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Ana Teresa Verdasca

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SOCIUS - Centro de Investigação em Sociologia Económica e das Organizações
Instituto Superior de Economia e Gestão
Universidade Técnica de Lisboa
Rua Miguel Lupi, 20
1249-078 Lisboa
Tel. 21 3951787 Fax:21 3951783
E-mail: socius@iseg.utl.pt
Web Page: <http://pascal.iseg.utl.pt/~socius/index.htm>

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Ana Teresa Verdasca¹

Universidade Técnica de Lisboa, Instituto Superior de Economia e Gestão

0 - Abstract

The aim of this paper is twofold: in the first place, reliability and validation analysis of the Portuguese version of the Negative Acts Questionnaire Revised, NAQ-R (Einarsen & Hoel, 2001) are presented; secondly, preliminary results concerning the incidence rates of workplace bullying in the Portuguese banking sector, using two different and complementary strategies are presented as well as the most frequent bullying behaviours. Gender, age, organizational and social status differences are also analyzed. As no validated instrument to map workplace bullying exists at the moment in Portugal, the need to fill this gap can be seen as the starting point of this investigation. Portuguese research in this field has been scarce, or even non-existent till now, thus this study has an exploratory nature.

Keywords: *NAQ-R, workplace bullying, negative acts, aggressive behaviours*

I – Introduction

The qualities of human relationships at work are often seen as an important factor in people's perceptions of well-being and job satisfaction. However, the occurrence of interpersonal conflicts and negative or aggressive social interactions have become increasingly frequent in organizations and, notwithstanding that, have received a relative lack of attention in management research (Einarsen, Raknes & Matthiesen, 1994; Van de Vliert, 1997). Indeed, violence, aggression and negative human interactions are rarely studied within an organizational context, perhaps due to the rational approach to the study of conflicts in organizations (Pondy, 1992). Despite this, fuelled by mass media stories and statistics from governmental and labour institutional sources, during the last decade violence at work and workplace bullying, in particular, have received an increasingly growing attention not only from occupational health institutions (Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Vartia, 2003) but also in organizational research (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997; Hole, Cooper & Faragher,

¹ Phd Student, Social Sciences Department, Universidade Técnica de Lisboa

2001). Many studies, in Europe and also abroad, have identified bullying at work as an occupational problem of significant magnitude (Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Rayner, 1997; Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Keashly & Neuman, 2002), suggesting that persistent exposure to negative behaviours at work is likely to manifest itself in health problems, increased sickness absenteeism, lower productivity, reduced commitment and motivation at work (Leymann, 1996; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2004; Hoel, Giga & Faragher, 2005). Also, results from a European Survey (Paoli & Merillié, 2000) showed that 9% of workers in Europe, or 12 million people, report being subjected to bullying over a 12 month period, nevertheless wide variation in the depicted prevalence of bullying in different European countries emerge from the data. Thus, evidence suggests that not only do employees suffer from negative physical and psychological effects, but organizations are also faced with increasing rates of absenteeism and turnover, decreasing levels of productivity and performance, as a consequence of workplace bullying (Hoel, Einarsen & Cooper, 2003). This calls for the need to have measuring tools to promote the study of this problem (its nature, causes and consequences) in order to provide management the means to undertake successful prevention and intervention measures.

In Portugal, this issue of Workplace Bullying has become notorious with its inclusion in the recent Labour Legislation (CT, 2003) and some sectors of Portuguese society have called attention to the need to bring more dignity into work relationships, due to the negative consequences of anti-social behaviours at work. As mobbing² cases published so far (Adams, 1992; Leymann, 1996; Niedl, 1996) imply, negative social behavior at work is more than the absence of positive behavior and it is a research theme in its own right (Zapf, Knorz & Kulla, 1996). Thus, the purpose of the research underlying this paper is to establish the prevalence of workplace bullying and potential organizational causes in the Portuguese banking sector. Also, as no validated instrument to map workplace bullying is available at the moment in Portugal, particular attention is paid to the development of appropriate instruments for this purpose. Hence, the aims of this paper are to validate the Portuguese version of the Negative Acts Questionnaire Revised, NAQ-R (Einarsen & Hoel, 2001) and to introduce the preliminary results regarding prevalence rates and most frequent bullying behaviours.

