



European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

# Violence, bullying and harassment in the workplace

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This report is available in electronic format only.

*Incidence rates of physical violence, bullying and sexual harassment have increased, according to the European Working Conditions Survey and national surveys. This report examines the manner in which these 'new' issues have been studied in the national surveys of seven European countries. It aims to define the problems more clearly and formulate appropriate questions. It is difficult to say how much of the increase is due to raised awareness of the issues, but the heightened levels of experience must be regarded as real. It also became apparent in the study that physical violence, bullying and sexual harassment are very different and cannot be regarded in the same way. This means that action measures in the workplace must be tailored to fit each problem.*

## **Introduction**

The issues of violence and harassment have gained interest across Europe in recent years. The Foundation and the Member States have carried out some initial studies in this field.

In the Foundation paper [Quality of work and employment in Europe](#), four aspects have been identified as key dimensions of quality of work and employment:

- career and employment security;
- health and well-being;
- skills development;
- reconciliation of working and non-working life.

The second dimension, health and well-being, contains matters that relate very closely to the concepts of violence and harassment. The health and well-being of employees are threatened if forms of violence, physical or psychological, occur at the workplace. The results of different studies show that the consequences of physical violence and mental harassment can be very harmful, both to the victims and to the work community.

This report will focus on national working conditions surveys from seven countries and the [European Working Conditions Surveys](#), exploring their understanding of violence and harassment, and the manner in which they ask about experiences of these issues. It seeks to uncover the extent and distribution of the problems, rather than the individual characteristics of the victims or perpetrators. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, large surveys, which will be the main data sources for this report, cannot be used for analysing individual characteristics. More qualitative research would be required. Secondly, it is important to learn more societal factors behind these issues in order to tackle the related problems.

The report will examine the methodological questions surrounding the study of violence and harassment. The aim is to develop better measurements, more exact definitions, and to map the variables that should be included in surveys in order to discover the broader connections of these issues.

## **Concepts and definitions**

The Foundation report, [Preventing violence and harassment in the workplace](#) (Di Martino, Hoel and Cooper, 2003), has collected information from European countries on violence and harassment at the workplace, as well as including relevant legislation. It also presents definitions of the concepts.

Discussion at EU level began at an expert meeting in Dublin in May 1995 where the following definition was proposed (Wynne et al, 1997, cited in Di Martino et al, 2003):

Incidents where persons are abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances related to their work, involving an explicit or implicit challenge to their safety, well-being and health.

Other international and EU organisations have been examining the issues of violence and harassment: the [International Labour Organisation](#) (ILO) and the [European Commission](#), for instance. This can be seen as part of the increased awareness of these matters at national level. In many Member States, where the issue of bullying is not a subject of specific attention in national working conditions surveys, other surveys carried out by major organisations or media articles, court cases, etc. indicate growing awareness and public debate.

Work is continuing towards a European directive on violence and harassment at the workplace. In its Resolution on harassment at the workplace (2001), the European Parliament:

...urges the Commission to consider a clarification or extension of the scope of the framework directive on health and safety at work or, alternatively, the drafting of a new framework directive as a legal instrument to combat bullying and as a means of ensuring respect for the worker's human dignity, privacy and integrity; emphasises in this connection the importance of systematic work on health and safety and of preventive action. (Di Martino et al, 2003, p. 6.)

This report will distinguish between the following concepts:

- Physical violence: 'The use of physical force against another person or group that results in physical, sexual or psychological harm' ([World Health Organisation](#) definition). This can be divided into a) real experiences of actions and b) feelings of a threat of violence. Physical violence can also be divided into a) personal experiences of being subjected to violence at work or b) awareness of the existence of violence at the workplace.
- Harassment, bullying or psychological violence: 'Intentional use of power against another person or group that can result in harm to physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development' (WHO definition). This can be divided into a) personal experiences of being subjected to bullying at work or b) awareness of the existence of bullying at the workplace.
- 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 (EU Directive 2002/73/EC). This can be divided into a) personal experiences of being subjected to sexual harassment at work or b) awareness of the existence of sexual harassment at the workplace.

Discrimination, in its various forms, is not considered here as coming under the concepts of violence and harassment. Discrimination can have similar consequences for the employee, causing similar health problems. However, it is a much wider concept, embracing both mental and material aspects. It is often viewed as a more unconscious or societal issue than violence and harassment.

## **Methodology**

Violence and harassment are new research subjects that are difficult to capture in surveys. There is as yet little experience in this field. Looking at the three different concepts of physical violence, bullying and sexual harassment, physical violence is the most tangible. This makes it easier to cover in surveys.

Psychological violence and harassment are more problematic concepts. In particular, sexual harassment is not easy to measure. It is usually understood as a hidden phenomenon, which makes it difficult to be aware of. If the concept is not commonly recognised, it leads to confusion in surveys.

The main problems in studying violence and harassment are:

- the concepts used do not always relate to people's everyday life or their own concepts;
- surveys do not allow the scope for subjective meanings;
- violence and harassment are social issues that are difficult to capture in surveys;
- surveys fail to see the progressive nature of the problems;
- translations in international surveys are problematic. Different meanings of concepts reflect cultural contexts.

## **Prevalence of violence, intimidation and harassment**

The European Working Conditions Survey asked about violence and harassment in the 1995/6 and the 2000 surveys, but in different ways. In the 1995/6 survey, only personal experiences were considered, i.e. whether the interviewees had been subjected to violence or harassment over the previous 12 months. The following kinds of behaviour were treated separately: physical violence, intimidation, sexual discrimination, unwanted sexual attention, age discrimination, discrimination linked to nationality, ethnic background/race, disability and sexual

orientation.

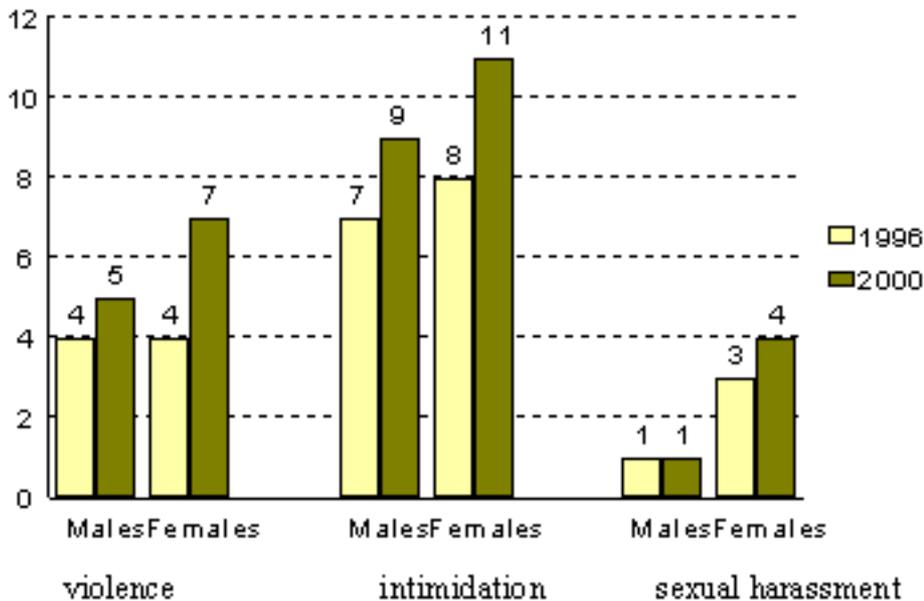
The 2000 European Working Conditions Survey followed this model, but it distinguished between personal experience and being aware of this kind of behaviour at the workplace. In the 2000 survey, the question concerning physical violence was also divided into ‘violence from people from your workplace’ and ‘violence from other people’.

These changes have made comparisons between 1995/6 and 2000 difficult. This report will present results from both years including only the items of physical violence, intimidation and unwanted sexual attention, which are the nearest concepts to violence and harassment. Using raw data from the European Working Conditions Survey, the report will seek answers to questions concerning the prevalence of different types of violence and harassment, and their distribution among employees.

The European Working Conditions Surveys carried out in 1995/6 and 2000 show an increase in all these aspects of violence and harassment. Figure 1 depicts the results by gender, showing that women suffer more than men from all these forms of violence.

