



Universidade de Aveiro  
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**JOANA MARISA  
SILVA LAMEIRA**

**ASSÉDIO MORAL E *CYBERBULLYING* NO  
TRABALHO EM PORTUGAL**

**BULLYING AND CYBERBULLYING AT WORK IN  
PORTUGAL**



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Dissertação apresentada à Universidade de Aveiro para cumprimento dos requisitos necessários à obtenção do grau de Mestre em Gestão, realizada sob a orientação científica da Doutora Vera Silva Carlos, Professora Auxiliar do Departamento de Economia, Gestão, Engenharia Industrial e Turismo da Universidade de Aveiro e da Doutora Ana Dias, Professora Auxiliar do Departamento de Economia, Gestão, Engenharia Industrial e Turismo da Universidade de Aveiro.



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**palavras-chave**

Assédio moral no trabalho, *cyberbullying*, género, idade, qualificações académicas, teletrabalho, autonomia no trabalho

**resumo**

O objetivo deste estudo é analisar a incidência de assédio moral e *cyberbullying* no trabalho em Portugal assim como averiguar se há diferenças ao nível do género, idade e qualificações académicas. Pretende-se ainda compreender se o teletrabalho e a autonomia profissional influenciam a existência destes comportamentos negativos no meio laboral. Primeiramente, foi elaborada uma revisão de literatura com vista a obter um conhecimento mais abrangente sobre os temas. Em seguida, foi utilizada uma metodologia quantitativa com a aplicação de um questionário que permitiu recolher 403 respostas válidas. Os dados foram analisados utilizando o software SPSS. Foram realizadas análises descritivas, teste t, ANOVA e correlações. Verificou-se que 38.2% dos inquiridos se sentiram vítimas de assédio moral nos últimos 12 meses e 22,8% se sentiram vítimas de *cyberbullying*. Os comportamentos negativos relacionados com o trabalho são os mais frequentes. Foi demonstrado que o assédio moral e o *cyberbullying* tiveram um forte impacto psicológico e/ou emocional, físico e laboral naqueles que se sentiram vitimizados. Os resultados indicam que a exposição ao bullying e *cyberbullying* no trabalho varia consoante as qualificações académicas, sendo as pessoas mais qualificadas mais vítimas destes atos negativos. Por sua vez, não foram registadas diferenças quanto ao género e idade, nem quanto ao teletrabalho. Relativamente à autonomia no trabalho, os resultados indicam que existe uma correlação negativa entre a autonomia e o assédio moral no trabalho, bem como entre a autonomia e o *cyberbullying*.

**keywords**

Workplace bullying, cyberbullying, gender, age, academic qualifications, remote working, job autonomy

**abstract**

The purpose of this study is to analyse the incidence of workplace bullying and cyberbullying in Portugal and to find out if there are differences in terms of gender, age, and academic qualifications. It also aims to understand whether remote working and job autonomy influence the occurrence of these negative behaviors at work. Firstly, a literature review was conducted in order to acquire a more comprehensive knowledge on the subjects. Then, a quantitative methodology was used with the application of a questionnaire that allowed to collect 403 valid answers. Data were analysed using SPSS software. Descriptive analysis, t-test, ANOVA, and correlations were performed. It was found that 38.2% of the respondents felt victimized by workplace bullying during the last 12 months and 22.8% felt cyberbullied. The negative work-related behaviours are the most frequent. It was shown that workplace bullying and cyberbullying had a strong psychological and/or emotional, physical, and work-related impact in those who felt victimized. The results indicate that exposure to bullying and cyberbullying at work varies according to academic qualifications, with more qualified people being more victims of these negative acts. In turn, no differences were found for gender and age, nor for remote working. Regarding job autonomy, the results indicate that there is a negative correlation between job autonomy and workplace bullying, as well as between job autonomy and cyberbullying at work.

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## Acronyms List

WB – Workplace Bullying

WC – Workplace Cyberbullying

ICTs – Information and Communication Technologies

EWCS – European Working Conditions Survey

EU – European Union

UK – United Kingdom

USA – United States of America

NAR-R – Negative Acts Questionnaire Revised

WCM – Workplace Cyberbullying Measure

WDQ – Work Design Questionnaire

SPSS – Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

SMEs – Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

SD – Standard Deviation

M – Mean

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The scientific and social interest in workplace bullying has been growing, making it a problem of global interest (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). The truth is that the work environment is for many employees a hostile place where offensive remarks, humiliation, persistent criticism, direct or indirect threats prevail (Leymann, 1990). In scientific terms, the exposure to psychological aggression in the workplace has several denominations, namely: bullying (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf & Cooper, 2011), mobbing (Leymann, 1990; Leymann, 1996), harassment (Einarsen, 2000; Nielsen, Glasø, L., & Einarsen, 2017), victimization (Aquino & Thau, 2009), emotional abuse (Keashly, 1997), among others.

Bullying at work occurs when an individual is repeatedly, regularly (weekly) and for a long period of time (about six months), exposed to negative behaviours being unable to defend himself (Einarsen et al., 2011). The evidence emerging from research suggests that workplace bullying can be considered a serious social stressor (Leymann, 1996), affecting the targets, the organisation, and the society (Jönsson et al., 2017).

In international terms, the literature on this theme is already quite rich. However, in Portugal, few studies have been carried out. Since workplace bullying also depends on cultural aspects, in other words, what is perceived as bullying in one country, may not be in another (Harvey et al., 2009), it seems worthwhile conducting a centralised study to analyse the country's reality. Although in Portugal it is already possible to criminalise bullying at work, it is still difficult to prove that it truly happened. Many are the victims who give up the court cases due to psychological distress or even shame (Eurofound, 2016). Furthermore, complaints of workplace bullying seem to fall short of the reality experienced by many employees. Thus, bullying at work remains an existing problem and further research is needed to better understand the phenomenon and demystify it.

The current pandemic situation has contributed to the increase of remote work, changing communication patterns to online (Belzunegui-Eraso & Erro-Garcés, 2020). In turn, workplace cyberbullying seems to emerge as a consequence of the growing adoption of technological means at work, becoming a new way of “organizational violence”. Cyberbullying at work refers to all the negative acts arising from work and occurring through the use of ICTs, for example, messages, emails, social media, and virtual communities. They can be “(a) *carried out repeatedly and over a period of time or (b) conducted at least once but forms an intrusion into someone’s private life, (potentially) exposing it to a wide online audience*” (Vranjes et al., 2017, p.326). Due to its specific characteristics, such as anonymity or intrusive nature, it can be considered more dangerous and harmful than face-to-face bullying (Coyne et al., 2017).

Cyberbullying has been mostly studied among children and adolescents, so studies among adults in their professional lives are scarce (Privitera & Campbell, 2009; Kowalski, Toth & Morgan, 2018). In Portugal, the phenomenon appears to be unexplored. Hence, the importance of investigating this subject in the Portuguese context.

### 1.1. Objectives

Workplace bullying is a serious social problem that affects employees' well-being, quality of life and happiness (Leymann, 1996). It is increasingly important to explore this phenomenon so that individuals, organizations and even society can take action to prevent it. Therefore, one of the objectives of this research project is to deepen the knowledge about workplace bullying in the Portuguese context, examining its prevalence rate, the negative behaviours that are more frequently committed, and the impact on the victims.

