of bullying is more anxious and insecure than other pupils and is often seen as cautious, sensitive and quiet. The victim reacts with withdrawal when attacked and they have a more negative self-esteem than other students. Also the victims of bullying at workplace have been shown to have low self esteem and to be anxious in social setting (Einarsen *et al.*, 1994). Others have described victims of harassment as conscientious, literal-minded, somewhat unsophisticated and as overachievers with an unrealistic view both of their abilities and demands of the situation (Brodsky, 1976, as described in Einarsen, 2000).

On the other hand Brodsky (1976, as described in Einarsen *et al.*, 1994) also claimed that harassment may be in fact an inherent characteristic and a basic mechanism within all human interaction. A similar view was presented by Thylefors (1987, as described in Einarsen *et al.*, 1994), who regarded bullying as a scapegoating process found in most organisations. However, the causal model of bullying at work that

as received most public attention in Scandinavia emphasises the quality of work environment as the main determinant of creating bullying. This view has been strongly supported by Leymann (1992, as described in Einarsen *et al.*, 1994), who claims that personality factors are irrelevant to the study of bullying and that work conditions alone are the primary cause of negative workplace behaviour.

Hubert (1997) points out to the fact that workplace bullying is a problem in which more people are involved: the victim, the bully who terrorises the victim, the observers that are affected by the conflict and employees who do not perceive this sort of behaviour.

Hubert therefore stresses the importance of integral approach towards the problem of bullying: the steps to be taken must be targeted at all involved, in preventive as well as in curative approach.

The problem of the conflict interpretation is very important when investigating the causes of workplace bullying. Victims may for instance perceive the negative workplace environment as negative more as a result of their own disappointment or anger than of objective characteristics (Einarsen *et al.*, 1994). It is therefore necessary to look more closely into differences between the victims' perceptions of their workplace environment and the perception of their co-workers.

4. Consequences of bullying

The consequences of bullying do not only concern the individual but they also influence the organisation. People being bullied use various strategies to approach their situation. Niedl (1996) mapped the patterns of behaviour of the victims of bullying: exit, voice, loyalty and neglect. Some victims responded to bullying by raising their concern within the organisation (voice). A frequent follow-up strategy was increasing their commitment to the organisation (loyalty). However, if no constructive solutions emerged, the individuals became losing their commitment and interest in the organisation (neglect). Sometimes the final step to leave the organisation appeared (exit).

In the 1997 UNISON study (Rayner *et al.*, 2002) less than a third of those who had been bullied said that they had taken time off because of bullying. People who were 'currently bullied' had the highest number of days off. On average the respondents who were currently bullied have taken off three and a half days more in the last six months than their colleagues.

Considerable evidence shows that people leave their jobs as a response to contact with bullying. The UNISON surveys showed that a quarter of those being bullied left their job. People leaving as a result of being bullied represents a very high cost to the organisation.

Some targets of bullying seek an apology or redress for their experience, and may stay on in the organisation to try and achieve this (Rayner *et al.*, 2002). As a result they might end up in a long-term conflict within the organisation, which can be destructive to all concerned.

4a. Work performance and productivity

Ashforth (1994, as described in Einarsen, 2000) suggests the following effects on employees: (1) frustration and stress, (2) helplessness and work alienation, (3) lowered self esteem and productivity and (4) low work unit cohesiveness. Being a victim of bullying seems to threaten people's positive assumptions of themselves, their performance and relationships with others.

It's not surprising that productivity tends to decrease as a result of bullying. Not only the quantitative aspect but also the qualitative aspect of work production seem to deteriorate.

Creativity and innovation are very likely to be negatively affected by bullying. Victims of longterm harassment at work may also strongly reduce their work commitment and may finally leave the organisation (Niedl, 1996).

4b. Ripple effect

Evidence shows that not only the victims themselves but also those who witness bullying may be negatively affected. A UNISON study survey showed that many witnesses (22%) ended up leaving job and 70% of them felt stressed by the contacts with bullying at work (Rayner *et al.*, 2002).

The negative consequences of bullying on witnesses have been confirmed by a research carried out by Hubert *et al.* (2001). Witnesses of bullying were found to have higher average scores than a control group as far as negative consequences are concerned. The most negative scores were reported within the group of victims, then witnesses and bullies as last. Thus, victims suffer most from bullying, but bystanders and witnesses also experience negative effects, such as health complaints. As for the health complaints, witnesses had significantly more health complaints than the members of a control group; but bullies didn't differ from the control group.

When bullying occurs, the onlookers can choose to passively observe, to become participants in the bullying, to walk away, or to intervene. Adair's recent New Zealand research (Adair, 1999, as described in Sullivan, 2000, see the consulted internet pages) found that 42% of onlookers to bullying chose not to intervene. She identified three reasons for this: "... the victim was not liked or not a friend; fear of being a target; belief that it was probably deserved" (p. 35). Adair identified sense of powerlessness amongst many onlookers. This was because they had neither strategies for combating bullying nor faith that it could be stopped.

