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Key words: bullying, harassment, intervention, prevention

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Denise Salin

Although workplace bullying and other inappropriate treatment in the workplace have received growing attention, especially in Northern Europe, in the past few decades, little research has so far been conducted about the prevention of and intervention in such phenomena. This paper provides a review of different organizational measures typically recommended for preventing and intervening in workplace bullying and other forms of inappropriate treatment in the workplace. These measures include anti-bullying policies, training and information, appropriate job designs, active monitoring, and early intervention. As for intervention, both informal and formal strategies are discussed. Furthermore, the paper reports findings from a study among Finnish municipalities on the extent to which these measures are actually used in Finland, a country that has fairly recently introduced anti-bullying legislation.

Key words: bullying, harassment, intervention, prevention

Introduction

This paper addresses the issue of organizational measures taken to prevent and intervene in negative, inappropriate treatment at work. Generally, during the past few decades we have seen a growing interest in analyzing such phenomena. Although presented under many different labels, such as ‘bullying’ (e.g. Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Salin, 2003a; Sheehan, 1996; Vartia, 1996), ‘mobbing’ (e.g. Leymann, 1996; Zapf, Knorz & Kulla, 1996), ‘victimization’ (e.g. Aquino et al., 1999), ‘social undermining’ (e.g. Duffy, Ganster & Pagon, 2002), ‘emotional abuse’ (e.g. Keashly, 1998), and 'workplace incivility'
(e.g. Andersson & Pearson, 1999), studies uniformly seem to indicate that such negative
behaviours in the workplace may have severe detrimental consequences both for the targets
and for the organizations concerned (e.g. Hoel, Einarsen & Cooper, 2003; Keashly &
Jagatic, 2003; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002a).

In this paper the term ‘bullying’ will primarily be used and it is here defined drawing on
previous research (cf. Salin 2003b) as negative behaviour that fulfill certain criteria: 1) 
duration and repetitiveness, 2) a perceived power imbalance, 3) creation of a 
hostile/negative work environment.

Bullying can take many forms and encompass a number of different negative behaviours
such as social isolation or silent treatment, attacking the victim’s private life or attitudes,
extensive criticism or monitoring of work, withholding information or depriving
responsibility, and verbal aggression (Einarsen, 2000; Zapf et al., 1996). Thus it may
include apparently minor acts, such as offensive remarks, rumours, or refusing to say
‘hello’, which may seem rather trivial on their own. However, it is important to note that
the major difference between ‘normal’ conflict and bullying is not necessarily what and
how it is done, but rather the duration and repetitiveness of what is done. For example,
Einarsen and Skogstad (1996) and Vartia (1996) stress that bullying is repeated, persistent
and continuous behaviour, typically, single negative acts are not considered bullying. In
other words, in bullying the accumulation of many ‘minor’ acts typically form a pattern of
systematic maltreatment.

Moreover, bullying has been seen as involving a power imbalance, i.e. conflicts between
parties of perceived equal strength are thus not considered bullying (Einarsen & Skogstad,
1996; Vartia, 1996). Formal power differences are a possible source of such an imbalance
in power, but as power imbalances can also be the consequence of other individual,
situational or societal characteristics (cf., for example, Cleveland & Kerst, 1993), the
required power differences can also arise among peers or even give a subordinate the
required power over a superior. What is more, as bullying typically is described as an
escalating process, the negative acts themselves may further contribute to putting the target
in an inferior position over time (cf. Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf & Cooper, 2003).
Finally, it is important to draw a line between friendly banter and jokes in the workplace and bullying, by establishing that bullying, just as sexual harassment, is about behaviour that is *unwelcome* by the target (cf. Pryor & Fitzgerald, 2003 on sexual harassment). Thus, bullying and inappropriate treatment is about behaviour that has the potential to *endanger the health and well-being of targets* (cf. chapter 5, section 28 in the Finnish Occupational Safety and Health Act 738/20021).

During the past few decades a number of studies have been conducted about the phenomenon of bullying itself (see, for example, Einarsen et al., 2003), consequences of bullying both for the targets and organizations concerned (for summaries see e.g. Hoel et al., 2003; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002a), and individual and organizational antecedents (for reviews see, for example, Hoel & Salin, 2003; Zapf & Einarsen, 2003). Despite this, although some advice has been put forward on how to deal with bullying in the workplace (e.g. Hubert, 2003; Mathieson, Hanson & Burns, 2006; Merchant & Hoel, 2003; Resch & Schubinski, 1996; Richards & Daley 2003, Vartia, Korppoo, Fallenius & Mattila, 2003), little empirical research has been done around what kind of measures have been taken by organizations to combat bullying.