On the other hand, considering the current pandemic situation and the adoption of remote working, cyberbullying seems to emerge as a negative result of the increasing use of technological means at work. Hence, it is important to strengthen the knowledge in this area so that preventive measures can be taken, namely the criminalization of cyberbullying, which in Portugal is not yet possible. So, another aim of this research project is to contribute to the literature on cyberbullying at work by examining its prevalence rate, the negative acts that are more often perpetrated, and the impact on the victims.

We intend to ascertain the incidence of workplace bullying and cyberbullying over the last 12 months (from June 2020 to June 2021), that is, in the middle of the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 disease and all its consequences, namely remote working. Thus, we aim to examine whether there are differences in exposure to these negative behaviours between people who worked remotely and people who did not.

Previous evidence shows us that high workload coupled with low autonomy is an antecedent of bullying at work (Baillien et al., 2011). Therefore, another aim of this research, is to understand whether job autonomy, namely in terms of work scheduling, decision-making, and working methods, decreases the exposure to bullying and cyberbullying behaviours.

Additionally, for both workplace bullying and cyberbullying, it is intended to explore the demographic variables 'gender', 'age', and 'academic qualifications' i.e., the aim is to analyse whether or not the prevalence rate varies by gender, age groups, and academic qualifications. It is intended to determine whether the phenomena of bullying and cyberbullying affect any specific age group, whether there are differences in terms of gender, in other words, whether the victims are more frequently men or women, and whether they depend on academic qualifications.

In order to achieve the defined objectives, this study uses a quantitative methodology and a questionnaire as a data collection technique.

In this sense, this study aims to answer the following research questions: What is the prevalence of workplace bullying and cyberbullying in Portugal? What are the most frequent bullying and cyberbullying behaviours in the Portuguese context? What is the impact on the victims? Does the prevalence of workplace bullying and cyberbullying differ in terms of age, gender, and academic qualifications? Does working remotely influence the exposure to bullying and cyberbullying at work? Does job autonomy reduce the existence of bullying and cyberbullying at work?

## 1.2. Structure

This academic work is divided into six different chapters. The first chapter, the present one, is introductory, contextualising the topic, stating the research objectives, and presenting the structure.

In the second chapter, a literature review introduces the relevant topics for this research which are bullying and cyberbullying in the workplace. For each of the topics, the different conceptualisations, the main characteristics of these phenomena, the antecedents, the consequences of this type of behaviour, the prevalence, as well as gender, age and academic qualifications differences are addressed.

After the literature review, chapter three indicates the methodological strategy that was adopted to achieve the objectives of this research. Sequentially, the research design, the data collection procedure, the instruments used, and the data analysis methods are presented.

Chapter four presents the results of the statistical analysis. Following the presentation of the results, they are discussed in chapter five, where a critical and interpretative analysis of the results and a comparison with previous research is made.

Lastly, a concluding chapter leaves the main findings of this study, the limitations, and some suggestions for future research.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Workplace Bullying

#### 2.1.1. Background and Conceptualization

In recent decades, the scientific and social interest in workplace bullying has increased, accelerating its understanding, and making it a problem of global interest (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). However, workplace bullying is not a new phenomenon. In fact, bullying behaviours have occurred since people have power over each other (Rayner, Hoel & Cooper, 2002). We may say that psychological aggression is almost as old as humanity and human relationships in general. The work environment is for many employees in both public and private organisations a hostile place where offensive remarks, humiliation, persistent criticism, direct or indirect threats prevail (Leymann, 1990).

In 1976, Brodsky published "*The harassed worker*", a pioneer work on harassment at work, where some cases of psychological aggression were first studied. This author advocated five types of work harassment: name calling, scapegoating, physical abuse, sexual harassment, and work pressure (Brodsky, 1976), yet his study did not have much attention at the time. The first scientific paper that explicitly treated the concept of workplace bullying was an article in Norwegian language that appeared in 1989 (Matthiesen, Raknes & Røkkum, 1989). However, the interest in psychological aggression at work started earlier in Sweden, where Leymann systematically explored the phenomenon and published the first English language paper in 1990 (Leymann, 1990). The findings of Leymann sparked considerable public debate and boosted the investigation, first to the other Scandinavian countries, and then to the other European countries.

In Portugal, greater prominence has been placed on this problem and some studies have been carried out in specific sectors of activity, for instance in health care (Norton et al., 2017) and banking (Verdasca & Baillien, 2019). One of the most comprehensive studies on workplace bullying in Portugal was conducted in 2005 (Vilas Boas, 2005). Although it is already possible to criminalize bullying at work, it is still difficult for victims to prove that it really happened. In many cases, the victims give up the court cases because of psychological distress or even shame (Eurofound, 2016). Moreover, complaints of workplace bullying seem to fall short of the reality experienced by many employees. Thus, bullying at work remains an existing problem and further research is needed to better understand the phenomenon and demystify it. Also, since workplace bullying depends on cultural aspects, that is, what is perceived as bullying in one country, may not be in another (Harvey et al., 2009; Eurofound, 2016), it is relevant to conduct a centralized study to analyse the reality of the country.

The exposure to psychological aggression at workplace has been conceptualized with different terms such as mobbing (Leymann, 1990; Leymann, 1996), bullying (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf & Cooper, 2011), harassment (Einarsen, 2000; Nielsen, Glasø & Einarsen, 2017), victimization (Aquino & Thau, 2009), emotional abuse (Keashly, 1997), incivility (Cortina, Magley, Williams & Langhout, 2001). The phenomenon is often referred to as workplace bullying in English-speaking countries, as harassment in the French-speaking countries, and as mobbing in most other European countries (Einarsen et al., 2011). Although other nation-specific terms are used, for example, *assédio moral* in Portuguese, *maltrato psicológico* in Spanish (Di Martino, Hoel & Cooper, 2003)

The term 'mobbing' arises from the English word 'mob' and is commonly used to describe the systematic mistreatment of organizational members (Einarsen et al., 2011). Mobbing can be defined as "*hostile and unethical communication which is directed in a systematic way by one or a number of people mainly toward one individual* (Leymann, 1990, p.120). According to Leymann (1996), the preference for using the term 'mobbing' was because the phenomenon among adults often refers to more psychological forms of aggression as opposed to the more physical forms of aggression that may be associated with bullying. However, among the researchers that use the term 'bullying', there is empirical evidence that the negative behaviours are usually of a verbal and indirect nature (Einarsen, 1999).

Workplace bullying is defined as "*harassing, offending, or socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone's work. In order for the label 'bullying' to be applied to a particular activity, interaction, or process, the bullying behaviour has to occur repeatedly and regularly (e.g., weekly) and over a period of time (e.g., about six months). Bullying is an escalating process in the course of which the person confronted ends up in an inferior position and becomes the target of systematic negative social acts*" (Einarsen et al., 2011, p. 22). The original conceptual difference between bullying (mainly referring to situations of individual aggression) and mobbing (mainly covering situations of collective aggression) is giving rise to a conceptual assimilation of these two terms. Even if the number of perpetrators or targets involved is different, the psychological processes involved seem to be the same. Both mobbing and bullying involve negative behaviours to undermine an individual or group of workers (Di Martino, Hoel & Cooper, 2003).

