# Workplace bullying in Serbia: The relation of self-labeling and behavioral experience with job-related behaviors

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Workplace bullying has been identified as a widespread problem in contemporary organizational research. The aim of the paper was to acquire theoretically based and comparable findings about workplace bullying in Serbia: to explore the behavioral experience and self-labeling approaches (applying the Negative Acts Questionnaire – Revised, NAQ-R) and their relationship with job-related behaviors. The sample comprised 1,998 employees. Prevalence rates of workplace bullying based on self-labeling and behavior experience approaches overlap significantly (70% of employees operationally identified as bullied had also labeled themselves as bullied). Both the self-labeling and behavioral experience approach showed significant correlations with job-related behaviors (perceived threat to a total job, absenteeism, intention to leave, and perceived productivity). Previously bullied, presently bullied and non-bullied employees differed significantly on all four job-related behaviors, with large effect size for the intention to leave and medium effect size for the perceived threat to a total job. The findings support combining self-labeling and behavioral experience approaches in workplace bullying research.

*Keywords:* workplace bullying, NAQ-R, self-labeling approach, behavioral experience approach

Workplace bullying concept was received with extraordinary interest by both laymen and scientists during the 1990s across Europe (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2011). This rise of interest can be regarded as a part of wider shift of conceptualizing organizations as conflict-systems, contrary to the previously held view of organizations as cooperative systems (Pondy, 1992; Einarsen, 2000). After identifying and thoroughly describing workplace bullying, the first decade of the Third Millennium was marked with a flourishing of workplace bullying operationalizations and research (Nielsen, Matthiesen, & Einarsen, 2010).

In line with this, both scientists and the lay public gradually got used to the idea that there exist extremely negative work relations that may have considerable consequences for individuals and organizations (Høgh, Mikkelsen, & Hansen, 2011; Hoel, Sheehan, Cooper, & Einarsen, 2011). A previously taboo phenomenon has become an almost unavoidable topic at a number of international conferences, journals and publications (Zapf & Einarsen, 2001).

Workplace bullying is a situation where one or more employees are persistently exposed to negative behaviors, mostly of a psychological character, which finally brings them into an inferior position (Einarsen et al., 2011). Workplace bullying includes various negative acts (Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaers, 2009), ranging from the more "subtle" (e.g. withholding information, unmanageable workload) to drastic ones (e.g. being the target of anger, threats of physical abuse).

Exposure to these negative acts is related to numerous negative psychological states and maladapted behaviors at work (Einarsen et al., 2009; Hoel et. al., 2011; Høgh et al., 2011). Hence, exposure to workplace bullying is correlated with depression, anxiety, tension, fatigue and psychosomatic symptoms (Djurkovic, McCormack, & Casimir, 2008; Giorgi, 2010; Høgh et al., 2011). It also appears that negative psychological states persist, since the psychological and physical health of employees who report that they used to be bullied (but no longer are at the time of the research) is in more danger than the health of those who have neither been the victims nor witnesses of workplace bullying (Hoel & Cooper, 2000). Negative reactions and attitudes that arise from bullying at work may have significant organizational consequences manifested as sickness absenteeism, turnover and problems in individual and team productivity (Hoel et al., 2011).

Out of all job related reactions to workplace bullying, it appears that the intention to leave, as the key predictor of turnover (Hoel et al., 2011), has been the most interesting for researchers (Djurkovic et al., 2008; Hoel et al., 2011; Öcel & Aydin, 2012). This is not surprising since it was Leymann (1990), one of the first researchers of this phenomenon, who viewed the final phase of the bullying process in the context of excluding an individual from an organization as well as the labor market. Besides, leaving the organization is often the only possibility for the bullied individual to be rescued from an inferior position (Sobre-Denton, 2012) and to end his/her social isolation (Johns, 2009).

