

Running title: Bullying among Business Professionals

# **Prevalence and Forms of Bullying among Business Professionals: A Comparison of Two Different Strategies for Measuring Bullying**

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# **Prevalence and Forms of Bullying among Business Professionals: A Comparison of Two Different Strategies for Measuring Bullying**

*The aim of this study was to analyse the prevalence and forms of workplace bullying among business professionals holding predominantly managerial or expert positions. A cross-sectional survey study was conducted among Finnish professionals with a university degree in business studies. In the study two different strategies for measuring bullying were used and compared. When provided a definition of bullying, 8.8% of the respondents reported that they had at least occasionally been bullied during the past 12 months. However, when using a slightly modified version of the Negative Acts Questionnaire (Einarsen & Hoel 2001), containing a list of 32 predefined negative and potentially harassing acts, as many as 24.1% of the respondents reported that they had been subjected to at least one of the negative acts on a weekly basis. The respondents had experienced predominantly work-related negative acts, e.g. that their opinions and views were ignored, that they were given unreasonable deadlines or that information was withheld. Although the prevalence rates reported with the two strategies varied considerably, there was still consistency between the two strategies in the sense that those who had classified themselves as bullied also reported higher exposure rates to almost all of the negative acts included.*

# **Prevalence and Forms of Bullying among Business Professionals: A Comparison of Two Different Strategies for Measuring Bullying**

## **Introduction**

Workplace bullying can be defined as repeated and persistent negative acts towards one or several individuals, which involve a victim-perpetrator dimension and create a hostile work environment (cf. Einarsen & Skogstad 1996; Vartia 1996). Increasingly, bullying is being recognised internationally as a serious problem in the work environment. It has been shown that bullying can have severe consequences for both the job satisfaction (Einarsen & Raknes 1997) and the health of victims (Björkqvist, Österman & Hjelt-Bäck 1994; Einarsen & Raknes 1997; Einarsen, Matthiesen & Skogstad 1998; O'Moore, Seigne, McGuire & Smith 1998; Niedl 1995; Zapf, Knorz & Kulla 1996). As for its effects on the organisation, bullying has been shown to be associated with higher absenteeism, higher intent to leave the organisation, higher turnover, and early retirements (Leymann 1996; Rayner 1997).

The severe negative outcomes of bullying have made bullying an issue of great public interest and have led a growing number of researchers to study the phenomenon. Since the mid 1980's when the concept of workplace "mobbing", or bullying, was introduced in the Scandinavian and German context by Leymann (e.g. 1986), a considerable number of studies have been undertaken in order to more precisely define the concept and nature of workplace bullying (e.g. Leymann 1996; Liefoghe & Olafsson 1999), to describe the prevalence and forms of bullying (e.g. Einarsen & Raknes 1997; Einarsen & Skogstad 1996; Leymann 1992a; Niedl 1995; den Ouden, Bos & Sandfort 1999;

Rayner 1997; Vartia 1996), and to identify personality traits and organisational factors associated with bullying (e.g. Einarsen, Raknes & Matthiesen 1994; Vartia 1996; Zapf et al. 1996).

Research has shown that bullying is a widespread phenomenon in many countries and large-scale studies in Scandinavia have indicated that approximately 3-4% of the working population are affected on a regular basis (Einarsen & Skogstad 1996; Leymann 1992a). Finnish and British studies have revealed even higher prevalence rates, approximately 10% (Hoel & Cooper 2000; Vartia 1996). However, so far some professions have attracted a very high number of studies, for example health care (Einarsen et al. 1998; Einarsen & Skogstad 1996; Niedl 1995; den Ouden et al. 1999), whereas others seem to have been underresearched. In addition, the majority of the studies have been undertaken in the public sector, for example, among municipal or local council workers (e.g. den Ouden et al. 1999; Vartia 1996) or in state-owned hospitals, universities or prisons (Björkqvist et al. 1999, Einarsen et al. 1998; Niedl 1995; Vartia 1999). In contrast, the number of employees working in the private sector has been fairly low in the studies (cf. also Einarsen & Skogstad 1996; Hoel & Cooper 2000). Similarly, fairly little research has been conducted specifically on professionals with a business or technical degree. What is more, bullying experienced by employees in managerial positions seems to have received very limited attention. This article is thus an attempt to fill this gap by studying bullying among business professionals predominantly holding managerial or expert positions and predominantly employed in the private sector.