Another concept of psychological aggression at work is 'victimisation', which occurs when an act of aggression committed by one or more members of the organization affects the wellbeing of an employee. "*An employee's wellbeing is harmed when fundamental psychological and physiological needs are unmet or thwarted*" (Aquino & Thau, 2009, p. 718). The term 'incivility' has been used to account for rude behaviours that are low in intensity and often perceived as lacking conscious intent to harm, but that disturb the workplace norms for mutual respect (Cortina et al., 2001). The line between aggression and



rude behaviours might often be thin, leading to uncertainty regarding the concepts of bullying and incivility (Kowalski, Toth & Morgan, 2018).

### 2.1.2. Characteristics

Although the concept of workplace bullying may slightly diverge between the different labels used by researchers, their meaning overlaps, focusing on the following aspects: persistent exposure to negative acts over a long period of time, and perceived powerlessness of the targets (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). Thus, bullying is not about single and isolated incidents but, rather, about negative acts that are repeatedly pointed to one or more employees (Einarsen et al., 2011). Furthermore, it is the repeated and systematic nature that makes it so damaging (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018).

Regarding the duration, some authors suggest an exposure of at least six months as an operational definition of workplace bullying (Leymann, 1990). Others have used repeated exposure to negative acts (e.g. weekly) within a period of six months (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Einarsen, et al., 2011). In practice, the targets of negative behaviours feel bullied after a shorter time. Yet *“there is consensus among researchers that bullying is a matter of months and years rather than days and weeks”* (Einarsen et al., 2011, p. 12). However, the fact that bullying, in most researcher’s views, reflects a frequent and extended exposure to negative behaviours, does not mean that society and organizations can ignore the impact of the single and isolated acts (Einarsen et al., 2003).

The imbalance of power between the parties, which may precede the bullying or emerge during the conflict, is another central feature of the phenomenon and inhibits targets from successfully defending themselves (Einarsen et al., 2011). Imbalance of power in the context of bullying means that the target has low control or few possibilities to respond in kind (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2010). Whilst some definitions include ‘intent to cause harm’, most choose to leave it out as intent is hard to prove, and difficult to measure (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). Also the fact that people have no intent to harm does not mean that they have no responsibility for their actions, especially when they are aware that their behaviour is inappropriate (Einarsen et al., 2011).

Conceptually, workplace bullying is described by three main criteria: (1) the victim is exposed to negative behaviours of a non-sexual and mostly non-violent nature; (2) the negative behaviours are frequent and persistent, and take place over a long period of time; and (3) the real or perceived imbalance of power between the bully and the target, makes the victim feel that he or she is unable to defend himself (Hoel & Vartia, 2018). Moreover, the targets of negative acts can be superiors (managers/supervisors), colleagues or subordinates (Hoel & Vartia, 2018). Matthiesen and Einarsen (2010) suggest some additional features of bullying, in which the exposed individuals perceive the hostile acts

to be intentional and directed against them, lack adequate social support that could prevent it, are individually or socially vulnerable, and feel insulted, humiliated, or ashamed by the way they are treated.

The negative acts associated with bullying are many. The most common classification has distinguished three main categories: 'work-related bullying' (e.g., being given tasks with unfeasible deadlines or unmanageable workloads, excessive monitoring of work, someone withholding information which affects the performance, being ordered to do work below your level of competence), 'person-related bullying' (e.g., being humiliated, or ridiculed in connection with work, having insulting or offensive remarks, persistent criticism, being the subject of excessive teasing and sarcasm, spreading gossip or rumours, being ignored, being excluded from work teams or social events), and 'physically intimidating bullying' (e.g., being the target of spontaneous anger, intimidating behaviours such as finger-pointing, shoving, blocking your way) (Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaers, 2009). Cyberbullying, or bullying using electronic devices, is a later form of bullying (Privitera & Campbell, 2009).

### 2.1.3. Antecedents

The literature often classifies the antecedents of workplace bullying in two broad categories: organisational factors and individual factors (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2010). Leymann (1996) emphasized the organisational factors, stating that the shortcomings in work designs and leadership behaviour are the main causes of workplace bullying. This author rejected individual characteristics as a source of conflict, advocating that if a situation turns into bullying, the responsibility lies on the leadership, due to flaws in conflict management or lack of organisational policies. While some authors exclude the role of individual characteristics, others argue that individual antecedents such as personality may indeed increase the risk of suffering bullying (Nielsen, Glasø, & Einarsen, 2017).

In terms of work environment, several aspects have been mentioned as potential risk factors of bullying, such as organizational culture, organizational change, leadership, job demand or role conflict (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2010; Samnani & Singh, 2012; Samsudin et al. 2020). It has been argued that for bullying to exist it is required an organizational culture that allows it (Brodsky, 1976). Organizational culture has been defined as "*shared basic assumptions, values, and beliefs that characterize a setting and are taught to newcomers as the proper way to think and feel*" (Schneider et al., 2013, p. 362). Values and norms such as low level of mutual support and understanding may foster bullying (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2010). The organizational change or restructuring, for instance, due to technology advances, work intensification, workforce diversification or increased competition, leads to job insecurity (De Cuyper, Baillien, & De Witte, 2009), and may be linked to higher levels of workplace bullying (Blackwood et al., 2017). Sometimes, even

changes in tasks allocation, in team composition, in work methods or equipment can turn into experiences of being bullied by employees (Holten et al., 2017).

As bullying is often associated with hostile acts on the part of managers and supervisors, research has identified leadership as a key element of bullying (Samnani & Singh, 2012). The prevalence of bullying is higher in organisations where leaders cannot guarantee job satisfaction, create work plans, solve conflicts and give scope for development (Francioli et al., 2018). Therefore, a leadership that is described as weak or bad often leads to unresolved conflicts, which, in turn, result in bullying (Francioli et al., 2018). Workplace bullying has been associated with autocratic leadership, in which leaders have absolute control over a group (Hoel et al., 2010). A passive leadership style, or *laissez-faire* leadership, in which leaders are seen to abdicate their responsibility, is also linked to more cases of bullying (Skogstad et al., 2007). On the other hand, studies have found that authentic leadership, in which the transparency, openness, morality and leader's own inspiration prevails, prevents bullying behaviours (Warszewska-Makuch et al., 2015).

The job demand or workload is another antecedent of bullying and, when excessively high, it may indeed be considered a negative act in its own (Einarsen et al., 2011). Workload has been studied in association with other factors, such as job autonomy and job insecurity. Studies have found that high workload and low autonomy are associated with higher levels of stress, as well as with bullying (Baillien et al., 2011). High workload combined with job insecurity may also enhance the risk of bullying (Spagnoli & Balducci, 2017). The role conflict is a factor that influences the prevalence of bullying at work as well. When there is a lack of clear objectives and expectations and when job descriptions are ambiguous bullying is also more likely to occur (Hauge, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2007). Moreover, high levels of perceived stressors in a team may lead to more hostile behaviours within the team (Mathisen, Øgaard, & Einarsen, 2012).

In terms of individual factors, personality traits have been pointed as antecedents of bullying behaviours (Nielsen, Glasø, & Einarsen, 2017). Some factors such as low self-esteem, lack of social competency, and learning disability, are identified as precursors of workplace bullying (Hidzir et al., 2017). Moreover, an exposed social position and overachievement also contribute to the target vulnerability (Einarsen et al., 2003). It is important to highlight that not all the victims of bullying have the individual characteristics mentioned above. Thus, it is likely that these characteristics apply to some people, and there are cases in which the reasons for bullying are completely different (Einarsen et al., 2003).

