

VIOLENCE AT WORK SEXUAL AND MORAL HARASSMENT CHARACTERISTICS AND CONSEQUENCES ON FEMALE AND MALE WORKERS



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2001-2002

**Project initiated by the Belgian
Ministry of employment and work
Directorate Humanisation of work
(Ministère de l'Emploi et du Travail,
Direction de l'Humanisation du travail)
with the help of the European Social Fund.**

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FOREWORD

What is violence at work? How to identify this phenomenon in the workplace? Who are the perpetrators and the victims of violence at work? What are the risk factors and the circumstances leading to violence at work? What are the victims' strategies and what are the reactions of their entourage when dealing with violence at work? What are the consequences of violence at work on the well-being of the workforce?

The objective of this brochure is to bring answers to the possible questions that workers ask themselves about the issue of violence at work. This brochure aims at raising workers' awareness and at informing them about the different characteristics, risk factors and consequences of violence at work.

INTRODUCTION

For a dozen years the issue of violence at work has aroused a growing interest among the scientific community and the media in many countries. In Belgium, over the academic year 2001-2002, a country-wide research was carried out on a sample of male and female workers in the country's three regions, i.e. in Flanders, in Wallonia and in Brussels. This research 'Violence at work: moral and sexual harassment, characteristics and consequences on female and male workers' ("Violences au travail: harcèlement moral et sexuel, caractéristiques et conséquences sur les travailleurs féminins et masculins") was undertaken following the initiative of the Directorate Humanisation of work, Federal Ministry of Employment and Work ("Direction de l'humanisation du travail du Ministère fédéral de l'Emploi et du Travail") with the help of the European Social Fund.

This country-wide research included two types of surveys.

- The first survey aimed at determining the extent of violence at work in Belgium, in particular moral and sexual harassment, and the risk factors associated to these phenomena. This survey had a quantitative character and was carried out on the basis of a phone poll of a randomised preselected sample of 2000 persons.

- The second survey aimed at analysing the process of violence at work and collecting more precise data about the characteristics of harassment. This survey had a qualitative character and was carried out on the basis of interviews. 193 subjects in Wallonia and 197 subjects in Flanders accepted to relate their experience to specially-trained interviewers. This data was collected in order to test and complete the phone poll survey results.

The results of both surveys are in this brochure. The first (quantitative) part of the research is referred to as " poll survey ", and the second (qualitative) part of the research as " interview survey ". Moreover, particular attention was given to men's and women's reactions when analysing the results and more specifically when analysing the data collected in the interview survey. All data collected in this research aim at offering workers, whether or not they are concerned by this issue, information and means of fighting against different forms of violence in the workplace.

This country-wide research was undertaken at Université catholique de Louvain and directed by Ada GARCIA. For the qualitative part (interview survey) of the research carried out in Flanders, there was collaboration with a team of researchers from the LUCAS Centre at Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, directed by Sybille OPDEBEECK.

CHAPTER I : VIOLENCE AT WORK, MORAL OR SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT WORK

1. What is it?

The Loi du 11 juin 2002 relating to protection from violence, moral harassment (bullying) and sexual harassment at the workplace determines what must be understood by violence at work and by moral or sexual harassment at work¹.

1.1. Definition of violence at work

Violence at work is found where a worker is psychologically or physically harassed, threatened or attacked when carrying out her or his work contract².

1.2. Definition of moral harassment at work

Moral harassment at work is the repeated and abusive conduct/behaviour of whatever origin, whether from inside or outside a company or institution, manifested in particular by behaviour, words, threats, actions, gestures or one-sided texts with the purpose or effect of violating the personality, the dignity or the physical or psychological integrity of a worker or any other person to whom this chapter applies, in the conduct of their work, placing their employment in jeopardy or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment³.

1.3. Definition of sexual harassment at work

Sexual harassment at work is any form of verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, which the perpetrator knows, or should know, will affect the dignity of women and men at the workplace⁴.

¹ The legal comment (*commentaire juridique*) of the Loi du 11 juin 2002 is available at the Ministère fédéral de l'Emploi et du Travail.

² Article 32 ter, paragraph 1, 1^o of the Loi du 11 juin 2002 relating to protection from violence, moral harassment (bullying) and sexual harassment at the workplace.

³ Article 32 ter, paragraph 1, 2^o of the Loi du 11 juin 2002.

⁴ Article 32 ter, paragraph 1, 3^o of the Loi du 11 juin 2002.

2. How to identify harassment at work?

In order to identify harassment at work, two questions must be asked:

What modes of behaviour constitute harassment at work?

What are the criteria used to determine whether there is a incidence of moral or sexual harassment at work?

2.1. Description of modes of behaviour of harassment at work

2.1.1. Types of harassment

Harassing types of conduct as compiled in the interviews are numerous and varied. Two main types of cases of harassment have been identified:

- Cases of work-orientated violence, divided into five categories.
- Cases of person-orientated violence, divided into four categories.

CASES OF WORK-ORIENTATED VIOLENCE:

A. Evaluation of work

1. Unfairly or exaggeratingly criticising work;
2. Negative evaluation of work, memos;
3. Excessive control of work;
4. Excessive medical control.

B. Distribution of tasks

1. Withdrawal of tasks of work;
2. Overload of work;
3. Absence of work;
4. Multiplication of different/new tasks;
5. Tasks unsuitable to the victim's level of competence or health;
6. Unnecessary or absurd tasks.

C. Workforce's career management

1. Blackmail related to employment, promotion or transfer;
2. Forced transfer;
3. Withdrawal of or change in distribution of work tools (e.g. desk/office, fax, computer, telephone);
4. Discrimination regarding holidays, schedules, work load, access to training;
5. Verbal pressure to quit the job.

D. Professional communication

1. Distorting or withholding information necessary to the performance of work, sabotaging work;
2. Discrediting the victim at work in front of other people.

E. Criminal conduct patterns

1. Violating work-related laws (e.g. withdrawing end of year premiums, holiday premiums (*pécule de vacances*) or legal holidays; using multiple fixed-term contracts (*contrats à durée déterminée*));
2. Stealing work-related documents.

CASES OF PERSON-ORIENTATED VIOLENCE:

A. Verbal violence

1. Intruding into the individual's private life (e.g. asking indiscreet questions, listening to phone conversations, reading e-mails, overloading the victim with telephone calls or registered letters at their place of residence);
2. Criticising the victim's private life;
3. Verbally bullying and mobbing, shouting at the victim;
4. Verbally violating the person's dignity (e.g. jibes, banter, racism, sexism, nicknames);
5. Demeaning the person in front of other people;
6. Refusing to collaborate with the victim;
7. Manipulating verbal communication (e.g. denying a spoken agreement, lying, changing or vague speech, emotional blackmail, manipulation of feelings);
8. Forbidding other workers to speak to the victim;
9. Harmful rumours, unfounded accusations.