2 – Methodological issues

There has been little disagreement concerning measuring issues in this area of workplace bullying. Although some preliminary studies (Rayner, 1999a; Zapf, 1999) have relied on self judgement or subjective perception of being bullied (or not), most studies use written questionnaires measuring perceived exposure to bullying behaviours, being one of the most used instruments the “Leymann Inventory of Psychological Terrorization” (LIPT; Leymann, 1990b). Other instruments that have

² In this article mobbing and bullying will be used interchangeably.

also been used are the “Bullying at Work Questionnaire” (Quine et al., 1999), the “Work harassment Scale” (Bjorkqvist & Osterman, 1992) and the “Negative Acts Questionnaire” (NAQ), (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997).

Leymann (1996) has suggested that bullying behaviors are just the kind of acts that occur in daily normal interactions but, when occurring persistently over a period a time, may evolve to bullying negative acts. This researcher has thoroughly investigated and used a wide range of reports of critical incidents to generate items for the LIPT. Many authors still use this instrument or often combine it with the “Negative Acts Questionnaire” (NAQ), used by Norwegian researchers (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997). The differences between these instruments lie more in the label descriptions rather than in any major difference in the list of behaviours included (Dick & Rayner, 2004). The NAQ was developed on the basis of two distinct sources of information: existing literature on bullying and harassment and reports given by victims. The items include both negative acts of direct and indirect harassment, and also some items related to sexual harassment. All items are written in behavioural terms; therefore respondents do not have to base their responses on a judgement of whether they have been harassed or not (Einarsen, 2000). According to Einarsen, Hole, Zapf & Cooper (2003), these instruments provide a more “objective” method than presenting respondents with a definition which requires individuals to “label” their own experience as bullying or not. This author also refers that situations where one person perceives to be offended or harassed by another person often involve subjective perceptions and interpretations of the conflicting participants, i.e. victims may potentially interpret a given situation as negative more as a consequence of their own anger, distress or anxiety than because of objective characteristics of their work environment (Einarsen, Raknes & Matthiesen, 1994). As such, as far as possible, single subjective measures should be avoided.

The instruments above mentioned are then operationalised by defining the criteria for deciding when a person is being bullied. According to the strategy developed by Leymann (1996), called the “Leyman Criterion”, to be considered a victim of bullying a person has to answer affirmatively “at least once a week” to “at least one single item” and the duration should be at least 6 months. Sometimes a wider period of time is used, “during the last year”, to be considered a victim of bullying (Quine et al., 1999). Another approach is to measure perceived victimization from bullying at work through a definition of bullying which is presented to respondents, followed up by questions regarding frequency and duration of exposure for those who labelled themselves as bullied, according to the definition (Einarsen et al., 2003).

The Norwegian leading researcher Stale Einarsen considers that the optimal measurement of bullying at work should include both methods of measuring above mentioned, as this provides information on both the nature and the intensity of the perceived behaviours as well as on the subjective perception of being victimized (Einarsen, 1996; Einarsen et al., 2003). However, some

issues remain still open and deserve to be mentioned, being a remarkable point referred by Salin (2001). As she states, in what concerns the individual items included in the questionnaire, the inherent severity of negative acts, is not necessarily the same: whereas some of them may occur more regularly without being perceived as bullying, others may have a very long-lasting effect even though occurring only occasionally. Additionally, only situations where a specific act is repeated regularly (e.g. weekly) are regarded, leaving outwards cases where the target is subjected to different acts every week or every day (Neuberger, 1999, cited in Salin, 2001). As for the prevalence studies carried on so far, the prevalence rates of bullied respondents reported have been lower for studies relying on self-judgements than for studies using list of predefined negative acts (Rayner, 1997; Zapf, 1999). As such, in order to get a more comprehensive understanding of the forms and perceptions of bullying both strategies for measuring bullying are used in this study.