The personality traits have been studied through the Big Five Model, which classifies personality into five subdomains: extraversion (individual's propensity to social interaction and positive emotions), agreeableness (proneness to preserve relationships and refuse conflicts), conscientiousness (ability to plan, organise and complete tasks), neuroticism

(propensity to negative emotionality and instability) and openness (interest in new ideas and in experiencing new activities) (Lynam, Miller, & Derefinko, 2018). According to Nielsen, Glasø and Einarsen (2017), targets of bullying often score high on neuroticism, whilst extroversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness appear to protect against bullying. It has been argued that neurotic individuals are not only susceptible of negative behaviours when revealing insecurity and anxiety, but are also more likely to perceive bullying due to their negative nature (Nielsen, Glasø, & Einarsen, 2017; Mathisen, Øgaard, & Einarsen, 2012). Additionally, introverts may be easy targets of hostile acts because of their quiet, deliberate, and reserved nature (Mathisen, Øgaard, & Einarsen, 2012).

| <b>Author and Year</b>   | <b>Antecedents</b>   |
|--|--|
| <b>Brodsky (1976); Leymann (1996);<br/>Matthiesen &amp; Einarsen (2010);<br/>Samnani &amp; Singh (2012)</b>  | Organizational culture (e.g., low level of mutual support and understanding).  |
| <b>De Cuyper, Baillien, &amp; De Witte (2009); Matthiesen &amp; Einarsen (2010); Samnani &amp; Singh (2012);<br/>Blackwood et al. (2017);<br/>Holten et al. (2017)</b> | Organizational change or restructuring (e.g., technology advances; work intensification; workforce diversification; increased competition; changes in task allocation; changes in team composition; changes in work methods or equipment). |
| <b>Leymann (1996); Samnani &amp; Singh (2012); Francioli et al. (2018);<br/>Skogstad et al. (2007)</b>   | Weak or bad leadership (e.g., flaws in conflict management; lack of organizational policies; leaders who fail to ensure job satisfaction, create work plans, give scope for development; leaders who abdicate their responsibilities).     |
| <b>Einarsen et al. (2011); Baillien et al. (2011); Spagnoli &amp; Balducci (2017)</b>  | High job demand/workload and low autonomy or job insecurity.   |
| <b>Hauge, Skogstad, &amp; Einarsen (2007)</b>  | Role conflict (e.g., lack of clear objectives and expectations; ambiguous job descriptions)  |
| <b>Mathisen, Øgaard, &amp; Einarsen (2012)</b>   | High levels of perceived stressors in a team   |
| <b>Nielsen, Glasø, &amp; Einarsen (2017);<br/>Hidzir et al. (2017); Mathisen,<br/>Øgaard, &amp; Einarsen (2012)</b>  | Personality Traits (e.g., low self-esteem, lack of social competency, learning disability, neurotic individuals, introverts).  |
| <b>Einarsen et al. (2003)</b>  | Exposed social position and overachievement.   |

*Table 1 – Antecedents of workplace bullying*

*Table 1* summarises the antecedents of bullying at work aforementioned, although there may be many others, as each case of bullying has its own particularities. The most frequently mentioned antecedent in the literature is organisational change or restructuring, followed by organisational culture and weak or poor leadership. Role

conflict, personal traits, and the fact that the person has an exposed social position are also factors identified in the literature as leading to bullying behaviours. This latter one, therefore, the exposed social position and overachievement, seems to be in many cases associated with activities in which people are considered public figures, thus being more prone to criticism and bullying often made by external entities or people unknown to the victims.

#### 2.1.4. Consequences

The evidence emerging from research suggests that workplace bullying can be considered a serious social stressor (Leymann, 1996), affecting the targets, the organisation and the society (Jönsson et al., 2017). Although findings suggest that bullying is more strongly associated with psychological health in the form of depression and anxiety, it is also linked to behavioural outcomes such as lack of commitment, job frustration, intent to leave and absenteeism (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). The consequences for the victims are many, namely physical (ill health, high anxiety and anger, concentration disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder), emotional and psychological (depression, chronic fatigue, low self-esteem, sleep disorders), social (isolation, frequent absenteeism, reduced well-being) and work-related (intent to leave the organization, deteriorating job performance, job dissatisfaction, lack of commitment) (Gupta, Gupta, & Wadhwa, 2020).

Workplace bullying can cause victims to suffer deeply, damaging their professional lives and exhausting them emotionally (Ahmad & Sheehan, 2017). It has indeed been considered *“more dangerous than physical violence”* (Duru et al., 2018, p. 211). In addition, social isolation affects the perception of belonging to the organization, leading the victims to doubt their worth and feel an increased threat of potential job loss (Park & Ono, 2017). The poor psychological environment disturbs not only the targets of bullying, but also colleagues who witness those negative behaviours. Witnessing bullying may also have negative consequences, with bystanders often reporting higher levels of stress, as well as physical health symptoms (Vartia, 2001). The disturbances suffered by the victim, end up affecting those with whom he maintains affective relationships, namely family and friends. *“Individuals who were targeted shared the agony of workplace bullying experience with friends, family members, and health care providers to derive some social support”* (Ahmad & Sheehan, 2017, p. 90).

The organizational consequences include declining efficiency, reduced creativity, low job satisfaction, high employee turnover, increased absenteeism, and decreased levels of organizational commitment (Bryant, Buttigieg, & Glennis, 2009). The organisation's profitability may be affected through costs associated with employee absence, requests for schedule changes, employee concern due to dealing with negative occurrences and turnover (Kitterlin, Tanke, & Stevens, 2016). Also, bullying behaviours affect the

organization’s productivity by creating dysfunctional workplace behaviour (Bryant, Buttigieg, & Glennis, 2009). The negative working conditions due to lack of communication, conscious miscommunication, and conflicts, disturb cooperation and information flow (Zapf, 1999). Workplace bullying can act as “*an organizational cancer, eventually killing the entire firm*” (Harvey et al., 2006, p. 3), being costly both in financial and human terms (Bryant, Buttigieg, & Glennis, 2009).

Society can also suffer the consequences of bullying, for instance the health sector, since targets of bullying often need medical assistance and psychological support (Leymann, 1996). Workplace bullying can result in more medical costs, increased number of sick leaves, premature retirement, higher unemployment levels, and loss of contributions (individual and organizational) (Di Martino, Hoel, & Cooper, 2003).

| <b>Author and Year</b>  | <b>Consequences</b>   |
|---|---|
| <b>Leymann (1996); Vartia (2001); Nielsen &amp; Einarsen (2018); Gupta, Gupta, &amp; Wadhwa (2020).</b>                     | Physical (e.g., ill health; high anxiety and anger; concentration disorders; post-traumatic stress disorder)  |
| <b>Ahmad &amp; Sheehan (2017); Nielsen &amp; Einarsen (2018); Gupta, Gupta, &amp; Wadhwa (2020).</b>                        | Emotional and psychological (e.g., depression; anxiety; chronic fatigue; low self-esteem; sleep disorders)  |
| <b>Park &amp; Ono (2017); Gupta, Gupta, &amp; Wadhwa (2020).</b>  | Social (e.g., isolation; frequent absenteeism; reduced well-being)  |
| <b>Nielsen &amp; Einarsen (2018); Gupta, Gupta, &amp; Wadhwa (2020).</b>  | Work-related (e.g., lack of commitment; job frustration; intent to leave the organisation; absenteeism; deteriorating job performance; job dissatisfaction)   |
| <b>Zapf (1999); Bryant, Buttigieg, &amp; Glennis (2009); Kitterlin, Tanke, &amp; Stevens (2016); Jönsson et al. (2017).</b> | Organizational (e.g., declining efficiency; reduced creativity; low job satisfaction; high employee turnover; increased absenteeism; decreased levels of organizational commitment; lack of communication; conflicts; disturbances in cooperation and information flow; reduced productivity and profitability) |
| <b>Leymann (1996); Di Martino, Hoel, &amp; Cooper (2003); Jönsson et al. (2017).</b>  | For society (e.g., more medical assistance and psychological support; increased number of sick leaves; premature retirement; higher unemployment levels; loss of individual and organizational contributions)   |

