



Violence in the education sector

Background paper



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Introduction

This background paper has been drafted in response to a request in June 2008 from the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) for a summary of Eurofound research and data on the incidence of workplace violence in the education sector in the EU.

Eurofound sources

Eurofound has a track record of research on workplace bullying, violence and discrimination going back to the 1990s. These negative dimensions of the work experience have in particular been charted in successive waves of the European Working Conditions survey [EWCS] from 1990–2005. In addition to survey data, we will also draw from a literature review entitled *Preventing violence and harassment in the workplace* (Di Martino et al., 2003) which outlined the evolution of concepts / definitional issues in relation to workplace violence. A final source has been Eurofound's online observatories (<http://www.ewco.eurofound.europa.eu> and <http://www.eiro.eurofound.europa.eu>) which publish regular contributions from a network of national correspondents on topical working conditions and industrial relations news and research. We have used recent news items from the online observatories to give complementary sources of national data and research on these increasingly high profile forms of workplace risk.

European Working Conditions survey

The recent waves of the EWCS (1995-EU15, 2000-EU15, 2001-NMS12 and 2005-EU27) provide the main data source for this paper. The findings are based on interviews with a representative sample of workers in each member state; nearly 30,000 individual workers were interviewed for the most recent, 2005 wave of the survey.

The EWCS is a rich source of data on violence in the workplace. All interviewees were asked questions in the most recent survey relating to their exposure to threats of violence, to actual physical violence at the hand of colleagues and/or of non-colleagues, to bullying/harassment as well as to sexual harassment ('unwanted sexual attention') over the previous twelve months. It is important to draw attention to the fact that the EWCS is based on self-reported exposure to these forms of negative behaviour on the part of a representative sample of European workers and not on official or administrative data sources. The data therefore reflect both the experience of workers as well as their perceptions as to what constitutes 'physical violence' or 'harassment' and these may vary from culture to culture, from workplace to workplace and indeed from worker to worker. In 2005, according to the EWCS, one in twenty EU workers reported having been exposed to physical violence in their workplace and a similar proportion to workplace bullying or harassment over the course of the previous twelve months.

In addition to the questions on workplace violence and harassment, the survey also records detailed background information on individual workers which allow us to analyse to what extent, for example, gender, age, hours worked, sector or occupation affect the likelihood that an individual has been exposed to workplace violence.

The aim of the paper is to analyse the data in relation to workplace violence in the education sector¹. We will try where possible to compare the situation in the education sector (NACE 85) and amongst teaching professionals (ISCO 23 or 33) with those of the overall working population as well as with other high 'social interaction' sectors (eg. health, public administration and retail).

¹ With the caveats indicated in Annex 2

Sample definitions

Violence: “Violence can be defined as a form of negative behaviour or action in the relations between two or more people, characterised by aggressiveness, sometimes repeated, sometimes unexpected, which has harmful effects on the safety, health and well-being of employees at their place of work.”

Source: *European Commission, Advisory Committee on Safety, Hygiene and Health Protection at Work (Opinion on violence in the workplace, 2001)*

Harassment: “Harassment occurs when one or more workers or managers are repeatedly and deliberately abused, threatened and / or humiliated in circumstances relating to work”.

Source: *EU social partners, Framework agreement on Harassment and violence at work (April 2007)*

Sexual harassment: “Where any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature occurs, with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment”.

Source: *European Directive 2002/73/EC*

Policy context

National working conditions surveys as well as administrative data in recent years have shown that an increasing proportion of work-related health problems are attributable to psychological or psychosocial causes. Levels of workplace violence – physical and, to a growing extent, psychological – are an important factor behind this development.

The *Community strategy 2007–12 on health and safety at work* (COM(2007) 62) highlights ‘the emergence of new risk factors’ for workplace health and specifically identifies “violence at work, including sexual and psychological harassment” in this context.

How does existing European legislation deal with workplace harassment? In principle, harassment and violence at work are covered under the general duty of employers to assess, prevent and reduce risks to safety and health at work under the main EU health and safety legislation dating back to 1989 (Council Directive 89/391/EEC). This directive does not explicitly list violence as one of the targeted workplace risks, but national legislation enacted in application of this directive has been extensively used in relation to workplace violence.

It should also be mentioned that EU ‘anti-discrimination’ directives (Council Directives 2000/43/EC and 2002/73/EC) include new definitions of racial and sexual harassment applicable across the EU and impose a duty on member states to designate a body or bodies to promote the work of the directives.

Increasingly, the trend of policy has been to assert the rights of European workers – male and female – to a working life that is healthy and safe both physically and psychologically and also one that ‘ensures respect for the workers’ human dignity, privacy and integrity’ (European Parliament, 2001). This expansion of scope is clearly intended to address changes in the labour market (increasing tertiarisation), the increasingly ‘social’ or relational dimension of work and the consequent shift of focus from more traditional workplace health and safety concerns to emerging psychosocial forms of risk.