*Figure 1. Violence, intimidation and sexual harassment*

*Own experience, European Working Conditions Surveys 1996 and 2000, employees*



Physical violence seems to be experienced most in the health care and educational sectors throughout the European Union (Figure 2). The rate of increase also seems to be most prominent in these sectors: in 2000, 11% of employees in health care and education had experienced physical violence during the last 12 months. According to the results, physical violence from people other than fellow workers is much more common: 1.5% of all employed people in the EU had been subjected to violence from colleagues, while 4.1% reported having been subjected to violence from people from outside their workplace. This indicates that the problem of increasing physical violence concerns mostly occupations that require dealing with difficult customers.

Figure 2. Physical violence by industry

Own experience, European Working Conditions Surveys 1996 and 2000, employees

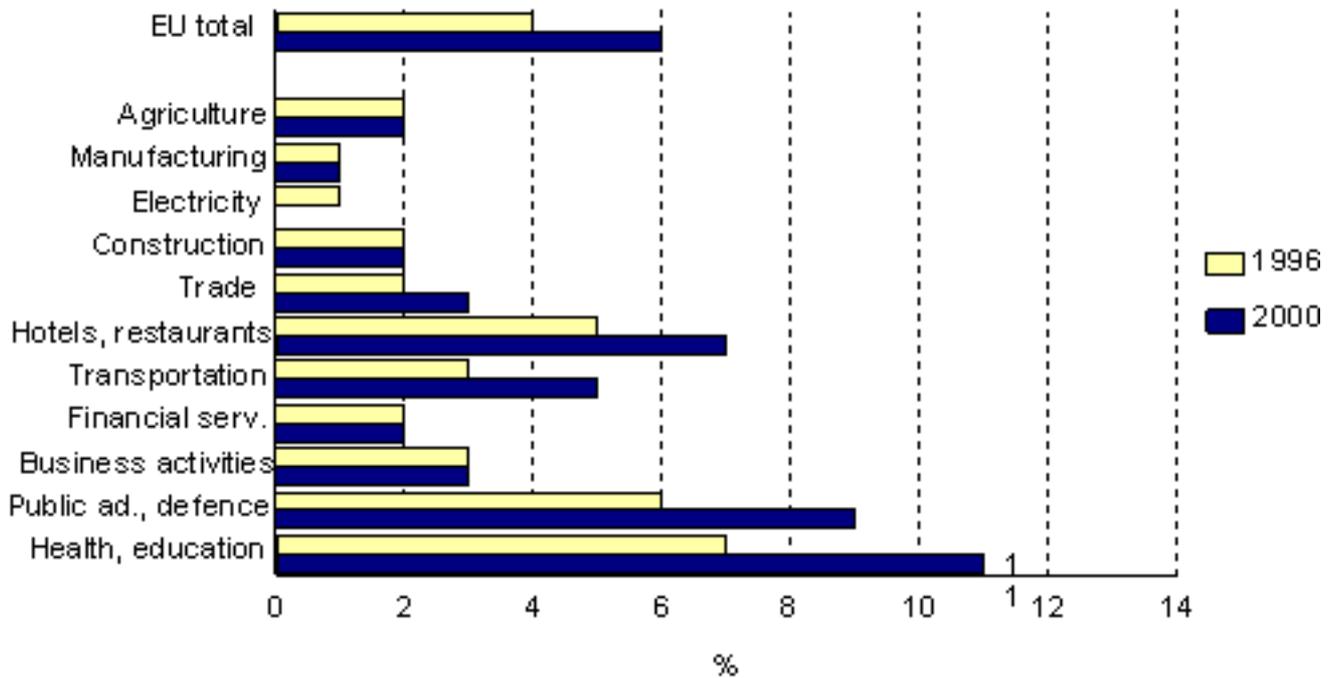
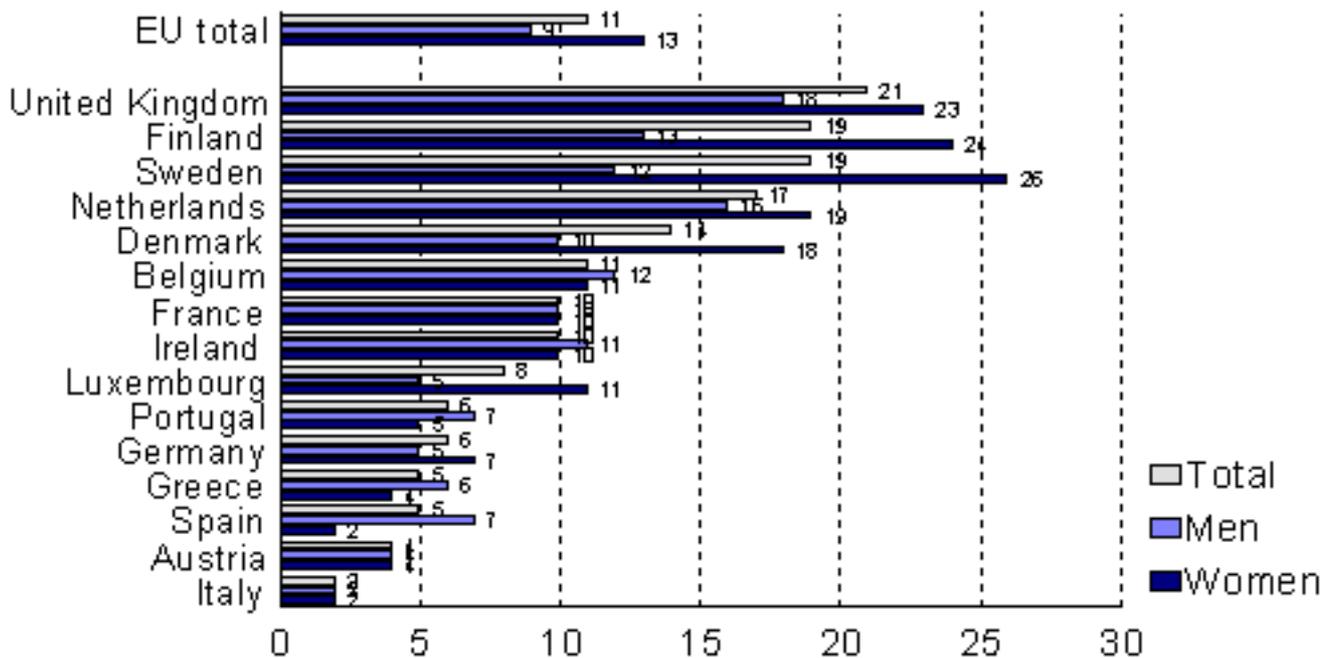


Figure 3 shows the awareness of physical violence by country. Countries which have large welfare service sectors, especially in health and social care, also report a higher prevalence of physical violence in the workplace. In Finland and Sweden, a particularly large number of women are employed in these sectors. Here, women identify more physical violence at the workplace than in the other countries.

Figure 3. Awareness of physical violence at workplace by country

European Working Conditions Survey 2000, employees



Intimidation is difficult to define, e.g. its Finnish translation is not identical to the concept that usually encompasses

bullying: the word refers more to the use of threats at the workplace (such as threats of dismissals or violence). However, in this report, intimidation by sex, age, sector and country has been analysed according to the European Working Conditions Survey.