*Table 2 – Consequences of workplace bullying*

Table 2 summarises the consequences of bullying at work aforementioned. These are just some of the consequences found in the literature, so there may be more, as each

person/victim reacts differently. Thus, we can see that bullying has negative effects on individuals, organisations and also on society. Several studies focus on the individual consequences, often divided into four levels: physical, emotional/psychological, social, and work-related. On a physical level, health problems, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder stand out. In emotional/psychological terms, depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem are most frequently mentioned. On a social level, the literature often points to the isolation of victims. As for work-related consequences, the intent to leave the organisation, absenteeism, decreased commitment and deterioration in work performance stand out.

There are also several studies on the organizational consequences and some on the consequences for the society. Although these are addressed in the literature review, it is important to highlight that the present study focuses primarily on the individual consequences, therefore, on the impact that bullying behaviours have for victims at the different levels mentioned.

#### 2.1.5. Prevalence

The research into workplace bullying has increased with many studies analysing its prevalence rates. The majority of these articles rely on cross-sectional national samples often focused on an industry, a specific sector, or an occupation. The prevalence rates vary widely in the literature: 8.6% in Norway (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996); 31.1% in Australia (Privitera & Campbell, 2009); 3.5% in Sweden (Leymann, 1996; Forssell, 2016); 18.5% in New Zealand (Gardner et al., 2016), and 19.7% in the UK (Coyne et al., 2017).

A review article based on a survey of 30 studies, concludes that *“between 1-4% of employees may experience serious bullying, and between 8-10% occasional bullying. Between 10-20% (or even higher) of employees may occasionally be confronted with negative social behaviour at work which does not correspond to definitions of bullying”* (Zapf, Einarsen, Hoel, & Vartia, 2003, p. 121). The meta-analysis of Nielsen et al. (2010), has estimated that about 15% of employees on a global basis are exposed to some level of bullying behaviours.

The European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) conducted by the European Foundation is an extensive survey that studies the quality of work across Europe through indicators such as work intensity, earnings, social environment. Exposure to adverse social behaviour (e.g., bullying, unwanted sexual attention, threats, sexual harassment) is analysed within the 'social environment' indicator. Workplace bullying is assessed with a single question (self-labelling method) and no definition. In the 6<sup>th</sup> EWCS in 2015, *“around 16% of workers – more women than men – report exposure to adverse social behaviour”* and 5% of the respondents stated being subjected to bullying over the last twelve months (Eurofound, 2016, p. 8).

According to the 6<sup>th</sup> EWCS, Portugal has one of the lowest prevalence rates in the European Union. The data indicate that around 4% of Portuguese workers reported at least one adverse social behaviour and only 0.9% reported being victims of workplace bullying (Hoel & Vartia, 2018; Eurofound, 2016), which seems to be an understated result. Although not recent, one of the most comprehensive studies on workplace bullying carried out in Portugal found a prevalence rate of 10.3%, with the bullies being mainly male and managers (Vilas Boas, 2005). According to Vilas Boas (2005, p. 881), "*among the perpetrators the managers stand out clearly (56.8%), followed by colleagues (27.6%), subordinates (8.6%) and, finally, people outside the organisation (7%)*".

As already pointed out, the prevalence rates of workplace bullying are quite different between countries, which might be partly a result of cultural differences (Harvey et al., 2009). Tolerance for undesired behaviour may diverge from country to country, as well as the problem of underreporting, which may be more prevalent in some countries than others (Eurofound, 2016). Additionally, victims might feel ashamed or even guilty to report such situations, especially if public awareness is reduced or non-existent. Also, "*due to the sensitive and complex nature of the issue, victims might be reluctant to talk about them and incidents might be underestimated*" (Eurofound, 2016, p. 68).

Prevalence rates may also vary depending on methodological factors. There are two measurement methods that are often used in workplace bullying research: the self-labelling approach and the behavioural experience method (Nielsen, Matthiesen, & Einarsen, 2010). Self-labelled bullying is estimated by way of a single item (usually preceded by a definition) which asks whether the respondent has been a victim of bullying in the past 6-12 months. The behavioural experience method involves asking respondents how often they have been exposed to a set of bullying behaviours (Nielsen, Matthiesen, & Einarsen, 2010). *Table 3* shows the prevalence rates of bullying at work, considering the measurement methods used in the studies.



| Study                                  | Number of respondents | Country     | Bullying Measurement |                               |
|--|-----------------------|-------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|
|  |                       |             | Self-labelling model | Behavioural experience method |
| <b>Einarsen &amp; Skogstad (1996)</b>  | 7,787                 | Norway      | 8.6%                 | -                             |
| <b>Privitera &amp; Campbell (2009)</b> | 103                   | Australia   | 31.1%                | 23.3%                         |
| <b>Vilas Boas (2005)</b>               | 984                   | Portugal    | -                    | 10,3%                         |
| <b>Eurofound (2016)</b>                | 1,037                 | Portugal    | 0.9%                 | -                             |
| <b>Eurofound (2016)</b>                | 43,850                | EU          | 5%                   | -                             |
| <b>Forssell (2016)</b>                 | 3,371                 | Sweden      | 3.5%                 | -                             |
| <b>Gardner et al. (2016)</b>           | 826                   | New Zealand | 18.5%                | 15%                           |
| <b>Coyne et al. (2017)</b>             | 120                   | UK          | -                    | 19.7%                         |

*Table 3 – Prevalence rates of workplace bullying*

Through *Table 3* it is possible to see that there is a wide variability in the prevalence rates of workplace bullying, both between countries and between the type of study conducted. It is found that using the behavioural experience method leads to a higher incidence rate than if only a self-labelling model is used. This discrepancy between the two methods can be justified by the fact that lay people understand bullying differently from the scientific knowledge of the construct, and thus may not fully understand the definitions presented (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018).

Despite the differences, the data seems to indicate that a significant percentage of people are victims of bullying at work, which if we consider the potentially devastating consequences that a single negative act can cause, reveals the seriousness of bullying in companies.

#### 2.1.6. Gender differences

Within the literature on workplace bullying, different findings have been noticed in terms of gender, and thus the results are often inconsistent and unclear. However, it is argued that bullying should be analysed with a gender sensitive perspective, rather than treating the problem as ‘gender-bling’ (Salin & Hoel, 2013). It has been shown that “*there are gender differences not only in reported prevalence rates and forms of bullying, but that gender also matters for the way targets and third parties make sense of and respond to bullying*” (Salin & Hoel, 2013, p. 235).