B. Physical violence

1. Aggressive gestures (e.g. slamming the door, fist on the table);
2. Threats of physical aggression;
3. Physical aggression (e.g. shoving, spitting, treading on toes, mauling);
4. Damaging or disrupting the victim's work material or personal belongings ;
5. Stalking (e.g. following the victim in the street, spying on her/him at her/his place of residence);
6. Extortion of money/racketeering with physical intimidation;
7. Unhealthy work conditions (e.g. repeatedly exposing the victim to dangerous substances, repeated handling of too heavy objects).

C. Sexual violence

1. Sexual violence without physical contact (e.g. making advances, hints or comments of a sexual nature, suggestive looks as if to undress the victim);
2. Sexual violence with physical contact (e.g. light touches, looking for physical contacts, sexual fondling).

D. Behavioural violence

1. Small annoyances, mean tricks (e.g. turning the heating off, hiding objects) ;
2. Offensive gestures (e.g. turning one's back on somebody, refusing to say hello, refusing to shake hands, shrugging one's shoulders, sighing, raising one's eyes heavenwards).

2.1.2. Nature and frequency of cases of harassment

84% of the cases reported by the interviewees are of a mixed nature (work-orientated and person-orientated cases).

Work-orientated incidents include the following:

- 77% of interviewees reported cases of harassment related to the evaluation of their work. In other words, more than 3 out of 4 interviewed persons were overcriticised regarding the quality of their work.
- 61% of interviewees reported cases of harassment related to task distribution.
- 59% of interviewees considered poor career management of the workforce and poor communication management as cases of harassment.
- 28% of interviewees said they had been subjected to behaviours in breach of the law.

Person-orientated incidents include the following:

- 91% of interviewees said they had been the targets of verbal violence at their workplace. This type of violence includes unacceptable tones of voice, verbal discrimination or abuse as well as more insidious conducts such as spreading rumours and slander.
- 40% of interviewees said they had been subjected to behavioural violence. This form of violence includes mainly non-verbal attitudes but without direct physical handling of the person.
- 28% of interviewees said they had been exposed to physical violence.
- 7% of interviewees said they had been subjected to sexual violence. Sexual violence can be physical (e.g. light touches, fondling, rape), verbal (e.g. invitations, suggestive or misplaced comments, questions about sexual life) and/or non-verbal (e.g. looks, exhibitionism, pornography).

Both men and women were indiscriminately subjected to the above-mentioned behaviours of violence at work. It has to be noted however that women reported a lot more cases of sexual violence than men.

2.2. Behaviour criteria for moral and sexual harassment at work

In order to identify an issue of harassment at work, there must be one or several cases of violence as well as a few criteria⁵:

2.2.1. Behaviour criteria for moral harassment

Four criteria must be met in order for behaviour/conduct to be considered as a case of moral harassment.

◆ *The conduct must be abusive*

Abusive behaviours change the expected results of work. Examples include: ostensibly refusing to communicate, meanly criticising work, insulting attitudes or words. However an employer is not abusive when he or she demands that his or her employees perform the tasks that are allocated to them through their contracts.

⁵ Cordier, J.-P. (2002). Comment of the Loi du 11 juin 2002 relating to protection from violence, moral harassment (bullying) and sexual harassment at the workplace.

◆ *The conduct must be repetitive*

Some behaviours, when isolated, can seem minor. For example, a disagreeable or even insulting comment made in a moment of stress is not significant. But if this disagreeable comment about quality of work is repeated day after day, this is moral harassment.

◆ *The conduct must have " the purpose or effect of :*

- violating the personality, the dignity or the physical or psychological integrity of a worker or of another person;
- placing the employment in jeopardy;
- or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. "

Workers can therefore no longer claim that they ignored the fact that some conducts are reprehensible or that they did not willingly act with the purpose of harming another person.

◆ *The conducts must take place when carrying out work*

Cases of violence perpetrated after work are not taken into consideration. However, any violent conduct perpetrated outside of the workplace but while carrying out one's work is taken into consideration, in order for the law to also cover all itinerant workers (e.g. medical delegates, sales representatives).

2.2.2. Behaviour criteria for sexual harassment

Any form of behaviour of a sexual nature is considered as sexual harassment:

- ◆ *If it is unwanted, misplaced or harmful to the person.*
- ◆ *If it is explicitly or implicitly used as a basis for a decision affecting a worker's rights regarding employment, promotion, salary, professional training or any other decision regarding employment (e.g. blackmail about employment or promotion).*
- ◆ *If it creates an intimidating, hostile or humiliating environment around the person.*

3. How does harassment appear and develop ?

A phenomenon of harassment is generally triggered off by an ill-managed event in a specific work situation. Once harassment is under way, if nobody reacts in order to stop the violent behaviours, it is prone to progressively evolve towards excluding the worker from the job market.

3.1. Trigger events

The data we collected in the interview survey has revealed many trigger events. A trigger event is an incident that triggers off a process of harassment at the workplace.

The four trigger events that were most often mentioned both by men and women in our survey are:

- getting a new job or a new post;
- the arrival of a new superior;
- the victim speaks out regarding weaknesses, faults or mismanagement in the workplace;
- a conflict regarding work organisation.

Unlike men, women mentioned five trigger events specific to women:

- refusing to yield to sexual harassment;
- reducing work hours for childminding or family reasons;
- announcing a pregnancy;
- returning to work after maternity leave;
- refusing advances from a superior.

A further trigger event that was mentioned exclusively by women is the arrival of a new (male or female) colleague.