### Figure 4. Intimidation by industry

*Own experience, European Working Conditions Surveys 1996 and 2000, employees*

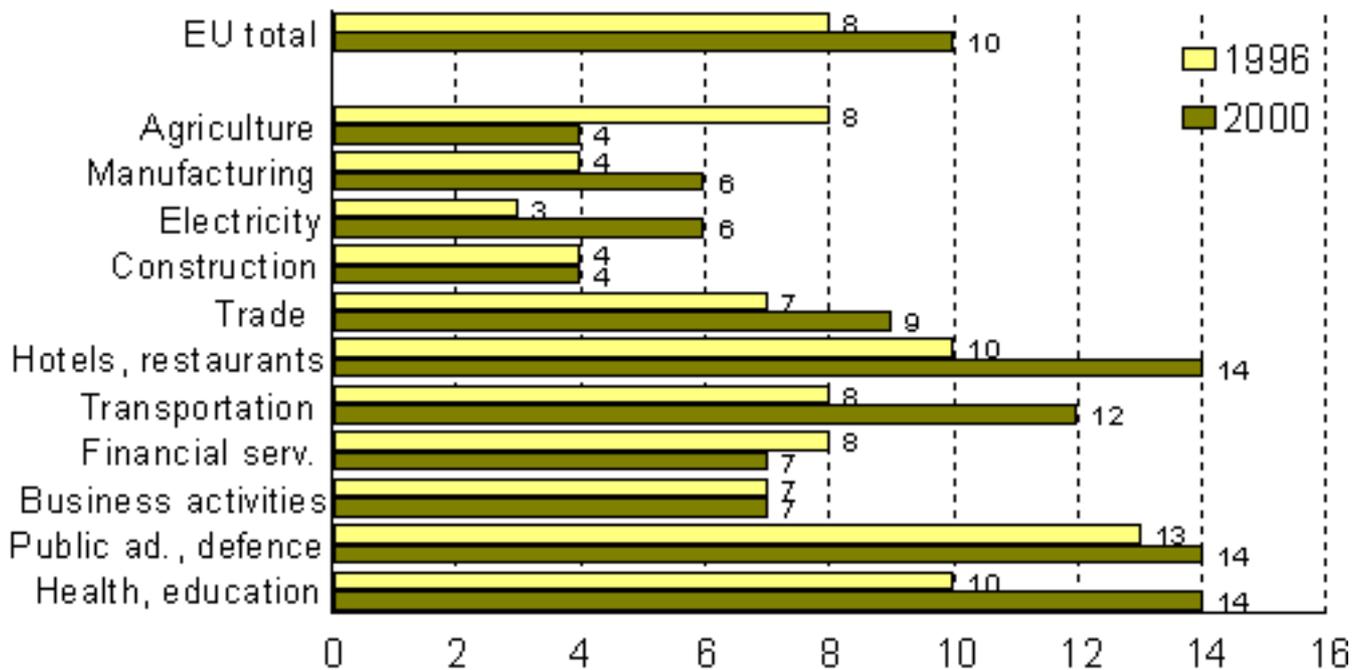
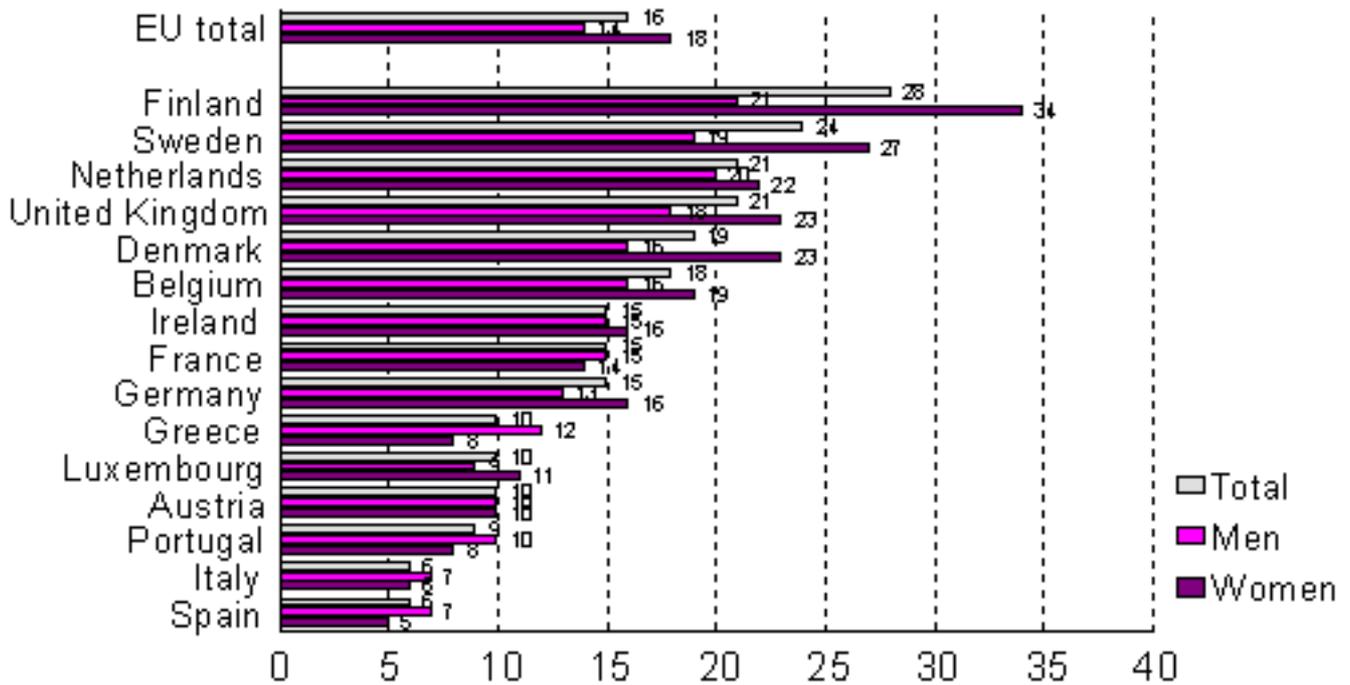


Figure 4 presents the distribution of intimidation by sector. The results are quite similar to those for physical violence. This indicates that the idea of ‘intimidation’ is very close to that of threatening and is perhaps translated using concepts that are more reminiscent of it than of ‘bullying’. A similar conclusion can be drawn from the distribution of awareness of intimidation by country as shown in Figure 5. The order of the countries is almost the same as for physical violence.

**Figure 5. Awareness of intimidation at workplace by country**

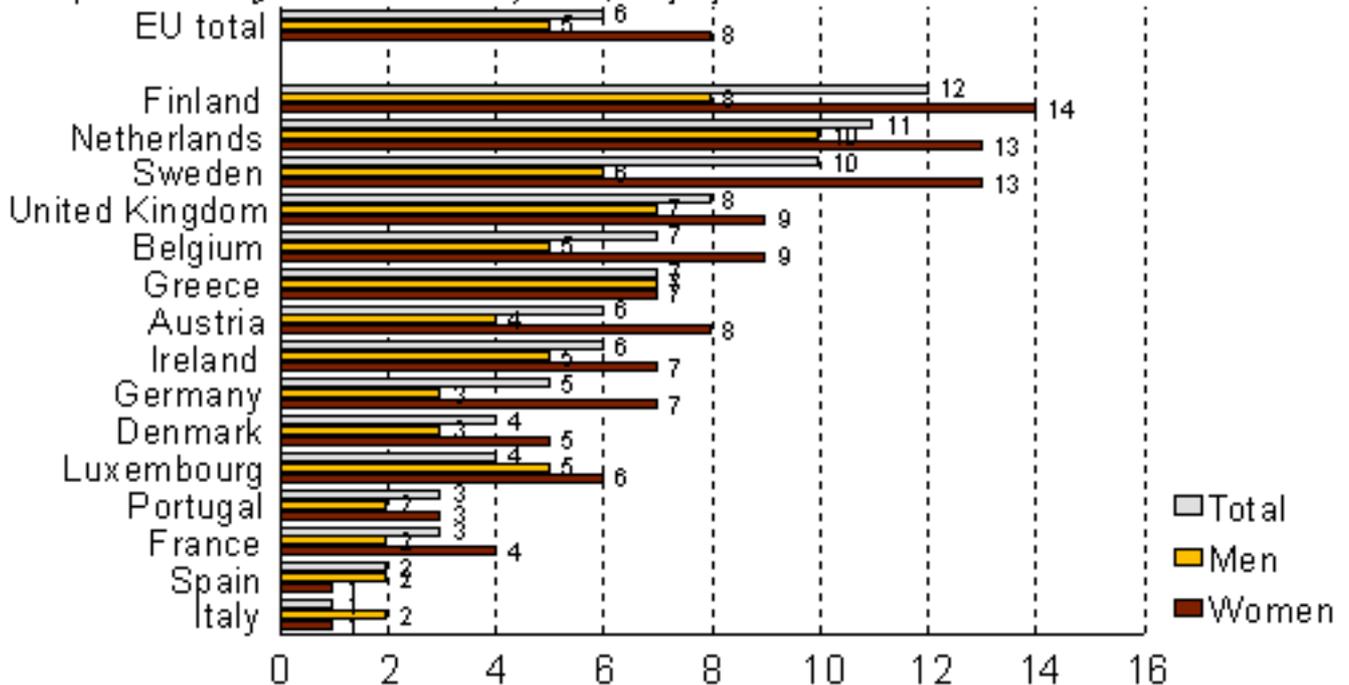
*European Working Conditions Survey 2000, employees*



Sexual harassment is also difficult to quantify by survey. Countries where sexual harassment has been a topic of public debate would be expected to show higher prevalence rates and experiences (Figure 6). The 1995/6 and 2000 European Working Conditions Surveys asked about unwanted sexual attention: as a personal experience, and awareness of it at the workplace. Both are more typical among women, particularly personal experiences (see Figure 1).