At first glance, it may be assumed that managers and other employees in high positions may experience less bullying than other employees as, due to their formal power, it may be difficult to put them into a position where they cannot defend themselves. However, existing studies indicate that this is not necessarily the case. In Leymann's

study (1992a) it was shown that senior managers were actually the ones reporting the highest degree of bullying. Other studies have reported middle managers as the most likely victims of bullying (Hoel & Cooper 2000; One in Eight 1997). Although this might seem surprising, high pressures and high internal competition may increase stress and frustration and lower the threshold for aggression in these groups (cf. Hoel & Cooper 2000; One in Eight 1997). This thus emphasises the need for more studies on the prevalence of bullying among professionals in managerial positions. Studying bullying in this so far fairly neglected group of employees will also provide us with a more diversified and nuanced picture of the different forms of bullying used in different professions and on different organisational levels.

Although previous studies indicate that managerial employees are bullied to no less extent than other employees, it may be hypothesised that they are subjected to somewhat different acts of bullying. As bullying among managers has partly been explained by high pressures and high internal competition (One in Eight 1997), it can be assumed that work-related bullying behaviours, such as giving impossible deadlines and withholding information, are more common than among other employees, whereas non-work related behaviours, such as receiving insulting remarks about one's private life and being ignored, are less common. Due to high internal competition it can further be assumed that bullying among managers is often associated with micro-political or rent-seeking behaviour, i.e. behaviour that deliberately aims to improve the competitive position of the perpetrator.

Although being a highly educated professional itself appears to provide no immunity against bullying, it can still be assumed that professionals who are perceived to have less power or to be in a more vulnerable position will be more exposed to bullying. It may thus be hypothesised that for example women, who still are underrepresented among managers, may be particularly exposed. Previous Scandinavian studies on

bullying have revealed approximately equal victimisation rates among men and women (Einarsen & Skogstad 1996; Leymann 1992b; Niedl 1995; Vartia 1996). However, a recent large-scale UK study revealed that although men and women in general were bullied in equal proportions, female managers were considerably more often bullied than male managers (Hoel & Cooper 2001). It would therefore be of interest to analyse if a similar trend can be found in Scandinavia, as well. As for risk groups, previous research has also indicated that the bullying rates appear to be higher in private organisations than in public ones (Einarsen & Skogstad 1996). The popular conception that the private sector is characterised by even higher internal pressures, higher internal competition and less security would further support this hypothesis.

When comparing different studies on bullying it should be taken into consideration that there are several factors that make such comparisons difficult. For one thing, different researchers have used somewhat different definitions of bullying. What is more, different strategies for measuring bullying have been employed. Some studies have relied on giving the respondents a short definition of bullying and asking them to judge whether or not they have been subjected to such behaviour (e.g. Einarsen & Skogstad 1996; Vartia 1996). In some other studies the respondents have been asked to indicate how often they have been subjected to a list of negative and potentially harassing acts, and those respondents who have experienced at least one of the negative acts with a specified frequency, typically once every week or more often, over a longer period of time have been classified as bullied (e.g. Einarsen & Raknes 1997; Leymann 1992a).

The strength of using lists with predefined negative acts is that it can be considered somewhat more reliable or "objective", since the respondents do not need to make a judgement whether or not they have been bullied. On the other hand this strategy cannot differentiate between situations that the respondents can tolerate and those that they cannot. In addition, the respondents' possibilities to defend themselves or retaliate are

not taken into consideration (cf. Einarsen 1996). What is more, not all possible bullying techniques are necessarily included in such lists (Neuberger 1999). As for the individual items, it can be concluded that they are not necessarily all of equal severity. Whereas some of them may occur more regularly without being perceived as bullying, others may have very long-lasting effects even though occurring only occasionally. Additional criticism has been addressed towards the fact that only situations where a specific act is repeated regularly, for example weekly, are considered bullying. Cases where the target is subjected to different acts every week or every day are thus not considered (Neuberger 1999).