On the other hand, the studies on the correlation between workplace bullying and productivity and sickness absenteeism were much less frequent and consistent in their results compared to the studies dealing with the relationship between bullying and intention to leave (Hoel et al., 2011). This may be due to the fact that it is difficult to find an adequate way of assessing these phenomena, as well as the possible expectation that the reaction of bullied individuals can be manifested at both ends of the continuum of productivity and work presence (Hoel et al., 2011; Høgh et al., 2011). Hence, we can expect a decrease in the productivity of bullied individuals, and an increase in sickness absenteeism due to exposure to workplace bullying. On the other hand, bullied individuals often

invest additional efforts and avoid taking leave in order to demonstrate their loyalty and commitment.

Notwithstanding the instability of results, studies on the relationship between bullying at work and productivity and sickness absenteeism are highly important in the context of the preservation of an individual's wellbeing as well as the prevention of high financial losses to the organization (Hoel et al., 2011; Johns, 2009). The losses that an organization may suffer pose an even greater threat since the disrupted work behavior persists even after workplace bullying has ceased. Those employees who report that they used to be bullied at work also report a lower estimated productivity, higher sickness absenteeism and a more intensive intention to leave than those who have not been bullied (Hoel & Cooper, 2000).

Some authors propose a conceptualization of workplace bullying as strategic leaders' behavior with both negative and positive consequences, such as increased productivity (Ferris, Zinko, Brouer, Buckley, & Harvey, 2007). Bullying occurs in organizations that directly or indirectly support workplace bullying (Ferris et al., 2007; Salin & Hoel, 2011). In such organizations, it can form an integral part of organizational culture (Salin & Hoel, 2011), and also serve as a "strategy" for dealing with unproductive workers (Ferris et al., 2007). Bullying can send an implicit signal to employees that they should leave the organization or adjust. In that sense, it is clear that bullying at work is connected with the feeling of job insecurity (De Cuyper, Baillien, & De Witte, 2009).

The frequency of bullying in the workplace in different populations is difficult to ascertain since different authors have used different criteria in the assessment of bullying (Zapf, Escartín, Einarsen, Hoel, & Vartia, 2011). Namely, there are two complementary approaches to the assessment of workplace bullying: the first is perceived victimization from bullying at work as a subjective measure, and the second is perceived exposure to specific negative behaviors as a more objective measure (Notelaers, Einarsen, De Witte, & Vermunt, 2006; Salin, 2001; Zapf et al., 2011). Subjective measures usually imply the self-labeling method, where the respondents label themselves as bullied or not bullied. The assessment is performed on a scale and employees' ratings refer to the frequency of exposure to workplace bullying, varying from no bullying at all to everyday bullying. Prior to self-labeling, the respondents are usually offered a definition of bullying in the workplace in order to provide the same starting point for the respondents in their rating. On the other hand, an objective assessment of bullying at work is based on behavioral experience of different negative acts and rating of their frequency.

As a result of a stressful work environment, employees are nowadays frequently exposed to different negative acts, but as long as the acts are isolated and random we cannot treat them as bullying (Einarsen et al., 2009). Leymann (1990, 1996) considered someone as a target when he or she reported being subjected to at least one negative act on at least weekly basis. This criterion was broadened later to include at least two negative acts a week in order to secure a more reliable assessment of workplace bullying (Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy, &

Alberts, 2007; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001). Namely, some of the acts that are considered negative can be features of certain work circumstances (e.g. the need for constant monitoring of employees in unsafe jobs), and hence cannot be labeled as bullying at work. It has been confirmed that at least two negative acts a week better fit the self-labeling method.

It is also important to note that regardless of the method used, the assessment has to include the duration of exposure to negative acts, i.e. the exposure to workplace bullying in the period of usually six months (Zapf et al., 2011). Namely, the difference between workplace bullying and other similar negative acts (such as discrimination, work incidents) is the duration of bullying. In that sense, respondents are offered a time framework to assess the frequency of exposure to individual negative acts or bullying in the workplace.