**Figure 6. Awareness of sexual harassment at workplace by country**

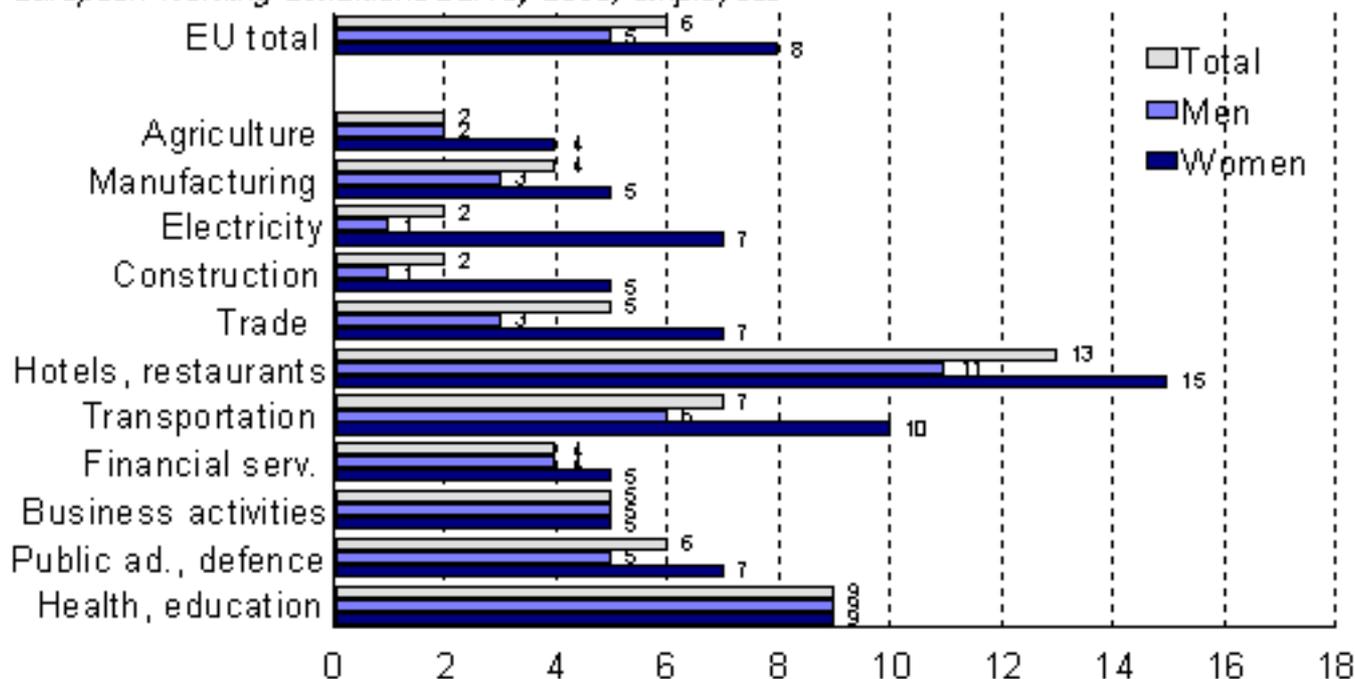
*European Working Conditions Survey 2000, employees*



The hotel and restaurant sector shows the highest prevalence of sexual harassment, both as personal experience and as awareness of it (Figure 7). The Foundation report [EU hotel and restaurant sector: Work and employment conditions](#) also outlines such harassment: ‘Contact with the public is especially related to violence, aggression and discrimination for employees working in pubs, discotheques, night clubs and bars’. This behaviour causes high stress for employees in the sector.

*Figure 7. Awareness of sexual harassment at workplace by industry*

*European Working Conditions Survey 2000, employees*



### ***Different ways of studying violence, bullying and harassment***

This section draws on the responses to a questionnaire among the [network of correspondents](#) within the European Working Conditions Observatory (EWCO). According to the Foundation investigation, [Working conditions surveys: an international comparison](#) (2003), at least some of the countries within the Observatory network have national information on physical violence, bullying and harassment. The forms of the questions can differ but it is useful to review the national distributions of these issues.

#### **Physical violence**

##### **Denmark**

The [Danish Work Environment Cohort Study](#) analyses physical violence at the workplace. The question in 1990 and 1995 (first and second editions of the study) was: ‘Are you exposed to violence or threats of violence at your workplace?’ The response categories were: 1) yes, to a large extent; 2) yes, to some extent; 3) yes, to a lesser extent; 4) no, or almost never.

The DWECs 2000 (third and latest edition) asked: ‘Have you been exposed to threats of violence at your workplace within the last 12 months?’ and ‘Have you been exposed to physical violence at your workplace within the last 12 months?’ The response categories were: 1) no; 2) yes, from colleagues; 3) yes, from management; 4) yes, from subordinates; 5) yes, from clients/customers/patients. It then enquired as to the number of times in respect of each category.

Because of changes in the questions between 1990, 1995 and 2000, no trends in physical violence can be presented. In 2000, 6% of all employees had experienced the threat of violence (7% of women and 5% of men). The proportion of those who had actually been exposed to physical violence was 2% of all employees (3% of women and 1% of men).

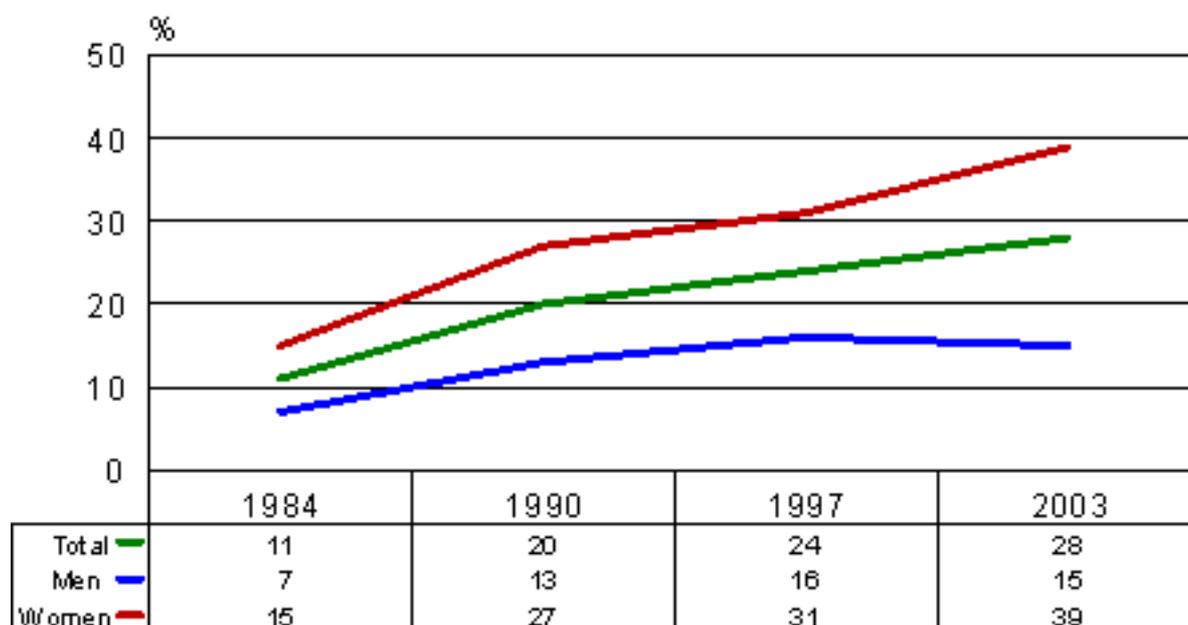
The occupations which are most exposed to the threat of physical violence are nurses (21%), healthcare workers (26%) and teachers. By sector, the threat is to be seen in health (14%), home care and 24-hour care centres for adults (24%), passenger transport (19% of men), finance and retail (about 9%). Incidences of actual violence are low overall so it is difficult to distinguish differences. Nonetheless, health (6% of women), and home care and 24-hour care centres for adults (17% of women) are most likely to experience physical violence.

