

## Violence at work in the European Union

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The Fourth European Survey on Working Conditions, based on 30.000 face to face interviews with workers in 31 European countries, indicates that:

- 2% (10 million) workers are subjected to physical violence from people belonging to their workplace
- 4% (20 million) workers are subjected to physical violence from people outside their workplace
- 2% (10 million) workers are subjected to sexual harassment
- 5% (25 million) workers are subjected to intimidation and bullying

### Sexual harassment

2% of all workers are subjected to sexual harassment, but it affects three times as many women as men. Highest exposures are to be found in: catering services (hotels and restaurants) with 4%; and among women with precarious employment status: 5% of women with temporary agency contracts are subject to sexual harassment compared to 2% of women on fixed-term contracts.

### Physical violence

4% of all workers are subjected to physical violence from people not belonging to their workplace. In the period 1995-2005, the level of physical violence increased by one third from 4% to 6%.

2% of all workers are subjected to physical violence from people belonging to their workplace.

### Bullying and harassment

5% of all workers are subjected to bullying and harassment with highest exposure rates in services (over 8% is the health sector and in

hotels/restaurants; over 6% in education and in transport and communications).

Female workers are more concerned than male workers, and especially young women are affected: over 8% of 15-29 year old women are subjected to bullying and harassment compared to 4% of men in the same age group.

## **Differences between countries**

There are considerable differences between the various member States. We suspect these differences to be due to underreporting in some countries and to greater awareness in others. For example, in northern Europe the occurrence of physical violence at work is highest, averaging at about 8%. It is particularly severe in the UK and the Republic of Ireland. However in southern Europe the incidence is much lower, averaging at around 3% in countries like Spain, Italy and Portugal.

Factors increasing the chances of violence:

- **Status**  
Precarious employment is an aggravating factor.
- **Sex**  
Especially in the case of sexual harassment, female workers are more exposed.
- **Time pressure**  
The pressure within an organisation to perform is certainly a factor which needs to be explored further. Intensity of work is increasing strongly and can be seen as a factor exacerbating tension in the workplace.

## **Health effects of violence at work**

Violence at work clearly leads to an increase in health complaints. Workers who are bullied or harassed are four times more likely than other workers to suffer from irritability, stomach ache, anxiety and sleeping problems.

## **Effects on absenteeism**

Health related absenteeism increases with violence at work:

- 15% of workers exposed to physical violence have been absent from work due to work-related health problems over the last 12 months
- 23% of workers exposed to bullying have been absent from work due to work-related health problems over the last 12 months

The EU average for absence from work due to work-related health problems over the last 12 months is just 6%.