As for the prevalence rates reported, studies relying on self-judgement have typically reported lower bullying rates than studies using lists of predefined negative acts (cf. Rayner 1999a; Zapf 1999). Based on previous studies it can thus be assumed that also among business professionals the number of respondents who have been subjected to negative acts on a regular basis will be considerably higher than the number actually classifying themselves as bullied. In order to get a more comprehensive understanding of the forms and perceptions of bullying among business professionals both strategies for measuring bullying are used and compared in this study. Using both strategies simultaneously also allows for a comparison between the perception of being bullied and having been exposed to different negative acts.

## **Method**

### ***Research objectives***

The aim of this paper is to extend current research by in particular focusing on bullying among business professionals in predominantly managerial or expert positions. In

addition, the paper aims at comparing two strategies for measuring bullying. More precisely, the objectives of the study are the following:

- I. to describe the prevalence and forms of bullying among business professionals and to identify particular risk groups. First of all, the study aims to measure how many have been subjected to or have observed bullying. Secondly, the study aims to describe how professionals are being bullied, i.e. by whom they are bullied and to what kind of negative acts they are subjected to. Thirdly, it is analysed whether there are any particular risk groups with respect to gender, formal position and sector.
- II. to compare two different strategies for measuring bullying among business professionals, i.e. self-judgement based on a definition of bullying and reported exposure to predefined negative acts. More precisely, the study aims to compare the prevalence rate obtained by each strategy and to compare if those classifying themselves as bullied have actually reported higher prevalence rates for the listed negative acts.

### **Sample**

The empirical study was conducted as a cross-sectional survey study and was limited to business professionals. A questionnaire was sent to 1000 members of a nationwide professional organisation (SEFE) for employees holding a university degree, i.e. a Bachelor's or Master's degree, in business studies. The respondents were randomly drawn from the member register, which totally comprised approximately 26,000 persons. Three groups, which however totally accounted for only a minor share of all members, were excluded from the search, i.e. entrepreneurs, top managers, and those who were not presently active in working life, e.g. due to unemployment or maternity



leave. Entrepreneurs were excluded since many of them work alone or only with close family members. Top managers were excluded both because of their expected low willingness to participate and because of the fact that their position (including for example the possibility to lay off people) can be assumed to provide an extra shield against bullying.

In total, 385 (38.5%) questionnaires were returned, of which 377 were filled out and thereby usable. The respondents were employed in a variety of organisations, most of them within the private sector, and most of them holding either a managerial or expert position (see Table 1). Of the respondents women were slightly overrepresented. Approximately one-fifth of the respondents belonged to the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland. The age range was from 24 to 64, with a mean age of 39.2. Mean job tenure was 6.9 years, ranging from two weeks to 36.9 years. The vast majority, 97.6%, worked full-time.

<b>Position</b>	(N=375)	<b>Gender</b>	(N=377)	<b>Sector</b>	(N=377)
Managers	13.6%	Men	42.7%	Private	82%
Middle managers	30.7%	Women	57.3%	Public	18%
Experts	37.1%				
Officials/clerks	16.8%				
Others	1.9%				

Table 1. Main characteristics of the respondents included in the sample.

### ***Measurements***

The questionnaire employed in the study included background questions about the respondent and the employing organisation, and two different measures of bullying. In addition, some information about the work tasks of the respondent, the workgroup, and the work climate was collected, but are not used in this article.

The first part of the questionnaire consisted of questions concerning the respondent and the employing organisation. The background questions about the respondent included gender and year of birth. In addition, questions regarding the respondent's position, tenure, and employment contract (temporary vs. permanent and full time vs. part time) were included. Furthermore, the respondents were asked to indicate whether they worked in a public or private sector organisation.

Two complementary strategies were used to measure bullying, as recommended by e.g. Einarsen and Skogstad (1996). First, the respondents were asked to indicate how often they had experienced 32 negative and potentially harassing acts within the past 12 months. Second, the respondents were introduced to a short definition of bullying and asked if they had been subjected to such behaviour within the past 12 months. As the questionnaire was sent out in September the time period was extended to 12 months instead of 6 months as used in some other studies (e.g. Einarsen & Skogstad 1996, Hoel & Cooper 2000) to avoid seasonal variations due to the recent holiday period.