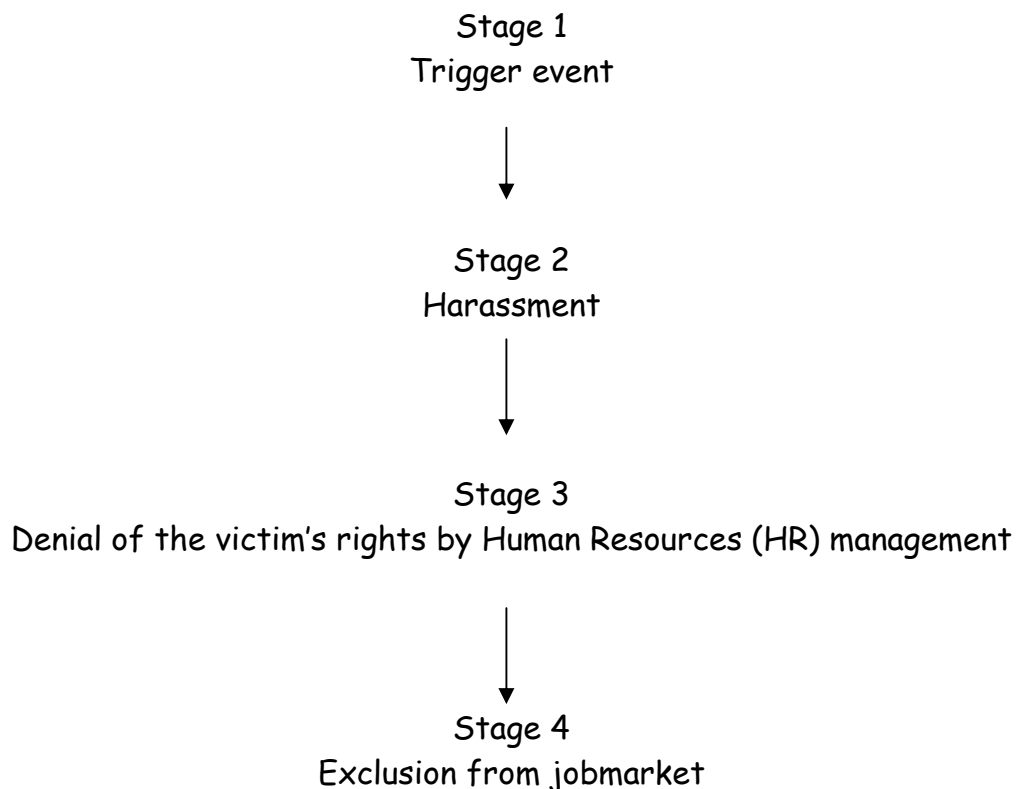
3.2. Evolution towards a process of exclusion

When such events or changes are left untackled or ill-managed at the workplace, they can develop into harassment. The following example shows how the arrival of a new (male or female) colleague can deteriorate into harassment.

Pascaline had been working as a secretary in an organisation for a few years when Aurélie arrived. Pascaline was naturally in charge of telling the new employee about the job duties. But very quickly the latter took ascendancy over Pascaline, refused to follow her advice, and acted disdainfully towards her. They were sharing the same office, the same computer, the same diary and had the same tasks at work. When Pascaline was absent, Aurélie went up to their line manager with critical remarks about her, sabotaged the computer, concealed the diary. Disagreeable comments, sometimes made in an unacceptable tone of voice, bursted forth in front of clients, leaving

Pascaline defenceless. Her physical and mental health progressively deteriorated and Pascaline went on sickleave. In spite of the moves she made in order to be proved right, she was discredited in the eyes of her employer and ended up being made redundant.

In this example as in many others, the change seems to represent a risk factor and open the door to a process of harassment. In this case, the trigger event, which at first seems insignificant, eventually led to the victim being excluded from the jobmarket. This process, starting with a trigger event and leading to the exclusion of the jobmarket, generally takes place in four successive stages if nobody intercedes in order to stop the conduct(s) of harassment⁶ :



At stage 1, the trigger event is usually followed by little punctual attacks which are difficult to notice at this stage.

⁶ Leymann, H. (1996). Mobbing. La persécution au travail. Paris : Seuil.

At stage 2, the violent conducts that were already present at step 1 are repeated. The victim adopts a defensive attitude towards harassment and makes mistakes in performing her or his job.

At stage 3, HR often react too late and to the victim's detriment. In many cases, HR are powerless and overwhelmed by the graveness of the situation. It is therefore easier for them to attribute the responsibility of the harassment to the victim because at this stage, she/he tends to annoy her/his entourage with her/his defensive reflexes. Exhausted, the victim becomes embarrassing and is progressively kicked out of her/his workplace.

At stage 4, the victim is excluded from the jobmarket. Forms of exclusion include being pushed aside, being successively transferred from one position to the next, being given the status of industrially disabled person (*mise en invalidité*), being dismissed or even being sent to psychiatric ward. The victim who enters this last stage of the process sometimes ends up prematurely putting an end to her/his professional life because the treatment she/he has undergone has affected both her/his health and her/his work.

These four stages correspond to a full process of harassment. The work situation worsens from one stage to the next. For these reasons, it is important to spot harassment at the earliest stages and to intercede in order to prevent it from developing to its worst possible consequences.

4. Who are the main perpetrators of moral and sexual harassment ?

Anybody can be the perpetrator of violence in the workplace. Some people can intentionally harm another person while some others are not aware of the harm they can do to others. Nevertheless, anybody having that kind of violent behaviour nowadays, whether intentionally or not, knows or should know that they are now reprehensible.

4.1. Status in the hierarchy of perpetrators of moral and sexual harassment

The perpetrator of harassment can be a superior, a subordinate, a colleague and/or somebody working outside of the organisation.

When moral harassment comes from one or several:

- superior(s), it is called "descending vertical harassment" (*harcèlement vertical descendant*);
- subordinate(s), it is called "ascending vertical harassment" (*harcèlement vertical ascendant*);
- colleague(s), it is called "horizontal harassment" (*harcèlement horizontal*);
- people working outside of the organisation - such as a client for example - it is called "lateral harassment" (*harcèlement latéral*). (There have been no statistics about this form of harassment so far.)

Some situations of harassment set off by one or several person(s) in the same position in the hierarchy can develop into "mixed harassment" (*harcèlement mixte*). For example, harassment can be set off by a colleague (*horizontal harassment*) and then come from both this colleague and a superior (mixed harassment, ie a combination of horizontal harassment and descending vertical harassment). Interviewees have mentioned a number of perpetrators ranging between one and ten. They have identified at a "main aggressor" (*agresseur principal*) assisted by a few "accomplices" (*complices*).

4.1.1. Position in the hierarchy of the perpetrators of moral harassment

The data collected in the poll survey show that:

- in 48% of the cases, moral harassment comes from a superior (descending vertical harassment);
- in 29% of the cases, moral harassment comes from a colleague (horizontal harassment);
- in 7% of the cases, moral harassment comes from a subordinate (ascending vertical harassment);
- in 16% of the cases, moral harassment comes from people of different status (mixed harassment).

In other words, descending vertical moral harassment seems to be the most frequent form of harassment at the workplace. This phenomenon therefore seems to be particularly linked to the power relations that develop in the workplace.

4.1.2. Position in the hierarchy of the perpetrators of sexual harassment

The results of the poll survey show that cases of sexual harassment come both from superior(s) and colleague(s). As with moral harassment, the proportion of victims who report harassment set off by a subordinate is very low (5%).

4.2. Gender of perpetrators of moral and sexual harassment

4.2.1. Gender of perpetrators of moral harassment

- In 63% of the cases, men are identified as perpetrators of moral harassment both by male and female victims.
- In 22% of the cases, women are identified as perpetrators of moral harassment both by male and female victims.
- In 14% of the cases, both men and women are identified as perpetrators of moral harassment both by male and female victims.