4c. Costs to the quality of life of the individual

Consequences of bullying do not only affect the organisation and work quality, but the social life of the individual as well. Bullying takes its toll on relationships and family life, all of which affects the person's well being. On the individual level, bullying may not be the only source of strain in someone's life, but may attribute to exacerbating other problems.

A common feature of bullying is systematic exclusion and rejection from social groups - social ostracism (Williams, 1997, as described in Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003). Fear of being excluded from an important social group is a basic fear of all human beings. From an existential point of view, social exclusion may be life threatening (Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003). It may be, therefore, no surprise that exposure to social exclusion is associated with extreme anxiety and uncertainty (Einarsen, 2000). Ostracism deprives people of a sense of belonging to others and it threatens people's self-esteem and self-confidence. Leymann (1990, as described in Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003) described how exposure to social isolation or ostracism gradually reduces the victim's ability to cope with everyday problems, leading to a situation where the victim displays more and more abnormal behaviour.

The combination of the external situation and the stress put on the victims may result in developing severe psychological and psychosomatic health problems and the inability to engage in interaction with other people.

4d. Costs to health

Exposure to bullying at work has been classified as a significant source of social stress at work (Zapf, 1999; Vartia, 2001, as described in Einarsen *et al.*, 2003) and as a more devastating problem for employees than all work related stress put together (Wilson, 1991, as described in Einarsen *et al.*, 2003). A number of studies have confirmed that a relationship exists between bullying and impaired health. The number of people who become unemployable and develop severe health problems as a consequence of bullying is increasing.

A Norwegian study of trade union members within a number of occupations and industries concluded that anxiety, depression and aggression were the effects most related to bullying (Einarsen *et al.*, 1994). In a Finnish study of university employees the following symptoms have been reported by those

suffering from workplace bullying: insomnia, apathy, melancholy and a lack of concentration (Bjorkqvist *et al.*, 1994, as described in Rayner *et al.*, 2002).

Several studies of bullying have suggested that women may be more negatively affected than men by bullying. An Austrian study carried out by Niedl (1996) reported that women suffer from more psychosomatic complaints than men. A possible explanation is that working women may face additional domestic pressures which can cumulatively affect their health. Another argument may be that men have a higher threshold for complaints than women linked to other factors as personal image, smaller willingness to admit weaknesses and problems (Verbrugge, 1985, as described in Rayner *et al.*, 2002).

On the basis of clinical observations and interviews with American victims of workplace bullying Brodsky (1976, as described in Einarsen, 2000) identified three patterns of effects on victims: some expressed their reaction by developing vague physical symptoms such as weakness, chronic fatigue, pains and various aches. Others reacted with depressions and symptoms related to depression (sleeplessness, impotence, lack of self-esteem).

A third category reacted with psychological symptoms such as hostility, nervousness, loss of memory and avoidance of social contact. Therefore personal traits can be important moderators of the victim's reaction to bullying. Victims who are not anxious in social interactions and victims with positive self-esteem may cope better than others when facing interpersonal problems.

Recent research also shows a link between workplace bullying and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Until recently the PTSD had been linked exclusively to single traumatic events. However from the mid 1990s researchers in Scandinavia pointed to similarity between symptoms of the victims of workplace bullying and those identified as having PTSD. For instance, some victims have reported that they started to sweat and to feel physically sick on seeing their workplace, a very strong resemblance to a common symptom of those who suffer from PTSD. However, Scott and Stradling (1994) introduced a term Prolonged Duress Stress Disorder to distinguish the long-term exposure to small traumatic events as opposed to a single traumatic incident identified with PTSD.

5. Risk groups and risk organisations

Data from surveys of 7986 Norwegian employees within 13 different organizational settings (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996, as described in Einarsen, 2000) showed no differences in the prevalence of bullying among men and women. On the other hand, more men were reported as offenders. Furthermore, men were mostly bullied by men, while women were bullied by both men and women (most often by other women). Einarsen and Skogstad (1996, as described in Einarsen, 2000) also found that older employees reported more exposure to victimisation from bullying than younger employees. However, younger employees have been found to experience more direct attacks and negative treatments than their older colleagues. Also, behaviour labelled by older employees as bullying can be interpreted by younger employees as behaviour to be expected and tolerated. As employees grow older, they may expect to be treated with more dignity and respect, hence lowering their threshold for what they regard as acceptable treatment (Einarsen, 2000).

Further, bullying seems to be more common in private and large organisations, in male-dominated organisations and in industrial organisations (Einarsen, 2000). The possibility of experiencing bullying may occur as a result of many layers of superiors and unequal distribution of power in these organisations (Einarsen, 2000). In small and transparent organisations both the aggressors risk of getting caught and the following potential consequences may be greater.

