

Bullying: When Work Becomes Indecent

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Bullying: When Work Becomes Indecent

Angelo Soares

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

Bullying in the workplace in one form or another has always existed. Since the 1990s, however, the frequency, intensity and psychopathological consequences of bullying in the workplace have reached alarming proportions in a variety of countries. In France the publication of a book on the subject titled *Le Harcèlement moral* by Marie-France Hirigoyen launched a debate which has led to a better understanding of this phenomenon. Not only does the book focus attention on this insidious form of violence, it also reminds readers that putting up with bullying at work is not a normal part of the job. Furthermore, the volume gives a voice to numerous victims of work-related bullying, and it resulted in the passing of a law in France (December 2001) to counter work-related bullying. The law, drafted within the framework of a thrust towards social modernization, makes bullying at work punishable by up to one year in prison and a fine of 100,000 Francs (\$20,000). Similar laws are currently being considered in Ireland, Belgium, the U.K. and Portugal. The European Parliament recently endorsed a report on bullying at work; it is also presently considering different means by which to combat this form of violence in the workplace. In Québec, an interministerial commission led by the Minister of Labour tabled a report on the problem in May 2001.

Definitions

Different definitions have been used in different studies on bullying at work. Listed below are some of the principle definitions used in the francophone and anglophone literature:

- X repeated and obstinate attempts of one person to torment, frustrate, or break the resistance of another person, an attempt to get a wanted reaction from them. It is a form of treatment that, applied with persistence, provokes, pressures, frightens, intimidates, and inconveniences the victim (Brodsky, 1976).
- X destructive process consisting of a succession of hostile statements and actions which, if taken in isolation, seem harmless, but whose constant repetition has pernicious effects (Leymann, 1996: p. 26-27).
- X any and all action which, through its repetition or its severity, diminishes the dignity or the integrity of the worker... It can take many forms such as insults, humiliation, threats, blackmail, direct or indirect accusations, unfounded insinuations, unjustified acts of retaliation, constant personal attacks (Au bas de l'échelle, 1998).
- X repeated inappropriate behaviour, direct or indirect, whether verbal, physical or otherwise, conducted by one or more persons against another or others, at the place of work and/or in the course of employment, which could reasonably be regarded as undermining the individual's right to dignity at work. (Doyle, 2001)
- X all behaviour deemed abusive (through gestures, words, demeanour, attitude...) which diminishes, by its repetition or systematization, the dignity or the psychological or physical integrity of an individual, thereby compromising the individual's employment or causing damage to labour relations (Hirigoyen, 2001: p. 13).

Both the francophone and the anglophone literatures seem to agree on at least three elements of the definition: first, (1) the recurring and persistent nature of the action; next, (2) the harmful, even devastating, effects on the person being targeted; and finally (3) the focus of the definition on the effects suffered by the targeted individual and not on

the intentions of the aggressor (Quine, 1999). Bullying is described in the literature as a form of systematic aggression committed by an individual or group against an individual or group.

Contrary to other forms of violence in the workplace, bullying is a process comprised of different types of behaviours which evolve over time. Since it is a process, it is important to understand how and when it originates if we are to prevent it or intervene effectively shortly after its onset.

Sources and Types of Bullying

Dejours (1998) associates bullying at work to newly emerging forms of labour relations that are characterized by the weakening of labour unions and by the destabilisation of labour alliances caused by the rationalization of the labour force within organisations¹. This far-reaching transformation of the organization and of work conditions can be seen as a probable cause of the increase in the incidence of bullying at work.

In fact, bullying at work must be understood here not as an isolated, episodic, instant, and accidental phenomenon, but as the result of the convergence of several tendencies which affect the very nature of work organization today. For not only do these tendencies carry the germs of violence, they also provoke the disintegration of social relations in the workplace as well as outside the workplace. Le Goff (2000) also emphasizes the social conditions which bring about an increase in the expression of this form of violence. It must be understood that these new forms of work (dis)organization do not in themselves lead to bullying, but they do provide a fertile ground in which it may occur.