2.1 – Instruments

As previously mentioned, and following other researchers in this field (Einarsen, Raknes & Matthiesen, 1994; Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Salin, 2001), workplace bullying was measured by using two complementary strategies. First, respondents were asked how often they have experienced a set of 38 negative and potentially harassing acts within the past 12 months (as the questionnaire was launched in the beginning of summer, the period was extended in order to avoid the negative impact of the holiday's period); secondly, respondents were introduced to a definition of bullying, based on prior research (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Einarsen et al, 2003):

Bullying consists of repeated and persistent negative political behaviors, including harassing, offending, socially excluding, towards one or more individual, involving a perceived power imbalance and affecting someone's work tasks or social work environment. Bullying is an escalating conflict process in the course of which the target of the aggressive behaviors finds it difficult to defend him (her) self and ends up in an inferior position. A conflict cannot be called bullying if the incident is an isolated event or if the two parties have approximately equal strength.

This definition emphasizes the negative, persistent and long-term nature of the bullying experience and adds up to it the hypothetical political nature of the behaviours. For those considering themselves bullied there were follow-up questions regarding the perpetrator(s) and the duration of bullying. Additionally, respondents were asked about matters concerning perceptions of mental or physical consequences of being bullied in terms of ill-health, about consequences in terms of absenteeism, and losses of productivity. Coping strategies employed by targets with reference to the process of bullying were also included, the majority of them being taken out from the Unison (1997: 2002) and the UMIST (2000) studies. Finally, respondents were asked about their view on "Workplace Bullying" in terms of its impact in society and they were also asked to manifest their view on the significance of the subject to the existing unions in the banking sector.

The scale used to measure Workplace Bullying was constructed primarily drawing on the NAQ – R (Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised) (Hoel, Cooper and Faragher, 2001) and LIPT (Leymann Inventory of Psychological Terrorization) (Leymann, 1990b), with some additional items in order to anchor the instrument within the particular cultural and organizational setting in which it was applied. For instance, the item “practical jokes” was left out because it was considered inappropriate for this sample of respondents. Additionally some items were adopted from the LIPT, 1989 (e.g. “Someone causes you economic or material damage”, “You are physically isolated” and “You are left idle”); others were included based on existing bullying literature or banking sector characteristics (e.g. “Insulting comments or behaviour with reference to your social status” – item 32; “Your e-mails or other forms of establishing contact are ignored” – item 37; “You receive “NIM³” as a response to a request” – item 38; “You are excluded from social events “ – item 30; “Your rights with reference to your gender are ignored” – item 35). A complete list of the 38 items is included in the Appendix.

2.2 – Sample

Data has been collected through a snow-ball process, starting mainly with personal contacts of the members of this project within the banking sector; then, Union Representatives from the main existing unions in this sector (SBSI and SNQTB) and Worker Representatives were contacted in order to broaden the sample. In this case the participants were randomly selected, out of all the registered union members at the moment. However, some criteria regarding age, gender, academic and professional background have been defined according to the structure of the sector, not only in terms of historical composition but also paying attention to the recent changes observed in the banking sector (Almeida, 2000).

The rate of response differed significantly between the two methods of data collecting: whereas in the first case almost all the questionnaires were returned and suitable for use, in the second case rate of response was approximately, 26%. A total of 561 valid responses have been gathered.

2.3 – Statistical procedure

In the process of validation of the negative acts scale, frequency, mean and standard deviations of individual items were calculated in order to examine the adequacy of individual items for possible inclusion in the Portuguese version of the NAQ-R. Moreover, inter-item correlations were calculated between each of the sub-items and the NAQ-R total score. Cronbach’s Alpha was also estimated for the total NAQ-R scale. The internal structure of the NAQ-R in terms of construct validity was

³ “NIM” – means receiving no answer at all or receiving an answer after a specific and explicit dead-line

assessed through principal components exploratory factorial analysis techniques. Factors were extracted based upon its eigen values > 1 (Kaiser, 1970) and Cattell's Scree Plot (Cattell, 1966). After extraction, factors were orthogonally rotated using Varimax rotation; orthogonal rotation was most appropriate at this stage to yield a more interpretable solution. Another point to address is whether or not the results obtained in this study were consistent with previous research in this field, using the same instrument (the NAQ-R).