6. Anti-bullying policies

There are two basic strategies to tackle bullying: preventive, focusing on how to prevent the occurrence of the problem, and curative, dealing with the already existing bullying and trying to minimise its effects. As mentioned further on, the research carried out within the Dutch organizations showed that the prevention of negative workplace behaviour is still not being taken seriously enough (Hubert, 2003). Among the approaches to the issue of bullying curative policies have still been a dominant strategy.

Whilst the media has played a highly significant role in heightening awareness, a less positive role can be assigned to the management training community and its allied organisations (Rayner *et al.*, 2002). Management publications rarely contain any reference to bullying at work, and they certainly lack any profound suggestions as how to deal with it.

However, anti-bullying policies are gradually starting to appear.

Lamplugh (2001, as described in Rayner *et al.*, 2002) points out that the question of victimisation at work has been increasingly seen as an important issue throughout Europe.

Norway recently improved its Work Environment Act to provide more protection for employees, in Germany a campaign against the workplace terror has been growing, in Sweden a new legal provision which came into force in 1994 outlaws offensive discrimination at work. The Scandinavian countries are well known for their emphasis on caring social values. Therefore it's not surprising that awareness of school bullying began in these countries spreading to other countries such as Britain, Germany, Japan, Australia, etc.

The movement against bullying in the workplace is now growing fast. One of the countries at the forefront is Sweden, which has had anti-bullying legislation since 1993 - the ordinance of the Swedish National Board of Occupational Safety and Health contained provisions for measures against victimisation at work. Australia completed a huge study of workplace violence in March 2002, the Queensland Government Workplace Bullying Taskforce Report (Queensland Government, 2002).

All over the world bills are being drafted against bullying: the Dignity at Work Bill in the UK, which failed to pass through parliament before the summer break in 2002, but could be revived; the US Campaign Against Bullying is planning to lobby for state legislation in California then Colorado and other US states; and the European Union commissioned research into violence in the workplace which was completed in 2001 - a first step towards legislation (<http://www.bullyonline.org>).

In the Netherlands employers are according to Arboret (Work Environment Act) from 1 October 1994 obliged to protect their own employees against aggression and violence.

Also the law "Wet uitbreiding loondoorbetalingsverplichting bij ziekte" (Wulbz) forces the companies to be more interested in approaching the strategies to discover possible factors resulting in health problems of employees. Several kinds of undesired behaviour are covered by this legislation, for example sexual harassment, bullying, racism, and external aggression towards the employees from the public.

In order to follow the legislative requirements Dutch organisations took several measures. In her article about preventing undesired behaviour patterns Hubert (2003) claims that 34% of all Dutch organisations appointed one or more employees as confidential counsellors where victims of bullying could seek support and guidance. 17% of Dutch organisations have a grievance committee and have formal complaints procedures for bullying. The way to approach this issue must be discussed with all the parties involved in the situation - management, confidential counsellors, grievance committee, company medical officers, labour unions, etc.

In the Czech Republic the legislation to tackle the problem of bullying has not been completed yet. The new law on preventing and tackling undesired behaviour patterns is being discussed in the Parliament at present. If everything goes well, the new law should be active since the beginning of the next year.

Tackling the issue of bullying is, generally speaking, nothing but easy. A general complaint of confidential counsellors has been that the management sometimes uses them as an excuse to push off responsibility for preventive policy. Victims are often sent from one person to another ending up without any solid recommendation and advice. If undesirable behaviour has been prevalent in the group for a long time and is thus seen by the employees as normal, intervention is more difficult, and it is advisable to hire an external expert (Hubert, 2003).

It is generally known that many organisations are not willing to acknowledge that bullying takes place. It is very simple to blame the victim that he or she is just "a difficult person". The bully remains in the organisation, the victim then leaves. This situation creates an enormous risk that the offender will pick another victim and the situation will simply repeat.

The most famous specialist in the field of bullying and to handle it is undoubtedly Dan Olweus. He did a large-scale research on bullying among school children in Norway and Sweden. He invented an anti-mobbing program, which resulted in surprising effects: bullying decreased by 50-70%, the school climate has improved and other forms of negative behaviour such as vandalism and truancy diminished as well (Olweus, 1993).

The anti-bullying program designed by Olweus is based on several conditions. To prevent aggressive behaviour there must exist a supportive and positive climate maintained by positive and caring attitudes of professionals, who must also be able to clearly define the acceptable rules of behaviour. If the rules were broken, the student must not be treated with hostile approach followed by physical sanctions.

The Olweus Prevention Program works with interventions at three levels: school-wide interventions (staff training, development of effective anti-bullying policy), classroom-level interventions (classroom meetings, peer groups, meetings with parents) and individual-level interventions (individual meetings with bullies and targets). This program is primarily targeted at schools but some elements can be certainly used for anti-bullying policies for organisations. Steensma (2000) points out to the use of this program's principles when trying to prevent or deal with undesired workplace behaviour: organising project groups, workshops, creating a code of conduct, supervising and establishing the role of confidential counsellors.