While there have been calls in the past for a specific EU directive dealing with violence/harassment at work, the European Commission indicated its preference that the issue be dealt with through joint social partner action within the existing structures of the European social dialogue. In 2007, the social partners at European level responded positively to this call and finalised a *Framework Agreement on Harassment and Violence at Work* which set out to ‘provide employers, workers and their representatives at all levels with an action-oriented framework to identify, prevent and manage problems of harassment and violence at work’. The agreement does not however specifically deal with third-party violence and, as we shall see, this may be a significant gap given that the majority of physical violence in the workplace occurs at the hands of those not from the workplace rather than from colleagues.

Incidence of violence and harassment

According to survey data from recent EWCS waves, exposure to violence of either the psychological or physical kind at work remains the exception rather than the rule in the direct, recent experience of most European workers. One in twenty workers reports having been exposed to bullying in the previous twelve months and a similar proportion report having been exposed to physical violence. Sexual harassment is reported by three times as many women as men but still less than 3% of female employees report having experienced ‘unwanted sexual attention’ in the previous twelve months.

Table 1: *General EWCS data (1995–2005) on workplace violence*

% of all workers subject in the previous 12 months to ...	1995 EU15	2000 EU15	2005 EU25	2005 EU15	2005 NMS
Threats of physical violence	-	-	6	6	5
Physical violence from people within workplace	4*	2	2	2	1
Physical violence from people outside workplace		4	4	5	4
Physical violence either from people within or outside workplace **	4	5	5	6	4
Intimidation	8	9	-	-	-
Bullying/harassment	-	-	5	5	4
Unwanted sexual attention	2	2	2	2	2

Source: *EWCS 1995-2005*

* The two phenomena were addressed in one single question in 1995

** A combined variable based on those answering yes to either Q29b or Q29c

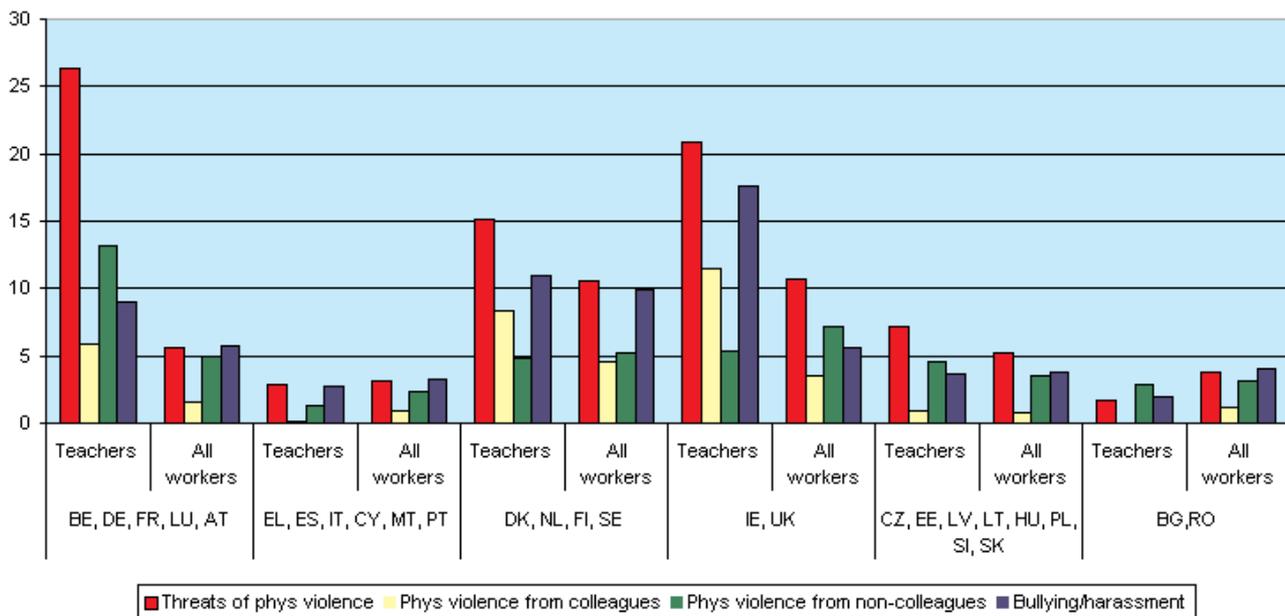
Trend data going back to 1995 indicate that the overall incidence of sexual harassment has remained stable at 2% while that of workplace physical violence has tended to increase. For bullying, a change in the formulation of the survey question in 2005 has made comparison across time impossible. The question was posed in terms of ‘intimidation’ in previous survey waves and it seems likely that this wording – and its translations – generated a higher percentage of respondents saying that they had suffered such exposure than the newly adopted term (‘bullying/harassment’) used in the 2005 survey. The decline may not, we think, reflect a lower incidence of actual bullying but more the impact of the changed wording.

