Workplace bullying with special emphasis in the Greek public sector – a review article

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Abstract
During the last decades, bullying at the workplace has gained much attention by many researchers. Increased levels of psychological complaints, depression, irritation, anxiety, despair, mood swings, aggression, or even psychosomatic and musculoskeletal health complaints are some of the effects that have been reported in various studies. Workplace bullying is a growing problem which occurs not only in the private sector, but also in the public sector in recent years and generates negative outcomes for individual, group and organizational effectiveness and productiveness. Research in workplace bullying launched mostly by Scandinavian and Anglo – Saxon countries, but later expanded globally. Not many studies have been conducted in Greece, although the reported cases by individual employees is rising during the last years. This may be due to the fact that the country is going through an economical crisis, and as a result extended structural changes have occurred in the public sector in the context of its rationalization and restructuring. The present review article, is an effort to make a review of the literature regarding the various definitions that have been attributed to the term "workplace bullying", the causes, the effects, the perpetrator's and the victim's profiles of this complex phenomenon, focusing on the public sector. Furthermore, reference is made in ways of reducing the phenomenon and its impacts on employees.

Keywords: workplace bullying, public sector, Greece, employees, stress reactions, perpetrator

Introduction

Workplace bullying is recognized as an important problem worldwide and as a result several research articles and investigations have been published by academics, journalists, trade unions and governments, underlining the significance of bullying the last two decades. Research in workplace bullying launched mostly by Scandinavian and Anglo – Saxon countries, but later expanded globally. Heinz Leynmann conducted a number of studies in Sweden (Leynmann, 1990; 1996; Leynmann and Gustafsson, 1996) and he is considered one of the first researchers who introduced the importance and impacts of harassment at work. This interest quickly grew in other Scandinavian countries and particularly in Norway, where the significance of bullying in workplaces was also pointed out, mainly by Stale Einarsen who has published numerous studies concerning workplace bullying (i.e. Einarsen *et al.*, 1994; Einarsen, 2000; Einarsen *et al.*, 2009). Other

European countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany, Austria and Denmark (Neidl, 1996; Zapf *et al.* 1996; Hoel *et al.*, 1999; Rayner, 1997; Mikkelsen and Einarsen, 2001) followed soon, while other countries such as Australia and the United States also started studying bullying and its effects at workplaces (Keashly, 1998; Sheehan, 1999; Ferris, 2004).

Although bullying is a well known term worldwide, in Greece it became popular the last three years due to the increase of violence incidents in schools, culminating in the suicide of a student who was bullied by his fellow students in a dairy farming school located in the city of Ioannina, on March 2015. Bullying in schools is in some ways similar to workplace bullying. Factors such as organizational climate and working arrangements can contribute to the incidence of bullying, both in schools and in workplaces. Nevertheless, personality traits among victims and bullies must also be taken into account in both schools and workplaces (Cowie *et al.*, 2002). Questionnaires used in research on school bullying have affected those used in workplace bullying (Einarsen *et al.*, 1994), although the latest used a range of other methodologies including focus groups, case studies and other qualitative approaches (Smith, 1997). Moreover, studies have indicated links between childhood bullying and workplace bullying (Tritt and Duncan, 1997; Smith *et al.*, 2003). Empirical evidence on workplace bullying is almost inexistent in Greece (Galanaki and Papalexandris, 2011), although Galanaki and Papalexandris (2013) in a survey which was conducted on 840 junior and middle managers in Greece, demonstrated that 13% of their respondents were subjected to bullying, a percentage which is quite alarming given the fact that until March 2015 no legal stipulation or public debate existed concerning the issue.

Despite the fact that there are not many studies concerning workplace bullying in Greece, the individually reported cases of employees from the public sector have considerably increased during the last quinquennium, a fact that is probably related to the economical crisis that the country is undergoing since 2009. During this period, the Greek public sector has been subjected to repeated reorganization, restructuring, budget cuts and reductions in staff numbers. It has been reported that in such situations, uncertainty, frustration, increased stress and as a consequence bullying rates are typically higher (Hoel and Cooper, 2000).