Although the analysis of prevalence of workplace bullying in different countries provides very important pieces of information on the occurrence of this phenomenon, it is at the same time difficult to perform it due to different methodological approaches and cultural peculiarities. However, regardless of the applied criterion (self-labeling, with and without a definition, behavioral experience) and cultural differences, Zapf et al. (2011) analyzed different samples from international studies and reached a general conclusion that between 3% and 4% of employees are exposed to severe bullying, and between 9% and 15% to occasional bullying. Finally, up to 20% of the employees are exposed to negative social behaviors at work that by their nature do not fall within the precise definition of bullying, but still can be subsumed under stress at work.

The analysis of prevalence of workplace bullying is often accompanied by an analysis of potential risk groups. Risk groups are often sought among the members of different genders, hierarchical status, education and age. The analysis of samples of victims from different countries has shown that there are more women than men among them, and that men are more often the perpetrators (Zapf et al., 2011). On the other hand, analyses of workplace bullying of employees with less power (lower hierarchical positions, lower levels of education) have not confirmed a widely held perception of more bullying victims among them than among those in higher positions (Zapf et al., 2011). Finally, although different studies have established that both younger and older employees can be equally exposed to workplace bullying (Zapf et al., 2011), a study of workplace bullying on a representative sample of employees in Britain has shown that middle-aged employees are at higher risk than the very young and older employees (Hoel & Cooper, 2000).

Workplace bullying has been one of the most important research topics in work psychology for the past two decades (Einarsen et al., 2011). Initial research in Serbia was quite rare and incompatible with the European. This incompatibility is mostly a result of difficulty in reaching larger samples and an incomplete insight into the research methodology that has been continuously evolving (Cowie, Naylor, Rivers, Smith, & Pereira, 2002).

The goal of this research was to gain theoretically based and comparable findings about workplace bullying in Serbia using the Negative Acts

Questionnaire – Revised (NAQ-R, Einarsen et al., 2009). Namely, we wanted to explore workplace bullying manifestations and relations with the most relevant job-related behaviors (perceived threat to a total job, absenteeism, intention to leave, and perceived productivity), to compare prevalence rates across two assessment approaches, identify potential risk groups, examine job-related behaviors in relation to two workplace bullying assessment approaches, compare the groups of the previously bullied, non-bullied and presently bullied on job-related behaviors, and, thus, provide a valid foundation for further scientific research of the phenomenon.

## Method

### Procedure

The study was carried out in cooperation with the Confederation of Autonomous Trade Unions of Serbia[1]. The trade unions confederation covers almost one-third of employees in Serbia within the private, public, voluntary, civic, youth and cooperative sectors across Serbia. A network of unions' representatives at the regional, municipality and organizational levels was instructed to carry out field data gathering. Local representatives were handing out the questionnaires randomly to the employees, regardless of their union membership. Research participation was anonymous, voluntary and non-remunerated. It should also be noted that, due to the sensitivity and confidentiality of the answers, it was reasonable to expect that surveying through the Trade Union's network would provide the most secure environment.

### Participants

The sample comprised 1,998 employees (54.4% women), from 44 municipalities in Serbia. The mean age of participants was 44.40 years (SD =10.23), and the average tenure was 20.48 years (SD=10.70). The average length of service with their present organizations was 15.37 years (SD=10.64). Majority of respondents completed secondary education (55.5%), 24.3% had university degree, 16.2% completed trade school/college, and 4% had elementary education. There were 84.7% subordinates and 15.3% held supervisory positions.

More than half of respondents (61.3%) worked in public organizations and slightly more than one-third (35%) were from private organizations. More than half of participants (58%) were from organizations with 26–500 employees, 20.4% of participants were from organizations with fewer than 25 employees, 8.9% of participants came from organizations with 501–1,000 employees, and 12.7% were from large organizations with more than 1,000 employees.