In order to get an overall picture of the sample collected, the global structure of the data will be presented in terms of age, gender, academic background, occupational status, social status and other relevant variables of analysis. Frequencies, means and standards deviations were used to describe and compare the prevalence and most frequent bullying behaviours, the organizational status of targets and perpetrators and the social status of bullies' vis-à-vis victims; differences between men and women, and between age groups, were also tested.

3 – Discussion of Results

Starting with the general structure of the total sample, 54,2 % are men and 45,8% are women. All age groups are covered (from 22 years to 66 years, as minimum and maximum points), with a mean age of 39,42 years. The age-distribution follows an approximately normal distribution, slightly left-skewed, with the 31-40 age-group covering 38,3% of the total. As much as 92,2% respondents are employed in the private sector, being the rest in the public sector. Concerning the Academic Background, 57,6% of inquired people have Undergraduate Studies and 42,4% have Post Graduate Studies⁴. This data is in line with the findings reported in the 1st Diagnosis of the Portuguese Banking sector (Almeida,1999), according to which 75% of the working population was male and 19,2% female, despite showing a more balanced proportion in terms of gender segregation. Also in this study, the majority of employees were undergraduate, as in the current research, but in a more representative proportion of the total (64,5% vs. the figure of 57,6%, encountered in this study). This reflects the recent trends of labour markets (nowadays, having a degree is most frequently required as a compelling attribute to get a job in the banking sector). Regarding age, in the current study the most representative age rank is the 31-40 years group, as above mentioned, while in the 1999's 1st Diagnosis of the Portuguese Banking sector the majority of employees belongs to the 48-53 years rank. Once again, this is in line with the current developments in the sector under analysis, which has revealed a significant amount of early retirements contributing to a younger active population.

In this study, Occupational Status was identified by respondents as: clerical (41,5%), technical (37,4%), supervisors (16,4%) and management (4,7%); their Organizational Status was identified as: workers (65,9), supervisors (26,4%), middle management (6,6%) and top management (1,1%).

⁴ *Undergraduate* < owing a degree; *Postgraduate* >= owing a degree

Concerning this issue, no direct comparison can be made with the previous diagnosis of the banking sector because, in that study, 30,2% of respondents didn't identify their Occupational Status, leaving, as such, a black hole in the data. Also, Organizational Status cannot be usefully compared to the current data, because of a different categorization underlying the qualification of data.

3.1 – Factorial Analysis of the Portuguese version of the NAQ-R

As far as the validity and reliability of the Portuguese version of the NAQ-R used in the study is concerned, Cronbach Alpha measure of reliability, obtained for the whole scale (38 items), is 0,965. This value is highly “acceptable” with reference to the standards in most Social Science applications (Academic Technological Services, UCLA, 2005). Correlations matrix was considered factorable, given that the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy obtained was 0,956 and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant (approx. Chi-Square=15.684,62; $p < 0,000$). The exploratory factorial analysis revealed 5 factors with eigen values above 1, which account for 62,3 % of the total variance. These factors, after rotation, accounted for 19,56 %, 14,68%, 12,16%, 9,68% and 7,15% of the total variance, respectively.

Factor 1 has an eigen value of 7,433 and accounts for 19,56% of the explained variance. Factor 1 items largely constitute derogatory behaviours that would normally be instigated by someone in a superior position in the organizational hierarchy. We labelled this factor “**Organizational harassment**” and it includes items like: “Spreading of gossip and rumours about you”, “Being ignored, excluded or being sent to "Coventry"”, “You are ordered to do work clearly below your level of competence” and “You are humiliated or ridiculed in connection with your work”.

Factor 2 has an eigen value of 5,579 and accounts for 14,68% of the explained variance. Factor 2, on the other hand, seems to be constituted by behaviours that work by excluding the victim, socially or physically, like: “You are physically isolated”, “You are excluded from social events” and “Being moved or transferred against your will” and “Being left idle”. This factor was labelled “**Social Isolation/Exclusion**”.