Variations by country and by occupation

There is a growing awareness of how damaging and disruptive the consequences of workplace harassment or violence can be at individual and organisational level. However, there remains a wide variation in the reporting of workplace violence from country to country, which we can assume relates in part to different conceptions of what forms of negative behaviour actually constitute violence or bullying and also to the public or media profile of these phenomena in different countries. This may explain, partially at least, higher incidences reported in northern European countries compared to southern European countries.

The following chart demonstrates a higher than average incidence of workplace violence – in each of the four categories of workplace violence – in the Nordic countries, the Netherlands, Ireland and the UK and below average incidence in the southern European member states including Bulgaria and Romania. Comparing the teaching occupations (ISCO 23 and 33) with the labour force as a whole, it is also in these latter countries that teachers report lower levels of workplace violence than other workers. For the remaining country groups, the clearest pattern is one of greater exposure to violence on the part of the teaching profession.

Figure 1: Comparison of teachers to all workers in exposure (% exposed) to physical violence and bullying/harassment by country group in previous 12 months, 2005



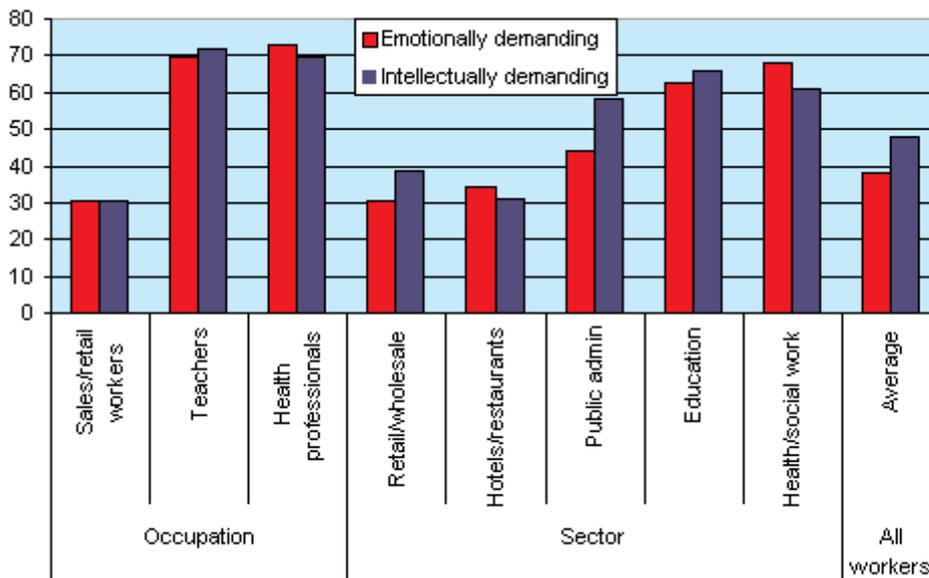
Source: Fourth European Working Conditions survey

Of particular note are the high exposure to threats of physical violence in the continental grouping (BE, DE, FR, LU, AT) as well as in the UK/IE. In both, over 20% of teachers report having been threatened with physical violence in the previous 12 months. Significantly higher levels of bullying/harassment are reported by teachers in the UK/Ireland as well as the Nordic countries/the Netherlands. As bullying/harassment is predominantly an inter-colleague phenomenon, it is perhaps consistent that in these two country groups, teachers also report higher levels of violence from colleagues ('people from your workplace') than from non-colleagues. Across the labour force, the pattern is normally the opposite with more people exposed to violence from non-colleagues (including patients, customers, students etc).

A closer look at the education – and other social – sectors

Sectors in which there is a high level of social interaction tend also to have the highest levels of incidence of violence. This is true of course in the trivial sense – by definition, there has to be both a perpetrator and a victim of violence and so the possibility of workplace violence increases as the level of social contact increases. It also reflects the fact that ‘customer-facing’ occupations (or for that matter ‘patient/pupil/student etc-facing’) tend to be inherently more demanding and potentially stressful than those with a limited amount of social contact and this may engender a greater potential for workplace violence. As we see below, both teachers and health professionals are much more likely to consider their work ‘emotionally demanding’ and ‘intellectually demanding’ than workers in other occupations. Over 70% of teachers consider their work emotionally demanding on a more or less ongoing basis.