The purpose of the present article was to make an overview of the terms that have been used in the literature to define the phenomenon of psychological violence at work, to explain the causes, to outline the victim's and the perpetrator's profile, to highlight the effects, to provide the legal framework and to propose ways of reducing this complex phenomenon with special emphasis on the Greek public sector.

Definition of workplace bullying

Researchers have searched through the years to conclude to a definition of workplace bullying, a fact that suggests that the phenomenon is quite complex and variable. The problem in giving a precise definition arises from the question of what is identified as workplace bullying, who is drilling it and in what way (Hoel *et al.*, 1999) and therefore it is extremely difficult to make direct comparisons between the various existing studies. Nevertheless, all researchers refer to a similar phenomenon and attribute to it common

features (Hauge *et al.*, 2007; Salin, 2009). Rayner and Keashly (2005) contend that five essential criteria must exist to define bullying: a) the victims incur negative behavior, b) the negative behaviors are persistent, c) the victims are psychologically or physically damaged, d) the victims discern that the bully is more powerful than them and thus they believe that they are incapable of defending themselves and e) the victims inscribe themselves as bullied.

Terms like bullying, mobbing, trauma and negative behaviors have been used the last 40 years in order to explain the phenomenon of psychological violence at work and some of them are been mentioned in Table 1. Greek articles describe the phenomenon using the terms mobbing, bullying, moral or psychological harassment and sometimes the terms moral terror or intimidation at work (Tsiama, 2013).

Table 1: Terms and definitions used to describe psychological violence at workplace

Term	**Definition**	**Researcher(s)**
Harassment	Repeated and continuous efforts made by a person in order to oppress, to wear down or to disappoint another person. It is a lasting process which causes psychological pressure, fear, intimidation and other mental disorders to other people.	Brodsky (1976)
Mobbing/ psychological terror	Hostile and non ethical communication that is directed systematically by one or more persons towards a colleague, who without support and not being able to defense himself/herself, is forced to accept the continued repressive actions. These actions have to occur regularly (at least once weekly) over a long period of time (at least six months).	Leymann (1990)
Workplace trauma	Complete disintegration of mental resistance of an employee from deliberate, continuous and malicious actions of the employer or a hierarchically superior.	Wilson (1991)
Work harassment	Repeated actions aimed to cause psychic (or sometimes physical) pain, and which are directed to one or more persons who for various reasons are unable to protect themselves.	Bjorkqvist *et al.* (1994)
Abusive behavior	Hostile verbal and nonverbal behavior that is not associated with sexual or racist content, which is directed by one or more persons towards others who are targeted as "saboteurs" of the workplace rules. The objective of these actions is the compliance of the "saboteurs".	Keashly *et al.* (1994)
workplace bullying	A situation in which one or several individuals persistently, and over a quite long period of time, perceive themselves as being on the receiving end of negative actions from superiors or coworkers, and where the target of the	Einarsen and Skogstad (1996)

	bullying finds it difficult to defend himself or herself against these actions.	
Mobbing	Hostile and aggressive behaviors, either physical or non-physical, that are directed systematically at one or more colleagues or subordinates leading to stigmatization and victimization of the recipient.	Leymann (1996)
Emotional abuse	Hostile verbal and nonverbal behavior that is not associated with sexual or racist content, which is directed by one or more persons towards others who are targeted as "saboteurs" of the workplace rules. The objective of these actions is the compliance of the "saboteurs".	Keashley (1998)
Mobbing	Harassment, bullying, social exclusion, insult during the assignment of a job or during labor of employees who are hierarchically in a subordinate position by other (s) who are higher in the hierarchy.	Zapf (1999)
Workplace bullying	The systematic persecution of a colleague, a subordinate or a superior, which is continued and may cause severe social, psychological, and psychosomatic problems to the target.	Einarsen (1999)
Bullying	A situation in which one or different persons undergo repeatedly for a long period, adverse effects from one or more persons without being able to defend themselves. A single negative act is not considered bulling.	Hoel and Cooper (2001)
Whisterblowers	Refers to people working in fields that are involved with critical secrets and which notify them to the public. Retaliation is mathematically foreseen in these cases. The goal here is a specific form of harassment, aimed to "shut the mouth". This phenomenon is qualitatively different from mobbing and bullying, but the mechanisms that lie behind correspond exactly to the definition of bullying.	Hirigoyen (2002)
Bullying	Repetitive and lasting negative actions which are directed to one or more individuals and create a hostile work environment. Targets exhibit difficulties in defending themselves. Repeated and lasting negative actions typical of a dispute between parties of equal power, is not considered bullying.	Salin (2003a)
Employee mistreatment	Form of abuse, which is observed both in interpersonal and institutional / systemic level and concerns interaction, distribution and employee's access to the resources and the processes of an organization.	Meares *et al.* (2004)