## Finland

Since 1984, the [Finnish Quality of Work Life Survey](#) has included several questions concerning physical violence. One question refers to possible threats in the workplace: ‘In your work, do you experience as a distinct hazard, think about occasionally, or experience as no hazard at all, the following: A... B. Becoming subjected to physical violence? C...’. The question continues with a long list of different threats. Figure 8 outlines the responses by gender. Experiences of a clear threat and thinking about occasionally are combined in the figure. Up to 1997, an increase can be discerned for both genders and, subsequently, a continuing increase among women. In 2003, almost 40% of women employees are to some degree afraid of physical violence in their work. Experiences of a clear threat are not as usual: 7% among women and 3% among men.

### Figure 8. Threat of becoming subjected to physical violence

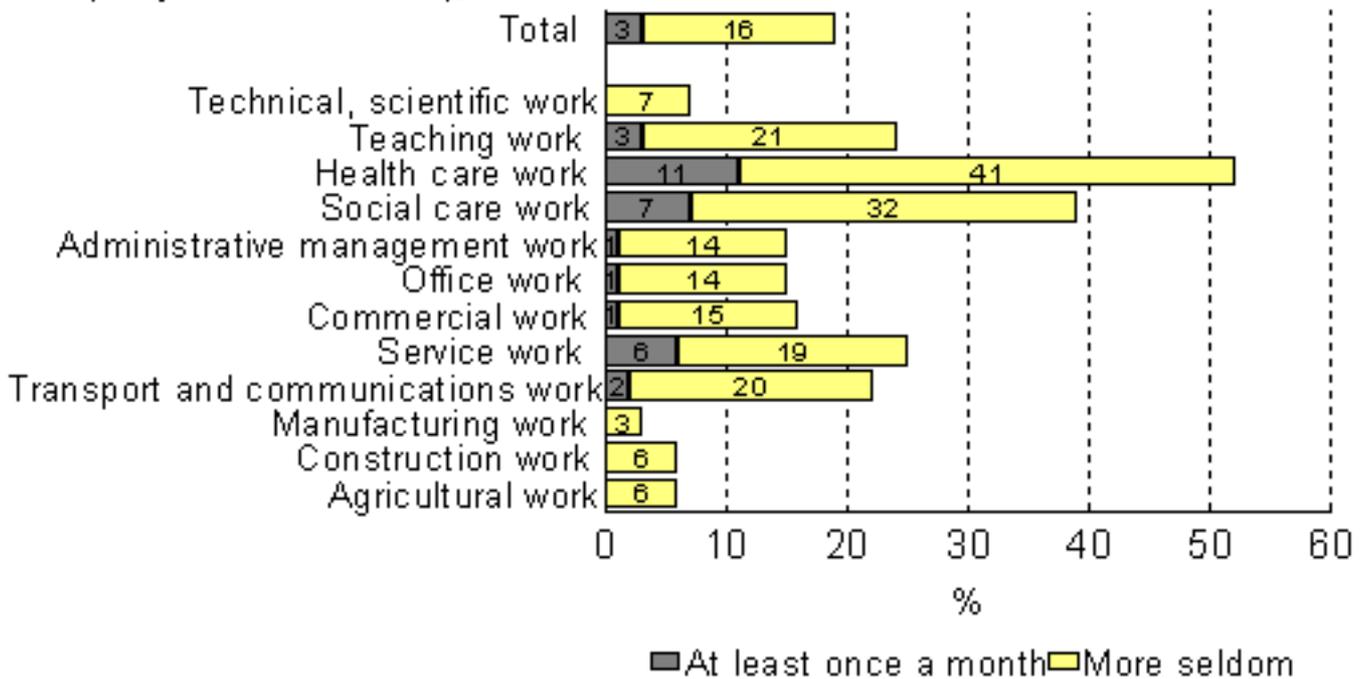
Employees, Finnish Quality of Work Life Surveys 1984-2003



Another question in the Finnish survey is: ‘When at work, have you been subjected to, or threatened by, physical violence (including from customers)?’ The response categories were: 1) at least twice a week; 2) a few times a month; 3) less often; 4) never. These responses have been changed somewhat since the 1997 survey, which makes the trend difficult to follow. Nonetheless, the latest results from the 2003 survey show roughly the same distribution of experiences of physical violence in different occupational groups as before: the most hazardous occupations are those in health and social care, and in service work (including policing), while teaching and transport are also more hazardous than the average (see Figure 9).

## Figure 9. Experienced violence at work

The Quality of Work Life Survey, Finland 2003



### The Netherlands

In the Netherlands, two questions on physical violence have been used in the work environment surveys [TAS](#) and [NEA](#) (see Appendix) to study the prevalence and distribution of the phenomenon: 'Over the past 12 months, to what extent have you been subjected to: Physical violence from colleagues/supervisory staff? Physical violence from customers (patients, students, passengers)? The answering categories were: 1) no, never; 2) yes, only once or twice; 3) yes, often; 4) yes, very often.

The results show an increasing trend of physical violence in the Netherlands.

**Table 1 % of physical violence in the workplace, the Netherlands**

	2000	2002	2003
From customers	6.9	6.8	8.8
From colleagues	0.6	0.9	1.7

Note: % of 'Yes'(all categories: yes, only once or twice, yes, often; yes, very often). Source: TAS 2000/2002, NEA 2003

By gender, the same results can be seen as in the other countries: women suffer more from physical violence in the workplace.

**Table 2 % of violence, by gender, Netherlands**

	Men	Women
From customers	5.7	8.1
From colleagues	1.2	0.4

Note: % of 'Yes'(all categories: yes, only once or twice, yes, often; yes, very often). Source: TAS 2000/2002 (combined)

When violence from customers only is considered, occupational and sector groups are in very different positions. Physical violence from colleagues is so rare that it is not worth comparing occupations. The occupational groups most exposed to violence from customers are health care workers (37%), teachers (15%), service workers (12%), drivers/transport workers (9%) and commercial/retail workers (8%). By sector, violence is most typical in health care and social work (26%), public administration (11%), education (11%), and wholesale and retail trade (8%).

## **Sweden**

In the [Swedish Working Environment Statistics](#), the following question is asked about physical violence: 'Have you been exposed to violence or the threat of violence in your work in the last 12-month period?'

According to the results in 2001, 17% of women and 10% of men stated that they had been exposed to violence or threats of violence in the last 12-month period. This was up slightly from the 1995 figures, by one percentage point for women and two points for men.

There are notable differences among the sectors and occupations. This is to be expected as physical violence is associated more with certain kinds of work. According to the Swedish survey, health care and social care are the sectors where physical violence is most common: 33% of employees in this sector reported violence or the threat of violence in 2001. As many as 55% of employees in mental health care had experienced these problems. Such experiences were also common in land transport (23%) and retail (22%).

## **France, Germany and Spain**

The EWCO correspondents reported that these countries do not have representative surveys concerning physical violence in the workplace.

## **Bullying, psychological violence**

Psychological violence can also be studied on the basis of national surveys. Denmark, Finland, Germany, Netherlands, Spain and Sweden have representative survey results. Very different concepts have been used, but the data describing changes in psychological violence and its distributions still have value for this report.

## **Denmark**

The Danish Work Environment Cohort Study (see Appendix 1) included the following question in 1990 and 1995: 'Are you exposed to any unpleasant bullying at your workplace?' The response categories were: 1) yes, to a large extent; 2) yes, to some extent; 3) yes, to a lesser extent; 4) no, or almost never.

In 2000, the question of bullying had been altered to read as follows: 'Have you been exposed to any unpleasant bullying at your workplace within the last 12 months?'

The question then asks who has carried out the bullying (colleagues, management, subordinates, clients/customers/patients) and how many times it has taken place.

According to the results from 2000, bullying in Denmark occurs more often to women (7%) than to men (5%). Trends cannot be identified due to the change in the question compared with the earlier surveys.

Differences by occupation are not very prominent according to these results. Among women, primary school teachers or nurses could possibly be identified as experiencing greater problems of bullying.