### Variables and instruments

**Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R).** The Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (Einarsen et al., 2009) is a 22-item scale based on the Negative Acts Questionnaire, NAQ (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001). The scale covers both direct and indirect forms of negative behaviors that represent work-related bullying, person-related bulling and physical intimidation. All items are expressed in behavioral terms and followed by a five-point rating scale which refers to the frequency of a negative act (1 – never; 2 – now and then; 3 – monthly; 4 – weekly, and 5 – daily).

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The latest thorough investigation of the NAQ-R psychometric properties (Einarsen et al., 2009), based on the data from a large heterogeneous UK sample (5,288 employees), showed that the instrument had a high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha was 0.90). There were three underlying factors: personal bullying, work-related bullying and physical intimidation. However, as demonstrated by Einarsen et al. (2009), the NAQ-R is a valid standardized workplace bullying instrument that may also be used as a single factor measure.

The Serbian version of the NAQ-R was developed through an initial validation research (Čizmić & Vukelić, 2010). The scale was adapted to Serbian applying the committee technique in three iterations (Brislin, Lonner, & Thorndike, 1973). The above-mentioned research with the NAQ-R Serbian adaptation (N=216 employees) showed high reliability, Cronbach's alpha was 0.96 (Čizmić & Vukelić, 2010).

In this research, the NAQ-R Serbian adaptation has also shown high reliability (Cronbach's alpha was 0.96). Principal component analysis revealed one principal component with eigenvalue greater than one (11.752) which explains 53.42% of variance. Based on respondents' answers on the NAQ-R, we used two measures of workplace bullying – the overall score (the sum of frequencies across all items) and categorization of respondents as bullied (at least two negative acts on at least weekly basis) or non-bullied.

**Self-labeling measures.** We applied a single-item measure of the self-labeled victimization from bullying. Following the procedure developed by Einarsen et al. (2009), after responding to the NAQ-R, we provided participants with a precise definition of workplace bullying:

> We define bullying as a situation where one or several individuals persistently over a period of time perceive themselves to be on the receiving end of negative actions from one or several persons, in a situation where the target of bullying has difficulty in defending him or herself against these actions. We will not refer to a one-off incident as bullying. (Hoel & Cooper, 2000)

We asked respondents to assess whether and how much they had been bullied during the past six months on a six-point scale (response categories were: No; Yes, very rarely; Yes, now and then; Yes several times a month; Yes, several times a week, and Yes, almost daily). This item was also an integral part of previous research in Serbia (Čizmić & Vukelić, 2010). In order to isolate the group of the previously bullied workers, we applied an additional item.

**Perceived threat to a total job.** The perceived threat to a total job is a 10-item sub-scale from the Job insecurity scale constructed by Ashford, Lee and Bobko (1989). The items refer to different events that could threaten one's job. Respondents estimate the probability of each threat on a five-point scale (from 1 – very unlikely to 5 – very likely). The authors reported Cronbach's alpha of 0.74.

The scale was adapted into Serbian for this research. Two parallel committees were involved in translation and cultural adaptation of the scale. Based on psychometric and conceptual analyses, we identified two items that were inappropriate for the Serbian socio-economic context (for example, moving to another geographic location), and, thus, they were excluded from further analyses. The investigation of psychometric properties showed that the eight-item Serbian version of The perceived threat to a total job scale had high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha=0.88). Principal component analysis revealed one principal component with eigenvalue greater than one which explains 55.30% of variance.

**Absenteeism, intention to leave and perceived productivity.** Following Einarsen's et al. research (2009), we asked the respondents to assess absenteeism, intention to leave and self-perceived productivity in the past six months through single-item measures. Absenteeism was estimated by the duration of sick leave, choosing from five options (from no sick leave to more than twenty days during the previous six months). Intention to leave was assessed

by the frequency of considering quitting the job on a five-point scale (from never to very often). Perceived productivity was estimated in comparison to the usual operating capacity on a rating scale with five degrees of productivity varying from 100% to less than 25% (we have modified the rating scale and offered a wider range compared to the original research where the capacity ranged from 50 to 100%).