Workplace bullying	Repetitive and harmful to health abuse which takes the form of verbal attack, offensive behavior (verbal or non-verbal), interference and subversion during work and it aims to threat, humiliate or intimidate a person. It is not just a rude behavior, but a kind of interpersonal aggression having particular frequency, duration and heterogeneity between the two sides with the different power.	Lutgen – Sandvik *et al.* (2009)
Emotional tyranny	Refers to members of an organization who taking advantage of their power, manipulate the emotional world of an employee using a destructive, authoritarian, unjust and cruel way.	Waldron (2009)
Workplace bullying	All those repeated actions and practices directed to one or more workers, which are unwanted by the victim, which may be done deliberately or unconsciously, but clearly cause humiliation, offence and distress, and may interfere with job performance or cause unpleasant working environment. These actions have to occur repeatedly and regularly (for example weekly) over a certain period of time (for example, about six months).	Einarsen *et al.* (2009)

Causes of bullying in the workplace

Empirical studies demonstrate that bullying in not a phenomenon, but a gradually evolving process which seems to contain at least four phases: a) aggressive behavior, b) bullying, c) stigmatization and d) severe trauma (Einarsen *et al.*, 1994). Many researchers argue that the most important cause of bullying at work is the personality of the victim. Most of the victims feel that the bully is envious of them, especially of their qualifications. It is believed that some victims are been harassed by others because of their high self – esteem and they are found to differ from their non-bullied colleagues. The traits of the victims are mentioned in the section bellow.

According to other researchers, organizational characteristics and the psychosocial workplace environment are the most important causes of bullying (Agervold and Mikkelsen, 2004). Moreover, various studies provided additional information concerning the relation between organization and workplace bullying: job design and working conditions, laissez-faire leadership, organizational climate and violence, highly competitive and stressful environment combined with interpersonal conflicts and lack of supportive, directive and friendly atmosphere, low moral level in the departments and organizational change are all precursors of bullying (Seigne, 1998; Skogstad *et al.*, 2007; Giorgi and Majer, 2008; Giorgi and Majer, 2009). Sometimes workplace bullying is used as a tool for sabotaging the efforts of one's colleagues (Salin, 2003b). Furthermore, a high degree of excessive demands and expectations about roles, tasks and responsibilities may create great frustration which in turn leads to conflicts between the members of a work team, especially in connection with rights, obligations, privileges and positions. Nevertheless,

various case studies reveal that bullying exists only in organizations that their culture permits or even sometimes rewards aggressive behaviors (Einarsen *et al.*, 2003). Actually, there are organizations that institutionalize bullying as part of leadership and managerial practice.

The victim's profile – Characteristics

Victims of workplace bullying differ from their non-bullied colleagues, with regard to their personality. According to Zapf and Einarsen (2003) and Hirigoyen (2002) personality traits such as low self esteem, high anxiety levels, introverted, conscientious, neurotic people, people who are very committed to their work, sensitive and submissive people attract psychological violence. Ramsey (2002) argues that younger, weaker, and smaller employees are prone to being bullied, while Noring (2000) claims that the same holds true for the trusting, creative, and highly loyal, if politically inept, employees. This diversity regarding the characteristics of the victim could be indicative of factors that may be antecedents in bullying scenarios (Omari, 2007).