## **Finland**

In the Finnish Quality of Work Life Survey, bullying is addressed in two questions, preceded by a rather long definition: 'Psychological violence at work, or workplace bullying, means the isolation of a member of the work community by nullifying the results of his/her work, using threatening behaviour, telling stories behind his/her

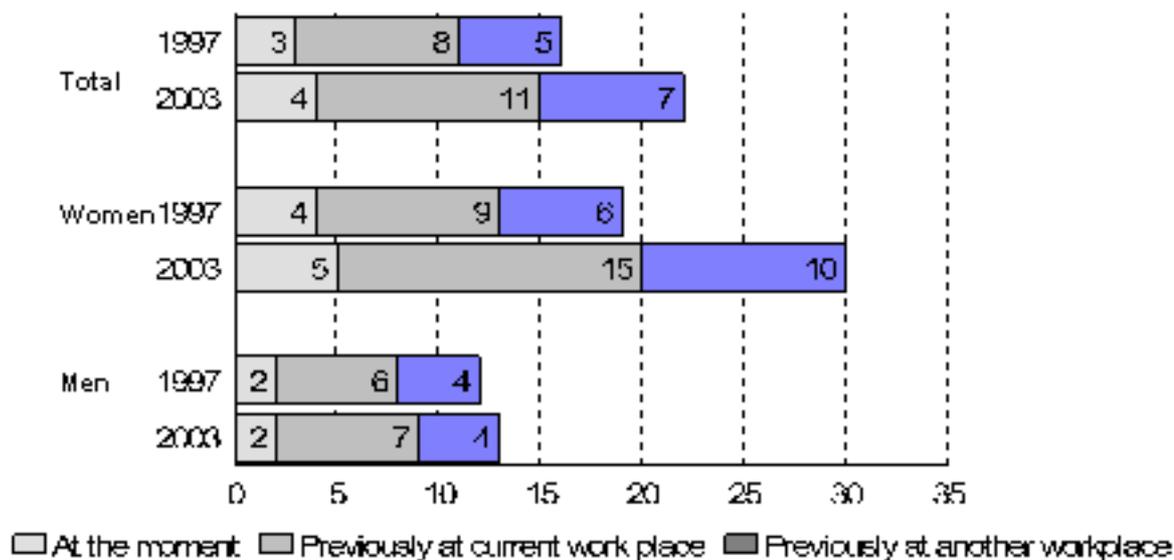
back, or exerting some other form of psychological pressure on him/her. Do you think that this type of behaviour exists at your workplace (even by customers)? 1) not at all; 2) occasionally; 3) continuously?’

The next question seeks to identify personal experiences: ‘Have you personally been subjected to this kind of bullying: 1) yes, at the moment; 2) yes, previously at current workplace, not anymore; 3) yes, previously, at another workplace; 4) never?’

These two questions were included in both the 1997 and the 2003 survey. In 2003, those who had been bullied were further asked: ‘Have the bullying persons been: 1) superiors; 2) co-workers; 3) subordinates; 3) customers (e.g. pupils)?’ (several choices possible).

There is an increased incidence of both being aware of bullying and being subjected to it. Figure 10 illustrates that personal experiences ‘at the moment’ have increased from 3% to 4%, and experiences ‘previously at current workplace’ from 8% to 11%. Women in particular report previous experiences more than before. This gives reason to presume that answers to this question are largely dependent on cultural awareness of the matter.

*Figure 10. Personally subjected to bullying*  
*The Finnish Quality of Work Life Surveys 1997 and 2003*

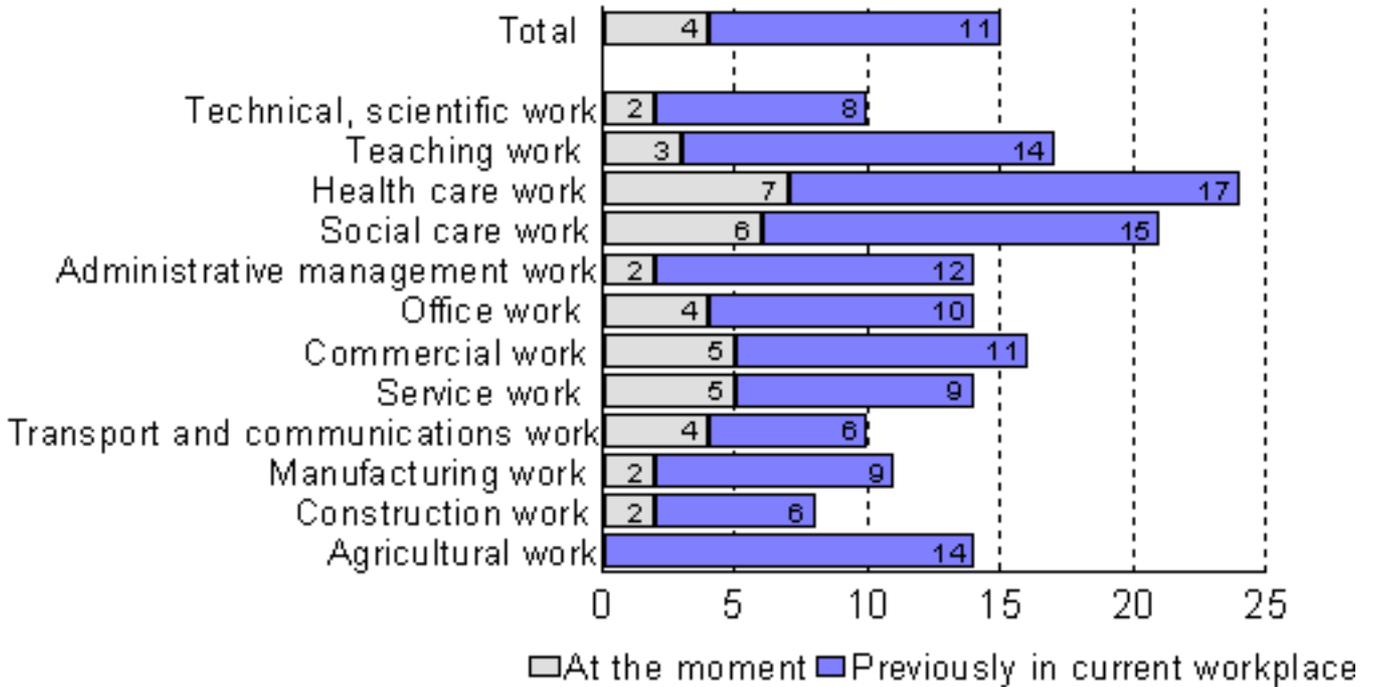


Awareness of bullying has also increased considerably. Occasional or continuous bullying has been observed by 42% of all employees, while the corresponding figure in 1997 was 39%. A greater increase is seen among women (44% to 49%), while little change is observed for men (33% to 34%). In 2003, the breakdown by perpetrator was as follows: co-workers 12%, superiors 9%, customers 4%. Fewer than 1% reported that a subordinate was the bully.

Unlike the situation for physical violence, occupation and sector are not very significant factors in bullying. However, some occupations are somewhat more vulnerable than others, and these differences are quite common among all the countries where bullying has been studied. Figure 11 shows that, in Finland, bullying is personally experienced ‘at the moment’ most often in health care (7%), social care (6%), and commercial (5%) and service work (5%). Previous experiences are most common in more or less the same occupational groups: health care (17%), social care (15%) and teaching (14%). Some improvement has taken place, particularly in teaching work, where bullying ‘at the moment’ has decreased to 3% in 2003 from 7% in 1997.

Figure 11. Personally subjected to bullying

The Quality of Work Life Survey, Finland 2003



### Germany

In Germany, national surveys on working conditions do not contain questions about bullying. However, a survey carried out by the Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health provides a representative study of mobbing (ganging up on someone) at the workplace. (See Appendix 1.)

The following definition is set out: ‘Mobbing is taking place if a person is frequently harassed, tormented or discriminated at the workplace over a long period of time. Are you currently or have you ever been affected by mobbing in this sense?’

The following figures represent the main results:

- By the end of 2000, 2.7% of the labour force were currently being affected by mobbing.
- During 2000, 5.5% of the German labour force had been affected by mobbing.
- In all, 11.3% of the German labour force have been affected by mobbing during their working life.

Women are more affected by mobbing than men are: 3.5% of women currently experience mobbing, true also for 2% of men. 12.9% of women and 9.6% of men have had this experience at some stage during their working life. There are no major differences by occupation or sector, but work in social care shows a higher risk of being subject to bullying than other occupations.