Male victims are significantly more harassed by men (81%) than by women (9%). In 10% of the cases, male victims are harassed by both genders. Female victims are more harassed by men (43%) than by women (38%). In 19% of the cases, female victims are harassed by both genders.

When the presumed perpetrator is a man, the victim is most often a man. Similarly, female perpetrators take it out more on women than on men.

4.2.2. Gender of perpetrators of sexual harassment

Men and women are mostly victims of male perpetrators. This is the case in more than three quarters of the situations (78% when taking into account people who pointed at several male and female perpetrators of both genders).

As with moral harassment, when the perpetrator is a woman, the victim is most often also a woman. The cases in which a man is the target of sexual violence from a woman are more seldom.

5. Who are the victims of moral and sexual harassment at work?

Anybody can become a victim of harassment. A student, a temporary worker or a sales representative can be exposed to a problem of harassment when performing their work. However, the interview survey identifies several risk factors linked to the victims' personal characteristics.

5.1. Personal characteristics of victims of moral harassment

According to the interview survey, apart from the place of residence, no personal characteristic seems to be linked to the issue of moral harassment at work. In other words, no characteristics such as age, gender, nationality, marital status, parental status or level of education seem to predispose a person to become a victim of moral harassment at the workplace.

The variable that might predispose someone to experience an issue of moral harassment is, according to the results of the survey, the region of residence. People living in Wallonia (16%) and in Brussels (18%) complain significantly more often about moral harassment at work than people living in Flanders (8%). The collected data confirm that people living in Brussels are twice and a half as likely to be exposed to a situation of moral harassment as people living in the North of the country.

5.2. Personal characteristics of victims of sexual harassment

Contrary to moral harassment, the data collected in the interview survey shows that gender, age, and marital status might predispose a person to experience an issue of sexual harassment within the framework of her/his professional life. People under forty, female and/or living alone reported significantly more facts of sexual harassment.

Even though sexual harassment happens at all ages, workers under forty are more exposed to it than others.

Also, women are twice as likely as men to complain about sexual harassment at work.

Single people are also twice as likely as people with partners to undergo behaviours of sexual harassment within the framework of their professional lives.

Other personal characteristics such as nationality, level of education, region of residence or parental status do not seem to predispose someone to become a victim of sexual harassment.

CHAPTER II : Extent and socio-professional risk factors of violence at work

1. What are the proportions of victims of violence at work in Belgium ?

The poll survey undertaken on a representative sample of the active population in Belgium has shown that phenomena of violence at work such as moral harassment, sexual harassment and physical violence are realities of professional life in this country.

Among the people who accepted to take part in the poll

- 11,5% declared they felt they had been the victims of at least one behaviour of moral harassment;
- 8% declared they had been the victims of sexual harassment;
- 3,5% declared they had been the victims of physical violence.

2. What are the socio-professional risk factors?

2.1. Socio-professional risk factors of moral harassment

The analysis of the results of the poll survey has enabled us to identify next to personal risk factors (see chapter I, point 5.1.), five socio-professional risk factors of moral harassment: the region where the workplace is, the sector of activity, the branch of industry, the size of the firm and the wage-earner's status.

2.1.1. Workplace region

People working in Brussels (14,5%) and in Wallonia (16%) mention more often than people working in Flanders (8%) cases of moral harassment within the framework of their professional activities. In other words, working in the Flemish region seems to be a protective factor against moral harassment.

2.1.2. Sector of activity

People who said they had been victims of moral harassment are significantly more exposed to this issue in the public sector (17%) than in the private sector (9%). Public sector workers are almost twice as likely as private sector workers to be exposed to a situation of moral harassment within the framework of their professional activities.

2.1.3. Branch of industry

Public administration is the branch of industry that shows the highest percentage of victims of moral harassment (23%), followed by education (15%), banks and insurances (15%) and transport (12,5%).

2.1.4. Size of the firm

The size of the firm is significantly linked to rates of victims of moral harassment. The larger the organisation the more a worker risks being exposed to a situation of moral harassment. Percentages of victims according to the size of the organisation are as follows:

- 8% in an organisation employing less than 50 people;
- 15% in an organisation employing between 50 and 500 people;
- 18% in an organisation employing more than 500 people.

People working in firms employing more than 500 people are almost twice as likely to be exposed to a situation of moral harassment in their professional activities compared to people working in firms employing less than 50 people.

2.1.5. Wage-earner's status

Within the workforce, employees are more exposed (15%) to moral harassment than workers (9%). However, self-employed people and the members of the medical/legal professions (professions libérales) are much less likely to declare themselves as victims (4%).

2.2. **Socio-professional risk factors of sexual harassment**

The analysis of the data has enabled us to identify next to personal risk factors (see chapter I, point 5.2.), three socio-professional risk factors: the length of service, the size of the firm and the type of work contract.

2.2.1. Length of service

People whose length of service is shorter than five years are almost three times more likely to be exposed to sexual harassment than people who have been in service for more than 21 years.

2.2.2. Size of the firm

Organisations with a workforce of more than 50 people (11%) seem to be places where there is a risk of sexual harassment compared to organisations with a workforce of less than 50 people (6%).

2.2.3. Type of work contract

People on a fixed-term contract (*contrat à durée déterminée*) (14%) are more exposed to sexual harassment than people on a permanent-term contract (*contrat à durée indéterminée*) (8%).

CHAPTER III : FACTORS OF VIOLENCE AT WORK

1. For which reasons does a phenomenon of harassment develop at the workplace ?

Reasons leading to a phenomenon of harassment at work are numerous and complex. The testimonies that were collected in the national survey have enabled us to identify trigger events (see chapter I, point 3.1.) as well as four groups of factors likely to be at the origin of an issue of harassment at work: factors linked to the work situation, factors linked to the victim, factors linked to the perpetrator, and factors linked to an existing conflict.

These representations as a whole are shared both by men and women except as far as factors related to the perpetrator are concerned. In this group, women mention - more often than men - elements linking harassment to the perpetrator.

1.1. Factors linked to the work situation

Factors linked to the work situation have been divided into five categories.

1.1.1. Problems linked to Human Resources management

This type of problem is most often (84%) mentioned as a cause of harassment both by men and women. They believe that the way in which their company or their organisation is managed is an important element in the process of violence at work with which they have been faced. Many people think that their superior either let the harassment situation deteriorate or offered a solution that was unsatisfactory for the victim.

1.1.2. Problems linked to work organisation

Problems such as flaws in the process of work evaluation, of recruitment or of task distribution, difficult communication and shortage or excess of workforce have been identified both by men and women (40%) as the second category of factors likely to favour a situation of harassment.