Moreover, the incidence of workplace bullying may be influenced by socio-demographic factors such as gender, age, physical characteristics, origin, marital status, educational level, financial situation, religious or political beliefs (Di Martino *et al.*, 2003). Research also reveals that women are more subjected to bullying than men, probably because women are said to be educated to be less self – assertive and less aggressive and have the tendency to be more obliging than men and therefore, they are not so capable of defending themselves when they are bullied (Zapf *et al.*, 2003). Furthermore, especially in the public sector, the commitment to organizational values may act as a barrier for a woman to recognize the abuse of power (Lewis, 2006) and taking into consideration the fact that women hold less powerful positions in organizations, being a subordinate may increase the chances of being bullied (Poilpot-Rocaboy, 2006). According to the Fifth European Working Conditions Survey (2010) by the European Foundation conducted in 48,316 employees (about 1000 from every country) in Greece, men reported to be subjected to bullying and harassment more often than women (female 2.8%, male 3.7%) (Vartia – Vaananen, 2013).

The perpetrator's profile – Characteristics

The research regarding the perpetrator's profile is ambiguous. In some studies the perpetrator is perceived as authoritarian, manipulative, aggressive, hostile, impulsive, moody, egocentric, intensive, competitive, lacking managerial skills, evil, sadist or psychopath (McCarthy, 2001; Seigne *et al.*, 2007), while other studies claim that the perpetrator is not always a sick person (Poilpot - Rocaboy, 2000). Actually the gentlest person may become a bully under certain circumstances. Zapf and Einarsen (2003) suggest that there are three types of bullying which are related with the perpetrator's characteristics: a) bullying due to protection of self – esteem which results in more aggressive behaviors (frustration, anger, anxiety and envy), b) bullying due to the lack of social competencies of the perpetrator (lack of emotional control, of self reflection and perspective) and c) bullying due to micro – political behavior, which

leads to harassment to another person in order to protect or improve one's own position in the organization.

Einarsen (2000) and Cowie *et al.* (2002) demonstrated that a factor leading to bullying is the imbalance of power in the workplace. The struggle for power has often been a subject of conflict between people with different professional, personal values and personalities. Standmark *et al.* (2007) argue that a long – standing struggle for power is the main cause for systematic bullying in the public service sector. Furthermore, managers within the public services sector have often weak or indistinct leadership skills. Actually, in their study perpetrators made all the decisions themselves, had sometimes a direct and abrupt authoritarian manner towards the targeted employees, and seemed to be jealous of the higher qualifications, concerns and skills of their victims. Shallcross *et al.* (2008), in a study conducted in Australian public sector employees who were self identified as targets of workplace bullying, revealed that the perpetrators were insecure and focused on furthering their career ambitions at any expense. Moreover, their behavior was described by lack of empathy for others, persistent and excessive unjustified criticisms and constant scrutiny, spreading malicious rumors, excluding and socially isolating others. Other studies have demonstrated that aggressive behaviors such as responding belatedly to an e-mail, assigning meaningless tasks, constantly changing instructions, devaluating of the employee's performance, overloading of work, blocking the employee's promotion, withholding information, hiding documents and setting impossible deadlines can lead to diminution of the employee's productivity with great economic cost to the organization (Vega and Comer, 2005; Sandberg, 2006).

Of particular interest is the fact that women – perpetrators have the tendency to target other women (Namie and Namie, 1999). Brunner and Costello (2003) claimed that women in a position of a supervisor or manager hinder qualified women from being noticed and promoted using insidious or surreptitious behaviors. These covert behaviors include spreading rumors, making unjustified accusations that defame their victim's performance, abilities and productivity.