The 32 negative and potentially harassing acts were primarily based on the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ) (Einarsen & Hoel 2001; Hoel & Cooper 2000). However, some minor modifications were made. First of all, some questions that were not considered relevant for this particular group of respondents were left out (e.g. practical jokes). In addition, some questions were combined into one (e.g. questions about being ignored), and some questions split into two (e.g. “insulting e-mails” and “other insulting written messages or insulting phone calls” as separate questions). Furthermore, two items were adopted from the Leymann Inventory of Psychological Terrorization (LIPT) (Leymann 1989): “Somebody causes you economic or material damages” and “You are physically isolated”. Finally, based on other bullying literature two additional acts were included: “Somebody tries to sabotage your performance” and “You are excluded from social events”. For all the 32 acts the respondents were asked to indicate how often they had experienced them on a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (daily). A list of the items can be found in the Appendix.

The final part of the questionnaire dealt with the respondent’s own perceptions of being bullied or not. Respondents were given a short definition of bullying and asked to determine if they had been subjected to such behaviour, and if so, how often. The respondents were given the options: “No”, “Yes, occasionally”, “Yes, at least monthly”, “Yes, at least weekly”, and “Yes, daily”. In the questionnaire the respondents were introduced to the following definition of bullying:

“Bullying” is here used to denote repeated and persistent negative acts that are directed towards one or several individuals, and which create a hostile work environment. In bullying the targeted person has difficulties defending himself; it is therefore not a conflict between parties of equal strength.

For those considering themselves bullied there were follow-up questions regarding the perpetrator(s) and the duration of the bullying. In addition, all respondents were asked whether they had witnessed somebody else being bullied at work during the past 12 months.

## **Results**

### ***Prevalence and forms***

When provided with a definition of bullying, 8.8% of the respondents in this sample reported that they had been subjected to such behaviour at least occasionally. 1.6% reported that they had been bullied at least weekly. Although 91.2% reported that they had not been bullied during the past 12 months, many had been affected by bullying at least indirectly. Of all the respondents, 30.4% reported that they had witnessed bullying in their present workplace during the past 12 months. 5% reported that they had witnessed bullying at least weekly. This clearly shows that bullying is a widespread and visible problem also among professionals in managerial positions.

Of those considering themselves bullied, the mean reported bullying duration was 2.7 years, ranging from one month to 18 years. As for the formal position of the perpetrators, roughly two-fifths were exclusively bullied by superiors, almost one-third were exclusively bullied by colleagues and one-sixth were exclusively bullied by subordinates. In addition, approximately one-tenth were bullied by several perpetrators on different organisational levels.

	<b>Men (N=160)</b>	<b>Women (N=216)</b>	<b>Total sample (N=376)</b>
<b>No</b>	95.0%	88.4%	91.2%
<b>Yes, occasionally</b>	2.5%	8.8%	6.1%
<b>Yes, at least monthly</b>	1.3%	0.9%	1.1%
<b>Yes, at least weekly</b>	1.3%	0.0%	0.5%
<b>Yes, at least daily</b>	0.0%	1.9%	1.1%

Table 2. Prevalence of bullying among men and women during the past 12 months

Analyses were undertaken to explore if there were particular risk groups with reference to gender, formal position, and ownership of the company. A t-test revealed that the percentage of victims was significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) higher among women than among men, as hypothesised. Whereas 11.6% of the female respondents reported that they had been bullied at least occasionally, only 5% of the male respondents did so. In particular, among the respondents reporting being bullied only "occasionally" women were clearly overrepresented (see Table 2).

In addition, formal position seemed to be an important factor. Of those classifying themselves as managers, only 2% had experienced bullying during the past 12 months, whereas 9.6% of middle managers, 7.2% of experts, and 17.5% of officials/clerks had experienced bullying within the same time period. As for the sector of the organisation, 7.8% of the private sector employees and 13.2% of the public sector employees reported being bullied. Contrary to what had been hypothesised, employees in public organisations thus showed a somewhat higher prevalence rate, although the difference was not statistically significant.