The suggestions written by Steensma (2000) are theoretically very useful, but practice can often bring new questions and problems. The idea of creating the code of conduct is very good, but we must not forget that such guidelines are effective providing that there is room for feedback. The code of conduct must not only be written on the board, but must be explained and discussed with the employees, so that they would feel that they are involved. Furthermore, as far as supervising and regular meeting groups are concerned, two questions arise: First, the groups must be small, so that everybody can participate. However, the smaller the groups, the more supervisors needed. Therefore, who will be the supervisor?

Should it be the manager from the department or the confidential counsellor? And, will the person in charge be willing to take on this extra duty? As far as the role of the confidential counsellors concerned, their tasks are mostly supportive and representative. What is, however, the optimal proportion between the tasks of this person as a confidential counsellor and as an ordinary employee? Furthermore, could a confidential counsellor be really impartial if you are at the same time involved in the company as an ordinary employee? Should this not lead to the role conflict? Apart from that, as research indicates (Daniels & Guppy, 1992; French & Caplan, 1972, as described in Einarsen *et al.*, 1994) that role conflict and lack of self-monitoring opportunities could lead to work and emotional stress, one cannot help wondering whether this would not contribute to the frustration of the counsellor.

Considering the issues above, we may wonder if the position of the confidential counsellor should at all be combined with a position of an ordinary employee. This solution may, however, bring high costs, and that may not get the support from the management. Suppose that the problem was solved by hiring a part-time external counsellor, then new issues may arise: First, will the external counsellor seem to be

trustworthy for the employees if he/she is from outside of the organisation?

Second, will the employees be willing to talk about their problems with a person from outside? These are issues that definitely must be considered before putting the new ideas into practice.

According to her research on the position of confidential counsellors, Barendrecht (2003) claims that confidential counsellors spend most of their time on the curative approach - support, advice and after-care, whereas the focus on prevention seems to be of less importance. Hubert (2003) points to the general complaint of confidential counsellors that they don't have time for other tasks than supporting and monitoring the victims, confirming the lack of preventive tasks. Apart from that, confidential counsellors do not always get the support from the management regarding enough time and the possibility to follow further trainings.

All in all, we see that there are a number of strategies and suggestions that can be used to tackle bullying, but that there are also practical obstacles that can hinder the application of the theories into practice. However, the practical obstacles can be dealt with suppose there is willingness to admit the existence and danger of the problem.

7. What can be done

What are the options for someone who has already become the target of bullying?

The person who believes they are being bullied needs to be able to discuss their situation with somebody who is empathic and trained in these issues. At this stage it's essential to identify the type of bullying that has been reported. The person who is in charge of investigation must be impartial and fully trained in bullying and investigation techniques specific to bullying.

For many targets the main concern will be to see their life return to normal (Rayner *et al.*, 2002). They may want to keep their jobs and to stop bullying so that they could continue with their normal lives. For others it may be important to get an apology, whereas for some people vengeance might be of the greatest importance: to see that their attacker suffers just like they did. It is necessary for the people who are being bullied to carefully consider the possible outcomes of the bully tackling process.

Hubert (2003) suggests two basic intervention strategies for one-to-one bullying:

informal solutions and formal complaints. The informal solutions seem to be most effective for victims and their relationships with their colleagues. In practice a formal complaints procedure often leads to rather an unfavourable solution - even if the victim wins the formal procedure, they almost always leave because they simply cannot cope with other co-workers who all know about the conflict. The start of intervention should be informal. If the strategy doesn't work, other (more escalating) steps might be taken.

A study carried out by Hoel and Cooper (2000, as described in Rayner *et al.*, 2002) focused on actions taken by the employees who faced bullying. The most frequent actions were informal: 47% of respondents discussed the problem with their colleagues and 34% confronted the bully, whereas only 8% made use of the organisation's grievance procedure and 11% went to the personnel department.

Informal actions Organisational bullying can often be defused without the need to escalate matters to the formal stage. With unwitting bullying, a quiet word or a letter from the target can often be sufficient. With a serial bully, the informal procedure may require that the alleged bully is made aware of their behaviour, as well as the harmful effect on their target. The bully will have to be reminded that bullying is a disciplinary offence and repeated incidents may render them liable to a formal procedure which might result in a disciplinary action. The policy must also have a clause stating that victimisation as a result of reporting bullying and harassment will be regarded as a serious breach of discipline and automatically result in a formal investigation. This investigation may then result in disciplinary action against the perpetrator, which may include dismissal.

Formal actions

If an informal strategy doesn't prove to be effective, a victim may formulate a formal complaint. A formal complaint procedure might start as a grievance committee considering a formal complaint. In some organisations the grievance committee consists of internal members only, in other organisations it consists of external members only or partially (Hubert, 2003). By hearing out the victims and the bully the plausibility of the complaint is being considered. Normally, the grievance committee gives advice to the organisation of how the situation can be solved. However, when great organisational interests are at stake, the complaints procedure often fails to be effective (Hubert, 2003).