Prevalence of workplace bullying in public sector

A significant portion of workplace bullying in the literature concerns the public sector. Most of these studies show that the extent of bullying and its impact to the employees is particularly severe (Stokes and Clegg, 2002; Quinlan, 2007; Shallcross *et al.*, 2008). One of the main characteristics of bullying is the time period that the victim receives the negative actions from the perpetrator (Leymann, 1990; Einarsen and Skogstad, 1996). Considering that the employees in public sector are more difficult to change job positions, the bullying in civil servants can last for longer periods and cause dramatic consequences to the health and personality of the victims (Hirigoyen, 2002). Moreover, the public sector agencies are strongly influenced by the broader context of governance in which they operate (Stokes and Clegg, 2002); and in addition, the bureaucracy and culture that usually exist in public organizations facilitate the bullies to make deliberate inappropriate use of legitimate organizational processes to harm targets (Hutchinson *et al.*, 2005; Shallcross *et al.*, 2008).
Recent studies in the United States showed that over one-quarter of adult Americans (27%) said that they directly experienced abusive conduct at work, either the last year (7%) or at sometime in their

work life (20%)(Namie, 2014). Similar results were also revealed among workers in the Australian public sector agencies where 24% of the respondents reported that they were currently experiencing workplace bullying (Hutchinson and Jackson, 2015). Much higher results appeared in a survey conducted among white-collar workers in Turkey where over 50% of the responders reported personal experiences of bullying (Bilgel *et al.*, 2006). Similar results also come from a study carried out in a public service agency in Malaysia, where 21.8 % of the employees were categorised as experiencing regular bullying and 34.5% as experiencing severe bullying (Omar *et al.*, 2015). On the contrary, in Japan, data from seven offices in local governments showed bullying as less prevalent, and ranged from 4% to 9% - depending on the methodology followed (Tsuno *et al.*, 2010).

Studies conducted during the last years in Europe show a great variance regarding the prevalence among and within the countries. For example, Lewis *et al.* (2008) reported that 9% of the staff of the National Health Service in the United Kingdom showed that bullying between staff has been a persistent problem with an increasing trend, rising from 15% to 24% in less than a decade (Carter *et al.*, 2013). In Croatia, 22.4% of the teachers from the public education sector were exposed to different kinds of harassment in the previous 12 months (Russo *et al.*, 2008). In Italy, 6.4% of the employees in the studied public and private organizations were victims of bullying (Giorgi, 2009). Higher percentages were reported by Arenas *et al.* (2015) among Italian and Spanish employees, where the prevalence rate of workplace bullying was 14.9% and 15% respectively.

According to the last report of Eurofound (2015) about the violence and harassment in European workplaces, survey findings among member states showed increases in violence and harassment in the 1990s and early 2000s. Evidence from 2005 to 2010 also showed that threats, intimidation, bullying and harassment overall increased from 11.2% in 2005 to 14.9% in 2010. Individual European country figures vary from 6% in Cyprus to over 20% in Austria, the Czech Republic, Finland and Norway (Figure 1). In Greece, the proportion of workers reporting violence or harassment at the workplace was 11.2%. The lack of information and knowledge about the phenomenon was the main reason for a low level of awareness in southern European countries (Eurofound, 2015), which could also partly explain the low percentages reported.

Unlike to several European countries, the workplace bullying in Greece has barely been studied. One of the first research works in the country was conducted by Makrakis (2009) who studied a small number of employees both in a public and a private hospital in Chania. He reported that the percentage of employees that had been bullied or had been witnesses of bullying in their work ranged from 10.5 to 12.5% - with the public sector showing higher percentages (12.5%) compared to the private sector (10.5%). Much higher was however the prevalence of bulling measured in seven hospitals in Western Greece reaching 71% of the responders who also reported several psychosomatic symptoms (Bakella *et al.*, 2013). Similar, Koukia *et al.* (2013) found that up to 80% of the health care staff in a general hospital in Athens, were victims of psychological and verbal violence by patients' visitors. Zigrika (2013) in a small size survey among civil servants employed in the Prefecture of Serres reported that 10.6% of the employees were bullied systematically. Finally, Galanaki and Papalexandris (2013) conducted a survey among 840 junior and middle managers from both the public and private sector in Greece, using two different

methodologies. They found that the occurrence of workplace bullying in Greece ranged between 7.3% and 13%, depending on the method that was followed.