In addition to giving a self-judgement on whether or not considering him- or herself bullied, all respondents were also asked to indicate how often they had been subjected

to 32 different negative acts in the past 12 months. As many as 24.1% reported that they had experienced at least one of the negative and potentially harassing acts at least weekly during the past 12 months. As expected, the acts and behaviours that were directly related to the respondent's work were the ones that were reported most frequently. The six acts that were reported by the highest number of respondents as occurring at least on a weekly basis all belonged to the work-related ones. In particular, the respondents reported that they were given tasks clearly below their level of competence (13.7%), that information was withheld, which affected their performance (7.4%), that they were given tasks with impossible targets and deadlines (5.3%), and that their opinions and views were ignored (5.1%). Several respondents also complained about being exposed to an unmanageable workload (2.4%) or having their work excessively monitored (3.2%). As for the non-work related items the most frequently reported items were being ignored or excluded (2.1%), having rumours and gossip spread about themselves (0.8%) and being shouted at or the target of rage or anger (1.1%). A list of the reported frequency of all 32 acts can be found in the Appendix .

### ***A comparison of two measures of bullying***

In addition to describing the prevalence and forms of bullying among business professionals, another aim of this study was to compare two different strategies for measuring bullying. As reported above, as many as 24.1% reported that they had experienced at least one of the negative and potentially harassing acts at least weekly during the past 12 months. However, only 8.8% of the respondents in the same sample had classified themselves as bullied. As expected, using the predefined list of negative acts indicated a considerably higher frequency of bullying.

Experienced one of the 32 negative acts at least weekly	Bullied according to self-judgement					
	Never	Occasionally	Monthly	Weekly	Daily	
<b>Yes</b>	69	12	3	2	4	90
<b>No</b>	274	11	1	-	-	286
	343	23	4	2	4	376

Table 3. A comparison of two measures of bullying (N=376).

As for a comparison between the two groups of targets it can be noted that of those classifying themselves as bullied on a daily or weekly basis, all were identified when using the list of different negative acts. However, of those classifying themselves as bullied only occasionally or monthly, only 55.6% were identified when using the criterion of having been subjected to at least one of the predefined negative acts at least weekly (see Table 3).

Still, it should be noted that those classifying themselves as bullied did on average report higher incidence rates for almost all of the specified negative acts (see the Appendix). A significantly higher percentage ( $p < 0.05$ ) of those classifying themselves as bullied than of those not classifying themselves as bullied had on a weekly basis experienced that their opinions and views were ignored, that someone was withholding information and that they were ordered to do work clearly below their level of competence. In addition, a significantly higher percentage of those classifying themselves as bullied reported that they had been given tasks with unreasonable or impossible deadlines or that their work was excessively monitored. As for the non-work related items, a significantly higher percentage of the respondents who classified themselves as bullied reported that they were being ignored or excluded and that gossip and rumours were spread about them.

	Number of negative acts experienced on at least a weekly basis					
	0 (N=286)	1 (N=51)	2 (N=19)	3 (N=7)	≥4 (N=13)	
Respondent classified him- or herself as bullied based on definition	Yes	4.2%	13.7%	15.8%	14.3%	76.9%
	No	95.8%	86.3%	84.2%	85.7%	23.1%
		100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 4. A comparison of the number of negative acts experienced and the perception of being bullied (N=376).

What is more, when also taking into consideration those respondents who had experienced the negative acts only now and then, 23 of the 32 negative acts included had been reported by a significantly higher ( $p<0.05$ ) percentage of respondents classifying themselves as bullied. In fact, only two items had been somewhat more often reported by non-bullied respondents, i.e. insulting remarks or behaviour with reference to native language, race or ethnicity or insulting remarks or behaviour with reference to religious or political convictions.

Finally, a comparison was made as for number of negative acts experienced on a weekly basis and the perception of being bullied. The results showed that whereas only a small minority of those having experienced one to three of the acts weekly classified themselves as bullied, the vast majority (76.9%) of those who had experienced several ( $\geq 4$ ) of the negative acts did the same. The relationship between number of negative acts experienced and the self-judgement of being bullied is illustrated in Table 4.