Factor 3 has an eigen value of 4,62 and accounts for 12,16% of the explained variance. Factor 3 seems to be constituted by items more directly related to work and work responsibilities. We labelled this factor “**Work related harassment**” and it includes items like: “Excessive monitoring of your work”, “Being given tasks with impossible targets or deadlines” and “Being exposed to unmanageable workload”.

Factor 4 has an eigen value of 3,678 and accounts for 9,68% of the explained variance. This factor includes items of intimidating nature, like: “Intimidating behaviour such as finger pointing, invasion

of personal space, shoving, blocking/barring the way”, “You get insulting written messages or telephone calls” and “Threats of violence or physical abuse” and was called “*Intimidation*”.

The last factor, **Factor 5**, has an eigen value of 2,717 and accounts for 7,15% of the explained variance. It was labelled “*Personal Harassment*” because it comprises mainly items related to gender or age issues as well as to political or religious attitudes of the victim.

The chosen factor solution is consistent with previous research in this field; namely it comes very close to the results of Vartia (2003), with four factors similar, and also with Einarsen & Raknes (1997), and includes the original list of 38 items. It should be noted that this analysis has an exploratory nature and conclusions drawn from the factor solution achieved should be dealt with care. Despite the fact that the preliminary psychometric properties are adequate, further validation work using confirmatory factorial analysis is advisable.

In order to assess the internal consistency of each factor, item analysis was performed. This involved calculating the item-total correlations. Items were considered to have adequate consistency if their item-total correlation fall between 0,275 and 0,75 (Pedhazur and Schmelkin, 1991). Items that failed to reach this accepted standard of item homogeneity should be removed to improve the internal consistency of the scale. All items demonstrated high levels of consistency with the rest of the items in the subscale; thus, no items needed to be removed, as removal of any items would have decreased the reliability of the measure. Also, Cronbach Alpha was calculated for each individual factor, giving the following measures of reliability: Factor 1= 0,955; Factor 2= 0,886; Factor 3= 0,788; Factor 4= 0,760 and Factor 5= 0,712.

3.2 – The experience of workplace bullying, incidence rates, gender, targets and perpetrators

3.2.1 –Incidence rates, duration, most frequent behaviours, gender and other relevant issues

As far as the experience of bullying is concerned, we provided respondents with a definition of workplace bullying, adapted from Einarsen et al (2003) to the context of the present study. As such, *according to the definition presented* to the inquired people, 5,9% of respondents reported that they have been “frequently” bullied over the last 12 months; 24,8% of inquired referred to be “occasionally bullied”, during the same period of time, and 69,3 % not bullied at all. More explicitly, and according to a procedure used by Hoel & Cooper (2000), in order to make a distinction between occasional and frequent experience of bullying we recoded the responses with “never” as “not bullied”, “yes, very rarely” and “at least once a month” as “occasional” bullying, making up the occasional group, and “at least weekly” and “at least daily” forming the “frequent group”. Strictly speaking, the “very rarely” group doesn’t correspond with the definition of bullying given that it

emphasizes the persistent nature of the behaviours; however, we decided to consider this group as bullied because the respondents had answered “Yes, very rarely”. When we extended the period of experience of negative behaviours to previous work life, a total of 24,4 % of respondents reported having experienced negative or aggressive behaviours at work, according to the definition provided, and 15,5% of victims left their job as a result. It was also revealed by the data analysis that 23,4% of respondents have witnessed bullying in their workplaces.

The complementary strategy of measuring the incidence of workplace bullying was implemented through the use of a *List of 38 negative and potentially harassing behaviours*, an adapted and modified version of the NAQ-R (Einarsen & Hoel, 2001); respondents have to answer how frequently these behaviours occur in their workplaces. According to this procedure, 39,8% of respondents reported that they had been the target of “frequent” bullying and 51,5% of “occasional” bullying and 9,1% had “never” been bullied, following the Leymann Criteria of “at least one negative act” and “at least once a week”. Concluding, these figures may lead us to infer that a vast majority of the workforce is likely to experience bullying behaviours during their working careers.