Rayner *et al.* (2002) claim that the decision whether to use formal complaints methods is very difficult for many victims. If a formal action is being taken, there is now more at stake, including the possibility to lose the job. At that point many people decide to leave the organisation as they think that they won't be able to cope with the formal procedure. It is, however, understandable, because even if the situation has formally been solved, the come back to the workplace may cause extra stress, so the benefit of taking the action may not bring the desired satisfaction.

There are some main issues that could make the informal procedures less effective.

Firstly, a discussion between the bully and the victim is sometimes impossible because the bully may not admit that there is something wrong with their behaviour or they might even not admit it at all. Opening the problem can make the situation worse. Secondly, if the bully is threatened that their behaviour might lead to a formal procedure, the bully may become more aggressive as threats are not very successful strategies to deal with problems. As far as formal procedures are concerned, the main problem is that organizing a formal procedure can take time. Meanwhile, the situation may become so escalated and unbearable for the victim that they may leave before the procedure starts or may become exhausted before the procedure begins (or even drop the case).

7a. What can individuals do

The following suggested steps to tackle bullying are based on research of Charlotte Rayner *et al.* (2002) and Adrienne Hubert (2003).

7a.1. Doing nothing

There may be times when ignoring the aggressor's remarks or negative behavior may be wise, for example if the bully is acting that way because of personal circumstances you may be aware of. However, if this behaviour is persistent, ignoring the bully will most probably be of no help. Also, if the victim keeps silent the organisation may remain unaware of the problem and thus enabling the bully to continue with his attacks.

7a.2. Confronting the bully

If bullying is recent there is a good reason to believe that confronting the bully might be effective. It can be possible that the offender may not realise the effects of their actions and a clear signal may be enough to stop that behaviour. However, if the idea of confronting the bully makes the target more frightened, it would be then reasonable to identify what this fear is based on by means of assertive techniques. It is also worth considering your chances of support from your colleagues. Colleagues may be unwilling to give you support because they may be too afraid, but yet can one open protest start a cooperation from others who may have negative feelings.

If the bully is a manager, it represents a serious problem. The support of the bully may originate from respect as well as from fear. The research carried out by UNISON in 1997 (Rayner *et al.*, 2002) showed that a large number of targets confronting the bully has ended up becoming more isolated and finally leaving their jobs. Therefore it's not advisable to confront the superior directly.

7a.3. Going to the boss

Unfortunately many bullies are reported to be the managers or superordinates so this strategy is often ineffective. Based on her research of 1997 Charlotte Rayner (1997) claims that when the employees made a complaint at their boss the situation became worse instead of improving. This highlights the need for targets to get support when making confrontations. In general, the targets who went to the professionals such as the trade union or the personnel reported few negative outcomes.

7a.4. Going to the confidential counsellor

In the Netherlands many organisations have a confidential counsellor, a specially trained member of the staff, who is to offer support and guidance with problems of harassment and intimidation in the workplace. Some organisations employ an external confidential counsellor via Arbodienst. Organisations usually have more internal confidential counsellors or a combination of an internal and external counsellors. There is one 'central' counsellor who has to coordinate the cooperation between all the counsellors in the organisation.

The confidential counsellor is responsible for tasks related to prevention, advice and after-care of employees as well as for communication among various departments of an organisation. The counsellor should in case of serious psychosomatic and psychological complaints send the victim to a specialist, inform and talk about possible intervention plans.

After-care should match the intervention chosen. The supervisor should remain alert to any signals of the repetition of undesirable behaviour.

7a.5. Going to the personnel

The most important point of going to the personnel is that the targets let the organisation know that there is something going on. By doing so the target passes on the duty of care to personnel who are expected to take some action. However, it is necessary to admit that we cannot be very optimistic as far as the effect of this procedure concerns. The majority of the targets in the UK (Rayner *et al.*, 2002) conveyed that nearly nothing happened as a result of going to the personnel.

7a.6. Going to the union or staff organisations

Many organisations in the UK have a trade union or a staff association. Their knowledge of dealing with similar situations can be very useful. As their members have experience with dealing with the target organisation they might provide some useful tips for the best channels to follow.

In the Netherlands trade unions are almost always national unions. In general, these unions negotiate with representatives of employers' associations.

7a.7. Going to the occupational health specialist

Many organisations have an occupational health specialist who has broad experience with effects of stress. Furthermore, these specialists can use their network of contacts to alert the personnel that there is a potential problem.

Confidential counsellors have reported that a victim often doesn't have the courage to talk to the aggressor directly. If the bully doesn't deny the behaviour, then mediation can be a helpful strategy to deal with (Hubert, 2003). Mediation is, however, not the task of the confidential counsellor because of the possibility of being on the victim's side. A mediator should be an independent person, and this role can be very well fulfilled by an occupational health specialist. The mediator should stay in touch with the person after the necessary steps have been taken to keep an eye on whether the agreements are being followed.