## Discussion

The present study showed that bullying is a relatively widespread phenomenon and that also highly educated employees in managerial or expert positions are subjected to such behaviour. In fact, the bullying frequencies reported are rather consistent with previous



research in other professions. In this study 8.8% of the respondents reported that they had been bullied occasionally and 1.6% weekly, which can be compared to the percentages obtained by Einarsen and Skogstad (1996): 8.6% and 1.2% respectively. However, the number of observers of bullying, 30%, is considerably higher than reported in previous Finnish studies (e.g. Vartia 1996). However, this might be due to the fact that public awareness of the issue has grown in the past few years, which may make employees more inclined to recognise the phenomenon.

As for gender differences the results of this study are in contrast with those of most Scandinavian studies, which have reported approximately equal victimisation rates for men and women (Einarsen & Skogstad 1996; Leymann 1992b; Vartia 1996). In this study women were significantly overrepresented among those classifying themselves as bullied. However, Hoel and Cooper also (2001) reported similar findings for the female managers in their sample. This would thus indicate that the gender differences in prevalence rates grow with higher formal position. This can also partly be explained by the fact that female managers still are in minority and that employees representing the underrepresented sex are more vulnerable and exposed. This would also be in line with the findings that men are more often victimised in the female-dominated child care sector (Lindroth & Leymann 1993).

In addition, this study also highlighted other aspects of organisational power in bullying. Although employees in all categories were exposed to bullying, employees in lower hierarchical positions, i.e. clerks and officials, experienced considerably more bullying than employees in managerial and expert positions. Similarly, supervisors were the group who were most often pointed out as perpetrators. However, it should also be noted that almost one-sixth of the victims were bullied by subordinates only. This thus shows that the required power imbalance can be created through other means than formal position (see Cleveland & Kerst 1993 on sexual harassment research). It

would thus be of interest to further study how superiors can be put into a position in which they cannot defend themselves and how bullying alters power relations.

Contrary to what was expected, public sector employees reported a higher victimisation rate than private sector employees. However, the restructuring of the public sector in the 1990s may partly explain this, as downsizing and increased demands for efficiency and profitability may have contributed to increased stress, frustration and insecurity. In addition, bureaucracy and the difficulties in laying off employees with permanent status may increase the value of using bullying as a micro-political strategy for circumventing rules, eliminating unwanted persons or improving one's own position.

What should be noted is that when measuring the frequency of specified negative acts, the frequency of many of the work-related acts was considerably higher than in previous studies, whereas the prevalence of the non-work-related negative acts seemed to be lower. In particular three work-related acts were reported considerably more often than in a large-scale British study (Hoel & Cooper 2000): being given tasks with impossible targets or deadlines, having one's opinions and views ignored, and being given work clearly below one's level of competence. In addition, a considerably higher number of respondents in this study than among the male industrial workers in Einarsen & Raknes' (1997) study reported that somebody withheld information, which affected their performance. In contrast, the professionals in this sample reported considerably lower prevalence rates than the respondents in previous studies (cf. Einarsen & Raknes 1997; Hoel & Cooper 2000) for many of the non-work-related negative behaviours. These items included for example spreading rumours and gossip, being ignored or excluded, being subjected to excessive teasing and sarcasm, getting insulting remarks about one's person or private life or experiencing physical abuse or threats of physical violence.

Although national culture and gender differences may partly have contributed to the differences in prevalence of the different negative acts, the hierarchical position and high education of the employees in this sample can also be assumed to be important explaining factors. Some of the negative acts included, such as “impossible” deadlines can be considered a rather normal feature of much managerial work. Similarly, the higher the education of an employee, the higher the risk that some of the tasks he or she has to do are below their level of competence. In addition, some of the behaviours may also be part of a competitive game in organisations and some of the acts, such as deliberately withholding information, may be thought of a micro-political strategies (cf. Allen, Madison, Porter, Renwick & Mayes 1979).