1. On the topic of the casualisation and the weakening of the relationships at work see: Huez (1997 and 1998), Sennett (1998) and Appay & Thébaud-Mony (1997).

Dejours (2001) also raises an important point which has heretofore evaded empirical study in asserting that bullying is rarely felt by just one person. "The persecution of an individual has a powerful intimidating effect on colleagues who come to recognize the impunity with which the aggressor acts... and this increases their own fear! Everyone is out to protect himself/herself... Silence and the defection of witnesses, the absence of solidarity and assistance are catastrophic for the victim" (p. 10). Therefore, it seemed important and pertinent to ask questions not just about the effects of bullying on the mental health of targeted individuals, but about witnesses of the acts as well.

On the basis of a series of inquiries and interviews Leymann (1996) was able to devise a typology of forty-five behaviours arranged in five groups to characterize bullying at work. These behaviours attempt to: (1) prevent the victim from expressing himself/herself; (2) isolate the victim; (3) diminish the victim with respect to colleagues; (4) discredit the victim in the workplace; (5) compromise the health of the victim.

According to Leymann (1996), bullying can develop vertically within the hierarchy of the organization or horizontally (between and among colleagues within the same hierarchical level). Cru (2001) further refines the issue with respect to vertical bullying by differentiating between bullying in which management is openly involved in dismantling the social bond versus where management denounces bullying but abets it through its action (or inaction). We believe that it is necessary to describe a third type, namely one in which management is directly responsible for bullying as a result of its incompetence or through lack of leadership. The objective here is not to defend nor to justify the actions of the bully; however, before advancing simplistic hypotheses one must try to better understand and contextualize the problem so as to be more effective in countering or preventing it.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to document and better understand the issue of bullying among the members of the *Centrale des syndicats du Québec (CSQ)*² in an effort

2. The CSQ numbers 13 federations that unite approximately 250 unions affiliated on the basis of their members= fields of activity: education (teaching, professional and support staff), daycare, health and

to: (1) identify the effects of bullying on the mental health of unionized workers; (2) determine if bullying is influenced by different social relations (namely race and ethnic origin, age and gender); and (3) identify if there are differences with respect to the effects of bullying on mental health between workers who are targets of bullying and those who witness it.

Methodology

Considering our objectives, we have favoured a quantitative research project based on responses gathered in a questionnaire mailed to different groups of workers who are members of the CSQ (n = 2000 questionnaires).

To ensure a greater degree of representation, our sample was stratified according to gender and type of work. This dichotomy further allowed us to introduce social relations based on gender in our analysis. Thus, it was possible to determine if gender is a factor in bullying in the workplace or if it is a simple bias resulting from a gender-based division in the workplace.

To ensure a higher response rate, we addressed each questionnaire to a specific person, including a letter of introduction explaining the objectives of the questionnaire and ensuring confidentiality and anonymity. Each envelope contained an introductory letter, the questionnaire, and a stamped return envelope. A reminder letter was sent three weeks after the initial mailing of the questionnaire. The response rate was 33%.

Table 1 : Profile of Respondents

	(%)
<i>Occupational Group</i>	
Teachers	76.3
Support Staff	8.0
Professional	8.5
Health and Social Workers	6.1
Daycare Workers	1.1
<i>Total</i>	100.0
<i>Gender</i>	
Women	71.3
Men	28.7
<i>Total</i>	100.0
<i>Ethnic Origin</i>	
Canadians	96.1
Non-Canadians	3.9
<i>Total</i>	100.0

The respondents were arranged in four groups: (a) those who were never bullied or never witnessed any bullying at work (NB); (b) those who are presently being bullied (VB); (c) those who were bullied at work in the last 12 months (BB); and (d) those who have witnessed incidents of bullying in the workplace (WB). Psychological distress, depression,

and post-traumatic stress syndrome were used as early indicators of declining mental health. We compared these indicators within the four groups, and with respect to the Quebec population in general as pertains to psychological distress.