1.1.3. Context of change in the organisation

Companies' merging or splitting and restructuring as well as changes of superiors are events that both men and women (30%) consider as a third category of factors favouring the emergence of harassment.

1.1.4. Professional stress and atmosphere at work

A competitive environment and pressure regarding productivity are mentioned by 20% of the interviewees as the fourth category of factors likely to be at the origin of a process of harassment at work. A lot more men than women complain about this.

1.1.5. Unequal salaries and influence of politics

Financial stakes and the influence of politics on some sectors of activity are situations that are also reported in some testimonies as further factors likely to favour a process of harassment at work. Men (16%) complain significantly more than women (7%) about unequal salaries.

1.2. Factors linked to the victim

Seven categories of factors linked to the victim were identified in the testimonies. These factors were mentioned by as many men as women as elements likely to contribute to a situation of harassment at work.

1.2.1. Personality traits

The victim's personality traits were most frequently (57%) mentioned in the testimonies as factors favouring harassment. Some traits are sometimes opposed. For example, some victims think that they have been more exposed to harassment because of their strong personalities whereas others think that it is their emotionalism or their psychological fragility that has contributed to setting off a process of violence against them. According to respondents, personality traits that might contribute to harassment include dedication, optimism, assertivity or lack thereof, and impulsiveness.

1.2.2. Deviation from the group norm

46% of the people who took part in the survey mentioned one or several characteristics that singled them out compared to the group norm. Gender, age, length of service, mother tongue, social or ethnic group, geographical region of origin, religious beliefs, disability or physical fragility, facial appearance, professional status, level of education, political orientation are characteristics mentioned as factors likely to contribute to an issue of harassment. Some stories have brought to the fore an issue specific to Belgium, i.e. the language conflict between Dutch- and French-speakers.

1.2.3. Attitudes towards work

31% of the interviewed victims have brought to the fore their ideas about how to reconcile their family and professional lives, their professional and relational competences as well as their work ethics as a group of elements that might have contributed to harassment.

1.2.4. Professional status

20% of the interviewees mention a vulnerability to harassment because of their professional status. Having privileged relations with someone who's badly considered in one's workplace; being a trade union representative (délégué syndical); having a status that is either envied by others or on the contrary precarious, are many elements linked to a person's professional status that might have contributed to the process of violence at work.

1.2.5. Change in the workplace

20% of the testimonies mentioned the issue of change as an element likely to contribute to the emergence of a relational issue.

1.2.6. Unwelcome behaviour

Behaviour such as opposing new work conditions, lack of productivity or denouncing or even simply discovering mismanagement in the company can be unwelcome by fellow-workers and contribute to a process of violence at work.

1.2.7. Private circumstances

Some of the interviewees thought that the fact of needing one's work i.e. salary to live on or of being weakened due to circumstances in one's private life made them more vulnerable to conducts of harassment.

1.3. Factors linked to the perpetrator

Nine categories of factors linked to the perpetrator were identified in the testimonies. These factors were mentioned by more women (88%) than men (66%) as being elements likely to contribute to a situation of harassment at work.

1.3.1. Harassment is not an isolated fact in the perpetrator's behaviour

Many victims (39%), both males and females, think that the harassment they have endured is not an isolated fact in the perpetrator's behaviour. Either the perpetrator has encouraged other workers to also harm the victim, or he/she has already harassed other people on other occasions.

1.3.2. Abuse of power

39% of the interviewees think that the perpetrator abused his/her power. As many men as women claimed that this element was at the origin of the harassment they endured.

1.3.3. Pathological personality

37% of the victims describe the perpetrator's personality as being pathological. Personality disorders such as manipulation, paranoia or perversion are considered by more women than men as elements that might have caused harassment.

1.3.4. Professional status

More than 20% of the interviewees mention the perpetrator's professional status as an element that allowed the process of violence to develop. Enjoying support from people in politics or in the hierarchy, finding oneself in a situation of competition with the victim are some of the factors considered by both male and female victims as elements that contributed to harassment.

1.3.5. Personality traits

Without going as far as presenting the whole personality of the presumed perpetrator of facts of harassment as pathological, 20% of the interviewees described some traits of the perpetrator's personality as elements likely to favour a process of harassment. According to the victims these traits include racism, lack of respect, sexism, egocentrism and alcoholism.

1.3.6. Private circumstances

Some circumstances experienced by the presumed perpetrator of harassment have been reported. 19% of the interviewees mentioned frustrations linked to personal or professional difficulties or to disappointment in love linked to the fact that the victim did not share the perpetrator's feelings. More women than men mentioned circumstances experienced by the perpetrator as a possible explanation for the process of violence at work.

1.3.7. Feelings of jealousy and envy

18% of the victims explain the perpetrator's violence with feelings of jealousy and envy towards them. More women than men thought the perpetrator had such feelings.

1.3.8. Pursuing a goal

17% of male and female victims think that harassment is just a means used by the perpetrator in order for him/her to reach a specific goal: ousting the victim and possibly wanting to take his/her place. Sometimes, the interviewee sees in the perpetrator's conduct a way of acting towards a personal interest or a status that would entail more power and/or money.

1.3.9. Flaw(s) in professional competence

11% of the interviewees explain harassment with a flaw in the perpetrator's competence such as insufficient training, lack of experience or incompetence.

1.4. Factors linked to an existing conflict

47% of the people, both male and female, who consider themselves as victims mention interpersonal conflicts as an element likely to be at the origin of the issue of harassment at work. These observations parallel those of Heinz Leymann's⁷ who indeed considers interpersonal conflicts such as diverging opinions, disputes regarding competence or power struggle as factors likely to set off a process of harassment when they are not properly dealt with.

2. Can an isolated factor be at the origin of harassment?

Among the testimonies, only 3% of the victims pointed at a single factor to explain the harassment they endured. In other words, 97% of the victims took into account several factors as possible explanations for harassment. These figures show that harassment is a complex process due to the interaction between many factors. The example that follows shows the difficulty there is in isolating one single factor to explain the emergence of a process of harassment.

Following the merging of two companies, there were too many employees for the number of posts. In this context, everyone was afraid of losing their jobs. The managing director, who was under pressure and also afraid of losing his position, adopted inappropriate managing attitudes with Marie, an executive. According to Marie, the managing director is a bit of a macho man and started discrediting her in her job by stopping to communicate information to her. After a sickness absence, Marie's job was attributed to another person. Marie found herself in a lower position and earning a lower salary.

In this example, circumstances linked to the work situation (merger, professional stress, competition) and linked to the perpetrator (sexism and abuse of power) can explain the emergence of the process of harassment (acts aiming at discrediting the victim in her/his work).

This example brings to the fore the necessity of analysing a situation as a whole in order to avoid always attributing harassment to a single factor such as the characteristics of one single person (perverse personality for example). The system in which harassment takes place must also be taken into consideration and questioned.