This paper thus aims, firstly, to provide a review of recommendations on combating workplace bullying and, secondly, to analyze what kind of measures have in practice been taken by Finnish municipalities to prevent and intervene in workplace bullying and other inappropriate treatment in the workplace. The Finnish context was of particular interest because of a new Occupational Safety and Health Act (2002) entering into force in January 2003, stating that employers are required to take measures in cases of ‘harassment and other inappropriate treatment’ in the workplace. This is thus a descriptive account of measures being used to combat workplace bullying in Finland according to personnel managers in Finnish municipalities.

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1 If harassment or other inappropriate treatment of an employee occurs at work and causes hazards or risks to the employee’s health, the employer, after becoming aware of the matter, shall by available means take measures for remedying this situation.
Preventing and intervening in workplace bullying

Understanding the causes of workplace bullying

During the past few years several studies have been undertaken on causes of workplace bullying and other inappropriate treatment in the workplace. Whereas some articles have focused on the characteristics of targets (e.g. Coyne, Seigne & Randall, 2000; Zapf & Einarsen, 2003), others have primarily focused on contextual factors, such as the organizational environment (Einarsen, Raknes & Matthiesen et al., 1994; Hoel & Salin, 2003; Vartia, 1996). Despite the fact that most researchers today seem to agree that both personal and organizational factors and the interaction between the two are important for understanding the complicated bullying process (e.g. Einarsen, 2000, Zapf, 1999), the focus in this paper is on organizational causes of bullying, as these are to a larger extent under management control. Understanding these is thus of importance for developing potentially effective and successful prevention and intervention measures.

Organizational factors may contribute to bullying in many different ways. For instance, Salin (2003a) argued that whereas some factors enable bullying, others might actually motivate and trigger bullying. Enabling factors were described as structures and processes that provide a fertile ground for bullying and structures and processes that act as a filter (or rather lack thereof). In other words, the enabling structures and processes are those that make bullying possible in the first place. Thus, by focusing on these aspects we may in fact be better equipped to create a work environment which ‘disenables’ bullying and makes bullying, if not impossible, at least less likely to occur.

Enabling structures and processes include, in addition to a perceived power imbalance, structures and processes that are likely to make the perpetrator consider the ‘costs’ of bullying to be low, and structures and processes that cause general dissatisfaction and frustration. As for low perceived costs, a ‘permissive’ organizational culture and lack of leader intervention have been seen as major risk factors. Already in 1976, Brodsky (1976: 83) stated that 'for harassment to occur, harassment elements must exist within a culture that permits and rewards harassment'. The importance of role models and a culture, which, for example, celebrates toughness and humiliating ‘jokes’ and shows a lack of norms
Figure 1: Disenabling factors in the work environment acting as a filter.


prohibiting ‘inappropriate treatment’, has also been demonstrated by Robinson and O'Leary-Kelly (1998), Collinson (1988), and Einarsen and Raknes (1997).

In addition, the link between bullying and leadership (or rather lack thereof) has also been shown by a number of empirical studies. For example, Leymann (1996) and Einarsen et al. (1994) found that bullying among colleagues was often associated with ‘weak’ or ‘inadequate’ leadership on higher levels in the organization. Similarly, Hoel and Cooper (2000) showed that bullying was associated with high scores on a laissez faire style of leadership.

Several issues related to the job design and work organization have also been put forward as potentially enabling bullying. For example, positive relationships have been reported
between bullying and lack of clear goals (Vartia, 1996), organizational constraints, a lack of control over one’s own job (Einarsen et al., 1994; Spector 1997; Vartia, 1996; Zapf et al., 1996), and role conflict and ambiguity (Einarsen et al., 1994; Spector 1997). Furthermore, deficient internal communication, i.e. poor information, lack of mutual conversations about tasks and goals, and a poor communication climate have been shown to correlate with bullying (Vartia, 1996). Further, studies have shown that people with a high work-load, time pressure and a hectic work environment report more bullying (Einarsen et al., 1994; Hoel & Cooper, 2000).

**Prevention of workplace bullying**

As reported above, organizational factors play an important role in either ‘allowing’ bullying to take place or in ‘disallowing’ bullying to take place. In order to reduce bullying we thus need to address the issues that may potentially enable bullying (cf. Salin 2003a) and try to disenable bullying instead, for example, by increasing the perceived costs for the perpetrator and by supporting general satisfaction and clarity (see figure 1). The organizational culture, active leadership, an appropriate work organization, and job design can thus be seen as key issues. In line with this, recommendations to combat bullying (e.g. European Agency, 2002; Hubert, 2003; Mathieson et al., 2006; Salin 2003b) have typically focused on:

- creating a ‘zero-tolerance’ for bullying
- increasing awareness of the issue of bullying
- improving and increasing managers’ competence and responsibility to deal with interpersonal conflicts
- ensuring clarity concerning work responsibilities, rules and ‘appropriate’ work behaviour
- intervening in escalating conflicts at early stages, before stigmatization of one of the parties has occurred
In order to create ‘zero-tolerance’ for bullying, increase awareness and clarify what is meant by ‘appropriate’ work behaviour several researchers and practitioners have recommended the introduction of anti-bullying policies (European Agency, 2002; Hubert 2003; Mathieson et al., 2006; Richards & Daley, 2003; Vartia, et al. 2003). The effectiveness of anti-bullying policies has also been demonstrated in some recent empirical studies reporting a negative relationship between having an anti-bullying policy and the prevalence of workplace bullying (Baillien et al., 2005; Neyens et al., 2005).