In line with this, Neuberger (1999) has described bullying as a “foul game” in organisations. In addition, some German researchers have seen bullying as “personnel management by other means” (Zapf & Warth 1997) or as a possible strategy for eliminating too high- or low-achieving colleagues or subordinates (Kräkel 1997). Despite this, discussing bullying as an rent-seeking strategy that can be rational from the point of view of the perpetrator is a perspective that has not been emphasised in the literature and therefore deserves more attention in the future.

Furthermore, this study showed that care should be taken when comparing studies that have relied on different strategies for measuring bullying. The results indicated that using lists of negative acts gives a considerable higher victimisation rate than self-judgements and that the two different strategies do not even necessarily identify the same victims. One possible explanation is that in some occupations and organisations certain negative acts are expected as part of the culture and therefore not considered bullying (cf. Archer 1999). In addition, whereas the victim’s perceptions of not being able to defend him- or herself on an equal basis is an important part of the definition of bullying, this power imbalance is not taken into account in lists of predefined negative

acts and the studies using such an instrument may therefore also report situations where the persons subjected to the negative acts have been able to retaliate or hold their ground without long-term effects (cf. Einarsen 1996). What is more, some employees may be hesitant to label themselves bullied, since the word “bullied” may have connotations of failure and self-blame.

However, it should be noted that there was a consistency between using the list of negative acts and the definition of bullying in the sense that those classifying themselves as bullied also had reported more incidences of 30 or the 32 negative acts (cf. Rayner 1999b). The only exceptions were insulting remarks or behaviour with reference to native language, race or ethnicity and insulting remarks or behaviour with reference to religious or political convictions. The high rate of insulting remarks with reference to language, race and ethnicity among those not classifying themselves as bullied can be explained by the fact that one-fifth of the respondents belonged to the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland. Among them 12.8% had experienced such remarks, whereas the corresponding rate for Finnish-speaking respondents was 1.0%. This distortion may thus have affected the values. As for insulting remarks with reference to political or religious conviction, the item was only endorsed by 3 respondents altogether, making any comparisons unreliable. All in all, the items in the negative acts questionnaire thus still appear to show that there are relatively clear differences between those classifying themselves as bullied and those not.

An explanation for the discrepancy in the prevalence rates between using lists with predefined negative acts and self-judgements might be that bullying should not be considered as a unified bi-modal construct, but rather as a continuum (cf. Rayner, Sheehan & Barker 1999). Similarly, there might be a difference in perceptions based on if the victim feels that the acts are addressed towards him as an individual or towards him as a representative of a certain minority group, for example as a member of the

underrepresented gender or an underrepresented linguistic or ethnic group. Despite the limitations of predefined lists of negative acts as the sole instrument of measuring bullying, when used in combination with a general question on whether or not the respondent feels bullied, such lists still contribute valuable information by giving details on what kind of negative acts the respondent has experienced and perceived as bullying. Such lists can therefore be seen as valuable instruments when studying the nature of bullying behaviour in different occupations.

## **Conclusion**

This article contributed to the discussion on workplace bullying by studying bullying among business professionals in managerial and expert positions, a so far fairly neglected group in bullying research. Comparisons with previous studies showed that bullying among professionals seemed to be approximately as common as in other occupational groups. However, two major differences as compared with previous research emerged. First, in contrast to most previous Scandinavian studies there was a significant gender difference and women were clearly overrepresented among the victims. Second, as for the nature of the negative acts that the respondents had experienced, acts that were clearly work-related or linked to micro-political behaviour seemed to be reported more often by the business professionals in this study than by other respondents in previous studies. In order to further increase our understanding of workplace bullying among professionals, studies that further explore the gender aspects of bullying and the overlap between micro-politics and bullying should thus be encouraged.