Today, there is already a lot of information about the bullying rates reported by men and women in many different countries. As for the prevalence of bullying, large-scale national studies covering various industries and sectors, for example in the UK (Hoel & Cooper, 2000), Belgium (Notelaers et al., 2011), Japan (Tsuno et al., 2015), and Norway (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Nielsen et al., 2009), have reported no or only non-significant gender differences in terms of bullying prevalence. Also in Portugal, Vilas Boas (2005, p. 881) has stated that *“although women tend to report being targets of more negative behaviours, there are no significant [gender] differences in bullying rates”*. By contrast, a representative sample from Ireland (O’Connell et al., 2007) reported higher rates for women. Similar results emerge from several studies conducted in particular occupational settings, with more women than men reporting being bullied, for example university employees (Björkqvist, Österman, & Lagerspetz, 1994), business professionals (Salin, 2001), fire service and teaching (Hoel & Cooper, 2000).

In the 6<sup>th</sup> EWCS, 5.4% of women and 4.4% of men reported being bullied. Women have experienced bullying behaviours more often than men in most EU countries. In Portugal, 1.0% of women and 0.8% of men reported being victims of bullying at work (Eurofound, 2016; Hoel & Vartia, 2018). A review of research on gender and workplace bullying noted that most of the studies pointed to women being the most victims. (Salin, 2018).

Salin (2003) states that women may be more prone to bullying when their profession or occupation has been traditionally male-dominated or when they work in organizations where male values prevail. *“The fact that more men than women occupy managerial and supervisory positions affects bullying behaviour in many ways”* (Salin & Hoel, 2013, p. 239). With this in mind and considering that bullying is more often a downward process than upward, it is not surprising that more men are reported as bullies (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Zapf et al., 2003). Females are frequently seen as less capable of retaliating, and less willing to retaliate than males (Gilbert et al., 2013). In addition, women tend to understand the negative experiences differently than men, feeling more vulnerable, to some extent due to gender stereotypes and expectations (Salin, 2003).

Based on the literature presented above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H<sub>1</sub>: Women are more likely to experience workplace bullying than men.

### 2.1.7. Age differences

Researchers have cited age as an important sociodemographic factor in the occurrence of bullying (Ariza-Montes et al., 2017). However, there is still no consensus in the literature about which age-groups are most affected by workplace bullying behaviours. Whereas some studies have failed to identify significant differences in bullying among different age groups (Quine, 2002), others suggest that young workers are more likely to experience

higher levels of workplace bullying than older employees (Rayner, 1997; Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Tsuno et al., 2015; Ariza-Montes et al., 2017).

According to Rayner (1997), victims of workplace bullying are generally under the age of 25. Cunniff and Mostert (2012) found that the 20–29 age group has an increased risk of experiencing workplace bullying. In Portugal, Vilas Boas (2005) confirmed that there are differences in the prevalence of bullying according to age. People aged between 25 and 35 appear to be particularly susceptible to bullying behaviours, with the opposite happening in those over the age of 46, also indicating a tendency for younger people to be more bullied than older people (Vilas Boas, 2005).

The exposure to bullying can be understood as a rite of passage or behaviours that young people are supposed to learn to deal with. For these reasons, some authors consider younger workers the most vulnerable age group (Østvik & Rudmin, 2001). Also, young workers usually feel less protected within organizations, hence easily becoming potential victims of abuse (Ariza-Montes et al., 2017). On the contrary, a few studies have noticed that older employees are more affected by bullying, suggesting that the risk of experiencing bullying increases with age because of the complexity of finding a similar job and because there is a lower tolerance for any hostile behaviours (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Vartia, 2003).

Based on the literature presented above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H<sub>2</sub>: Younger employees are more likely to experience workplace bullying than older employees.

#### 2.1.8. Academic qualifications differences

Research on the prevalence of bullying at work according to academic qualifications is still not very frequent (Vilas Boas, 2005) and the existing studies seem to reach different results on this issue. On the one hand, some authors say that the lower the skill level, the greater the chance of exposure to workplace bullying (Cunniff and Mostert, 2012). According to Niedhammer et al. (2007), employees with lower skills and unqualified workers reported more experiences of bullying. Similarly, Cunniff and Mostert (2012) have found that employees with lower academic qualifications reported higher levels of workplace bullying than do employees with higher academic qualifications.

In turn, Magerøy et al. (2009) found no significant differences in exposure to workplace bullying based on the educational level. Vilas Boas (2005), that developed her study in the Portuguese context, also found no significant relationship between academic qualifications and exposure to workplace bullying behaviours. However, a trend was noted for individuals with a lower level of education to reveal lower rates of bullying than those with higher education (Vilas Boas, 2005). Also, in the “Task Force on the Prevention of workplace

Bullying issues report” the risk of workplace bullying increased with academic qualifications (Dobbins, 2001). One possible reason is that “*people with higher qualifications may have higher levels of expectations regarding treatment in the workplace and/or be more sensitive to incidents that tend to undermine their dignity*” (Vilas Boas, 2005, p. 840).

Based on the literature presented above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H<sub>3</sub>: Employees with higher academic qualifications are more likely to experience workplace bullying.

## 2.2. Workplace Cyberbullying

### 2.2.1. Background and Conceptualization

The development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has been changing the patterns of social interaction, making communication increasingly digital (Jönsson, Muhonen, Forssell & Bäckström, 2017). Nowadays, the portable devices (e.g. laptops, smartphones, tablets) combined with the increasing access to Wi-Fi allows people to be connected anywhere, at any time (Jönsson et al., 2017). Even in the workplace, communication is progressively moving online, not only through emails and text messages, but also through social media, such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and digital communities (Kowalski, Toth & Morgan, 2018). If, on the one hand, the use of ICT has a positive impact on work, improving task performance; on the other, it can have negative effects on individuals, namely stress and anxiety (Karimikia, Singh & Joseph, 2020). The increasing use of digital media at work has fostered the growth of online bullying or cyberbullying, a recent phenomenon in the workplace (Kowalski, Toth & Morgan, 2018).

Cyberbullying has been mostly studied among children and adolescents, therefore studies among adults in their professional life are scarce (Privitera & Campbell, 2009; Kowalski, Toth & Morgan, 2018). Yet, there is evidence that online negative acts do not happen only in school environments, but also take place at work (Privitera & Campbell, 2009; Farley et al., 2015). Some authors state that cyberbullying experiences appear to be more common for adults than traditional bullying experiences (Kowalski, Toth & Morgan, 2018). In Portugal, the existing studies on cyberbullying focus on children and adolescents in school context, and on young people in university environments. The phenomenon appears to be unexplored among adults in working life. Hence, the importance of researching this subject in the Portuguese context. Furthermore, considering the current pandemic situation and the global adoption of remote working, cyberbullying may emerge as a negative result of the increasing use of technological means at work.

There is an ongoing debate as to what extent cyberbullying is the same or a different phenomenon from traditional bullying (Slonje & Smith, 2008). Some authors suggest that cyberbullying is an extension of traditional bullying, the main difference being the channel

used: digital devices (Olweus, 2013). Others argue that these are distinct phenomena, since the behaviours and the nature that characterize them are different (Runions, Shapka, Dooley & Modecki, 2013). Within the child/adolescent research context some cyberbullying definitions have been proposed such as *“an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself”* (Smith et al., 2008, p. 376).