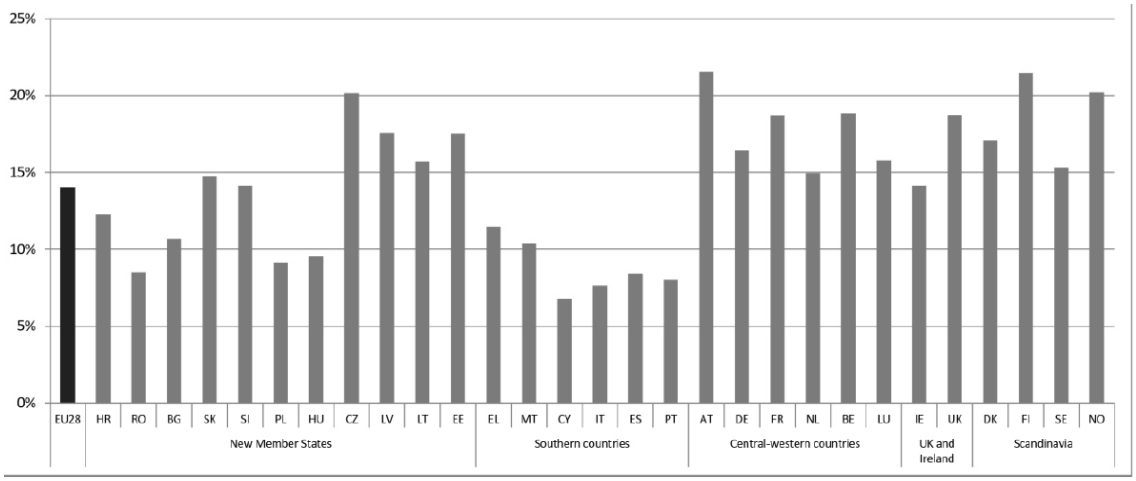

Figure 1: Proportion of workers reporting violence or harassment at the Workplace (source: Eurofound, 2015, p.15)

The majority of workplace bullying studies gives differentiated results when different measurement tools are used. Considering that the outcomes are correlated and may differ according to the methodology (Zapf and Einarsen, 2001; Nielsen *et al.*, 2009; Nielsen *et al.*, 2010; Tsuno *et al.*, 2010; Galanaki and Papalexandris, 2013); the comparison among the studies is not always applicable. Yet, despite the variability in research methods employed, the figures appear to indicate that the problem exists.

Effects of Workplace Bullying

Many investigations in a wide variety of countries show negative effects not only on the mental and physical health of the targets of workplace bullying, but also on organizations who are faced with increasing absenteeism and turnover rates (Arcangeli *et al.*, 2014) as well as decreasing levels of performance and productivity (Hoel *et al.*, 2003).

Exposure to systematic aggressive actions by another person can cause severe emotional reactions such as stress (Arcangeli *et al.*, 2014; Mucci *et al.*, 2015), psychosomatic symptoms (Hansen *et al.*, 2010), fear, anxiety (Leymann, 1996), helplessness, depression (Hansen *et al.*, 2006), cognitive effects (e.g. concentration problems), reduced self-confidence, isolation and loneliness, deterioration of relationships (Chappell and Di Martino, 2006), shock, aggression, insomnia, apathy (Bjorkqvist *et al.*, 1994), muscle pains, headaches, stomach problems, and hand tremors (Celep and Konakli, 2013). Furthermore, many targets of long – term bullying at work, showed symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Mikkelsen and Einarsen, 2002; Matthiesen and Einarsen, 2004). PTSD may lead to life-threatening menaces, object loss and physical harm. In fact, the victim may be stigmatized thus become less capable of responding to its daily job duties. This causes the victim to become even more vulnerable and as a consequence an easiest target (Matthiesen and Einarsen, 2010). Furthermore, perceiving oneself to be treated unfair

and exposed to aggressive behavior may be emotionally upsetting and fuel a deep sense of cynicism about the workplace as a whole, which in turn affects individuals' satisfaction and commitment towards their jobs, their willingness to be present at work, and thus to have an adverse impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of the entire organization (Hauge *et al.*, 2010). Results of a study in the United States demonstrated that employees who were exposed to aggressive behaviors presented poorer self-evaluations on their health status and the perceived workplace bullying was related to a 42% increase in the expected number of days of absence from their jobs (Asfaw *et al.*, 2014). Figueiredo-Ferraz *et al.* (2015) in a longitudinal research revealed that there is strong correlation between workplace bullying and depression which at an advanced stage may even lead to suicide ideation (Nielsen *et al.*, 2015).