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## Appendix A

	AT LEAST NOW AND THEN				AT LEAST WEEKLY			
	All (n=376)	Non-bullied (n=343)	Bullied (n=33)		All (n=376)	Non-bullied (n=343)	Bullied (n=33)	
1. Your opinions and views are ignored	73.5%	72.1%	87.5%	*	5.1%	2.9%	28.1%	**
2. You are given tasks with unreasonable or impossible targets or deadlines	69.1%	67.4%	84.8%	*	5.3%	3.8%	21.2%	*
3. You are ordered to do work clearly below your level of competence	67.0%	65.9%	78.1%		13.7%	11.8%	34.4%	**
4. Someone withholding information, which affects your performance	61.8%	59.5%	87.9%	**	7.4%	5.5%	27.3%	**
5. You are exposed to an unmanageable workload	35.9%	33.9%	57.6%	**	2.4%	2.0%	6.1%	
6. Your work is excessively monitored	27.4%	24.9%	51.5%	**	3.2%	1.2%	21.2%	**
7. You are repeatedly reminded of your errors and mistakes	26.2%	22.9%	59.4%	**	1.6%	1.2%	6.3%	
8. Rumours and gossip are spread about you	22.0%	20.7%	36.4%		0.8%	0.3%	6.1%	
9. You are ignored or excluded	21.5%	17.8%	60.6%	**	2.1%	0.6%	18.2%	**
10. You are shouted at or the target of rage or anger	18.8%	16.0%	48.5%	**	1.1%	0.0%	12.1%	*
11. Key areas of responsibility are removed or replaced with trivial or meaningless tasks	18.1%	14.7%	51.7%	**	0.3%	0.0%	3.0%	
12. Persistent criticism of your work and effort	17.8%	14.6%	51.5%	**	0.8%	0.0%	9.1%	
13. You are systematically required to carry out tasks which clearly fall outside your job description	17.0%	14.9%	39.4%	**	2.4%	1.7%	9.1%	
14. You are humiliated or ridiculed in connection with your work	12.8%	9.0%	53.1%	**	0.5%	0.0%	6.3%	
15. Pressure not to claim something which by right you are entitled to (e.g. sickleave, holiday entitlement, travel expenses)	12.7%	11.1%	30.3%	*	0.5%	0.3%	3.0%	
16. You are excluded from social events	12.5%	9.9%	39.4%	**	0.3%	0.0%	3.0%	
17. You are subjected to false allegations	9.0%	6.1%	39.4%	**	0.8%	0.0%	9.1%	
18. Insulting or offensive remarks about your person (e.g. habits and background) or your private life	8.5%	6.1%	33.3%	**	0.5%	0.0%	6.1%	
19. Being moved or transferred against your will	6.9%	5.6%	21.2%	*	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	
20. You are sexually harassed or get unwanted sexual attention	6.6%	6.1%	12.1%		0.3%	0.0%	3.0%	
21. You get other insulting written messages or telephone calls	5.1%	3.2%	24.2%	**	0.3%	0.0%	3.0%	
22. You get insulting e-mails	4.3%	3.2%	15.6%		0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	
23. Somebody tries try to sabotage your performance	3.7%	2.6%	15.2%	*	0.8%	0.0%	9.1%	
24. You are the subject of excessive teasing and sarcasm	3.4%	2.0%	18.2%	*	0.5%	0.0%	6.1%	
25. Insulting remarks or behaviour with reference to your native	3.4%	3.5%	3.0%		0.3%	0.3%	0.0%	

language, your race or ethnicity							
26. Threats of making your life difficult (e.g. over-time, unpopular tasks)	3.4%	2.0%	18.2%	*	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
27. Hints or signal from others that you should quit your job	2.9%	1.5%	18.2%	*	0.3%	0.0%	3.0%
28. Intimidating behaviour, such as invasion of personal space, shoving, blocking/barring the way etc.	1.9%	0.9%	12.1%	*	0.3%	0.0%	3.0%
29. You are physically isolated	1.3%	0.9%	6.1%		0.5%	0.3%	3.0%
30. Somebody causes you economic or material damages	1.1%	0.6%	6.1%		0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
31. Physical abuse or threats of violence	0.8%	0.3%	6.1%		0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
32. Insulting comments or behaviour with reference to your religious or political convictions	0.8%	0.9%	0.0%		0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Appendix: Percentage of respondents endorsing each of the negative acts included in the questionnaire (cf. Einarsen & Hoel 2001). The frequencies for those classifying themselves as bullied and those not classifying themselves as bullied are compared. Statistically significant differences are marked with \* ( $p < 0.05$ ) or \*\* ( $p < 0.01$ ).