It is important to note that, similar to previous empirical studies, we could not establish a correlation between individual traits (age, gender, ethnic origin, type and status of work) among the targets of bullying (see Table 1). It seems apparent, therefore, that bullying is less a matter of individual characteristics than it is a result of intolerance within organizations.

The average age of respondents is 43 years. The average number of years of work experience is 17 years, an average of 11 years in the current position, and an average of 14 years working for the same employer. In terms of education, 73% have a university degree and 8.2% have a post-graduate degree.

Bullying

This study uses two methods to identify people affected by bullying. The first measure is based on the "Leymann Inventory of Psychological Terror" (LIPT). The second is based on a given definition of bullying followed by a question whose objective was to establish the link between respondents and bullying at work, as demonstrated in Table 2.

These results indicate that one person in three among the members of the CSQ has been touched by some form of bullying. Furthermore, one person in five has been a target of bullying at work within the last year. These statistics cannot be generalized for Quebec's entire population however. We are presently planning additional research projects whose objective is to obtain a broader understanding of the situation for all of Quebec. Equally important is the difficulty of making international comparisons, for the methodology used in each of the studies is not equivalent.

Table 2 : Bullying in the Workplace

The Four Groups:		(%)
I am presently a target of bullying	(VB)	10.9
I have been bullied in the past 12 months	(BB)	18.0
I witnessed incidents of bullying	(WB)	6.1
I have never experienced bullying	(NB)	65.0

Through the use of the LIPT questionnaire, we observed that 13% of respondents have been the target of bullying. This difference indicates that there were at least ten respondents who stated that they were not targets of bullying, though they had been subjected to one or more acts³ of bullying at least once a week for a period of two months. This suggests that for these ten people, putting up with bullying at work is perceived as a normal part of their job. This is an unfortunate consequence of the trivialization of violence in the workplace.

The Elements of Bullying

The most common behaviours experienced in the last 12 months are indicated in Table 3⁴. It is important to note that in the course of bullying, rarely is just one type of

3. Among the behaviours which constitute bullying at work devised by Leymann (1996).

4. In Table 3 the percentage total exceeds 100%, as respondents were permitted to check more than one answer.

behaviour manifested vis-à-vis the target. In addition, this collection of behaviours further illustrates the process of psychological destabilisation that the target undergoes.

Tableau 3 : The Most Common Behaviours Expressing Bullying (%)

Insinuations, no direct remarks ^b	66
Disapproving stare or gestures ^b	58
Talking behind the your back ^b	53
Superior who hinders the expression of your opinion ^a	45
Other people hinder the expression of your opinion ^a	43
People question your judgement ^b	40
Shouting at you ^a	35
Disparaging your work ^b	32
Interrupting you every time ^a	27
Spreading rumours about you ^b	27
Performance is evaluated on false criteria ^b	20
Verbal threats ^a	25

As intense as it is frequent, bullying was reported by 63% of respondents who were targets of bullying as a situation which they have had to endure for more than two years, while 69% reported having to endure an incident nearly every day. The events can be organized in two groups on the basis of the effects on the individual. The first group (a) aims to silence the target, while the second group (b) aims to discredit the target in the workplace.

The Sources of Bullying

Leymann (1996) identifies three sources of bullying in the workplace: (1) the work organization; (2) the perception of tasks (to escape boredom/repetition); and (3) the

management style. According to our data (see Table 4), three elements appear to trigger bullying: (1) organizational changes; (2) interpersonal conflicts; and (3) the exercising of a right⁵.