## Results

### Prevalence rates based on self-labeling and behavior experience approaches

Applying the self-labeling approach, after reading the definition of workplace bullying, 74% of employees stated that they had not been bullied in the workplace during the past six months. Table 1 shows the distribution of frequencies of being bullied. In order to differentiate between those that labeled themselves as frequently bullied and as rarely bullied (Hoel & Cooper, 2000), we merged the sample of victims into two groups: "occasionally bullied" and "regularly bullied". The "occasional" group was made up of the workers that based on the definition stated they were bullied "very rarely", "now and then" and "several times a month", and the "regular" group of those that said they were bullied "several times a week" and "almost daily" (Table 1). Hence, the vast majority (90%) of those self-identified as being bullied, belonged to the "occasionally bullied" group, and only 10% could be classified into the "regularly bullied group". It is important to add that out of the workers that said that they had not been the victims of bullying in the past six months, 27.1% stated that they had been bullied previously.

Table 1
*Prevalence of bullying based on self-labeling 'Have you been bullied at work over the last six months?'*

|  | No | Yes, very rarely | Yes, now and then | Yes, several times a month | Yes, several times a week | Yes, almost daily |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | No | Occasionally | | | Regularly | |
| Rate (%) | 74.0 | 11.4 | 10.1 | 2.0 | 0.9 | 1.6 |

On the other hand, based on the NAQ-R, using the behavioral criterion, operationalized as at least two negative acts experienced on a weekly basis (two items from a 22-item scale), we can say that 16% of workers could be considered as regularly bullied in the workplace. The examination of prevalence rates of individual negative acts (NAQ-R items) showed that respondents were least exposed to threats of violence and physical abuse or actual abuse (1.7% of them, weekly or more often). Then again, employees were mostly exposed to gossiping and rumors (8.3%, at least on a weekly basis).

Comparing workplace bullying rates (bullied versus non-bullied) based on these two assessment modes, the chi square test of independence revealed significant overlapping between them ($\chi^2(1, N = 1833) = 362.11, p = .00$). The largest number, 70% of those operationally identified as bullied, had also labeled themselves as bullied.

A more detailed examination of comparing behaviorally identified bulling (two negative acts on a weekly basis) with self-labeled bulling (three groups of frequency of the overall bullying experience) showed (Table 2) that only 13% of employees that were regularly exposed to negative behaviors labeled this experience as regular exposure to bullying ($\chi^2$(2, N = 1833) = 356.84, p = .00).

Table 2
*Comparison of workplace bullying prevalence exposure based on self-labeling and behavior experience approaches*

| | Self-labeling approach | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Behavior experience approach | Non-bullied | Occasionally bullied | Regularly bullied |
| Bullied | 30.20% | 57.00% | 12.80% |
| Non-bullied | 83.00% | 17.00% | 0.50% |

In order to delineate the set of specific negative acts that best discriminates the employees self-labeled as bullied from those labeled as non-bullied, we entered the ratings of 22 negative acts (NAQ-R items) into a stepwise discriminant analysis. One significant discriminant function covered eight negative behaviors (Table 3; Wilks' lambda = 0.634, $\chi^2$ (8) = 717.457, p <0.00).

Table 3
*Behavioral acts that discriminate the bullied and non-bullied based on self-labeling*

| Item | Discriminant weight |
|---|---|
| Being humiliated or ridiculed | 0.330 |
| Pressure not to claim something you are entitled to | 0.233 |
| Being ignored or facing a hostile reaction | 0.201 |
| Having allegations against you | 0.142 |
| Being the subject of excessive teasing and sarcasm | 0.135 |
| Being exposed to an unmanageable workload | 0.124 |
| Being ignored or excluded | 0.123 |
| Intimidating behavior (finger-pointing, etc.) | 0.118 |

## Identifying potential risk groups

Identification and description of potential workplace bullying risk groups (identified by self-labeling and experience of negative acts approaches) using demographic characteristics showed that there were no risk groups based on gender, education and hierarchical level. We could only identify older employees as a potential risk group (those self-labeled as bullied were significantly older than those labeled as non-bullied F (1, 1784) = 15.74, p = .00). Still, the size of this effect expressed by the value of eta square coefficient was less than 0.01, which, according to Cohen, points to small influence (Cohen, 1988).