The great difference between the levels of bullying reported according to the two strategies employed may be an indication of the little awareness of the phenomenon in Portugal and may also be due to cultural reasons. That is, the respondents don't identify the behaviours as bullying but, otherwise they may be considered as part of the organizational culture and accepted as “normal” in an organizational environment characterized by frequent changes, job insecurity and changes in management. This finding is in line with Salin (2001) study conducted amongst business professionals (which may be considered to have common characteristics with the main features of the banking sector, in terms of job description and competitive work environment). In that Finnish study, she also found a higher level of prevalence in the “objective” criterion, i.e. a level of prevalence of 24,1% against a percentage of 8,8%, in the subjective criterion or proposed bullying definition. Here, a point should be made regarding international data: direct comparisons amongst the several research studies carried on in different European countries⁵ are often difficult because of discrepancies in definitions and measurement criteria. Notwithstanding this, where results are comparable, the figures reached in the current study are in line with other studies carried in Europe: in Norway (8,6%, Einarsen & Skogstad, 1986) or Sweden (8%, Leymann, 1996).

After this general overview of the state of art of workplace bullying, we will turn now to a more detailed analysis of the sampled data in order to explore if there are particular risk groups with reference to gender, age, tenure, academic background, occupational status, organizational status and

⁵ In this context it doesn't make much sense to do comparisons with studies carried on in the United States because American understanding of violence at work, in general, and workplace bullying, in particular, is quite different and also measured using different criteria.

social status. European research carried so far has been largely inconclusive concerning target characteristics such as gender, age and occupational status, suggesting that the experience of men and women is remarkably similar or with no relevant differences (Hoel, Rayner and Cooper, 1999). Regarding the frequently bullied group, and gender specifically, a *t-test* ($P > 0,05$) revealed that although a greater proportion of men (6,9%) report being bullied compared to women (4,7%), these differences are not statistically significant, according to the targets subjective perceptions. Age, tenure, occupational status and social status of respondents seem also not to be relevant with regard to the subjective measuring of bullying; however, statistically significant differences emerge for organizational standing, academic background and permanent vs. temporary work. If we take the objective criteria as the measuring instrument of the negative behaviours, the differences respecting gender become statistically significant and these regarding academic background as well.

The facts that workplace bullying is a prolonged experience or, as mentioned by Hoel & Cooper (2000), a “drawn-out affair” and that it has an interpersonal nature, are generally agreed upon and, as such, we found that, for the frequently bullied group, in the majority of cases (42,4%), the experience of bullying lasted more than 3 years, followed by the between 1 and 3 years group (36,4%). The most frequent bullying behaviours identified by targets were, by decreasing order of frequency, “Having your opinions or views ignored” (69,7%), “Being exposed to an unmanageable workload” (57,6%) and thirdly “Excessive monitoring of your work” (54,5%), for frequent bullied targets. “Being exposed to an unmanageable workload” (30,9%) again, “Excessive monitoring of your work” (23,8%) and “Being ordered to do work below your level of performance” (21,6%) were the top negative acts for occasional bullying.

In the majority of cases (53,8%) frequently bullied victims report being harassed by male perpetrators and 39,3% of them by male and female bullies altogether. Only 7,1% of targets reported being harassed by female perpetrators. Most commonly, they reported as having been bullied along with their workmates (46,7%). A lower percentage of targets has been singled-out (43,3%) from colleagues for mobbing. Regarding formal position of bullies, 75,8% of frequently bullied victims refer being victimized by a superior, which is in line with most of the English literature in this field (UNISON, 1997; UMIST, 2000). When faced with bullying, the actions most commonly reported by targets, as coping strategies, were: “Thought about changing jobs” (57,6%), “Stay in the job and do nothing”(51,6%) and “Work harder”(48,5%), for frequently bullied people. In the less severe situations, or occasional bullying, victims reported also that in most situations they decided to “Stay in the job and do nothing” (56,1%) or to “Work harder” (31,1%).