Table 4 : Factors Triggering Bullying
(%)

Following an organizational change	45.3
Following a conflict with the individual doing the bullying	14.9
After exercising a work-related right (Sick leave, maternity leave, etc.)	13.3
Following reductions of personnel	3.3
After taking part in a labour union event	0.6

The results presented in Table 4 seem to confirm the notion that bullying at work comes about as a result of changes in the work organization and the working conditions. What is even more troubling is the fact that 13.3% of bullying cases began when the worker exercised a work-related right. In practice, this means, for example, that a worker who comes back from sick leave is targeted for bullying. The "elimination" dimension, generally associated with bullying at work, is clearly evidenced here.

5. These three aspects and the casualisation of work have also been identified as triggers of bullying in the study we conducted among people affected by bullying in partnership with the popular Montreal group "Au bas de l'échelle", see Soares (1999).

The Bullies

Among the members of the CSQ, more often than not, the bullies are colleagues (see Table 5). A possible explanation for this characteristic might be the type of work associated to the emergence of new forms of work organizations which are based on individualism and the isolation of individuals in time and space. As a result, informal groups and social interaction at work are particularly weakened and at times even destroyed. The possibility for cooperation, communication and resistance become increasingly difficult. This, in turn, contributes to an increase in suffering, frustration and fear B emotions which one must struggle with in a social vacuum where it is every one for himself/herself and where one feels helpless.

Table 5 : Who is Doing the Bullying?	(%)
A colleague	31.0
Several colleagues	22.0
Your immediate superior	22.4
Student(s) / patient(s)	20.0
Subordinate(s)	4.4

It is important to note that the respondents in this study are unionized workers. Therefore, bullying by a superior can be checked, to some degree, by existing grievance mechanisms.

When it comes to the gender of bullies (see Table 6), one must be wary of generalizations. Based on the results, it would be tenuous to state that women tend to

bully more than men, since the majority of respondents in this study were women (see Table 1). Furthermore, no statistically significant difference was observed in comparing the gender of the bully to that of the target. That is, a man can bully another man or a woman as can a woman bully another woman or man.

	(%)
Man	26.6
Woman	38.2
Man & Woman	35.2

In brief, we are experiencing continual organizational changes, polarization between those who work more and more and those who don't have enough work, an increase in work-related stress and an increasing casualisation of labour. In such a social context, bullying is unfortunately finding fertile ground to spring roots within organizations.

Consequences

The consequences of bullying are always grievous. In this study we have measured the effects of bullying on the mental health of the workers who are members of the CSQ.

1- Psychological distress

To measure psychological distress we used the psychological distress scale developed by *Santé Québec* (IDPESQ-14) from Ilfeld's "Psychiatric Symptoms Index B PSI". Ilfeld's Index includes four factors: anxiety, depression, aggressiveness and cognitive

problems. It should be emphasized that the PSI does not identify cases of mental illness or incapacity. The index measures the intensity of symptoms, and it may be a good indicator of the state of mental health of individuals.

An interesting comparison to better understand this measure was offered by Perreault (1989). "Psychological distress is to mental health what fever is to infectious diseases: a measurable symptom, an obvious sign of a health-related problem, but which by itself cannot explain the etiology nor the severity of the problem."

Table 7 compares the average scores obtained on the Ilfeld Scale for the four groups of respondents: those who are presently being bullied (VB), those who have been bullied in the past (BB), those who have witnessed incidents of bullying (WB), and those who were never bullied or never witnessed any bullying at work (NB).

The results contained in Table 7 reveal the presence of symptoms of psychological distress which are significantly higher among people who are presently the target of bullying. The analysis results of analysis of variance are significant for all the groups (except for the WB and BB groups for whom the differences are not significant). The probability that the average differences among the four groups are due to a sampling error is extremely low ($p \leq .0001$).