**Workplace bullying and job-related behaviors**

We wanted to correlate workplace bullying assessment (based on both approaches) with job-related behaviors – sickness absenteeism, intention to leave, perceived productivity and perceived threat to a total job. As can be seen from Table 4, both the self-labeling and behavioral experience approach showed significant correlations with the examined job-related behaviors. The intention to leave showed the strongest correlation with both measures.

Table 4
*Correlations of the self-labeling and behavioral experience methods with job-related behaviors*

|  | Sickness absenteeism | Intention to leave | Perceived productivity | Perceived threat to a total job |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Behavioral experience | .135** | .458** | -.146** | .356** |
| Self –labeling | .121** | .404** | -.096** | .271** |

**p<0.01

**Job-related behaviors within the groups of the previously bullied, bullied and non-bullied**

The previously bullied, presently bullied and non-bullied employees (based on self-labeling) differed significantly on all four job-related reactions: sickness absenteeism $F (2, 1714) = 8. 547$ $p = .00$; intention to leave $F (2, 1736) = 141.811$, $p = .00$; perceived productivity $F (2, 1726) = 16.064$, $p = .00$, and perceived threat to a total job $F (3, 1579) = 68.086$, $p = .00$. In spite of the statistical significance of differences among these three groups on job-related reactions, based on Cohen's guidelines (Cohen, 1988), only the difference on the intention to leave had large effect size (explained 14% of variance), and the perceived threat to a total job showed medium effect size (8% of explained variance).

For the intention to leave, Tukey post-hoc comparisons indicated significant differences among all three groups. The previously bullied employees (M = 1.48, 95% CI [1.40, 1.58]) reported a higher intention to leave than the non-bullied (M = 1. 26, 95% CI [1.21, 1.30]), p = .00, and lower than the presently bullied (M = 2.18, CI [2.06, 2.30]), p = .00.

As for the perceived threat to a total job, Tukey post-hoc comparisons of the three groups also showed significant differences among all three groups. The previously bullied reported a higher perceived threat to a total job (M = 23.41, 95% CI [22.64, 24.17]) than the non-bullied (M = 21. 57, 95% CI [21.07, 22. 06]), p = .00, and lower than the presently bullied (M = 26.63, CI [25.93, 27.33]), p = .00.

**Discussion and conclusion**

The research presented in this paper has shown that prevalence rates of workplace bullying based on the self-labeling and behavior experience approaches correlate significantly. The majority, 70% of those operationally

identified as bullied had also labeled themselves as bullied at work. However, the finding that only 13% of employees that were regularly exposed to negative behaviors labeled this experience as regular exposure to bullying advises of the need for further exploration of the workplace bullying self-labeling method. Almost one-third of behaviorally assessed as bullied did not perceive themselves as bullied and almost one-fifth of those self-labeled as bullied were categorized as not bullied based on specific behavior experience.

Crossing the self-labeling and behavior experience data cautions against potential sources of mistake in workplace bullying research. Since the self-labeling method is a general one-item measure, a methodological explanation that could be examined further comes from the issue of differences between one-item and multiple-item measures. It is possible that the one-item approach covers specific behavioral acts that are not covered by the behavioral approach (Nielsen et al., 2010). In addition, in the case of workplace bullying, there is one important conceptual difference between one-item and multiple item measures, namely, the one-item approach is tied with the respondents' perception of being victimized.