7a.8. Seeking medical help outside the organisation

Some people see their general practitioners to seek advice. These specialists may suggest counselling or other sort of help. However, if there are no proved physical symptoms present, some doctors without specialised knowledge of bullying might be misled to diagnose a mental problem of the victim instead of connecting the problem with the work situation of the victims (Leymann 1996, as described in Rayner *et al.*, 2002). It is sad to admit that there are still many doctors who underestimate the problem of health consequences of workplace stress. Some victims of bullying in the Czech Republic have complained about the fact that their general practitioners underestimated this problem or didn't take any necessary steps to help in this situation (<http://www.vztahy.org>).

7a.9. Going to the court

Going to the court is demanding not only financially but emotionally as well.

Sometimes going through the court procedure can be as demanding as experiencing bullying. Many people may become so tied up in getting retribution that they spend years before they get satisfaction. Knowing that the legal procedure takes a lot of time, it is necessary to consider if such a long and exhausting process is worth the trouble and stress.

First, the question needs to be raised if the law can be effective when tackling the issue of bullying. In my opinion, if legislation is to be effective, it must be carefully designed to comprise not only specific laws concerning bullying, but it must also state what the consequences of such misconduct are. So far the legislation involves laws and statements under which can bullying be classified, but there are almost no specifications which paragraph concerns bullying and what the sentence can be. "At the moment, there is no law against bullying; you have to identify the nearest areas of law and base your case on them" (Tim Field, <http://www.bullyonline.org>).

Furthermore, suppose there was a clear and definite legislation, would it prevent the bullies from mistreating their victims? As said before, some researchers perceive bullying as obsessive because the bully has *to have* someone to bully and cannot do without a current target. I therefore do not believe that any legislation will stop such bullies. Apart from that, does legislation stop other misconduct and crime such as theft, murder and domestic violence? Legislation won't certainly stop bullying, but it doesn't mean that the legislation is no longer necessary. Legislation can prevent some crime, the rest is up to the people themselves. Education and family play definitely an important role here.

The problems with the law can be demonstrated on the law in the UK (<http://www.bullyonline.org/action/legal.htm>).

1. The current limit on compensation for unfair or constructive dismissal is £50 000 in the UK. In most cases, the award is less than one sixth this figure, and won't even pay the solicitor's bill, so the person may end up significantly out of money whatever the result
2. The nearest area of law to bullying is *constructive dismissal*: the conduct of the employer was such that you had no option other than to resign for the sake of your mental, and professional well-being. However, if you want to claim constructive dismissal, you must have resigned from your job; and once you resign you are jobless, without income, without access to records, and without references
3. The person may undergo a legal battle of 1-2 years with prospect of gaining only around £3000 which probably won't cover the solicitor's bill.
4. Who is going to employ a person who has been out of the workplace for a year and who has taken their former employer to tribunal? Would not the victim be labelled as a troublemaker?
5. In September 2000 new provisions under the Employment Rights Act 1999 in the UK come into force whereby workers have a right to be accompanied at disciplinary or grievance meetings. However, the person chosen can only be a fellow worker or trade union representative. In most bullying cases, fellow

workers are too scared to speak out or support someone being bullied, and in the majority of cases reported to the UK National Workplace Bullying Advice Line and Bully Online, the trade union rep has already refused to support their member.

6. The management often refuse to investigate, or use an untrained investigator. The union refuses to help, or initially shows interest but suddenly changes sides.

To sum it up, legal actions are often perceived as dragging and ineffective, as far as compensation and effort of the victim concerned. The prospects of achieving good consensus solutions diminish the longer an employee is away from work or the problems are left untackled.

In certain cases the problems may in time develop into a complete deadlock, with new misunderstandings and possibly the complete elimination of the employee from working life. It can be hard for an employer to take an objective view of all aspects of the problems, so sometimes mediation via the third party might be more effective.

7b. What can organisations do

Bullying is particularly difficult for HR departments to deal with because it is an issue between employees and requires care so as not to assume guilt on either side, as well as avoiding being more sympathetic to the victim, because the complaint is not always justified.

It is very difficult for HR departments to deal with because it is as if both sides were on trial.

The victim may be suffering from stress but the person who is accused will also find it a harrowing experience. There is potential for an employer to lose both sets of employees.

The manager has to be fair, neutral and independent.

7b.1. Creating the policy

Policy and procedures are the starting point for organisations who wish to create healthy workplace environment. Such statement is highly important because it provides a means to which everybody can refer to. According to Rayner *et al.* (2002) such a document should include:

- a statement of behaviour rules that one should follow.
- a description of behaviour that is required (code of conduct)
- a description of bullying behaviour patterns
- a statement that the organisation will not tolerate bullying
- what consequences of such behaviour can be
- procedures indicating how bullying will be dealt with
- reference to the person who is responsible for the implementation of the policy
- how the policy will be maintained and monitored

Some organisations take a different approach and rather than label all negative behaviour they focus on behaviour they seek, such as honesty, integrity and cooperation.