Use of the Scheffé test allowed us to carry out multiple comparisons, which in turn yielded a more precise analysis. For the general score as for the four factors (anxiety, depression, aggressiveness and cognitive problems) the average differences among each of the four groups are statistically significant (except for WB and BB). This indicates that the average scores obtained by people who are presently the targets of bullying (VB) are significantly higher than: people who experienced bullying in the past (BB); people who have witnessed bullying (WB); people who have never experienced bullying at work (NB).

Table 7 : Average Scores Obtained Using the Ifeld Scale

	NB	WB	BB	VB
General Score	15.9	25.2	30.7	38.1
Anxiety	20.1	32.6	36.9	44.6
Depression	14.2	22.2	29.7	37.1
Aggressiveness	15.0	25.5	30.5	37.1
Cognitive problems	15.9	22.9	25.5	36.2

VB > BB > WB > NB; WB= BB; multiple comparisons with Scheffé test. The symbol > indicates significantly greater at a threshold $p \leq .0001$ according to a bilateral test. There is no significant difference between BB and WB.

There is no statistically significant difference between the average score of people who have witnessed bullying and those who have formerly been but are no longer targets of bullying. Nonetheless, the average scores obtained in these two groups are significantly greater than the score obtained by people who have never been the targets of bullying.

The overall results indicate the presence of a greater incidence of symptoms of psychological distress among people who are targets of bullying at work compared to people who have never been bullied. Meanwhile, witnesses to bullying and former targets occupy an intermediate position between the two extreme groups.

The average psychological distress score of people who are presently the targets of bullying is 140% higher than that of people who have never experienced bullying. The average psychological distress score of people who have witnessed bullying is 59% higher than that of people who have never experienced bullying. Finally, people who have

experienced bullying in the last twelve months have an average psychological distress score which is 93% higher than that of people who have never experienced bullying.

It is to be noted that Santé Québec uses a value of 26.2 to identify a high-symptom population. In addition, according to the data obtained by the 1998 Social and Health Survey, the proportion of Quebeckers who can be categorized at the higher end of the psychological distress index declined between 1992-93 and 1998.

2- Depression

Depression is one of the most serious problems affecting mental health. Depressive states are often associated with other types of psychological problems. The danger of committing suicide is particularly higher among people suffering from depression. To measure depression we used an abridged version of the Beck Depression Inventory B BDI (13 items)⁶. It is a self-evaluation instrument which appears to be the best means of evaluating the severity of general depression.

Table 8 compares the average scores obtained via the BDI for the four groups of workers who: are presently the targets of bullying (VB); are former targets of bullying (BB); have witnessed bullying (WB); have never been bullied (NB).

Table 8 indicates the frequency and intensity of the symptoms of depression among the four groups of workers, members of the CSQ, tested. Use of the Scheffé test allowed us to carry out multiple comparisons, which in turn yielded a more precise analysis. The average differences among the groups are statistically significant when comparing two groups: the group containing workers who have experienced or continue to experience bullying versus the group containing workers who have never been bullied or have witnessed bullying. This indicates that the average scores obtained for people who are

6. See Beck, A. et al (1974).

experiencing bullying (VB) or are former targets (BB) are significantly higher than the average scores of people who are witnesses to bullying (WB) or those who have never been bullied (NB).

Table 8: Measurement of the Severity of Depression According to BDI.

	NB	WB	BB	VB
General Score BDI (0 - 39)	5.9	10.3	14.1	14.1
Depression				
0 - 5 (normal)	58.5%	43.7%	27.2%	23.6%
6 - 10 (mild)	19.9%	15.7%	18.5%	20.0%
11 - 15 (moderate)	7.3%	15.7%	17.4%	10.9%
16 - 25 (severe)	8.6%	12.5%	20.7%	21.9%
26 and higher (very severe)	6.0%	12.5%	16.4%	23.6%

VB > NB; BB > NB; multiple comparisons with Scheffé test. The symbol > indicates significantly greater at a threshold $p \leq .0001$ according to a bilateral test.