Finally, a remark is worth to be made with reference to the consequences in terms of psychological and physical health of targets of workplace bullying; as such, targets of frequent bullying report more often damages in terms of mental (84,8%) than physical health (69,7%). Regarding the

organizational consequences in terms of absenteeism, surprisingly, the majority of frequent bullied victims (51,5%) referred that workplace bullying has not caused them to stay away from work; for those reporting as being absent (45,5%), the most frequent absenteeism period was between 1 and 6 months in 18,2% of cases.

3.2.2 – Organizational, Occupational and Social Status of Targets and Perpetrators

In this context, organizational status refers to the formal standing one individual occupies within the hierarchical structure of an organization and social status refers, on the other hand, to the personal position of any individual belonging to a particular status group. Occupational status here refers to the professional standing occupied within one organization with reference to a particular work setting and job organization.

Organizational status differences between victims and perpetrators have already been addressed in some European studies in this field of workplace bullying (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997; Hoel & Faragher, 2001). As an imbalance of power is a core feature of all the definitions of bullying presented so far, one would expect that bullying would be most prevalent among groups with relatively less power, both formal and informal (UMIST,2000). However, Einarsen and Raknes (1997) found no difference between the experience of negative behaviours for workers and supervisors/managers. Similar results were found by Hoel *et al.*, (2001), who are those who carried the most elaborated research regarding this issue, and they have observed no significant differences in the bullying experience for workers, supervisors, middle and senior management, questioning therefore a common assumption in workplace bullying literature that the weaker and defenceless in terms of organizational status becomes the primary victim of bullying. Salin (2001) however, in a representative sample of Finnish business professionals, found less bullying at the higher levels of the organization. Focusing on occupational status, Price Spratlen (1995), in a study amongst university employees, found that “mistreatment” was experienced far more often by professional staff than by academic and non-academic support staff; Richman et al. (1999) reported that both sexes were found to be subjected to sexual harassment and workplace abuse, despite sexual harassment being seen as a particular form of “female victimization”. These authors also demonstrated a hypothetical interaction between gender and social status for both sexual and generalized abuse. On the other hand, Lamertz & Aquino (2005) tested a social structural model of social power and status effects on victimization in organizations, in trying to elucidate how formal power and informal status differences associated with access to social powers are related to victimization perceptions. The results suggest that stratification in a social system may create the context in which victimization thrives because it affects access to informal forms of social power. Notwithstanding, the effect of formal power was opposite to what was expected, with managers perceiving greater victimization than non-managers. This was explained in part by the precarious

position of managers in that they must simultaneously deal with conflicting demands from people above and below them in the organizational hierarchy.

In our study of workplace bullying in the Portuguese banking sector, a one-way between groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of organizational status, occupational status/professional standing and social status on the occurrence of bullying, and we found no statistical significant differences regarding any of these variables using the objective criterion concerning being bullied or not. However, using the subjective perception of targets, we reached statistically differences regarding organizational status, being the group most at risk middle managers. We have further examined a potential relationship between social status of victim and perpetrator, as one of the main assumptions of the research underlying this paper is that targets of workplace bullying are victimized by bullies of a higher social status; this is also in line with the power element of the bullying concept. Regarding this point, we observed that 68,5% of the middle social status class victims reported being harassed by perpetrators from an upper social status class. The same applies to the upper medium and lower medium social status class with, respectively, 66,70% and 73,50% reporting being the target of bullies of a higher social status standing.

4 – Conclusions

This article contributes to the existing research on workplace bullying by providing insights about workplace bullying in the Portuguese banking sector, which is, until now, a fairly neglected group in bullying research. Two complementary strategies have been used for measuring incidence rates of workplace bullying and figures achieved are much in line with other European studies carried out so far, either using the subjective perception or the objective criteria. The Portuguese version of the NAQ-R has been presented and has shown good psychometric characteristics, not only in terms of internal consistency ($\alpha=0,965$, for the list of 38 negative acts) but also in terms of external validity. A factorial analysis was performed and has revealed 5 dimensions of bullying behaviours, being 4 factors in common with Einarsen & Raknes (1977) and also with Vartia (2003). Notwithstanding these results, and although the preliminary psychometrics properties are adequate, a confirmatory factorial analysis should be performed to test the factorial solution obtained.

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