There should be as many representatives from any group within the organisation present when creating the policy. It is important that the policy be discussed with the employees, so that they would feel that their opinions are valued.

In the Netherlands, the Work's Council is usually involved in giving advice on matters concerning workplace safety, aggression, etc., so the members of the Work's Council who represent all employees (and who are elected in formal elections) are in position to discuss the policy.

It is necessary that the people involved in the procedures get necessary trainings.

Some organisations have networks of staff who function as contact advisers or buddies for employees who want to discuss the issues regarding bullying. Their role is very often not to intervene, but have a listening ear for the person who may feel to be a target of bullying.

Confidentiality is an issue that is important when dealing with bullying and it can affect the contact advisor's role.

The person who is supposed to be the first contact point for the problems and inquiries should be able to carry out further actions. Such action might mean approaching the manager or the bully themselves to start with the first interventions. By identifying problems before distress is caused, harm to the business and organisation can be minimised.

A big issue is, however, how far these details must remain confidential. What if many people complain about the behaviour of one particular person and the whole department is in distress? Should the confidential counsellor discuss it with the seniors or is he or she supposed to keep this secret? Rayner *et al.* (2002) point out to the British law which says that anyone who becomes aware of something that can endanger physical or psychological safety of a fellow employees has a duty to report it. Thus, as far as the confidential counsellors are concerned, this could mean that they cannot respect confidentiality but have a duty to report the problem to the senior level. Still, this can be a great source of dilemma for the confidential counsellors.

Some victims are afraid of voicing their complaints (Barendrecht, 2003). They are afraid to stir up negative feelings and to attract undesired attention. Here, the confidential counsellors are facing a dilemma: should they undertake an action for the well-being of the client or should they respect the wish of the client to remain 'silent'? This issue can be very painful for the involved counsellors, who then may feel that their hands are tied.

The confidential counsellor is facing a dilemma: should they help the client only (and thus remain silent) or should they take into consideration the potential danger of bullying growing being unnoticed and affect more people? The confidential counsellor is thus torn between the interests of the client and the interests of the organisation as a whole.

There is probably not one general solution to the problem, because each case is different and unique. My opinion is, nevertheless, that the confidential counsellor should respect the wish of the client if he doesn't want to voice the problem, however painful and frustrating for the counsellor it might be. The strongest argument to support my opinion is that the basic condition for a good relationship between the counsellor and the employee/client is trust and confidentiality, which might disappear if the counsellor does an action without the consent of the client.

7b.2. Investigation

If bullying cannot be resolved by an informal procedure, the target - or the employer if they feel it is appropriate under their duty of care - can initiate a formal procedure. The formal procedure must state clearly in writing what the procedure involves and what the possible outcomes will be. The first step is to find out the facts, so an investigation by a trained investigator is essential. The investigator must be impartial and confidentiality must be ensured.

Fear of retribution can mean that people are not willing to testify, thus the investigator must take in consideration what possible obstacles there can exist. Sometimes the investigation cannot be carried out by the staff, so several organisations hire external investigators to help them. It is also an effective way to train new in-house investigators.

If bullying is found to have taken place, further steps must follow. In cases where the bully's behaviour has been seen as a serious misconduct the bully may be dismissed. Often, however, the situation is not so serious and formal warnings are sufficient.

How do the two parties then get back to their work? One of the possible solutions is to move one party within the organisation. These are often junior people as they are more flexible and therefore easier to move. The problem is, however, that the junior people are often those, who raise the complaint, and therefore they might feel punished by having to change their jobs. This is a tough issue for managers, as they frequently more value senior staff and wish them to continue in their positions. Nevertheless, what

is the fairness of such an approach if those senior managers are bullies? The costs for not moving someone are higher than if a change in positions happens. If someone is allowed to continue in their position, this can be a clear signal for the other people that bullying is tolerated. If the organisations don't undertake necessary steps to tackle bullying, they can be seen as supporters of bullying. Some senior managers may not dare to confront the key staff who are accused of bullying. Other managers may find it hard to undergo actions against their colleagues and friends of a number of years. Dealing with bullying at work is a test of leadership skills and making such radical decisions is hard.

Brodsky (1976, as described in Einarsen *et al.*, 1994) and Thylefors (1987, as described in Einarsen *et al.*, 1994) claim that bullying is a basic mechanism within all human interaction and is to be found in most organisations. A question then arises: Will not the former victim attract/trigger bullying behaviour by a potential bully present in the new department (and the situation being repeated)? If it is the bully who is to be moved, would he not start to protest by sabotaging? And what about the people in the new department? Will they be ostracising the former bully? According to the suggested personality model, the chances can be high, but if we stick to the other models, the risks might be low and acceptable.

Another problem is if the people in the department should be informed about the procedure. How to look upon this problem? From the company's point of view, we might feel that informing the department about the nature of the problem may stop rumours and misinterpretations, as well as raise awareness of the problem. On the other hand, taking into consideration well-being of the victim, we might not want to bring up the affair so that the victim would not become more negatively 'famous' to the whole company.