However, despite some minor differences in recommended content, researchers seem to agree on a number of issues that are important to cover in such a policy (e.g. European Agency, 2002; Richards & Daley, 2003):

- Commitment to a bullying-free environment: a statement that bullying is an organizational issue and that such behaviour will not be tolerated;
- Outlining what kind of behaviours are seen as bullying (and which are not)
- Stating the consequences of breaking organizational standards
- Indicating the responsibility of different actors, such as line managers and human resources professionals
- Naming contact persons
- Explaining the procedure of making informal/formal complaints and describing how complaints will be handled (incl. comments on confidentiality)
- Support available for targets and perpetrators

However, for an anti-bullying policy to be successful the contents themselves are not enough. Richards and Daley (2003) emphasize the need to incorporate staff from all levels and union representatives in the process of policy development and implementation, since broad involvement is needed to give status to the process, increase awareness and gain acceptance throughout the organization. Vartia et al. (2003) stress that the anti-bullying policies are not only important for the targets of bullying, but also provide supervisors and managers with much needed guidelines and advice on how to deal with bullying, which may increase both their willingness and competence to react appropriately.
As weak leadership and managers abdicating responsibility in cases of interpersonal conflict are identified as major risk factors (e.g. Einarsen et al., 1994; Hoel & Cooper, 2000), measures taken to increase leaders’ competence in dealing with bullying can also be seen as being of outmost importance. Including skills in identifying and dealing with bullying and interpersonal conflicts in managerial training is thus important. For example, in Finland, occupational health services can be involved in the prevention of bullying by providing training on issues such as the causes of bullying, the bullying process, the consequences of bullying and the handling of bullying (Vartia et al., 2003).

Although managers occupy a key role in dealing with bullying, increasing awareness and knowledge of bullying on all levels is important in order to quickly identify situations that may escalate to bullying and in order to help employees combat bullying by refusing to take part directly or in a ‘supportive’ role in such behaviour themselves. Providing information about bullying - its forms, its causes and consequences – is thus also important in order to increase awareness. Moreno-Jimenez et al. (2005) have also in an empirical study demonstrated that there was a negative correlation between information about bullying and the prevalence of bullying.

However, Resch and Schubinski (1996) stress that in order to change the leadership culture of an organization, providing training for middle management is not enough. Instead, they emphasize the importance of senior managers acting as role models in order to affect values and organizational culture. This is line with previous research on the importance of role models when attempting to change organizational culture (Schein, 1999). Resch and Schubinski (1996) also argue that appraisals by employees may be needed to evaluate whether anti-bullying principles have truly been adopted by managers at all levels.

As shown in the previous section, the work design may affect the prevalence of bullying and thus changes in work design can help to prevent bullying (Resch & Schubinski, 1996). Since studies have shown that the lack of clear goals in work (Vartia, 1996), lack of control over one’s own job (Einarsen et al., 1994; Spector 1997; Vartia, 1996; Zapf et al., 1996), and role conflict and ambiguity (Einarsen et al., 1994; Spector 1997) are associated with bullying, it is important to ensure the implementation of work designs which ensure clarity about rules and responsibilities and possibilities to control matters for which one is held
accountable (cf. Muinonen et al., 2005). Further, in order to ensure clarity about goals and responsibilities, well-functioning internal communication (cf. Vartia’s 1996 results on bullying and communication climate) is also of importance (cf. Järvinen, 1999).

Early interventions are also important. However, this requires getting information about unacceptable behaviour quickly. For example, Järvinen (1999) stresses the importance of constantly evaluating activities in order to provide a well-functioning work organization, and Mathieson et al. (2006) stress checking the environment and monitoring staff as steps that need to be part of a prevention strategy. Development discussions with staff and regular employee surveys may thus provide useful information to ensure early intervention. Thus, monitoring the work environment by conducting surveys of the work climate and prevalence of negative acts may provide useful information for directing extra efforts to the departments and functions concerned.