Although the detrimental effects of workplace bullying to individuals has been extensively studied, not much attention has been given to the costs that arise to organizations. One of the most serious implications is the turnover, meaning that the target may experience the working conditions as so difficult, that he or she chooses to "voluntarily" leave the job (Glambek *et al.*, 2014). The cost for the organization in this case regards the expenditure linked to recruitment, selection and training. Absenteeism is another effect of workplace bullying, since in most cases the health condition of the targets may necessitate their absence from work, a fact that raises the costs of sick pay (Giga *et al.*, 2008). Moreover, increased health problems resulting from long time exposure to bullying may also discourage employees, evoke gradually reduced job satisfaction and as a consequence lower their productivity and performance (Hoel *et al.*, 2003). Other effects that have been reported in the literature concern premature retirement, grievance, complaints, litigation and compensation (Giga *et al.*, 2008).

Prevention and management of workplace bullying

Workplace bullying, as already mentioned, is a complex phenomenon and the approaches that can be used in its prevention and management should be drawn from several and different levels. A distinction that is commonly made is regarding the target for change and the intended outcome (i.e. primary for prevention, secondary for reduction and tertiary for restoration). Also, measures should be taken both from the individual and the organisation, but also from the society (Murphy and Sauter, 2004; Vartia and Leka, 2011; Vartia-Väänänen, 2013) (Table 2). Individual level interventions intend to change characteristics of the way individuals interface with the job, such as perceptions, attitudes or behaviour. For example, several studies have shown development of victim's emotional intelligence skills can help address the problem (Sheehan, 1999; Littlejohn, 2012; Zigrika, 2013). Also awareness is very important as survey results have shown that very few respondents who have been bullied, identify themselves as "targets" (Rayner *et al.*, 2002); while often the victims seek help for health related complaints without even recognizing or acknowledging their aetiology (Lewis *et al.*, 2002). Finally, counselling after long lasting bullying can help significantly the employee to cope with bullying (Chappel and Di Martino, 2006).

Several studies have showed that bullying may be better understood as an organisational problem, rather than one of individual's, based on the characteristics of either the target or the bully (Hoel *et al.*,

2001; Lewis, 2006). Even if bullying may be related to the personality of the parties involved (Nielsen and Knardahl, 2015), the main preventive tool of employers is organizational measures. Organizational measures may not only prevent bullying but may also affect the way that the employees react when subjected to and protect them from some of the harmful effects (Einarsen *et al.*, 2016). In organizational level interventions plan to influence the attitude towards bullying, to develop organizational culture and to introduce policies and procedures for prevention or intervention when a problem occurs. Training of managers and employees is held to be a primary element of an organisation's strategy to cope with bullying (Beech and Leather, 2006; Chappel and Di Martino, 2006). Work engagement could also help to reduce bullying in an organisation and help the employees to cope with bullying when it occurs (Einarsen *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, the policies adopted by the organisation should be effective and reasonable and meet the needs both of the organisation and the employees, providing clear statements and management commitments, in order to culture an anti-bullying conscience in the organisations (Meglich-Sespico *et al.*, 2007; Einarsen and Hoel, 2008).

Table 2: Different levels of bullying interventions (taxonomy adopted from Murphy and Sauter, 2004; Vartia-Väänänen, 2013)

Level of work organisation interventions	Stage of prevention		
	Primary interventions	**Secondary interventions**	**Tertiary interventions**
Society	• Laws/regulations • Collective agreements	• Court case • Industrial tribunal	• Provision of rehabilitation opportunities
Organisation	• Anti-bullying policies • Development of organisational culture • Organisational	• Handling procedures • Mediation • Investigation of complaints	• Corporate agreements • Programs and contracts of professional after-care
Individual	• Training	• Social support • Counselling	• Therapy • Counselling • Redress

An optimal strategy for coping with workplace bullying must however involve both effective organizational interventions and as well as society awareness and legislative mechanisms to allow for restitution and compensation. The more the public knows about the causes and consequences of bullying and is aware about the perpetrator's behaviors and tactics, the greater the likelihood that the level of tolerance for workplace bullying will decline (Meglich-Sespico *et al.*, 2007).