7b.3. Prevention

According to Hubert (2003) the research carried out within the Dutch organizations revealed that not much has been done to prevent undesirable workplace behaviour. Curative policies stressing complaint procedures have received most attention. Also confidential counsellors take often their own initiative by arranging meetings and giving information about negative workplace behaviour for the staff. The crucial role must be, however, played by the management, who must establish preventive policy.

Employers should conduct a risk assessment to evaluate the risk of workplace bullying occurring within the organisation. The risk management process involves:

- 1) Identifying the hazards of workplace harassment to health and safety
- 2) Assessing the risks
- 3) Deciding and implementing control measures to prevent or minimise the risk
- 4) Monitoring the effectiveness of the control measures

Source: Queensland Government (2003)

For prevention, monitoring is critical, especially gathering data on why people leave.

High data regarding long-term sickness absence and number of employees leaving the organisation could be leading indicators for bullying at work. Interviewing staff who have left the organisation has proven to be a highly effective way of identifying problems (Rayner *et al.*, 2002). Also gathering as much information on informal complaints can be very useful when identifying bullying, as well as contacting occupational health specialists.

Furthermore, annual surveys of staff opinion are increasingly seen as good practice, at least judging from experience in the UK (Rayner *et al.*, 2002). The information should be reviewed at least once a year by a team of those involved in creating the company policy. According to the advisory standards for preventing workplace harassment issued by Queensland Government (2003) workplace harassment is encouraged in conditions of secrecy and poor communication. Many forms of workplace bullying, such as spreading false rumours or withholding important information from employees prosper from poor

communication workplaces. Open management decision making processes may ensure that employees are less likely to believe false information. Management should engage in an open communication with the staff and briefing at regular basis. In an open workplace people who display negative forms of behaviour are easier to be caught and exposed. Furthermore, it is well known that employees work better and more efficiently if they are being treated with respect and dignity and their judgements are taken into account.

There is a number of methods that an employer can use to make sure that the employees understand and are aware of policies to prevent undesired workplace behaviour.

Here are some of the strategies recommended by Queensland Government (2003):

1. Distribute policies: distribute a copy of a harassment policy to all workers
2. Training sessions: conducting trainings on workplace bullying
3. Staff meetings and briefings: management and staff regularly discussing prevention policy and handling complaints
4. Payslip attachment: attach a copy of workplace bullying prevention policy and complaints handling strategies to the pay slips of each employee
5. Posters: placing workplace harassment posters on notice boards and include contact information of workplace harassment contact people
6. Newsletters: placing information on workplace harassment in newsletters
7. Intranet: placing the information on undesired workplace behaviour and complaints handling systems on the internal network.

Not only the staff but also the management must get the training how to minimize negative workplace behaviour. The task must be seen as mutual by the management and the confidential counsellor; the responsibility should not be left on the confidential counselor only.

The problems with putting the ideas and suggestions into practice are the reason to develop an integral approach to the issue of bullying, such as designed by Olweus, with actions on several levels, inclusion of several parties and using both preventive and curative strategies.

In general, there is no best way to tackle work related violence, but much can be done concerning the creation of healthy workplace environment (prevention), management and staff trainings and support of the victims (rehabilitation).

8. Conclusion

From what has been written concerning the issue of undesired workplace behaviour it is evident that this issue grows if being unnoticed or disregarded. Bullying or harassment can undermine our dignity, self-confidence and relationships to other people. Research has repeatedly proved that disregarding or underestimating workplace bullying can have extensive negative consequences to the well-being of employees and it has great costs to productivity in general.

Bullying is difficult to recognise and treat if there is general unwillingness in the company to admit that something like this is present 'in our company'. "Many companies don't want to know about the problem. They are too frightened," says anti-bullying writer Tim Field, author of UK website <http://www.successunlimited.co.uk>, publishing his opinions at present on the website <http://www.bullyonline.org> too. "They have to recognise signs of dysfunction. It is a serial offence in the majority of cases I process, and the bully is often very convincing."

Many companies when dealing with bullying focus namely on curative policies, whilst paying little or no attention to preventive strategies. Thus, very often bullying receives attention when it's too late and when damage has already been done. Instead of focusing on the consequences of bullying only, companies should establish effective internal policy based on clear guidelines, open communication within the departments and willingness to admit and be prepared to deal with occurring problems.

From what has been written in this thesis, the questions and issues connected with bullying point out to the necessity of introducing an integral approach towards this problem, with actions on various levels and targeted at all the groups involved. Furthermore, it's necessary to combine preventive and curative strategies when trying to tackle bullying.

There are many ways that can help tackle bullying, but all of them are effective only on one condition - that the people in question are willing to do something about it. We need therefore to find the ways to be able to cooperate and find the ways to tackle the issue of bullying effectively. Understanding the problem and willingness to tackle it are basic presumptions of creating effective solutions.

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