### The Netherlands

The Dutch Working Conditions Surveys (TAS, NEA, see Appendix 1) put the following question which has been used in 2000, 2002 and 2003: ‘Over the past 12 months, to what extent have you been subjected to: Intimidation by colleagues/supervisory staff? Intimidation by customers (patients, students, passengers)?’ Response categories included: 1) no, never; 2) yes, only once or twice; 3) yes, often; 4) yes, very often.

The following tables combine all the ‘yes’ response categories. Looking at the trend since 2000, intimidation by customers has grown, while intimidation by colleagues has remained constant. More men experience intimidation by colleagues, while more women experience intimidation by customers.

The breakdown between colleagues and customers also shows that intimidation by customers is more common in younger age groups, and by colleagues in older ones. Almost no sectoral differences are evident in intimidation by colleagues, but sectors such as health care, hotels and restaurants, retail and education are more vulnerable to intimidation by customers.

**Table 3 % of intimidation in the workplace, Netherlands**

	2000	2002	2003
From customers	20.5	22.5	26.6
From colleagues	15.2	13.4	15.1
Source: TAS 2000/2002, NEA 2003			

**Table 4 % of intimidation, by gender, Netherlands**

	Men	Woman
From customers	19.9	25.9
From colleagues	15.3	11.0
Source: TAS 2000/2002 (combined)		

However, the EWCO Dutch correspondent voiced doubts whether the use of ‘intimidation’ here covers adequately the concept of ‘bullying’. This remark is valuable in preparing the next European Working Conditions Survey.

## Spain

Based on a sample of 2,410 Spanish employees, the Report Cisneros II is the most thorough study on mobbing carried out in Spain. Its main results show that 16% of the surveyed employees report having been bullied repeatedly at least once a week. However, when asked about their degree of agreement with a series of statements on their difficulty to cope with the situation, those who completely agreed were in a minority. Nevertheless, 16% is a much higher figure than in the European survey (see Figure 5), which uses the term ‘intimidation’.

**Table 5 Experience of mobbing, Spain**

Statement	% workers who completely agree
Mobbing is a heavy burden on my daily work	9.0
Just thinking about going to work every morning makes me feel uneasy	5.5
Psychological harassment is a common problem at work	5.6
Source: Obeso, C., et al, ‘Randstad Report, Quality at work in the EU 15. Moral harassment’, from ‘Report Cisneros II’, Madrid, 2003	

The author of the Report Cisneros II argues that mobbing is characterised by more than 40 negative ways of behaviour, such as isolation of the victim at the workplace (no communication), questioning/criticising the way he/she carries out his/her tasks, not assigning job tasks to the victim, or assigning too heavy a workload so that it cannot possibly be finished on time, or spreading rumours about the victim.

It is believed that harassment may be fostered by changes in the labour market, such as precarious working conditions, large influx of women into the labour market, growing competitiveness in companies and loss of human values.

The sectors most affected by mobbing in Spain are public administration, education, health care, the media, and hotels and restaurants.

## **Sweden**

Mobbing or bullying has been included in the Swedish Work Environment Surveys for several years. Comparable results are available from at least 1995. The question concerns the last 12 months: 'Are you subjected to personal persecution (mobbing) in the form of unkind words or behaviour from your superiors or fellow workers?'

Around 9% of the workforce has reported being subject to bullying in the last two surveys. No significant differences emerge by gender. The trend shows a slight increase in the period from 1995 to 2001: from 7.6% to 9.0% for men and from 8.2% to 8.9% for women.

## **France**

Survey results are not available from France because national working condition surveys have not examined bullying. The French correspondent presented results about 'moral harassment' but these were based on regional surveys only, which could not be included in the national focus of this report.

## **Sexual harassment**

Sexual harassment will be the most difficult subject to review or make comparisons about between the countries. Questions concerning this issue carry many methodological problems. Nevertheless, it is useful to examine the different ways of studying sexual harassment within the national working conditions surveys, where data exist.

## **Denmark**

The Danish Work Environment Cohort Study produces quite low figures about sexual harassment using only one short question:

'Have you been exposed to any unwanted sexual attention at your workplace within the last 12 months?' The response categories ask who the perpetrator is: colleagues, management, subordinates, or clients, and the number of times for each category.

In 2000, the proportion of those experiencing sexual harassment in the employed population was 1.8%, being much higher for women (3.2%) than for men (0.5%). Young women (aged 18 to 29) were the most vulnerable group. By occupation, among women, the highest figure was in nursing. Different groups of sectors ranked in descending order: home care, education, hotels and restaurants, and health care.

## **Finland**

The Finnish Quality of Work Life Survey (1977-2003), included questions on sexual harassment only once, in 1990. It became obvious from the experiences of the interviewers that this kind of matter is difficult to capture in surveys. There was a short definition of the concept in the question, but the matter was still awkward for many interviewees. Since then, the [Finnish Institute of Occupational Health](#), for example, has used this kind of question with a short definition in its Work and Health Survey 2000 (telephone interview). Another nationwide survey, the Gender Barometer, has addressed this topic but with a more detailed question concerning all sexual harassment, not only that at the workplace. (Melkas, 2001)

The degree of prevalence of sexual harassment is very much dependent on how widely different manners of behaviour are included in the concept. The Gender Barometer enquired about four forms: physical passes, proposals of sexual relations, impertinent remarks and dirty jokes. The definition in the main question was: '...such sexual behaviour which is not desirable, but biased and might contain pressure.'

Disturbance by colleagues, superiors or customers is defined as harassment in the work environment. Where the interviewee reported at least one of the four forms of behaviour and at least one of the three work environment

perpetrators, they were included within the definition. This resulted in 18% of female employees and 5% of male employees being counted as victims of sexual harassment in the workplace in the past two years. The last study was made in 2001.

As was seen in Denmark, surveys that use only one question on this matter give much lower figures. The Institute of Occupational Health has obtained the following results concerning sexual harassment at work during the last 12 months:

**Table 6 % of sexual harassment at work, Finland**

	Total	Men	Women
2000	1.3	0.7	1.7
2003	3.0	1.3	2.5

By age, young women and men have most experienced harassment. There are no perceivable differences by occupation or sector. The figures are so low that differences are hard to observe.

### The Netherlands

The Netherlands' Work Situation Survey (TAS) and National Working Conditions Survey (NEA) have a twofold question about sexual harassment: 'Over the past 12 months, to what extent have you been subjected to: Unwanted sexual attention by colleagues/supervisory staff? Unwanted sexual attention by customers (patients, students, passengers?)' The response categories are: 1) never; 2) only once or twice; 3) often; 4) very often.

**Table 7 % of sexual harassment, the Netherlands**

	2000	2002	2003
By customers	4.7	6.7	9.0
By colleagues	2.5	3.1	5.3

Note: 'Yes' (all categories: yes, only once or twice; yes, often; yes, very often). Source: TAS 2000/2002, NEA 2003

**Table 8 % of sexual harassment, by gender, Netherlands**

	Men	Women
By customers	3.0	11.4
By colleagues	1.6	5.1

Source: TAS 2000/2002 (combined)

These figures of personal experience can be compared to the European Working Conditions Survey (2000), where the Dutch percentage among employed people was 3.2% in respect of personal experience and 9.7% in respect of awareness of unwanted sexual attention at the workplace. However, the European survey did not differentiate between customers and colleagues as the source of harassment. The Dutch national survey results also show a clear increase from 2000 to 2003.

As in other countries, sexual harassment from customers is shown to be much more variable than that from colleagues. Harassment from customers is more typical in health care and teaching than in other occupations. Health care, hotels and restaurants, and education are the most vulnerable sectors.

## **Spain**

In 2000, the CCOO, one of the two main trade unions in Spain, published a study, 'Sexual harassment in the workplace in Spain', as part of the [Pandora Project](#). The study was based on the results of a national survey carried out in April 2000 among 1,004 employed people over 16 years. Three main variables were defined in the survey:

- Harassment ('Acoso' in Spanish): Unwanted behaviour experienced by respondents at least once throughout their working lives. The following are included: a) repeated invasion of physical space or too close an approach by work-mate/boss; b) pressure by someone to go out together or have a sexual relationship; c) offer (by boss) of improved working conditions in exchange for a sexual relationship; d) unwanted rubbing or touching by colleagues, clients, bosses; e) being subject of a sexual assault by someone in the workplace.
- Mild harassment ('Acoso leve' in Spanish): Mainly related to verbal abuse, also regarded as 'sexism'.
- Recognised harassment ('Acoso reconocido' in Spanish): Express awareness of having been subject to sexual harassment.