According to the first EU-OSHA's European survey of enterprises on new and emerging risks (ESENER-1) conducted in 2009, only 30% of EU enterprises had procedures to deal with bullying and harassment. Such procedures were most common in Ireland, the UK, Sweden, Belgium, Finland, Norway and the Netherlands, while in Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania and Greece, only a small percent of enterprises had

procedures to deal with bullying and harassment (EU-OSHA, 2010). Results from the second EU-OSHA's European respective survey (ESENER-2) conducted in 2014, showed a slight increase regarding the procedures that the EU enterprises had to deal with bullying and harassment. These procedures continued to be more prevalent in northern European countries and a slight increase was noticed in Greece (EU-OSHA, 2015).

During the last years, as the organizations and the society have began to understand the hidden costs of bullying practices, hopefully the development of the policies and procedures against workplace bullying will gradually lead to the loss of tolerance towards workplace bullying and provide relief and redress to those who have been bullied.

Legal protection against workplace bullying

Despite the increase of workplace bullying worldwide, not many countries have established legal frameworks for workplace bullying. At the European Union level, the legal framework relating to bullying derives from an overriding obligation to protect the health and safety of workers (Directive 89/391/EEC), as well as the anti-discrimination and sexual harassment provisions (Directives 2000/43EC, 2000/78EC, 2002/73EC).

In Europe, only a few countries have specific laws prohibiting workplace bullying. Sweden was again the pioneer country which implemented an anti-bullying legislation in the early 1990s. Other European countries such as France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Finland soon also instituted specific legislation. Recently, in 2015, Greece also adopted a specific criminal law about bullying (Penal Code, article 312). In several other European countries such as Germany, Spain and United Kingdom the law is not specifically addressing bullying at work. However, there is a variety of general civil provisions which can give redress against bullying and work-related stress. Finally, some countries such as Ireland and Denmark have adopted non-legislative measures such as code of practices or code of conduct.

In Canada the first anti-bullying law was implemented in Quebec early in 2004, and to date five provinces have specific legislation requiring employers to seek to provide workplaces free of harassment (Coldwell, 2013). In the United States, comprehensive workplace bullying legislation has not been passed by the federal government but in 2014, California and Tennessee enacted statutes covering workplace bullying, making them the first American states to codify laws addressing bullying (Yamada, 2015). Australia's innovative national anti-bullying legislation also came into effect in 2014 (Ballard and Easteal, 2016). In other countries, such as Japan, there is no legislation specific to workplace bullying at this moment. However, the national government has started taking countermeasures and lately, in 2012, published its Recommendations for Prevention and Resolution of Workplace Power Harassment (Naito, 2013).

Even in states which enacted workplace bullying laws that may fail to provide comprehensive protection to bullying targets, there is a growing commitment to using the legal system to prevent and respond to abusive work environments. Nevertheless, the existence of the legislative framework could be insufficient to address the problem if

is not followed by other primary and secondary interventions implemented in the workplaces (Hoel and Einarsen, 2010); with trade unions and voluntary organizations having an important role in this progress (Hoel, 2013).

Conclusions

Workplace bullying is a complex phenomenon which is related to the victim's and perpetrator's characteristics, the organisational culture of workplaces and generally, the culture of society. Existing research highlights the extent and seriousness of the phenomenon worldwide, the detrimental effects not only for the victim, but also for the organisation and underlines the need of actions that should be taken to cope with workplace bullying.

Although workplace bullying has not been widely studied in Greece, the first data show undoubtedly its presence both in the public and private sector. Moreover, the first results seem to be in accordance with the existing bibliography regarding the significance of bullying in the public sector. As the economical crisis rises and the public sector is progressively characterized by uncertainty and frequent changes, bullying events may become even more likely. Thus, further studies about the extent of the phenomenon in Greece and strategies for its prevention are necessary to be taken from organisations, trade unions, voluntary organizations as well as the state.

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