Among the people who are presently experiencing bullying, 45.5% demonstrate symptoms of depression severe enough to warrant medical attention. Among the people who have experienced bullying in the last 12 months, 37% still suffer from symptoms of depression and need medical attention.

One cannot overlook the fact that the risk of suicide is greater among people suffering from depression. Furthermore, the literature presents several cases of people who have committed suicide as a result of having been the targets of bullying (Leymann,

1996). Einarsen et al. (1994, quoted in Hoel et al. 1999) suggests that 40% of people targeted (that is, those most frequently targeted by bullying) have had suicidal thoughts. In France several cases of suicide have been attributed to bullying (Muller, 2000).

3- Post-traumatic stress syndrome

Numerous researchers have demonstrated a correlation between bullying and the onset of post-traumatic stress syndrome⁷. Leymann & Gustafsson (1996) focus on a very important aspect: post-traumatic stress syndrome causes personality changes in the sufferer of bullying to the point of triggering depressive or obsessive behaviour. This aspect is very important, for people who are or have been targets of bullying may already find themselves in a post-traumatic state; and as a result, efforts to identify their personality traits as a justification for bullying are invalidated from the start for what is being described are the traits of people whose personality has already been afflicted and therefore modified by bullying.

Except for rape targets, targets of bullying demonstrate a higher degree of psychological distress than all other patients who have developed post-traumatic stress syndrome after enduring a traumatic event or being targets of an accident (Leymann, 1996, and Leymann & Gustafsson, 1996).

Post-traumatic stress syndrome is an extremely debilitating anxio-depressive disorder which can manifest itself after exposure to a traumatic event; that is, an event in which the two following elements are present: (a) the individual is target or witness to a patently stressful event in which he fears for his life; and (b) the response to the event is one of intense fear, horror or impotence.

7. Cf: Leymann & Gustafsson (1996), Björkqvist et al (1994) and Greblinghoff & Becker (1996).

Most individuals afflicted by post-traumatic stress syndrome try to avoid all recollections or thoughts associated with the traumatic event. Despite all avoidance strategies, the individual will relive the event in repetitive fashion, through nightmares, intrusive thoughts, feelings of depression, feelings of guilt, irritability, etc.

Table 9: Post-Traumatic Stress Symptoms Scale (%)

	WB	BB	VB
No Problem (2 symptoms or less)	60.6	54.6	23.7
Uncertainty (3 to 5 symptoms)	33.3	22.7	28.8
Occupational Dysfunction (6 symptoms or more)	6.1	22.7	47.5

Multiple comparisons with Scheffé test. The symbol > indicates significantly greater at a threshold $p \leq .001$ according to a bilateral test.

We used two instruments to measure post-traumatic stress syndrome among the members of the CSQ who witnessed bullying, among those who were targets of bullying in the last twelve months, and among those who are presently being subjected to bullying. The first instrument used is the Post-Traumatic Stress Symptoms Scale (PTSS-10). Table 9 summarizes the principal results of exposure to bullying when comparing the three groups of CSQ workers described. The second instrument is the Impact of Event Scale (IES) developed by Horowitz (1986) to measure the subjective distress associated to a specific event. These two scales, one for cognitive intrusion symptoms and the other for avoidance experiences, comprise the general scale which constitutes an effective measure of post-traumatic adjustment.

Through the use of the Scheffé test, multiple comparisons allowed us to determine that the differences between the group currently subjected to bullying (VB) and the other two groups (BB and WB) are statistically significant. By comparison, the differences between the BB and WB are not statistically significant. This indicates that post-traumatic stress symptoms are significantly higher among individuals being subjected to bullying compared to individuals who have been but are not presently being victimized or those who have witnessed bullying. These results are confirmed through the use of the intrusion and avoidance scales of the IES (see Table 10).