⁷ Leymann, H. (1996). Mobbing. La persécution au travail. Paris : Seuil.

CHAPTER IV : VICTIMS' STRATEGIES AND ENTOURAGE'S REACTIONS TOWARDS VIOLENCE AT WORK

1. What strategies are set up by victims to face up to harassment ?

According to the interview survey, when faced with the painful situations generated by harassment, victims set up many strategies with the purpose of at least protecting themselves from harassment and if possible putting an end to it. Even though there are many different strategies, it is not always possible to find a satisfying solution to the problem.

The strategies that were mentioned by the victims have been grouped together in two categories⁸: emotion-centred strategies and problem-centred strategies.

1.1. Emotion-centred strategies

Faced with the emotional impact due to violence at work, the victim resorts to emotion-centred strategies. These strategies take the form of thoughts or attitudes.

These strategies aim at regulating the emotions linked to harassment and at enabling the victim to adapt to this difficult situation. Moreover, these strategies can be useful to maintain a satisfying level of health. The emotional state therefore tends to improve when the victims see that their strategies result in a reduction in or a stop to workviolence. However, the emotional state deteriorates when violence persists.

1.1.1. Emotion-centred strategies in the form of thoughts

Repression

Repressing the pain linked to harassment is also a way of adapting oneself to the situation. 3% of the victims say that they used this method to protect themselves from harassment.

⁸ Lazarus, R.S. (1984). Stress, appraisal and coping. New York: Springer Publishing Company.

Evoked feelings

71% of both male and female victims evoked a number of feelings. These were feeling misunderstood (25%), powerless (23%), feelings of guilt (17%), injustice (16%), solitude (16%), being destroyed (15%) discouragement (3%) and a sense of failure (2%).

Other strategies based on thoughts

Denying facts of violence or on the contrary viewing them from a different angle or even accepting the situation of harassment are strategies based on thoughts that have been set up by victims in order to adapt to the situation of harassment.

1.1.2. Emotion-centred strategies in the form of attitudes

Discharged emotions

44% of the victims expressed primary emotions. A lot more women (50%) than men (31%) discharged emotions such as anger, fear and sadness.

Fleeing from the workplace

Sickness absences or unpaid holidays, interrupting one's career or resigning are a number of attitudes used by the victim in order to regulate the emotions linked to harassment.

Looking for peer support

Peer support enables a person to feel that they exist, that they are valued and that they belong to a group. Enjoying peer support is likely to influence the impact of a situation of harassment on the health and well-being of the persons who are exposed to it. Looking for colleagues', other victims', partners', friends', parents' or other family members' attention and support are also attitudes set up by victims in order to regulate their emotions. Other people such as health professionals (e.g. doctors, psychologists) can also be called upon by the victims when looking for help.

1.2. Problem-centred strategies

Within the whole of the strategies that were mentioned by the people (as many men as women) who were confronted with a situation of violence at work, several categories of problem-centred strategies have been identified either in the form of thoughts or attitudes.

1.2.1. Problem-centred strategies in the form of thoughts

Among problem-centred strategies in the form of thoughts victims mention setting up plans of action aiming at resolving the situation of violence at work including for example reading books on harassment and/or on social laws as well as keeping a file with a note of all events. These strategies, which manifest themselves in the form of thoughts, seem to favour more behavioural strategies.

1.2.2. Problem-centred strategies in the form of attitudes

Resorting to authority

77% of the victims resorted to authority (superior, president of the board of management, medical inspection, police or justice) in order for harassment to stop. The effects of this strategy are mixed as either the hierarchy did not react or the solution brought by the authorities was not satisfactory to the victim. Nevertheless, gathering proof or preparing oneself for a judiciary response sometimes help the victim to regain self-confidence. Moreover, resorting to authorities has sometimes had a dissuasive effect, except when the victim felt that the perpetrator was protected by political or hierarchical support.

Adapting one's behaviour to the perpetrator's conduct

63% of the victims tried to adapt their behaviour to the perpetrator's conduct in order to face up to this painful situation. These are attitudes chosen by the victim in order to resist, to confront the perpetrator or even to attempt a conciliation procedure with him/her. In some cases, it was possible to establish a dialogue with the perpetrator which resulted in restoring a more serene work atmosphere.

Breaking up with work

More than half (54%) of the victims made steps towards breaking up with the difficult work situation with which they were confronted. Such steps include going back to university/school, resigning, looking for another job, sickness absences, interrupting one's career as well as retiring. These steps towards breaking up with work are made when the victim developed other strategies without success.

Looking for medical or psychological support

Because of the multiple-faceted difficulty caused by harassment on well-being in general, more than half (51%) of the victims turned to their GP, an occupational doctor and/or a psychologist for treatment or support.

Adapting one's behaviour to the work task

In order to face up to the events aiming at discrediting the person in her/his work, e.g. unnecessary tasks, tasks inappropriate to the level of the victim's competences, 42% of the victims resorted to various strategies including working more (26%), continuing to work in the same way (11%), working less (7%), keeping oneself busy in the absence of work (3%).

The strategy involving working more often aims at preserving oneself against possible further critics regarding quality of work or at proving one's professional ability. However, this strategy sometimes does not enable the victims to protect themselves of the perpetrator(s) of harassment and they eventually work less.

Looking for peer support

39% of the victims turned to their colleagues, partners, families and friends as well as support groups in order to break their isolation, to confide in somebody or to get advice. The victims who have found quality peer support are those who have best managed to overcome harassment. Nevertheless, it is not always easy to find peer support because some colleagues prefer not to take sides and/or some family members do not understand what is happening or get tired of constantly hearing the same stories. The entourage's reactions are analysed later on (see point 3).

Other strategies

21% of the victims asked for a change in their work conditions (change of room or request for transfer). A fifth of the victims decided to keep quiet, not to intervene or to stand back. 15% of the victims chose to keep a diary of events.

2. How do the strategies that are set up by victims change or develop to face up to harassment ?

When analysing testimonies, it appears that the victims of work violence adopt constructive strategies⁹ at the earliest stages of harassment. Constructive strategies are strategies used by a person in order to maintain or rebuild satisfactory work conditions. Informing one's superiors, applying oneself to do things better as well as passively waiting for the situation to sort itself out are considered as constructive strategies by the victims.

When such strategies do not have the results that were hoped for on the process of harassment, victims seem to often tend to progressively turn to so-called destructive strategies. Destructive strategies⁹ include the victim making steps towards breaking up with the difficult work situation. Such strategies are nevertheless not destructive per se since they allow the victim to get out of a harmful work situation. Chronic absences from work, thinking about leaving the company as well as requesting a transfer are so-called destructive strategies that were reported by the victims in the interviews.