**Intervening in workplace bullying**

Despite the best of efforts, workplace bullying may still occur in the workplace. However, as pointed out by several researchers, in such cases early intervention is crucial (e.g. European Agency, 2002; Keashly & Nowell, 2003). Keashly and Nowell (2003:348) argue that a fundamental characteristic of many conflict theories is that conflict ‘is prone to escalate, that it to become more intense, hostile and competitive, to include more issues, to undermine trust, and to involve more powerful attempts at control such as engaging other parties in alliances’. For example, Glomb (2002) and Andersson and Pearson (1999) have used escalation to show how ‘trivial’ acts of negative interpersonal work behaviours may spiral into increasingly hostile and violent behaviours. Thus, a main argument by many conflict management researchers is that different management or intervention strategies are appropriate and effective at different points in time and that the ‘failure’ of particular interventions may be due to inappropriate application with respect to the stage of escalation (Keashly & Nowell, 2003, cf. Fischer, 1990; Glasl, 1982).

Similarly, Leymann (1996) described bullying as an escalating process consisting of different steps and many other researchers have since described bullying as an escalating
process (Einarsen et al., 2003; Zapf & Gross, 2001). Thus, the more the situation has escalated, the less there is constructive discussion on the actual issues involved, the more personalized the conflict has become, and the higher the probability that the target has been stigmatized. The most appropriate intervention methods and the likely success rate of these are thus likely to be highly dependent on the stage of the bullying process.

Hubert (2003) notices that interventions can be either informal or formal. Informal intervention may involve, for example, arbitration or mediation by a third party. Although counselors typically advice against using the supervisor as a mediator (cf. Hubert, 2003), particularly in smaller workplaces this may sometimes be the only viable option (Tripp, 2006). However, when supervisors take on this role, skills in handling interpersonal conflicts are crucial. In some countries, occupational health services (Vartia et al., 2003) may also provide assistance in mediation. However, researchers and practitioners stress that mediation is typically possible only when the conflict is at an early stage (Vartia et al., 2003).

Hubert (2003) suggests that formal complaints procedures may be appropriate when informal strategies have failed or if the behaviour is too serious to be suitable for informal solution. In cases of formal complaints the investigation and grievance process is of crucial importance. Merchant and Hoel (2003) stress the need for setting clear ground rules, administrating the process well, and gathering evidence before reaching a decision. They emphasize the need for objectivity and fairness in all aspects of the process and provide detailed advice on how to do this, for example, by sending detailed letters to interviewees, recording interviews and encouraging interviewee representation. What is more, they strongly remind investigators of the importance of trying to keep information as confidential as possible and divulging information on a ‘need to know’ basis only. Formal complaints may lead to disciplinary action. For example, Hubert (2003) mentions that when a complaint is evaluated as plausible by the grievance committee, the advice is often to transfer or dismiss the accused. However, in the author’s own experience it is not rare in bullying situations to see the organization transferring the target instead.

In addition to addressing the particular bullying situation, it may also be important to provide additional counseling and training both for the target and perpetrator, both in order


to facilitate rehabilitation and in order to prevent similar situations from being repeated. Research has shown that bullying can have severe consequences for the targets and lead to, for example, different psychosomatic stress symptoms, burnout and depression (e.g. Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002a). Some studies have shown that targets of bullying may even develop symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (Leymann & Gustafsson, 1996; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002b). Thus counseling is important and may be carried out, for example, by occupational health care services (Vartia et al., 2003). Tehrani (2003) stresses that also the bully is likely to be in need of counseling in order to be able to change his or her behaviour. She argues that far from all bullies are psychopaths or suffer from psychological or psychiatric problems, but rather they may simply have failed to learn how to use their personal power properly. In line with this, Sheehan (1999) emphasizes the need to develop emotional intelligence and personal mastery in order to combat bullying in the workplace.

**Method**

**Aim**

As shown above, a growing body of literature has emerged on the topic of understanding bullying and recently also recommendations on dealing with bullying. Despite this, we know little about to what extent such recommendations are actually used by organizations. Thus, the aim of this study is to describe what organizations actually do in order to prevent and intervene in bullying in a country where anti-bullying legislation has been in force since 2003.

**Pre-study**

In order to provide pre-understanding of the measures taken by Finnish organizations to prevent and intervene in bullying an exploratory mini-study was undertaken in the winter of 2006 by Storgårds (2006), under the supervision of the author of this paper. Interviews were conducted in six organizations on actions taken to prevent and intervene in bullying
and other forms of inappropriate treatment in the work environment. Originally, both public and private organizations were contacted; however, none of the private organizations were willing to take part in the study.

The findings from this study and the respondents’ experiences were much in line with the recommendations given in previous research. For example, the importance of a clear position on bullying and the need for early intervention were strongly emphasized. However, the interviews also revealed that some measures not typically mentioned in literature were used, such as not prolonging the contract of bullies on temporary contracts or not promoting employees ‘with bullying tendencies’ to managerial positions. Further, most respondents found it very hard to answer what the effects of different measures had been and several respondents pointed out that no actual data on number of cases yearly were collected. The results of this pre-study thus informed the construction of the questionnaire used in the main study reported here.

**Selection of respondents and collection of data**

In the main study a questionnaire was sent to all 431 municipalities in Finland. Municipalities were chosen rather than private companies, since the pre-study (Storgård 2006) had indicated a higher willingness to reveal this kind of information in the public than in the private sector.

