and superiors, where possible victims of workplace bullying could be identified. Another possible application of the instrument is its use as an indicator of the risk of psychological alterations due to exposure to violent behaviours at the workplace.

Quantifying the risk: Adding severity to frequency measures of workplace bullying

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The treatment of bullying behaviour as a health and safety hazard is a growing approach internationally (Zilka et al., 2011). Recognising the negative impact of bullying behaviours is a key criterion for identifying bullying within this approach. However, existing measures of bullying have focused on the frequency of bullying events rather than their impact. Risk estimation requires simultaneous attention to the frequency of exposure and the impact it has.

An exclusive focus on frequency is problematic because a worker may be exposed to bullying behaviour(s), but not experience significant negative consequences (e.g. due to coping strategies; work context variables). They could nonetheless be classified as ‘bullied’ according to the operational method often used with frequency-based scales.

Accordingly, measures of prevalence could unintentionally maintain perceptions that rates and claims of bullying, are imprecise, overstated, or spurious. Being able to identify whether and to what extent particular bullying behaviours have negative impacts (i.e. effects on psychological and physical health and safety) is important in prioritising interventions, and supporting the treatment of bullying as a risk issue.

Some attempts have been made to examine the relative severity of categories of bullying behaviours (Escartin et al., 2009), but this has not taken account of the negative impact on the individual exposed to the behaviour. This study aims to measure the negative impact of specific bullying behaviours and develop a scoring method that combines frequency with severity information.

A random sample of Australian workers completed a modified version of the NAQ-R (Einarsen et al., 2009), and were asked to rate each event in terms of its negative impact on them (no negative impact, minor, moderate, significant and severe negative impact; with details to exemplify response options). Similar to other scales measuring the frequency and severity of stress (e.g. Spielberger & Vagg, 1999), frequency and negative impact will be analysed separately and as a product. Outcome variables, including general health and negative affect were also measured to help examine the validity of the frequency/impact score combination. Resulting rates of bullying will be examined in the context of existing prevalence rates from Australian and international studies.

The potential benefits of measuring impact along with frequency include that workgroups particularly at risk could be better identified, and interventions better targeted. In addition, prevalence rates will be more likely to accurately represent the burden of workplace bullying, improving all aspects of the management of this hazard.

Exploring the efficacy of an enhanced weighting and scoring structure for the Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R)

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Currently, the Revised Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ-R: Einarsen et al., 2009) viewed by many academic researchers to be the measurement tool of choice for understanding the phenomenon of workplace bullying (Caponecchia, 2011). Although the psychometric properties of this measure are well established, at present all 22 behavioural items are currently weighted equally in terms of severity. Additionally, the measure also employs a strict scoring system which may lead to issues in adequately identifying workplace bullying. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to present results of an in-progress research project being undertaken to explore a more complex weighting and scoring system for the NAQ-R and answer the following research questions:

1. Do working individuals perceive each of the 22 items contained within the NAQ-R to be of equal severity and if not, how severe do they perceive each of the behaviours to be in relation to workplace bullying?

2. Can a pattern in the progression of behaviours contained within the NAQ-R be identified and scored which may help researchers and organisations to successfully diagnose the occurrence and impacts of workplace bullying on individuals?

To provide answers to the above questions, this research program is being undertaken in 4 phases. Phase 1 entails adapting the NAQ-R to enable the temporal and progressive aspects of workplace bullying to be collected and analysed. In phase 2 a series of focus groups will be conducted with the aim of exploring the weighting structure of behavioural items contained in the current NAQ-R. Phase 3 will then focus on incorporating the findings from both the capability of capturing the complex elements of time, progression and severity of behaviours not yet possible with the existing measure. Finally, phase 4 will focus on incorporating the new NAQ-R weighting and scoring system into an existing survey constructed as part of a wider program of research. Data collected using the newly enhanced scale will then be compared with this initial sample and can be used to determine the efficacy of the enhancements made to the existing measure.

In conclusion, this research will determine whether the NAQ-R’s current weighting and scoring system can be enhanced to more fully capture the complex perceptions and impacts of this phenomenon for individuals in organisations. In-progress results and conclusions will be communicated in full during the conference.