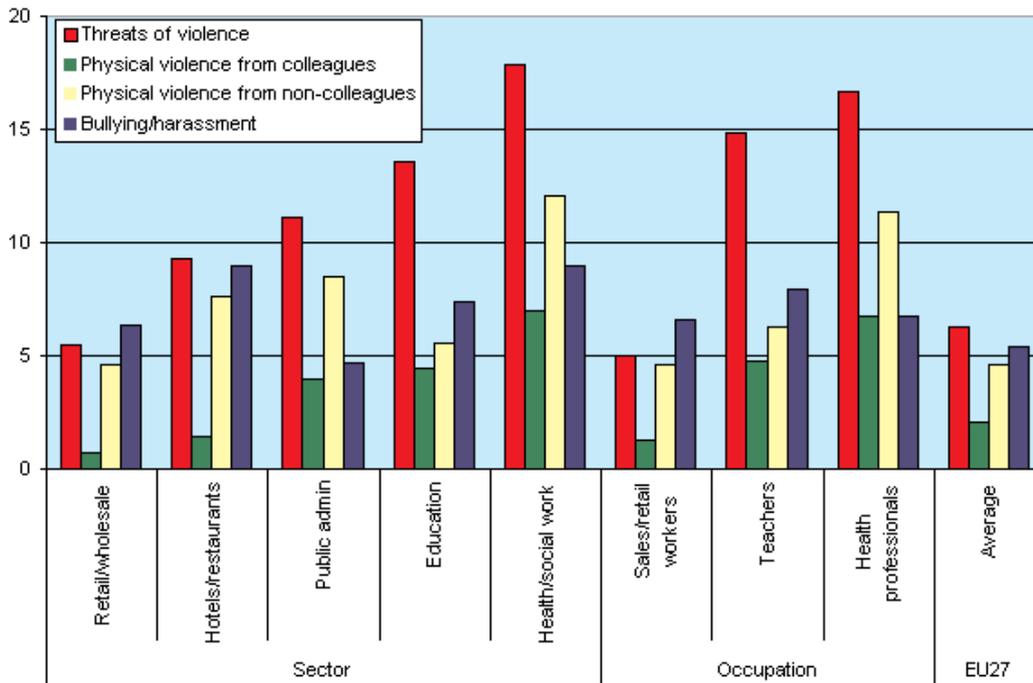
Figure 2: Percentage of workers whose work is emotionally or intellectually demanding, by selected sector and occupation, EU-27



Source: *Fourth European Working Conditions survey*

It is plausible that these levels of emotional demand, arising in many cases from frequent social contact, are both a consequence of, and a contributing factor to, higher levels of exposure to violence. As the figure below demonstrates, health and social workers report the highest level of exposure to workplace violence. Those in the education sector report high levels in particular of threats of physical violence. In both sectors, workers are exposed to higher than average levels of violence for each of the specific forms identified in the survey.

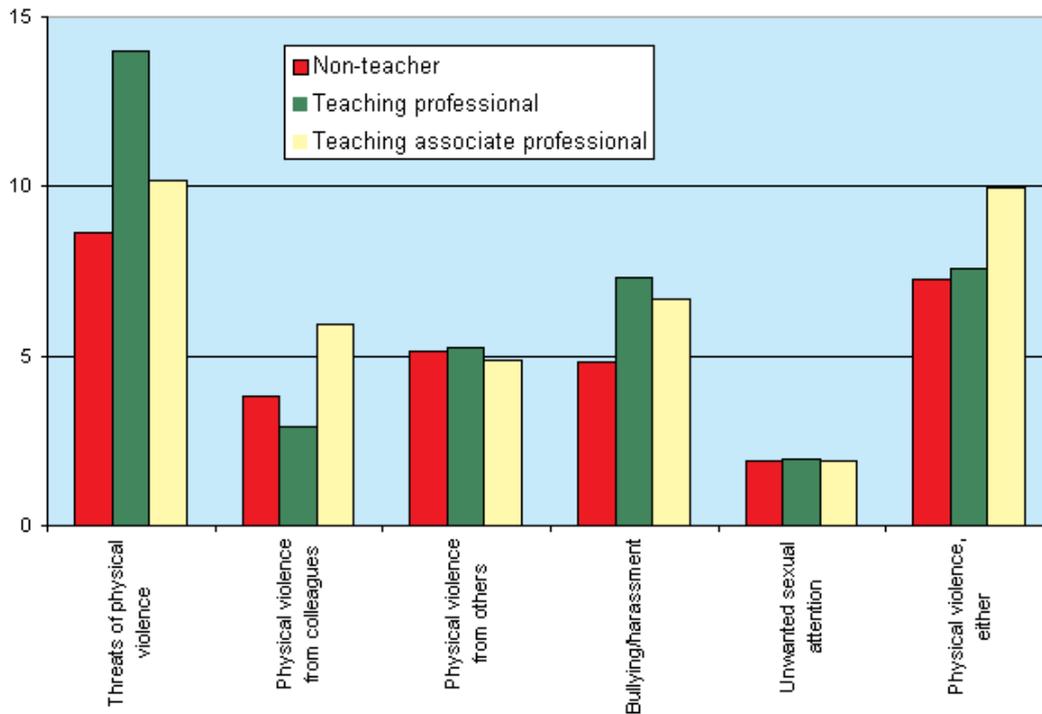
Figure 3: Percentage of workers exposed to physical violence and bullying/harassment, by selected sector and occupation, EU-27, in previous 12 months



Source: Fourth European Working Conditions survey

Comparing the sectoral and occupational perspectives in the above chart, we see minor but suggestive differences between the occupational category of ‘teachers’ (ISCO 23 and 33) and the sectoral category, ‘education’ (NACE 85). The two groups clearly overlap to a large extent: in our sample, around 90% of teachers are in the education sector (1,787 of a total 2037 workers) while over 70% of workers in the education sector are teachers. Nonetheless, we can observe that teachers specifically are more exposed than education sector workers as a whole in relation to each of the forms of workplace violence. This is the opposite of what occurs in the health sector where medical professionals are less likely than other health sector workers to have experienced workplace violence. We can infer therefore that in the education sector, it is the most common occupational category, teachers, that is at the greatest risk of violence.