Overall, 14.5% of the surveyed population had been sexually harassed at their workplace, that is, they had experienced some of the situations detailed above, the share being significantly greater among women (18.3% of all surveyed women) than among men (8.8%).

## **Sweden**

The Swedish Work Environment Survey asks the following questions about sexual harassment: 'Have you been exposed to sexual harassment from your superiors or fellow workers at your workplace?' 'Have you been exposed to sexual harassment from other persons at your workplace (e.g. patients, clients, passengers) during the last 12 months?'

Since the 1995 survey, the most apparent increase is seen among women experiencing harassment from customers: from 4.7% to 6.3%. Harassment from colleagues has increased from 1.5% to 2.1% among women. There is little difference between occupational groups in respect of the amount of harassment from colleagues or superiors. However, sexual harassment from customers is much more common in occupations in health care and social care, and in hotel and restaurant work.

## **France and Germany**

No data were available for these countries.

## ***Suggestions for further research***

### **Physical violence**

In the European Working Conditions Survey of 2000, physical violence was divided into violence from colleagues and violence from people outside (customers). According to the results and experiences of the correspondent countries, it is not necessary to make this distinction because violence from fellow workers is rare. It would be useful to include the threat of violence, as many national studies do. Violence and the threat of violence show similar distribution tendencies and can lead to serious problems in the workplace.

### **Bullying**

It may be useful to replace the word 'intimidation' in the European survey with 'bullying'. Intimidation may be translated to imply threatening rather than bullying. The word bullying has gained a certain position in common awareness. It is unnecessary to make a distinction between bullying from colleagues or from customers: most bullying happens inside the workplace, among fellow workers.

### **Sexual harassment**

This question in the European survey is well phrased, referring to experiences and awareness of 'unwanted sexual attention'. However, this item and 'sexual discrimination' could be moved so that all discrimination questions would be together.

As this report has shown, sexual harassment is a difficult topic to cover in surveys. National, specialised research is necessary with detailed formulations and more qualitative methods.

### **Correlation with other factors**

It was not possible within the scope of this report to examine a detailed correlation between these three issues and other work environment factors. However, in order to improve the work environment, it would be important to consider such factors, especially with regard to bullying. The European Working Conditions Survey for 2005 should continue to include or add new questions on 1) receiving information concerning changes in work; 2) getting support from superiors and colleagues; 3) time pressure at work; and 4) uncertainty of positions and employment contracts. These have proven to be important factors connected with bullying, at least in the Finnish Quality of Working Life Surveys.

### **Commentary**

This report sought to learn how three 'new' phenomena, i.e. physical violence, bullying and sexual harassment, have been studied in national surveys in the countries covered by the European Working Conditions Observatory. A further aim was to define these issues more clearly and formulate appropriate questions, especially for the next European Working Conditions Survey in 2005.

It is important to have a better overview of the extent and trends of violence, bullying and harassment in the workplace in order to design measures aimed at improving the working environment. These kinds of questions about the working environment become more essential as the structure of working life changes from physically demanding work towards more mentally oriented activity.

This investigation showed that experience of these three problems - physical violence, bullying and sexual harassment - has been on the increase. Both the European Working Conditions Survey and the national surveys give evidence of this. It is difficult to say how much of this change is due to raised awareness of the issues, but the increased levels of experience must be regarded as real.

It also became apparent that physical violence, bullying and sexual harassment are very different kinds of issues and cannot be studied in the same way. This means that action measures in the workplace must be tailored to fit each problem.

The importance of the methodology is obvious. The answers of the correspondents showed that even small differences in questions can cause big differences in results. In national surveys, the degrees of prevalence could differ considerably from the European survey, as in the case of bullying or sexual harassment in Spain. Physical violence is much more common in Sweden and Denmark if threats of violence are also included in the question, compared with the European survey results which omitted mention of threats.

In order to take preventive actions against physical violence, bullying and sexual harassment, it is important to identify which occupations, sectors and circumstances are most vulnerable to this kind of behaviour. The EWCO correspondents indicate that measures have already been taken at legislative level, as well as practical labour inspections and compiling good practice. The report from the [European Agency for Safety and Health of Work](#) also contains valuable information concerning the prevention of violence.

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## Appendix

This appendix provides more information on the national surveys mentioned in the report.

## Denmark

### Danish Work Environment Cohort Study

Survey name	The Danish Work Environment Cohort Study 2000, DWECS
Frequency	Conducted every five years. Three editions: First edition 1990, next edition 2005
Coverage	The study covers the whole labour force including self-employed people
Population	Active population (aged between 18 and 69) in all economic activities
Sample size	1990: 9,700 people; 1995: 11,347 people; 2000: 12,322 people. The relative size of each panel reflects the proportion of the relevant groups of the total population. Each panel represents around 1/330 of the national population.
Response rate	2000: 75%; 1995: 85%; 1990: 90%
Share of respondents refusing to participate in interviews	2000: 15%; 1995: 12.5%; 1990: 5.5%
Sampling strategy	Split panel design: Stratified simple random sampling design with proportional allocation
Register used for the sample	Statistics sample of the Danish population drawn from the Central Population Register
Interviews	Type of interview: By telephone; Location of interview: Respondent's home
Sources: Buur, Hermann (2003): 'The Danish Work Environment Cohort Study. Purpose, design, variables, analyses and plans', p.1; 'Working Conditions surveys - a comparative analysis', Foundation, 2003.	

## Finland

The Quality of Work Life Surveys carried out by Statistics Finland in 1977, 1984, 1990, 1997 and 2003 are extensive interview enquiries directed to between 3,000 and 5,700 employees. They have been implemented as personal face-to-face interviews in connection with the Labour Force Survey. The samples have consisted of employees aged 15 to 64 whose normal weekly working hours comprise at least five hours of paid work. The response rates have fluctuated between 91% (in 1977) and 78% (in 2003).

## The Netherlands

Three Dutch surveys provide information on the issue of violence and harassment:

- TNO Work Situation Survey (TAS: TNO Arbeidssituatie Survey)
- National Working Conditions Survey (NEA: Nationale Enquête Arbeidsomstandigheden)
- Integrated System of Surveys on Living Conditions/Permanent Quality of Life Survey (POLS: Periodiek Onderzoek Leefsituatie)

### Dutch surveys covering physical and psychological violence, bullying and harassment

	TAS	NEA	POLS
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Response	Approx. 4,000	Approx. 10,000	Approx. 10,000 (n = approx. 4,000 on the Module health and working conditions)
Response rates	53% (2000) 45% (2002)	41% (2003)	Approx. 60%
Method	Postal questionnaire	Postal questionnaire	Face-to-face interview, on health outcomes a postal questionnaire
Frequency	Every two years, since 2000	Every two years, since 2003	Yearly since 1989 (trend break in 1994)
Sample	Representative sample of the Dutch Labour Force (aged 15 to 64)	Representative sample of the Dutch Labour Force (aged 15 to 64), excluding self-employed people	Representative sample of the Dutch Labour Force (aged 15 to 64)
Data supplier	TNO Work and Employment	TNO Work and Employment/ Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment	Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) in the Netherlands

## Germany

The survey on mobbing was carried out in two phases. The first phase was a telephone interview based on a sample of the population. 4,396 persons were interviewed for this survey.

The second phase was to send a postal questionnaire to the persons who were currently experiencing mobbing or had been mobbed in the past. The respondents to whom the questionnaire was sent were found through newspaper advertisements and from the respondents interviewed in the telephone survey.

## Sweden

Statistics Sweden has carried out Work Environment Surveys every second year since 1989. The purpose of the surveys is to describe the work environment of the employed population aged 16-64. The survey is based on a sample of around 14,000 members of the employed population (each time). It is carried out by means of supplementary questions asked in connection with Statistics Sweden's continuous Labour Force Surveys (LFS), conducted as telephone interviews. Those who have taken part in the interview survey and answered the supplementary questions then receive additional questions in a postal questionnaire. Below are the response rates of the people who have already cooperated in the Labour Force Survey.

### Response rate to Swedish LFS (%)

	1997	1999	2001
Response in interview	91	88	90
Response in questionnaire	83	81	77
Total for those in labour force	74	69	67