The survey was conducted on-line and a short description of the study and a link to an on-line survey was e-mailed to all respondents. The questionnaire was constructed and the list of respondents managed using the Webropol software for creating on-line surveys (see www.webropol.fi). The questionnaire was available in both Finnish and Swedish.

Based on the municipalities’ contact information on the Internet, efforts were made to identify the most suitable respondent in each municipality, i.e. the person most likely to be in charge of personnel matters/psycho-social safety and health issues. Depending on the size of the municipality this would most likely be either a personnel manager, the head of administration or the municipal secretary. The e-mail was sent directly to this person’s e-mail address, with an encouragement to the respondent to forward the message to
somebody else in the municipality, should he or she not consider him or herself an appropriate respondent.

The questionnaire consisted of questions on measures taken and background information about the municipality and the respondent. In the questionnaire the term, ‘harassment and inappropriate treatment’, was used as an umbrella term, since this is the term used in the Finnish Occupational Safety and Health Act. However, for many of the aspects data were collected separately for different forms of harassment, such as bullying, sexual harassment and ethnic harassment.

As for the measures taken in order to prevent and monitor the occurrence of bullying, the respondents were asked about the existence of written anti-bullying policies, whether information and training on bullying had been provided to employees, whether surveys on bullying had been conducted, and whether the number of bullying cases was recorded. For all items the respondents could choose between ‘yes’, ‘no’, and ‘don’t know’.

In addition, the respondents were presented with a list of measures that might be taken in cases of harassment and asked both whether this particular action had previously been taken in any cases of harassment and inappropriate treatment and how likely the respondent considered it to be that it would be used in a possible future case. The list included, for example, different informal measures and disciplinary measures, transfer of either party, and choosing ‘no action’. Several options could be ticked, as many different measures could have been taken in the same case and different measures could have been taken in different cases. Open questions regarding the prevention of and intervention in bullying were also posed to the respondents and at the end of each section of the questionnaire the respondents were also encouraged to provide any additional information they found relevant. The sections of the questionnaire which addressed measures taken to prevent and intervene in bullying are included as an appendix.
TABLE 1: Size of municipalities included in study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;100</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100≤ x &lt;250</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250≤ x &lt;500</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500≤ x &lt;1000</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000≤ x &lt; 5000</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥5000</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results

Sample characteristics

After two reminders had been sent, a total of 204 responses were returned, giving a response rate of 47.3 %. All different regions in Finland were represented and also municipalities of all different sizes were represented among those answering. The median for number of employees was 365, with 10.1% of the responding municipalities having less than 100 employees and 17.6% having 1000 employees or more (please see table 1 for more information about the distribution).

Of the respondents 75% had a university degree. There were slightly more female respondents (54.5%), which is not surprising given that both the public sector and personnel work are often characterized as female arenas of work in Finland. Of the respondents approximately 80% said they were the ones (primarily) in charge in personnel matters in their municipality (please see table 2 for a list of the work titles of the respondents).
TABLE 2: Work title of respondent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>JOB TITLE</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personnel manager/secretary</td>
<td>39.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal secretary/head of administration</td>
<td>39.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial director</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Health and) safety manager</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Preventive measures taken

The review of previous literature on workplace bullying showed that typical recommendations on preventing bullying included having an anti-bullying policy, providing training and information, and monitoring the work climate, for example, by conducting surveys. In addition, an appropriate work design was recommended.

The results from this study showed that the majority of the responding municipalities had introduced a written anti-bullying policy: 55.4% of the respondents reported that such a policy had been adopted. An additional 16.2% reported that the municipality was working on developing a policy. As for those who had a written policy, the policy had typically been adopted in the past few years. When asked when the policy had been introduced, only 5 of those responding reported that had been introduced already in the 1990’s and the vast majority had adopted their policies within the past 18 months, i.e. in 2005 or in early 2006.

Most of the municipalities (65.7%) had also provided some form of information about bullying to employees and/or managers. Over a quarter (27.5%) said they had provided actual training on the topic. The importance of including training on bullying in leadership training for manager and supervisors was emphasized by several respondents:

*The prevention of such problems is in accordance with the personnel policy of the city and is linked to the implementation of the strategy and it covers also this topic. In the module of leadership training that covers personnel management, the issues of identifying the problem and early intervention are included.*
TABLE 3: Measures taken to prevent and monitor workplace bullying.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>DON’T KNOW/ NO RESPONSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written policy</td>
<td>55.4%</td>
<td>33.8%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>65.7%</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveys (on bullying)</td>
<td>33.8%</td>
<td>59.3%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>66.6%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>68.6%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Work design was also addressed by several respondents in the open questions as a key to preventing bullying and other forms of inappropriate treatment at work.