3. What are the reactions of the entourage of the victim faced with harassment?

3.1. Private entourage's reactions

Five categories of reactions by the private entourage were brought to the fore when analysing the testimonies.

3.1.1. Positive reactions

67% of the victims, as many men as women, mention at least one positive reaction in their private entourage. The majority of the victims seem to enjoy relatively good support from their friends and families. It can be the spouse, a parent, a child, a friend who has listened or given them advice and enabled them to realise they have been in a situation of harassment.

⁹ Farrell, D. (1983). Exit, voice, loyalty, neglect as response to job dissatisfaction : a multidimensional scaling study. *Academy of Management Journal*, 26(4), 596-607.

3.1.2. Negative reactions

In 40% of the cases, both male and female victims feel they have been confronted with misunderstanding, incredulity or even lassitude from at least part of their entourage. Some pieces of advice have also been negatively perceived by the victim.

3.1.3. When the private entourage endure the consequences of harassment

In 35% of the cases, a lot more men (48%) than women (30%) say that their entourage has had to endure the consequences of their situation of harassment in their private lives and even within the framework of their own professional activities.

3.1.4. The victim avoids talking about the problem with her/his private entourage

In 17% of the cases, victims avoid talking about the situation of harassment with their private entourage. It is then difficult for the entourage to react in favour of the victim. More men (29%) than women (12%) adopt this attitude towards their private entourage.

3.1.5. A member of the private entourage wants to intervene to stop harassment

In 7% of the cases, a member of the private entourage wants to intervene or does actively intervene in the workplace in order for harassment to stop. As many men as women report this type of reaction by one or several persons in their private entourage.

3.2. **Professional entourage's reactions**

In their testimonies, both male and female victims mentioned a range of reactions from their colleagues but also from their superiors when facing the situation of harassment.

3.2.1. Colleagues' reactions

A. Negative reactions

79% of the victims perceived their colleagues' reactions as negative. Either colleagues take an active part in isolating or aggressing the victim or they

behave quite passively or indifferently for fear of becoming victims themselves if they intervene in favour of the person who is the target of violence. Nevertheless, in some cases, some colleagues give some peer support to the victim outside of the workplace.

B. Positive reactions

63% of the victims mentioned positive reactions from their colleague(s). In many cases, it is a firm and open stand in favour of the victim and in other cases it is informal support. These reactions do not always bring a solution to the problem but they enable the victims to feel they are getting support.

C. Some colleagues are also victims of harassment

In more than a fourth of the cases, victims mention that they are not the only people who suffer from the harassing conducts of one or several people in the workplace. Some colleagues are also victims of moral and/or sexual harassment.

D. Some colleagues do not know about the situation

A few victims (8%) underlined the fact that some of their colleagues were not informed of the situations of psychological violence that happened in the workplaces. This is the case when different services work independently and when the offices of these services are not located in the same building.

3.2.2. Reactions of the hierarchy

A. Negative reactions

The most frequently reported reactions of the hierarchy are perceived by 47% of the victims as negative. The victims reproach hierarchy with letting the situation of harassment develop either by actively taking part in the harassment or by tolerating harassment.

B. Positive reactions

In 17% of the cases, the reactions of the hierarchy are positively perceived by the victims. Superiors can offer informal support, a sympathetic ear as well as actively try to find or actually find a solution that is satisfactory to the victim. However, some solutions proposed by superiors are not always welcomed by the victim such as when a transfer makes the victim regret her/his former job even though she/he is away from the perpetrator.

CHAPTER V : CONSEQUENCES OF WORK VIOLENCE

The situations of work violence with which the victims have been confronted have brought about important consequences on both their private and professional lives. Most information concerning the effects of harassment has a negative connotation because of the painful or even traumatic aspects of work violence. However, a positive issue was reported in a few cases by people who were able to stand back from this difficult life experience:

- Psychologically speaking, 12% of the polled people consider this experience as an ordeal that enabled them to develop in their personality.
- Professionally speaking, 5% of the polled people did not go through major difficulty either because they found a more satisfying job elsewhere or because the change in their work conditions was in their favour.
- Socially speaking, 4% of the polled people reconsidered their lives' priorities and got closer to their families.

1. What are the consequences of work violence on the victims' personal lives ?

The content analyses of the testimonies and of the data collected in the survey have enabled us to identify negative effects of work violence on the victim's health as well as on the victim's socio-economic life. Many victims talked a lot about their ordeal even when they were no longer exposed to harassment at the time of the survey.

1.1. Impact on health

64% of the interviewed victims confirmed the impact of moral harassment on their health. A lot more women (75%) than men (54%) reported health deterioration.

The impact of sexual harassment on the victims' health is not easily identified. Indeed, fewer than half of the victims (48%) confirm that sexual harassment has had an impact on their health. Cases of sexual harassment such as " making eyes at somebody" or " showing pornographic material " could be questioned regarding the possible impact they can have on the victims' health. Similarly to moral harassment, more women (60%) than men (31%) tend to think that the acts of sexual violence to which they were exposed have brought about negative consequences on their health.

The effects of harassment on health that were identified in the testimonies include two categories of consequences : physical consequences and psychological consequences.

1.1.1. Physical consequences

In 64% of the testimonies, male and female victims mention psychosomatic symptoms of stress such as various kinds of pain, problems of digestion, cardiovascular troubles, endocrinal troubles, weight problems (important weight increase or decrease), exhaustion, skin problems, sleeping troubles as well as sexual problems. 2% of the victims link effects of harassment to the development or worsening of a chronic disease such as cancer.

1.1.2. Psychological consequences

87% of the people (as many men as women) who talked about their harassment seem to experience various symptoms of psychological pain such as lower self-confidence, lower confidence in others, stress, anxiety, bad mood as well as crying fits.

Next to these symptoms of psychological pain, 60% of the polled people mentioned psychological troubles such as depression, substance abuse (e.g. alcohol, medicines, tobacco), suicide attempts as well as suicide. In this respect, the thought of, the attempt or the suicide are phenomena that were reported by some people as the ultimate solution to the problem of harassment. The idea that someone could commit suicide because of harassment is much debated because suicide is likely to come within a larger context than work violence. Nevertheless, the accumulation of problems linked to harassment is not without risks for the well-being of the workforce.

Within the framework of a complementary survey on the long-term effects of harassment on the well-being of the workforce, it was noted that a lot more women than men suffer from anxiety troubles as well as post-traumatic stress disorders (i.e. a reaction of emotional distress including intrusive memories and avoidance behaviour towards harassment). The analysis of results has also shown that for both men and women harassment is linked to consuming more medicine (e.g. anxiolytics, sleeping pills) and to visiting health professionals (e.g. doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists) more frequently.