Figure 4: Education sector: exposure to violence of different occupational groups



Source: Fourth European Working Conditions survey

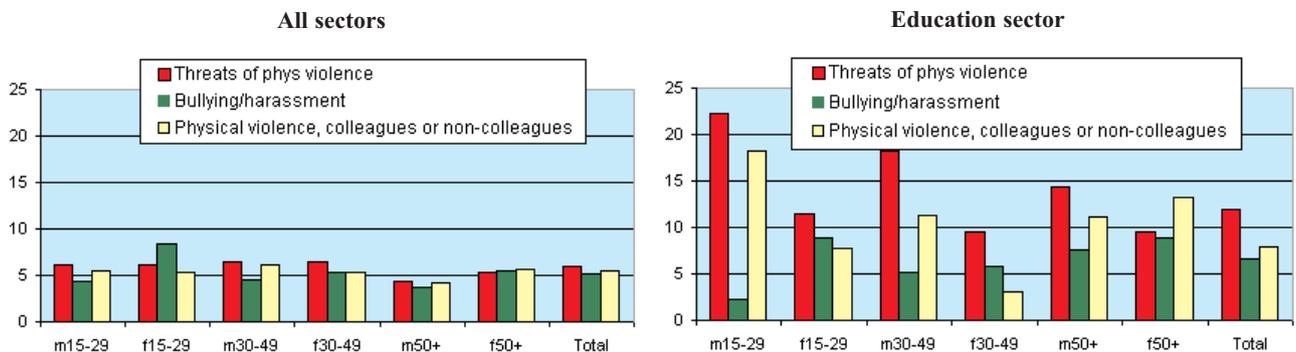
Within the education sector, there is no clear pattern differentiating between the exposure to violence of teachers at different levels of responsibility². Teaching professionals (ISCO 23) are more likely to have been threatened with violence but less likely to have suffered physical violence, in particular, at the hands of fellow workers than teaching associate professionals. As we have already seen, the levels of exposure of non-teachers working in the education sector (a wide-ranging group of occupations which includes *inter alia* clerks, protective services workers, managers) is generally lower than that of teachers.

Age/gender and violence in the education sector

Both the levels and the variation of exposure to violence by gender and age group are greater for those working in the education sector than for the labour force as a whole as the following figure indicates.

² The distinction between teaching professional and teaching associate professional is not necessarily clear and the ISCO classification may be applied differently from country to country.

Figure 5: Exposure to violence by age/gender, comparing education sector with all sectors



Source: Fourth European Working Conditions survey

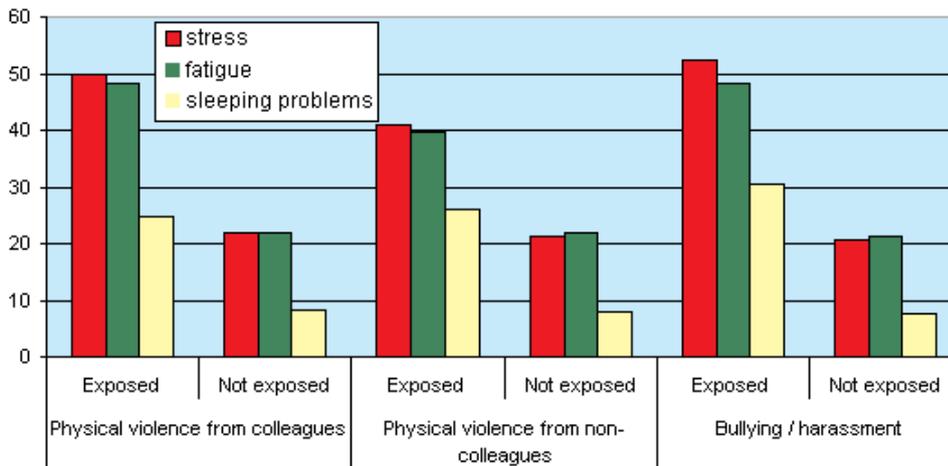
Men working in education, especially younger men, are at greater risk of threatened or actual physical violence. Over 20% of younger men report having been exposed to threats of physical violence in the previous twelve months. While the levels of exposure to physical violence decline with age for men, their exposure to bullying/harassment rises.

Younger women (under 30) and older women (over 50) in the education sector (which is predominantly female with a 70/30% gender split) report higher levels of exposure to violence than their core-age counterparts although levels are generally lower than for men. Levels of exposure to physical violence is however worryingly high amongst older women (over 13%).

The impact of violence and harassment in the workplace

Those exposed to violence or harassment in the workplace tend to report significantly lower levels of job satisfaction and higher levels of work-related ill health. The proportion of workers suffering from symptoms of psychological disturbance such as stress, sleeping problems, anxiety and irritability as a consequence of their work is over twice as great among those who have experienced violence or harassment as among those who have not. Over half (52%) of those exposed to bullying report work-related stress. It is worth noting that the forms of violence that generate the biggest increase in stress and related symptoms are those in which the individual worker is likely to have to continue working with the perpetrator(s) (violence from colleagues or bullying/harassment).

Figure 6: How work affects health



Source: Fourth European Working Conditions survey

The higher levels of stress and other psychosomatic symptoms associated with exposure to workplace violence can also be seen in the EWCS data on health leave. Levels of health leave are marginally higher overall in the education sector than in the labour force as a whole – 5.1 days per year per person as against 4.6 days per year per person – and a higher percentage of education sector workers report having taken leave in the previous year – 30% as against 23% of all workers.

Table 2: Exposure to workplace violence and the proportion of workers having taken health-related leave in previous 12 months / average number of days leave taken

Sector		Threats of physical violence		Physical violence, either type		Bullying /harassment	
		Days	% workers	Days	% workers	Days	% workers
Education	Exposed	6.3	35	10.7	51	10.9	46
	Not exposed	5.0	29	4.7	28	4.7	29
All workers	Exposed	7.6	32	8.2	34	11.2	44
	Not exposed	4.4	22	4.3	22	4.2	22

Source: Fourth European Working Conditions survey

In the table above, we see that bullying and physical violence in particular is associated with higher proportions of workers taking health leave and that the average length of leave also tends to increase markedly. While the same patterns can be observed for workers in general, one can pick out the fact that physical violence in the education sector is relatively more serious in its consequences involving a near-doubling of the proportion of workers reporting health leave.

Of course, higher absenteeism is only one of the costs associated with workplace violence. While the main negative impacts are borne by the individual employee targeted, there are also impacts on the employing organisation both in tangible, economic terms such as higher staff turnover, legal costs as well as in less measurable ways – reduced productivity of those directly involved and of other colleagues and negative consequences for an organisation's public image.

For these reasons, there is a strong business as well as ethical case for tackling workplace violence – in particular, in those sectors which appear to be at greatest risk. Ensuring the right of Europeans to work that is physically and psychologically safe and healthy is an integral part of the commitment to better, more productive, higher quality work.

Conclusions

- Levels of psychological violence (bullying, harassment, mobbing etc) are at least as prevalent as those of physical violence in EU workplaces. Though psychological violence is, by its nature, more cumulative in its impacts, EWCS data from 2005 confirms that its negative health effects measured in terms of self-reported stress related symptoms and in health-related leave are as serious as those of physical violence.
- The levels of workplace violence in the education sector are above average for each of the forms of violence identified – physical or psychological, from colleagues or non-colleagues. 15% of teachers report having been threatened with physical violence in the previous twelve months.
- Workplace violence is most common in northern European member states (both in the education sector and in the labour market as a whole).
- In the education sector, younger men (<30 years) tend to report high levels of threats of physical violence while older women (>50 years) report significantly high levels of actual physical violence.
- Exposure to violence is associated with higher levels of reported stress and sick-leave.
- A word of caution: the phenomenon of workplace violence can be difficult to capture using survey data. Different national or sectoral data sources often tell a different story.

Annex 1

Violence in the workplace in the public sector and the education sector: some evidence from national research cited in Eurofound's online observatories (EIRO/EWCO)

The level of exposure to workplace violence is not homogeneous across all occupations and sectors. Several studies have shown that bullying is more common in the public rather than the private sector (Hoel & Cooper 2000, Leymann 1992, Piirainen et al, 2000). Eurofound's fourth European Working Conditions survey shows that 6% of public sector employees (including the majority of those in education) report that they have been subject to bullying or harassment in the previous year compared to 4% of those working in the private sector.

The Netherlands *Working Conditions Survey* (2005) supports the finding of the 2005 EWCS that workplace violence originates mostly from non-colleagues although levels of violence reported are notably higher than in the 4EWCS. Women report higher exposure to workplace violence from non-colleagues over the previous twelve months (33% of female workers against 21% of male workers), while workplace violence at the hands of colleagues is more common among men than women (18% of male workers against 14% of female workers). The manufacturing and hotels and restaurants sectors report the highest prevalence of workplace violence from colleagues (20%), whereas workplace violence from non-colleagues is most prevalent in the healthcare and education sectors (respectively 48% and 30%) (Hooftman & Houtman, 2005).

According to the results from the Finnish *Working Life Barometer* (2005), workplace violence is most common in the local government sector (in Finland, teachers are directly employed by the local government) where 45% of employees have observed workplace bullying (increased from 43% in 2004). The same survey also captures data on the frequency of occurrence of workplace violence. Some 23% of local government employees have themselves been subjected to physical violence or the threat of violence at work several times and another 11% had experienced such negative behaviours at least once (Statistics Finland, 2006).

Another Finnish source exploring workplace violence – the *Quality of Work Life Survey* (2003) - showed that, in Finland, levels of ongoing bullying were highest in the following sectors: health care (7%), social care (6%), and commercial (5%) and service work (5%). Previous experience of bullying was reported, unsurprisingly, by a higher proportion of workers with the most affected sectors as follows: health care (17%), social care (15%) and teaching (14%). Occupational groups at greatest risk of exposure to physical violence at least once a month are those in health (11%) and social care (7%), service work (6%), and teaching (3%).

A number of studies have been undertaken to assess the level of risk of violence in Finland in the education sector. For example, a study conducted in Finland by the Confederation of Unions for Academic Professionals (AKAVA), showed that one third of AKAVA members have observed cases of harassment in their workplace, while one fifth claim that they have been bullied during the previous year (echoing closely the results of the 2005 EWCS where Finland has the unwanted distinction of being the EU member state with the highest incidence of bullying – 17% of all workers). AKAVA recommends providing protection to teachers and social workers similar to that offered to the police. This would allow for violent clients or pupils to be deterred using physical resistance by officials (Jokivuori, 2007). Also relevant to the teaching profession, a Finnish study of teachers (n = 2,038) revealed that 11% surveyed teachers reported having been bullied. "The comparable figure for exposure to physical violence from pupils was 9%, of whom 17% had experienced violence several times" (Di Martino et al, 2003).

In the UK, survey data, together with evidence gathered by trade unions, suggests that public sector workers and those whose work involves direct contact with the public are especially vulnerable. British analysis of the country's first large-scale official survey of unfair treatment, perceived discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment in the workplace, confirms that higher prevalence rates of reported bullying are found in the public sector than in the private sector (Parker, 2007).

A TUC (Trades Union Congress) survey published in 2002 found that violence is mainly a problem in the sectors involving work with the public: public administration (27% of workplaces), health and social work (26%), transport (21%) and education (18%). The 2001 HSE/Home Office report – *Violence at work* – based on findings from the *British Crime Survey*, gives a more detailed breakdown in terms of occupations most at risk: 47% of public transport workers reported being worried about threats, compared with 46% of nurses, 29% of retail workers and 20% of teachers.

More specifically in relation to the education sector, UK HSE statistics for assaults on teachers show a 26% increase between 1998–9 and 1999–2000. The third-largest teachers' trade union, the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), received more than 120 complaints in 2001 from teachers about physical abuse (Kirton, 2002).

In Ireland, a 2006–2007 survey published by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) found that 8% of workers had been bullied at work in the previous six months and indicated that levels of bullying had increased in recent years. Another survey conducted among public and private sector employers, revealed a higher tendency to report bullying in public sector organisations with the health and education sectors at greatest risk of exposure to workplace violence (Dobbins, 2007).

Along the same lines, the French SUMER (*Surveillance Médicale des Risques* [Medical monitoring of risks]) survey (2003) reaffirmed that workers in contact with public are more exposed to aggression and physical violence. Among these workers, 25.4% of women and 19.2% of men report having been subject to verbal aggression in the 12 previous months while the overall proportion of workers affected in this manner is 22%. In terms of actual acts of physical violence, 2.2% of women and 1.5% of men report being exposed to physical violence. Employees in health and teaching professions are the most exposed to aggression and physical attacks, with 33% of such employees reporting this problem (Nicot, 2007).

Specifically in relation to violence in schools in France, over the school year 2002–2003, secondary schools reported 72,000 incidents including 21,300 actual acts of physical violence without a weapon and 16,623 cases of verbal abuse or serious threats. Teachers were the victims in one incident out of six (Ministere de la Jeunesse, Education et Recherche, 2004).

The latest Norwegian *Level of Living Survey* (2006) reveals that teaching professionals are amongst those occupational groups particularly exposed to “conflict” in the workplace. About 65% of teaching professionals report having to deal with conflict at work. However, workers in the teaching profession do not generally report a particularly high incidence of bullying. The fact that levels of reported workplace conflict and bullying are not strongly correlated may indicate that conflicts are managed well within certain occupational groups preventing them escalating into cases of bullying (Eiken, 2008).

Also, Danish research³ found that teaching associate professionals (22%) are amongst the occupational groups most exposed to workplace violence along with workers in the police force (53%), social agencies (46%), and health services (25%). Again, what these jobs have in common is the high level of interaction with non-colleagues, i.e. people external to the organisation, firm or administration (Pedersen and Christiansen, 2005).

Other factors have been identified that may contribute to the higher levels of exposure to workplace violence and bullying in the public sector. Working in the public sector is associated with higher job tenure and job security. For workplace bullies, this may encourage the belief that bullying behaviour is unlikely to be punished by the ultimate

³ The study undertaken by the Danish Centre for Alternative Social Analysis (CASA) considers the results of two surveys conducted among a sample of 2,000 of the 450,000 members of the FTF (FTF – Salaried Employees and Civil Servants Confederation – Funktionærernes og Tjenestemændenes Fællesråd), in 1993 and 2001.

sanction, dismissal; it may also discourage workers who have been bullied from seeking redress. And even when genuine victims do come forward, demanding standards of procedural fairness can make it unlikely that in-house perpetrators of bullying or violence ever face serious sanctions; cases of bullying in particular remain very difficult to prove and this may lead to situations in which abuse is tolerated rather than confronted and stopped.

In addition, the knowledge acquired in a public sector job cannot be easily transferred to a job within the private sector – the teaching profession is indeed illustrative of such a constraint. Another aspect that may explain the high level of exposure to workplace violence in health and social and education sectors is the high level of personal involvement (Hochschild, 1983; Zapf, 2002) in these sectors. There is plentiful evidence showing high levels of exposure to emotional demands at work in the education and healthcare sector (Christiansen & Nielsen, 2007), for example.

Also, by the nature of their jobs, it is more difficult for a teacher or a nurse to demonstrate that she/he is doing a good job than, for example, a production worker in the manufacturing sector; this may make workers in these sectors vulnerable to professional criticism which is both unjustified and impossible to defend against – another of the many variants of bullying behaviour.

A review of articles from the European Industrial Relations Observatory (EIRO) identified cases of relevance in Malta, the UK and France. Cases of violence in Maltese schools, including physical abuse and psychological harassment of teachers, are on the increase. In response to the increase of violence in schools, the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT) prompted its members to take industrial action and organised a two-hour protest rally on March 2006. During the rally, MUT issued two major recommendations for all teachers, including kindergarten assistants and facilitators. The first of these recommendations was linked to a particular case where a geography teacher was physically injured by one of his pupils. The recommendation stated that all teachers should refuse to have any contact with the student who had shown violent behaviour towards his teacher. After this incident, union officials visited the school to offer staff members the necessary support. The second recommendation was extended to all cases of unacceptable behaviour reported to the government's education department, which the union feels were not adequately dealt with by the relevant authorities.

In the UK, the government, employers and unions have called for 'zero tolerance' of workplace violence. However, the union view tends to be that more remains to be done. There is also a view that the incidence of violence is greater than official records suggest due to the lack of common understanding of the term 'workplace violence' which tend to refer to cases of physical assault but not to other variants of violence. Reporting of incidents needs to be encouraged so that areas of vulnerability can be identified and action taken. The unions include the issue of violence on health and safety courses to encourage workplace representatives to be alert to risk areas. Other practical preventive measures include:

- tightening security on school premises and in school transport
- withholding service (for example exclusion of a pupil from school)
- training 'at risk' workers to defuse violent situations and behaviour

The trade unions have called for the adoption of a full package of initiatives to prevent workplace violence. It is also argued that extensive promotion of a 'customer culture' in the public sector and rising expectations of quality of service are not matched by the salaries of public sector workers such as teachers (Kirton, 2002).

A French report of the commission working on violence, work, employment and health stresses the importance of cooperation based on open discussion with employees and trust of all actors in order to establish working methods for the prevention of workplace violence. "These are important issues for the organisation, with far-reaching impacts beyond the sole consideration of productivity and profitability" (Nicot, 2005).

Annex 2

Caveats on use of EWCS data to analyse workplace violence in the education sector

- EWCS data is based on answers by nationally representative samples of workers to the EWCS questionnaire. When we refer to the incidence of physical violence, we are therefore referring to the self-reported incidence of violence. There is no corroborative independent administrative source of data. What the survey measures is violence as perceived by individual workers.
- The overall sample of workers in the education sector (n=1,441) is too small to allow detailed further breakdowns especially given that the phenomena in question are reported by a small minority of respondents. It is not possible for instance to give reliable national estimates for the incidence of harassment in the education sector.
- An interesting empirical finding that arises from a study of the EWCS data – and indeed of other crossnational datasources – on workplace violence is the strong country-to-country variation in the level of reporting of workplace violence. This is suggestive of the fact that what is perceived as ‘violence’ or ‘bullying’, as well as the actual incidence of either phenomenon, varies considerably across different national or cultural contexts. Accordingly, it can be difficult to disentangle the ‘real’ incidence of specific forms of violence from the prevailing levels of awareness of and sensitivity to these phenomena both at individual and collective (e.g. national) level. This can be all the more problematic for certain psychological forms of violence such as ‘bullying’, ‘intimidation’ and ‘harassment’ which are by their nature not one-off but cumulative and accordingly more difficult to capture in a cross-sectional survey such as the EWCS.
- An important qualification of the low levels of workplace violence evident in the 2005 EWCS is that respondents answered only in respect of the previous twelve months. Other national surveys (Di Martino et al, 2003, p. 28), which have used the respondent’s working life rather than a single year as the reference period, report much higher incidences, up to 70–90% in national surveys carried out in Austria, Germany and Luxembourg and in sector studies in Austria, Germany, Norway and the UK.

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