*Development discussions are held with staff now and then. This year all employees have been involved in a project, with the aim and ambition to develop and strengthen the image of the organization both internally and externally, through, for example, [specifying] role division and responsibility, better quality and higher efficiency, positive work attitudes and job satisfaction, motivation and well-being at work, new ideas for the future, among other things.*

As for monitoring the work environment, 79.9% said that work climate surveys had been conducted and 33.8% percent of all respondents said that issues around bullying had either been included in work climate surveys or bullying surveys conducted separately. Several respondents also stressed the importance of development discussions and other informal discussions between managers and employees for getting information about potential risk situations and thereby increasing the probability of early interventions.

*During the past two years, the contents of development discussions have been directed to cover also harassment and inappropriate treatment at work.*

*The strength of a small municipality is that it is possible to deal with problematic situations quickly and start looking for solutions.*
The majority of the municipalities used development discussions: 89.7% reported that at least half of all employees were covered by such systems, and 63.9% said that at least three quarters of all employees were covered by such systems.

What is still remarkable is that only one quarter of the organizations (24.5%) reported that the number of bullying cases is recorded. Thus, any statistical follow-ups in terms of increases or decreases in numbers are in practice impossible to do, and likely to remain so in the immediate future.

**Intervention measures taken**

As for intervention measures respondents were asked both which measures had actually been taken in cases of bullying and other inappropriate treatment and how likely they considered it that a particular measure would be taken in the future.

As can be seen from table 4, the most common measures taken were having discussions with the parties involved and consulting occupational health care services. These measures had been taken by 77.9% and 72.1% respectively. These were also the measures that respondents reported they were most likely to take in any future cases. Many of the respondents also reported that some kind of counseling/training had been provided for perpetrators (30.9%) and targets (41.7%). The informal route and starting with soft measures was also emphasized by some respondents in the open questions:

> Each case in a unique case. Usually they can be solved by discussing and then the situation resolves. Mediation is used and the 'rules of the game' are repeated.

> The employer takes cases of harassment seriously in our municipality and effort is made to start solving them quickly. Typically, a meeting to discuss the issue is arranged, where the reasons for the situation are clarified and further measures are agreed upon.

Transfer of either the target or the perpetrator had also been a relatively common strategy, with 23.5% of the respondents reporting that in at least one case of inappropriate treatment the perpetrator had been transferred and 21.6% of the respondents reporting that in at least one case of inappropriate treatment the target had been transferred.
Sanctions had also been used, although to a much lesser extent: 4.4% reported that bullying or other inappropriate treatment had resulted in not prolonging the work contract for a perpetrator on a temporary contract. In 2% of the municipalities the inappropriate treatment had been ground for not promoting a perpetrator and 2.9% reported that inappropriate treatment had been the ground for dismissing an employee.

An interesting fact is that 12.3% of the respondents reported that there had been reported/known cases of bullying/inappropriate treatment where no measures had been taken by the organization. In line with this, 6.9% of the respondents revealed that targets themselves had chosen to resign. Despite 12.3% reporting that there had been cases where no measures had been taken, when asked about the likelihood of choosing this strategy in the future, this alternative was clearly the least favoured.

**TABLE 4: Measures taken to intervene in harassment and other forms of inappropriate treatment in the workplace.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEASURE/ACTION TAKEN</th>
<th>Yes, has been used</th>
<th>Likelihood of being taken in the future 1-5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussions with parties involved</td>
<td>77.9%</td>
<td>4.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consulting health care services</td>
<td>72.1%</td>
<td>4.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer of target</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>2.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer of perpetrator</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>2.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training/counselling for target</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>3.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training/counselling for perp.</td>
<td>30.9%</td>
<td>3.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not prolonging perp.’s contract</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>3.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not promoting perpetrator</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>3.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissing perpetrator</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No measures</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>1.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target resigned</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perpetrator resigned</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please note that the same municipality may have taken many different measures, either in the same or in different cases of bullying and inappropriate treatment.
Discussion

Due to the lack of studies on measures taken to prevent and intervene in bullying, this study has aimed to address this issue by providing descriptive data on how frequently different prevention and intervention measures are used by municipal employers in Finland. This study thus serves as a starting point for further studies, analyzing in more detail, for example, employers’ reasons for choosing certain measures over others and the perceived success rates of different interventions.

In terms of primary prevention, that is reducing the risk of bullying taking place in the first place, many of the organizations in the sample seemed to be taking active measures. Compared to some previous data collected in Finland in 2000 on how employees themselves perceive organizational measures against bullying (Salin, 2004), this study provided a rather different picture. Whereas in the previous study four out of five of the employees in the public sector argued that no information had been provided about workplace bullying nor had the issue been discussed in their workplace, in this study over half of the employer representatives who responded reported that the organization had an anti-bullying policy and almost two-thirds reported that information about bullying had been provided to employees. Still, we need to acknowledge the differences between the two studies: whereas the first study was conducted among individual employees, the latter was conducted among official organizational HR representatives. In addition, it is highly likely that employers who have been active in this area are overrepresented in the current sample and that not all employees in these organizations are necessarily aware of existing written policies or information sessions held. Despite this, it still seems reasonable to assume that there has been a growth in awareness among Finnish employers and employees about workplace bullying. This is also supported by the fact that many of the municipalities reported that anti-bullying policies had been introduced in the past few years and that a high number of municipalities were planning such policies at the moment.