While most cyberbullying behaviours in the school context (e.g. gossiping online or insulting someone via online messages) are suitable to the work context (Vranjes et al., 2017), there are many other cyberbullying acts at work (e.g., receiving unreasonable work demands by means of ICTs, been sent conflicting information, having ignored emails, phone calls or messages at work) (Farley et al., 2016). The different setting (work versus school) requests an accurate and comprehensive definition in the work context (Vranjes et al., 2017). Cyberbullying at work has been defined as *“all negative behaviour stemming from the work context and occurring through the use of ICTs, which is either (a) carried out repeatedly and over a period of time or (b) conducted at least once but forms an intrusion into someone’s private life, (potentially) exposing it to a wide online audience. This behaviour leaves the target feeling helpless and unable to defend”* (Vranjes et al., 2017, p.326).

In the literature, two other constructs arise to describe the negative acts carried through electronic devices: ‘cyber incivility’ and ‘cyber aggression’. The term ‘cyber incivility’ refers to *“rude/discourteous behaviours occurring through Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) such as e-mail or text messages”* (Giumetti et al., 2012, p. 148), which are low in intensity and often perceived as having an ambiguous intent to harm (Giumetti et al., 2012). The term ‘cyber aggression’ can be defined as *“intentional harm delivered by the use of electronic means to a person or a group of people irrespective of their age, who perceive(s) such acts as offensive, derogatory, harmful, or unwanted”* (Grigg, 2010, p. 152). As well as cyber incivility and cyber aggression, cyberbullying shares some of the definitional criteria of its offline equivalent, including repeatedly behaviours described as inappropriate, negative and hostile (D’Cruz & Noronha, 2013) and a power imbalance between perpetrator and victim (Privitera & Campbell, 2009).

### 2.2.2. Characteristics

Cyberbullying at work has been conceptualized simply as *bullying via technology* (Coyne et al., 2017). However, the research has noted that cyberbullying has some additional features that makes it unique from traditional bullying (Kowalski et al., 2014). Some authors argue that cyberbullying may indeed have more severe outcomes than its offline equivalent (Coyne et al., 2017) because it has certain characteristics (e.g. physical separation of perpetrator and target, perpetrator anonymity) that increase fear and uncertainty (Ford,

2013). The electronic environment in which cyberbullying occurs comprises other elements that need to be considered in order to fully understand this phenomenon (Vranjes et al., 2017).

First, the lack of non-verbal signals, such as facial expression or gestures, is one of the most important aspects in online communication (Vranjes et al., 2017). *“The communication via computers is less ‘rich’ as it does not allow for all contextual information to be transmitted in a similar way as in face-to-face interactions”* (Vranjes et al., 2017, p. 325). Therefore, bullies can be less aware of the effect of their behaviour on the victim and this might further strengthen cyberbullying (Dooley, Pyzalski, & Cross, 2009). Second, while in traditional bullying the identity of the perpetrator is known, online communication allows one to stay anonymous, which gives a feeling of power and disinhibition and reduces the personal responsibility for negative acts (Kowalski et al., 2014). The anonymity of the bullies restricts the target’s feeling of control over the situation, which makes cyberbullying exclusively harmful (Ford, 2013). Furthermore, since the bully is able to stay anonymous, there have to be some signs that the negative acts come from the workplace, for example, the context of the acts (e.g. work intranet) (Vranjes et al., 2017).

Another important aspect of cyberbullying is its intrusive nature. While the victims of traditional bullying can usually escape the hostile behaviours when they are outside the workplace, online communication allows the transgression of the professional/private life boundary (Vranjes et al., 2017). Cyberbullying can occur anywhere and anytime, during and after working hours (Jönsson et al., 2017). For this reason, it may be much harder for the victims to escape (Slonje & Smith, 2008). The pervasiveness and absence of boundaries, which trespass the personal life and make the victims feel persecuted, are recurring themes in individuals' experience of cyberbullying at work (D’Cruz & Noronha, 2013).

The imbalance of power between the target and the perpetrator is a defining characteristic of workplace bullying (Einarsen et al., 2011). However, some authors argue that ‘power’ may have another meaning in online context (Vranjes et al., 2017). It is often related to an inequality of technological skills or expertise, allowing individuals in lower working positions (with less power) to still be perpetrators of cyberbullying behaviours (Dooley, Pyzalski, & Cross, 2009). Both bullying and cyberbullying can be aimed directly (e.g., insults) and indirectly (e.g., gossiping) (Vranjes et al., 2017), but indirect cyberbullying behaviours can reach a much larger audience, since there are virtually no limits (Jönsson et al., 2017). The volume of message viewing, sharing, and forwarding by Internet users is out of control (Jönsson et al., 2017).

There are different opinions with respect to repetition of cyberbullying behaviours. Although repetition is an important characteristic of traditional bullying, it has been argued that a single negative cyber-act can be enough due to the reach the act may have (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008). According to Langos (2012) repetition must be

considered in the private context, when the hostile cyber-act is sent directly to the victim (e.g., text message, email), but it is not relevant in the public context, when the online communication is disseminated to individuals beyond the victim (e.g., social media, digital communities). Vranjes et al. (2017) argue that what differentiates the negative acts that require repetition from the ones that do not require is their nature. *“In order to meet the one-time requirement, the negative behaviour has to pose an intrusion into one’s private life (...) This invasion together with the constant threat of public exposure or its actualization makes this kind of acts especially distressing, even after a single occurrence”* (Vranjes et al., 2017, p. 326).

The negative behaviours associated with cyberbullying can be grouped in two main categories: ‘work-related cyberbullying’ (e.g., receive messages that have a disrespectful or aggressive tone, be unfairly blamed for work problems by means of ICTs, receive unreasonable work demands, be sent conflicting information, be bypassed in group communications that are relevant to the work role) and ‘person-related cyberbullying’ (e.g., experience unfair personal criticism, have negative rumours or gossip spread online, have personal information shared without permission, receive threatening messages, be the only person excluded from social communications between colleagues) (Farley et al., 2016).

### 2.2.3. Antecedents

As expected in a developing area of research, understanding about the antecedents of workplace cyberbullying is limited. Gardner et al. (2016) offer some initial results finding significant correlations between weak physical health, low organizational support, and poor organizational strategies when experiencing cyberbullying for the first time and again three months later. Aspects associated with job design and workforce, such as short staffing, time pressures, deadlines, and constraints on resources, were also noted as fostering cyberbullying behaviours (D’Souza et al., 2018).

Samsudin et al. (2020) identified organizational climate, working culture, leadership, support, and justice, as potential risk factors in workplace bullying. An organization that is extremely competitive, puts too much pressure, and provides inadequate support contributes to an increase in negative behaviours either face-to-face (traditional bullying) or online (cyberbullying) (Farley et al., 2016; Samsudin et al., 2020). Poor leadership is also noted as contributing to workplace cyberbullying due to lack of respect, lack of organizational support and recognition, and less effective organizational strategies (Giumetti et al., 2012; Kowalski et al., 2018). Additionally, weak management control and ineffective human resource policies boost the risks of negative behaviours since there is no strict policy to prevent cyberbullies from acting out (D’Souza et al., 2018).

The existing research already provides some antecedents of cyberbullying in the workplace. However, there are still few studies compared to traditional bullying. If we agree with the view that cyberbullying within work contexts is conceptually similar to bullying, then there is a set of possible antecedents (see *Table 1*) that could be considered within cyberbullying research, namely job autonomy.