Table 10 : Average Scores Obtained with the IES

	Average		
	WB	BB	VB
Intrusion (total)	9.1	12.9	21.8
Avoidance (total)	14.0	14.7	21.2
IES Total	23.1	27.6	43.0

Multiple comparisons with Scheffé test. The symbol > indicates significantly greater at a threshold $p \leq .005$ according to a bilateral test. There is no significant difference between BB and WB. (Total: VB > BB; VB > WB), (Intrusion: VB > BB; VB > WB), (Avoidance: VB > BB; VB > WB).

Table 10 indicates that when individuals are subjected to bullying at work, they develop intense post-traumatic stress symptoms: intrusive and recurrent thoughts and avoidance of associated elements. For witnesses, as well as for former targets of bullying, one observes a certain reduction in post-traumatic stress symptoms. This reduction is

statistically significant. Through the use of the Scheffé test, multiple comparisons allowed us to determine that the differences between the group subjected to bullying (VB) and the other two groups (BB and WB) are statistically significant. The differences between the BB and the WB are not statistically significant.

Organizational Consequences

The organizational consequences of bullying result in a higher incidence of worker absenteeism and a degradation and disintegration of the organizational environment. This, in turn, implies a reduction in the quality of work, obstacles to teamwork, a deterioration of the organization's image, higher insurance premiums, low performance and an increase in legal costs. The current study revealed that 1500 workdays were lost as a result of bullying at work.

One of the myths about bullying is that people being bullied do not carry their weight, that their performance is substandard, or that they try to avoid work. It is important to debunk this myth. Individuals subjected to bullying are generally satisfied with their work. We used a scale from 1 (very satisfied) to 4 (very dissatisfied) to measure the sense of worker satisfaction with respect to a number of extrinsic and intrinsic aspects of work. Table 11 reveals that the average score is tilted on the side of satisfaction.

Table 11: Professional Satisfaction

		Satisfaction (average score)
I am presently a target of bullying	(VB)	2.2
I have been bullied in the past 12 months	(BB)	2.0
I witnessed incidents of bullying	(WB)	2.0
I have never experienced or witnessed bullying	(NB)	1.7

Finally, we were able to observe that in situations of peer bullying, managers are parties to incidents of bullying in that most adopt a passive behaviour and do not attempt to resolve the conflict. Sixty-three percent of targets of bullying at work have been subjected to bullying for two years or more, and 29% have been a target for more than five years! This collusion on the part of the management is highly troubling, for it not only demonstrates a renunciation of responsibility which falls squarely within its mandate (which is to resolve work-related conflicts), it also demonstrates an inability to ensure a safe workplace for employees. Similar to sexual harassment cases, intervention by management by the early signs of bullying is fundamental to preventing or halting this practice within the organization, and for allowing the targeted person to adopt a positive strategy in an effort to ward off such attacks on his/her dignity.

Conclusion

Firstly, we must be weary of generalizing the results in this study. Our results can only be generalized with respect to the members of the CSQ. We cannot generalize the results for Quebec's entire population. More research is necessary to obtain a more accurate picture of bullying among the general population.

This study confirms the results of other studies conducted in Europe, which show that bullying at work represents a significant threat and can have devastating effects on the mental health of workers. The high incidence of psychological distress, symptoms of depression and post-traumatic stress symptoms are indicators of a degradation of the working conditions, of the quality of life, and of the mental health of workers. It is deplorable that bullying is a part of everyday reality for so many workers in Quebec organizations. It is equally deplorable that there is no legislation to protect workers afflicted by this insidious form of workplace violence.

We were also able to observe that bullying may have negative consequences not just for targets of bullying, but for witnesses of bullying who experience a higher degree of psychological distress. Thus, we may affirm that passive bullying is also a source of psychological distress. However, witnesses of bullying do not develop more pronounced symptoms of depression or problems related to post-traumatic stress.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that no correlation could be established between individual characteristics (age, gender, ethnic origin, type or status of work) and individuals who were the targets of bullying. Factors which trigger bullying at work correlate solely with the organizational and socio-economic context.

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