Based on the presented data, it can be estimated that the overall prevalence in Serbia fits the international data where about 3-4% of employees can be exposed to severe bullying, while about 9-15% can be exposed to occasional bullying (Giorgi, Arenas, & Leon-Perez, 2011; Nielsen et al., 2010; Zapf et al., 2011). As for international comparisons, it is important to note that even when researchers apply standardized instruments, notably the NAQ-R, it is difficult to compare workplace bullying prevalence in different countries based on published papers since, in following their specific problems, the authors report different prevalence parameters (for an illustration see Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2007; Nielsen et al., 2010; Zapf et al., 2011). Our finding also confirms Nielsen et al. (2010) conclusion about the influence of methodological artifacts on observed prevalence rates.

The self-labeling and behavioral experience approaches cover different features of workplace bullying as a complex organizational phenomenon (Nielsen et al., 2010). Researchers should stick to both of them as they give complementary information, especially when it comes to the countries where the concept has not been thoroughly investigated yet. A combined approach provides grounds for fuller insight into the perception of specific behaviors as workplace bullying.

In this research we followed widely accepted approach to determine workplace bullying based on a predefined operational criterion of victims' exposure to at least two negative acts per week over a period of at least six months (Mikkelsen and Einarsen, 2001; Nielsen et al., 2010). If we follow less stringent operational definition of at least one negative act a week (Leymann, 1996; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001), prevalence of workplace bullying increases from 16% to 25%. However, only 47% of those that experienced at least one negative act a week perceived themselves as bullied, whereas 70% of those that experienced two negative acts a week labeled themselves as bullied. In the situation when we do not know how employees perceive different negative

acts and cannot have an insight into respondents' organizational culture, it is advisable to use two negative acts a week as an operational criterion. Undeniably, employees' perception of a negative act is a critical aspect of workplace bullying experience. Along the frequency, behavioral measures could be enriched with perception of each negative act. Future research needs to examine perception of negative acts. Further on, it could explore the relationship of perception of negative acts with both self-labeling and different operational criteria (one, two or more negative acts a week).

As for individual negative acts, the most frequent workplace bullying manifestations in Serbia are gossiping and rumors, whereas threats of violence and physical abuse or actual abuse are the least frequent. Compared to the UK (Hoel & Cooper, 2000), Finland (Salin, 2001), the USA (Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2007), and Estonia (Tambur & Vadi, 2009), where the most frequent negative acts reflect work-related bullying (withholding information is the most frequent regular negative experience in the UK and the USA, and the second most frequent in Finland), the most frequent negative acts that occur regularly in Serbia are person-related. Moreover, the acts that best discriminate employees self-labeled as victims and non-victims of bullying are predominantly person-related (Table 3). These findings can be considered in the cross-cultural perspective.

As suggested by Einarsen (2000), putting workplace bullying findings on Hofstede's cultural maps (Hofstede, 2001) can help in explaining differences among countries. The finding about the most frequent bullying behaviors tied to work as opposed to person-related could be further examined in the context of power distance. It is possible that in Serbia (a high power distance country – larger degree of accepting hierarchical order and unequal distribution of power) bullying is focused on person-related negative acts rather than work-related acts as work-related competencies are not to be 'challenged'. Work-related bullying is a threat to power distance and inequalities at work are not to be questioned, so negative acts are rather related to personality as personal qualities are more accepted bullying 'starting-point'.

The finding about the lack of workplace bullying risk groups in Serbia based on gender, education and hierarchical level is particularly interesting. According to Hofstede (2001), individualism versus collectivism reflects the degree of interdependence in the society. As a collectivist society, Serbia values loyalty above all other societal rules, whereas in the UK, the USA and Finland, as individualistic societies, people know they should only rely on themselves (Hofstede, 2001). Thus, in collectivistic societies, strong relationships and taking care of members of the group lead to equal distribution of negative acts among various subgroups of employees. Also, collectivistic values can lead to a more effective coping and protective mechanisms against workplace bullying (Giorgi, 2010; Samnani, 2013).