#### 2.2.4. Consequences

Alongside traditional bullying research, evidence to date reveals that experiencing cyberbullying also has negative effects on individuals and organizations. It has generally been shown that cyberbullying acts negatively affect employees' health (Muhonen et al., 2017). Individual consequences include reduced physical and mental well-being, job dissatisfaction (Farley et al., 2015; Coyne et al., 2017; Park & Choi, 2019), increased perceived stress, and decreased performance (D'Cruz, 2016), anxiety, and intention to leave the organization (Baruch, 2005); frustration (Hong et al., 2014); stress and low optimism (Snyman & Loh, 2015). Some studies have shown correlations with negative emotion, mental strain, perceived injustice, and job dissatisfaction (Coyne et al., 2017). Gardner et al. (2016) found poor health was associated with cyberbullying three months later.

In terms of work-related consequences, victims of cyberbullying tend to develop negative mindsets and attitudes towards the organisation (Kowalski, Toth, & Morgan, 2018). They become less engaged, thereby leading to high turnover intention (Jönsson et al., 2017; Muhonen et al., 2017). Given that workplace cyberbullying creates an unfavourable atmosphere and toxic working relationships (Coyne et al., 2017), employees who are exposed to such behaviours are likely to feel less committed to the organisation (Lim & Teo, 2009; Muhonen et al., 2017).

Ford (2013) has investigated whether anonymity moderated the relationship between cyberbullying and fear of future negative acts and has concluded that greater perpetrator anonymity was related to higher levels of fear in the targets. Indeed, not knowing the identity of the bully intensifies target distress, leaving them confused about who or what has initiated those negative behaviours and indecisive about the way to deal with the situation (D'Cruz, 2016). Researchers have hypothesized that the unique characteristics of cyberbullying may result in more severe outcomes when compared to traditional bullying and provide data showing that the strength of relationship between cyberbullying experience, mental strain, and job dissatisfaction is stronger than for offline bullying (Coyne et al., 2017).

Due to the paucity of research on workplace cyberbullying, it is too early to say whether its impact is smaller or greater than traditional workplace bullying. Nevertheless,



“extrapolating from research on the consequences of traditional workplace bullying, it would be surprising if cyberbullying did not result in detrimental outcomes for the target” (Farley, Coyne, & D’Cruz, 2021, p. 23). Thus, cyberbullying at work can be expected to have similar consequences as workplace bullying (see *Table 2*). However, since cyberbullying is easier to do than bullying, due to its specific characteristics, cyberbullying rates are likely to be even higher.

### 2.2.5. Prevalence

In contrast to workplace bullying, there have been few studies with an explicit focus on cyberbullying at work, and even fewer have explored prevalence rates. The limited evidence to date for cyberbullying has shown prevalence rates of 10.7% in Australia (Privitera & Campbell, 2009), 33.8% in the USA (Minor, Smith, & Brashen, 2013), 2.8% in New Zealand (Gardner et al., 2016), 9.7% in Sweden (Forsell, 2016), and 13.6% in the UK (Coyne et al., 2017). A survey of 158 trainee doctors in the UK found that 46.2% of respondents had experienced at least one act of cyberbullying during six months in their training (Farley et al., 2015).

Several research papers that measured the prevalence of workplace cyberbullying also measured traditional bullying, which allows a comparison. *Table 4* shows the prevalence rates of workplace cyberbullying compared with traditional bullying, considering the measurement methods used in the studies.

| Study                                  | Number of respondents | Country     | Cyberbullying Measurement |                               | Traditional Bullying Measurement |                               |
|--|-----------------------|-------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
|  |                       |             | Self-labelling model      | Behavioural experience method | Self-labelling model             | Behavioural experience method |
| <b>Privitera &amp; Campbell (2009)</b> | 103                   | Australia   | -                         | 10.7%                         | 31.1%                            | 23.3%                         |
| <b>Forsell (2016)</b>                  | 3,371                 | Sweden      | 0.7%                      | 9.7%                          | 3.5%                             | -                             |
| <b>Gardner et al. (2016)</b>           | 826                   | New Zealand | -                         | 2.8%                          | 18.5%                            | 15%                           |
| <b>Coyne et al. (2017)</b>             | 120                   | UK          | -                         | 13.6%                         | -                                | 19.7%                         |

*Table 4 – Prevalence rates of workplace cyberbullying compared with traditional bullying*

Similar to traditional bullying, we can see that there is a wide variability in the prevalence rates of workplace cyberbullying, both between countries and between the type of study conducted.

Most studies that have measured traditional bullying along with cyberbullying found that the former was more prevalent, when directly comparing the measurement method. Forssell (2016) found that just 0.7% of respondents labelled themselves as cyberbullying victims, whereas 3.5% self-labelled as traditional bullying victims. A study comparing the prevalence of traditional bullying and cyberbullying among men showed that one out of three respondents was bullied face-to-face, while the similar figure for cyberbullying was one in ten. Besides, the victims of cyberbullying also suffered face-to-face bullying (Privitera & Campbell, 2009).

Due to the lack of longitudinal data, it is not possible to know for a fact whether cyberbullying is increasing within the work context. However, it is clear that the use of ICT in organizations is growing, changing social interaction patterns by making communication increasingly digital (Jönsson et al., 2017) and progressively moving work online (Kowalski, Toth, & Morgan, 2018). In addition, the COVID-19 disease has forced many companies to rethink the way they work and adopt safer work practices, namely remote working (Belzunegui-Eraso & Erro-Garcés, 2020). Although these data do not directly imply workplace cyberbullying is on the rise, they do suggest that more employees have access to ICTs than ever before.

#### 2.2.6. Gender differences

Studies have found that gender differences exist in traditional workplace bullying, suggesting that women are more likely to become victims of bullying behaviours than men (Salin & Hoel, 2013; Hoel & Vartia, 2018). Although less clear, we can say that cyberbullying, like traditional bullying, is also a gendered phenomenon. Some authors have revealed that women are slightly more likely to suffer workplace cyberbullying than men (Wang et al., 2019; Loh & Snyman, 2020). Øistad (2015) reported that female journalists aged 25-35 were twice more likely to become victims of cyberbullying than their male counterparts. Researchers state that men and women experience different types of online bullying. While men tend to experience more name-calling and teasing, women tend to experience hostile online sexual harassment and stalking (Duggan, 2017). Hence, *“cyberbullying may be a particularly prevalent, distressing and emotionally stressful experience for women”* (Loh & Snyman, 2020, p. 571).

On the contrary, a few studies have revealed that men are more often victims of cyberbullying behaviours. Gardner et al. (2016) noticed that although women experience more workplace bullying than men, they were not more likely to experience workplace cyberbullying. According to Forssell (2016), there are differences in gender and hierarchical status compared to traditional bullying. Forssell (2016) reveals that male workers and supervisors are more often targets of cyberbullying behaviours than females. These

differences suggest that electronic devices used in cyberbullying challenge the traditional power relations (Forssell, 2016).

The aforementioned studies were conducted in countries culturally very different from Portugal, namely New Zealand, Australia, Norway, and Sweden. In the case of New Zealand, two different studies reached different conclusions, with Wang et al. (2019) finding women to be more victims and Gardner et al. (2016) stating the opposite. Albeit the literature is still inconsistent, it is important to address this subject in a more gender-sensitive manner (Loh & