

Bullies have harassed 14 percent of workers over past 6 months

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David Gonzalez and Jose Luis Grana have carried out a comprehensive study into the phenomenon of workplace abuse or bullying in Spain. The study includes data on 2,861 workers from various sectors, and confirms some commonly-held beliefs about workplace abuse while undermining others.

Although it is a relatively widespread phenomenon, the experts have still not been able to come up with an all-encompassing and precise definition of workplace abuse or bullying. Basing their work on previous literature, David González, of the High Court of Justice of Madrid and José Luís Graña, of the Faculty of Psychology at the Complutense University, have defined it in their study as a "process of systematic and repeated aggression by a person or group towards a workmate, subordinate or superior". Their research has been published in the latest issue of *Psicothema*.

According to the authors of the work, published by Psicothema, "the conclusions reached to date have been highly varied, due to the difficulties in the conceptual definition of mobbing". However, they tell SINC that "workplace abuse is a [phenomenon](#) with many causes, can lead to negative consequences in workers, their social and family environment, and can impacts on their job performance".

González and Graña were able to describe the characteristics of mobbing within the working population in Spain by using information from the nearly 3,000 valid responses received from the Negative Acts

Questionnaire - Revised (NAQ-R), which is a specific tool used to measure workplace abuse.

The survey sections are based on the definition of workplace abuse devised by the Norwegian researchers Einarsen and Raknes, which points out that "a one-off incident does not constitute harassment". The sections within the NAQ-R vary from the subtle, such as "someone has withheld information from you, which has affected your performance" to the most serious, "you have felt sexually harassed" or "you have been threatened with violence or physical abuse".

From the data obtained, the researchers tell SINC that 14% of the respondents have confirmed having suffered situations of psychological abuse over the past six months, with 5.8% suffering frequently and the rest, 8.2%, occasionally. In 2000, the International Labour Organisation said the prevalence of alleged cases of workplace abuse was 5%, a similar figure to the one now obtained by this study.

The results also provide evidence that women are most frequently on the receiving end of workplace harassment, which coincides with the results of other studies carried out on the issue.

Dismantling the myths about mobbing

However, the study by González and Graña contradicts previous results that indicated that workers under the age of 30 were "the most vulnerable to harassment". The study shows that those aged over 45 are more likely to be the victims of such abuse.

The myth about workers on temporary contracts being more likely to suffer abuse is also turned on its head. According to the research, "it has been shown that it is not the youngest workers who are most exposed to workplace abuse, but in fact workers with supposedly greater contractual

stability" who suffer more from this type of behaviour.

Workplaces with less than 50 workers are also shown to be more likely environments for mobbing, probably because of the absence of a "health and safety committee" (these are established in the Law on Workplace Risk Prevention), which are common features in larger places of work.

Some of the factors that tend to figure most frequently among victims of mobbing include membership of a union, having had previous experience of time off work or having had specialist treatment.

Lastly, the study also shows that only 9% of cases of abuse are carried out by subordinates, while 47.2% of the cases recorded were of vertically-descending abuse, also known as bossing, which is the most common form of abuse in Spain.

More information: David González Trijueque, José Luis Graña Gómez. "El acoso psicológico en el lugar de trabajo: prevalencia y análisis descriptivo en una muestra multiocupacional". *Psicothema*. 21 (2), 293-298. 2009.

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