Although many authors related workplace bullying to Hofstede's model of national and organizational cultures (such as Giorgi, 2010; Giorgi et al., 2011; Samnani, 2013; Zapf et al., 2011), due to inconsistencies in operationalizations and available prevalence data for different countries, it still seems more like

a plausible ground for hypotheses development than as a valid framework for cross-cultural analysis and explanation of underlying mechanisms of cultural differences in workplace bullying (Giorgi et al., 2011). As concluded by Giorgi et al. (2011), further cross-cultural research is needed in order to be able to thoroughly examine the explanatory power of Hofstede's cultural framework in workplace bullying research.

The exploration of relations of two workplace bullying assessment methods with job-related behaviors proved that both the self-labeling and behavioral experience method correlate significantly with all researched job-related behaviors (Table 4). The finding about the strongest correlation between bullying and the intention to leave supports previous research (Djurkovic et al., 2008; Hoel et al., 2011; Öcel & Aydin, 2012). Likewise, the intention to leave gives the largest size of the effect of differences between the previously bullied, presently bullied and non-bullied groups of employees. It gives ground for the conclusion that the intention to leave is an indicator of an actual departure from a difficult position, and, thus, can be regarded as the victims' "healthy reaction" to workplace bullying when other resources have been exhausted. At the intervention level, these findings suggest that we should include assessment of bullying at exit interviews.

The findings about job-related behaviors of the previously bullied, non-bullied and presently bullied employees corroborate the results reported by Hoel and Cooper (2000). For all explored job-related behaviors it is clear that the presently bullied employees were worst affected. The employees that used to be bullied expressed lower productivity, more sickness absenteeism and a more intensive intention to leave than those that had never been bullied. Although there are no comparable findings about the perceived threat to a total job, our results give additional evidence about the long-term negative effects of workplace bullying: those that used to be bullied perceived a threat to their job even when they were no longer exposed to workplace bullying. The persisting intention to leave and perception of threat to a job among the previously bullied warns about the long-term negative effects of workplace bullying on employees' relationships with their organizations.

This finding about the long-term consequences of workplace bullying reminds of the need to explore the problem at the level of individual cases. Once we develop the 'big picture' at the state (such as Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2007), sector (Giorgi et al., 2011), industry and organizational levels (Djurkovic et al., 2008), based on the NAQ-R data we could develop system interventions of a wider range. In order to develop an intervention at the level of individuals involved in workplace bullying at a particular organization, we should focus our research on deeper exploration of workplace bullying.

Data presented in this paper show that the NAQ-R Serbian adaptation provides a reliable and valid basis for further scientific exploration of workplace bullying in Serbia and its antecedents and consequences. The NAQ-R provides grounds for 'sophisticated' research (Rayner, Sheehan, & Barker, 1999) and theoretical development of the workplace bullying field. The NAQ-R provided

data important to map workplace bullying in Serbia along some basic parameters on one side, and to compare it with workplace bullying studies carried out in other cultures. At the theoretical level it opens up the space for richer mapping of the workplace bullying concept in the cross-cultural perspective. Additionally, the NAQ-R gives grounds to delineate workplace bullying from other counterproductive workplace behaviors.

This research has confirmed that for the state, industry and organizational level intervention, the application of NAQ-R can provide data about the spread of specific negative acts that could be related with organizational consequences such as sickness absenteeism, turnover and work productivity, necessary for the planning of prevention and care for employees' wellbeing (Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Hoel et al., 2011; Johns, 2009).

Finally, as presented in this paper, the introduction of NAQ-R to the Serbian scientific and research community is important beyond workplace bullying research as an exemplary approach to organizational behaviors that is necessary in a globalized economy. Einarsen and colleagues' theoretical and methodological rigor in approaching workplace bullying can be looked upon as a model in developing other organizational concepts.

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