It has been noted that these psychological symptoms and troubles, which were brought about by harassment, do not develop positively with time : they tend not to disappear with time. It therefore appears that harassment brings about important long term damages to the health and well-being of the people who were exposed to it.

1.2. Impact on socio-economic sphere

1.2.1. Consequences on relationships

Some of the particularly difficult consequences for the victims to experience are, in 57% of the cases, social isolation and family problems. It indeed seems difficult both for male and female victims to " turn the page " on their work day when they get back home. The situation of harassment can thus invade the friends and family circles and bring about problems of isolation, misunderstanding or conflicts.

1.2.2. Financial consequences

In 33% of the cases, victims perceive some administrative problems (e.g. difficulty in getting their letter of dismissal, disagreement about the reasons for dismissal mentioned in the letter, delays in pension files) as the continuation of harassment. Moreover, in some cases, these administrative problems as well as harassment bring about financial sources of worry (e.g. delayed payments, loss of income, medical costs, lawyer costs).

2. What are the consequences of work violence on the victims' professional lives ?

2.1. Impact on professional life

Analyses of the contents of testimonies and data collected in the survey have also enabled us to identify negative effects of work violence on the victim's professional life.

More than half of the people (54%) who have been confronted with a situation of moral harassment at work think that this painful situation has brought about negative effects as far as their professional lives are concerned. A lot more women (64%) than men (45%) report deterioration in their professional lives.

As for sexual harassment, a third of the people (34%) who declared that they had been victims of this form of violence consider that this situation has had negative effects on their professional lives. As many men as women have observed these negative effects on their professional lives.

The most frequently reported effects of moral and sexual harassment on professional lives are:

- sickness absences (28%);
- redundancy (25%);
- de-motivation towards one's professional activity (25%);
- difficulty in performing work well (20%);
- looking for another job (18%);
- blocking of professional career (17%);
- transfer (16%).

Harassment can not only bring about professional difficulty for the people who are exposed to it but also a deterioration in the work environment. Absenteeism and de-motivation, which harassment is likely to generate, can of course have repercussions such as workoverload for the work group and important financial costs for the company and the community.

2.2. Impact on work satisfaction

Work satisfaction reflects the degree of implication of the workforce in their professional activities. The results collected in the poll survey show that women are more satisfied than men regarding their relationships with their superiors, with the type of activity they have as well as with their work schedule. On the other hand, men are more satisfied than women regarding promotion and career opportunities offered by their professional activities.

Generally speaking, the results of the poll survey show that the Belgian workforce are rather satisfied with their professional lives. Nevertheless, this overview is not shared by the workers who say they are victims of work violence (moral and sexual harassment).

The workers who say they are victims of moral harassment are significantly less satisfied with the different aspects of their jobs (relationships with superiors and colleagues, type of activity, income, responsibilities, schedule and rhythm of work, physical environment and promotion opportunities) than the workers who say they are not the victims of this form of violence.

Aspects of work with which victims of moral harassment say they are the least satisfied are promotion opportunities and career opportunities. As far as relationships are concerned, victims think that their relationships with their superiors are less satisfying than the relationships they have with people at the same level in the hierarchy. Besides the fact that moral harassment might be linked to power relations, it also seems to be associated with the lack of positive career prospects.

As with moral harassment, victims of sexual harassment are significantly less satisfied with some aspects of their professional lives than non-victims: relationships with superiors and colleagues, type of activity, physical work environment as well as career opportunities.

CHAPTER VI : KNOWLEDGE OF RULES AND REGULATIONS AND ATTITUDES TO ADOPT IN CASE OF VIOLENCE AT WORK

1. How well do workers know the rules and regulations that protect them from violence at work ?

In the poll survey, i.e. one year before the Loi du 11 juin 2002 was passed, participants were asked whether or not they knew some rules and regulations aiming at protecting them from violence at work. According to the answers, 65% of the victim and non-victim respondents think that there are rules and regulations in Belgium that aim at fighting against forms of violence at work. Nevertheless, figures are lower when the questions regarding arrangements get more precise :

- To the question : " In your company or administration, are there rules aiming at fighting against violence at work? ", only 29% of the victim and non-victim respondents answered yes. More men (33%) than women (25%) know about the existence of measures taken by their company or organisation in order to prevent and fight against conducts of violence at work.
- To the question : " In your company or administration, do you know the trust person or department (*personne ou service de confiance*) to whom to turn to for help? ", 49% of both male and female respondents answered yes. In this regard, more victims than non-victims declared they knew the trust service or person named within the framework of the law on sexual harassment.

These results show that it is necessary to raise the awareness of professional sectors about the different forms of violence that take place in the workplace as well as about how necessary it is to make arrangements aiming at preventing and fighting against these hostile conducts.

2. What can be done if violence at work occurs?

In case of violence at work, a victim has several options. She or he can find information about rules and regulations aiming at protecting her/him from violence in the workplace and/or call upon services or any person likely to support her/him in case of harassment.

2.1. What is in the Loi du 11 juin 2002 ?

On June 11, 2002, the law relating to protection from violence, moral harassment (bullying) and sexual harassment at work was passed. The comment of this law (*commentaire juridique*) is available on request by phone (02/233.42.14) or in writing (rue Belliard, 51, 1040 Bruxelles) at the Service des publications du Ministère fédéral de l'Emploi et du Travail.

2.2. Whom to turn to in case of harassment ?

The following list is not exhaustive, but it nevertheless provides people who are exposed to incidents of work violence with directions towards a range of services that can inform and/or help them.

Inside the organisation, a person who feels she or he is the victim of violence when performing her/his work can turn to:

- the trust person (*personne de confiance*);
- the advisor on prevention (*conseiller en prévention*) and/or
- the employer or a superior.

Outside the organisation, a person who feels she or he is the victim of violence when performing her/his work can turn to:

- her/his trade union;
- legal services;
- occupational medical inspection;
- the police;
- the Directorate of Equal Opportunities (Direction de l'égalité des chances du Ministère fédéral de l'Emploi et du Travail, tel. 02/233.40.18);
- her/his GP;
- a victim support service;
- a mental health service ;
- Télé-Accueil : dial 107.

CONCLUSION

The data collected in this national study has shown that the phenomenon of violence at work such as moral harassment, sexual harassment and physical violence are realities of professional life in Belgium. Men and women do not always react in the same way towards these various forms of violence.

In the interview survey, only the people who felt they were victims have been interviewed. It would therefore be appropriate to interview other groups as well (e.g. fellow-workers, employers) when further research is undertaken.

Being confronted with violence at work is a difficult life experience. The fact that our community is becoming increasingly aware of such a phenomenon is an important step forward. The rules and regulations that have been set up have constructive prospects : they first and foremost aim at preventing the work environment from deteriorating ; they also aim at each worker being able to perform work in a responsible manner and to interact on their workplace with respect.