In terms of secondary prevention, that is actually responding and intervening in problem situations, ‘soft’ and non-punitive measures seemed to be clearly favoured by the respondents. The two measures most typically used were discussions with the parties involved and consulting occupational health services. Providing some kind of training or
counseling for targets and perpetrators were other common strategies, whereas punitive measures, such as not promoting the perpetrator, not prolonging the contract for perpetrators on temporary contracts or actually dismissing perpetrators, were rather uncommon.

In general, the measures taken by the highest numbers of respondents were also the ones that respondents reported they were most likely to take in future cases. The only notable differences here were ‘transfer of target’ and ‘taking no measures’ which were reported by 21.6% and 12.3% of the respondents in past cases, but which received very low score for the likelihood of being taken in future cases. One possibility is that respondents have not found these strategies to be useful in past cases; however, another plausible explanation is that the respondents’ answers have been influenced by what they think they should do, i.e. what they consider socially desirable, rather than what they actually will do in the future.

In previous studies on bullying, some researchers have pointed out the lack of studies on the evaluation of different prevention and intervention strategies (Di Martino et al. 2003). Similarly, the results from the pre-study showed that many organizations did not collect any information on the effectiveness of their procedures. In line with this, this study showed that only a minority (24.5%) of the companies actually recorded any statistical information on the number of bullying cases. Thus, actually evaluating the effects on any policies or changes in policies is difficult. As any evaluations will be highly dependent on some key informants’ perceptions of changes in the prevalence of harassment, such evaluations risk being influenced by random patterns in prevalence and the visibility of some individual cases.

What needs to be kept in mind that the responses for each municipality are based on the views of one respondent only. Although the recipients were asked to forward the questionnaire if they did not consider themselves the right person to respond, it is possible that some of the respondents did not have all the relevant information. What is more, this study analyzed only the measures that employer representatives reported that had been taken. To what extent employees actually were aware of these or how they would rate them was not covered in this study. For example, when Hodgins (2006) studied employee awareness and perceptions of an anti-bullying policy in a public sector organization in
Ireland she found that while 77% were aware of the policy, only 36% had actually seen it. In addition, Hodgin’s (2006) study revealed that employees did not have faith in the procedures established by the organization and in particular expressed concerns regarding the approachability, transparency and bureaucratic nature of procedures and felt they were not being enforced. It is thus possible that also in this study employees would perceive these measures quite differently than the representatives of the employers, who answered this questionnaire.

Moreover, we need to be aware that the respondents are not necessarily representative of all employers in Finland, neither all municipalities in Finland. It is highly likely that those municipalities who have taken an active interest in working with these issues are also more prone than others to respond. What is more, as private sector organizations have shown less interest in revealing information about measures against bullying (Storgårds, 2006) it is also difficult to make any speculations on the generalizability of these results to the private sector. Although the lack of willingness to participate may indicate less interest in the issues, it is also worth noting that in Salin’s (2004) study on employees’ perceptions of measures against bullying, employees in the private sector generally had more belief in the capabilities of their organizations to successfully intervene in bullying incidents. Further analyses of the extent to which employee perceptions of organizational capabilities to intervene and ‘official’ measures taken correspond are thus needed.

The aim of this paper was to describe what measures Finnish municipalities have taken to prevent and intervene in bullying. Although this paper provides some preliminary insights into the relative importance of different measures, it still remains open what actually drives organizations to develop a systematic response to workplace bullying and what factors actually affect an organization’s choice of primary and secondary prevention measures. Further research needs to address, for example, how the overall personnel policy and procedures, characteristics of the personnel manager, and size, innovativeness and profitability of the organization are linked to the use of different measures. In addition, assessing both the perceived and ‘objective’ effectiveness of different measures is another important avenue for further research.
Acknowledgements

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References


Hoel, H. & Cooper, C. L. (2000). *Destructive Conflict and Bullying at Work*. Manchester: Manchester School of Management, University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology.


Occupational Safety and Health Act (2002) [738/2002].


APPENDIX A: Questionnaire

On the following pages you can find parts of questionnaire that was used for this study. The survey was web-based and each respondent was given an individual link to the questionnaire. In the study the questionnaire was presented to the respondents in Finnish or Swedish and has afterwards been translated into English.

The questionnaire consisted of six parts in total:

A) Background information about the municipality

B) Information about personnel management in the municipality + information about the respondent

C) Characteristics of harassment and other forms of inappropriate treatment

D) Prevention of harassment

E) Intervention in harassment

F) Additional comments

In this appendix sections D and E are included, i.e. the sections on the prevention of and intervention in workplace harassment and bullying. Please contact the author by e-mail should you wish to use the same questionnaire: denise.salin@hanken.fi
D. PREVENTION OF HARASSMENT (4/6)

24) There are many ways of trying to prevent harassment and inappropriate treatment. Please indicate how efficient you consider the following ones.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizational culture</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job design and work organization</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written policy</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

25) How important have these measures been considered in practice in your municipality as ways of preventing harassment and inappropriate treatment?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizational culture</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job design and work organization</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written policy</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

26) There are many reasons for trying to prevent harassment and inappropriate treatment. How important are the following ones considered in your municipality?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining job satisfaction.</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral responsibility for employees.</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling costs (e.g. related to absenteeism and turnover of personnel)</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image of the municipality as an employer.</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational Safety and Health Act</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
27) Have surveys been conducted in your municipality on:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bullying/psychological violence?</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexual harassment?</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic harassment?</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work climate?</td>
<td>jk</td>
<td>jk</td>
<td>jk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you replied yes, when was the most recent survey conducted?

28) Do you have a written policy in your municipality on how to prevent:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bullying/psychological violence?</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexual harassment?</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic harassment?</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you replied yes, when was the policy adopted?

When was the most recent revision made?

29) Have the employees in your municipality received information or training on:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bullying/psychological violence?</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Yes, information.</th>
<th>Yes, training.</th>
<th>I don't know.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexual harassment?</td>
<td>jk</td>
<td>jk</td>
<td>jk</td>
<td>jk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic harassment?</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

30) Are cases reported to the personnel department in your municipality statistically recorded:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bullying/psychological violence?</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Yes.</th>
<th>I don't know.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexual harassment?</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic harassment?</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

31) Any additional comments on surveys, policies or training that you have done or are planning:

[Blank space for comments]
32) Are other measures taken to prevent harassment and other forms of inappropriate treatment (e.g. developing the organizational culture, values, job design?)
E. THE PREVALENCE OF AND INTERVENTION IN HARASSMENT (5/6)

33) Do the following phenomena occur in the work environments of your municipality:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bullying/psychological violence?</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sexual harassment?</td>
<td>js</td>
<td>js</td>
<td>js</td>
<td>js</td>
<td>js</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ethnic harassment?</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

34) Has your municipality received negative publicity concerning:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bullying/psychological violence?</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sexual harassment?</td>
<td>js</td>
<td>js</td>
<td>js</td>
<td>js</td>
<td>js</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ethnic harassment?</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

35) How many cases have been reported to your personnel department/personnel manager in the past three years concerning:

- bullying/psychological violence?
- sexual harassment?
- ethnic harassment?
36) What is the role of the following persons in intervening in harassment:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immediate superior/line manager?</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel/HR manager?</td>
<td>jg</td>
<td>jk</td>
<td>jk</td>
<td>jk</td>
<td>jk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety manager?</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety delegate?</td>
<td>jg</td>
<td>jk</td>
<td>jk</td>
<td>jk</td>
<td>jk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representative of the trade union?</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

37) Different measures for intervening in harassment and inappropriate treatment are listed below. Which of these measures have been taken in your municipality in the past three years in response to reported cases of harassment?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Don't know/no reported cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussions with the parties involved.</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consulting health care services.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer of target.</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer of perpetrator.</td>
<td>jk</td>
<td>jk</td>
<td>jk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training/counselling/other help given to target.</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training/counselling/other help given to perpetrator.</td>
<td>jk</td>
<td>jk</td>
<td>jk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary contract of perpetrator has not been prolonged.</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It had been decided not to promote the perpetrator.</td>
<td>jk</td>
<td>jk</td>
<td>jk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The perpetrator has been dismissed.</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No measures have been taken, as the situation has been expected to solve itself.</td>
<td>jk</td>
<td>jk</td>
<td>jk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The target has resigned.</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
<td>jn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The perpetrator has resigned.</td>
<td>jk</td>
<td>jk</td>
<td>jk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
38) How likely do you consider it that the following measures will be taken in a potential future case of harassment:

1 = highly unlikely  5 = highly likely

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussions with the parties involved.</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consulting health care services.</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer of target.</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>j</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer of perpetrator.</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>j</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training/counselling/other help given to target.</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>j</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training/counselling/other help given to perpetrator.</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>j</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary contract of perpetrator will not be prolonged</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>j</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's decided not to promote the perpetrator.</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>j</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The perpetrator is dismissed.</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>j</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No measures are taken, as the situation is expected to solve itself.</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>j</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

39) Please describe briefly a case of harassment in your municipality that was handled in a successful manner.

40) Any additional comments on interventions:
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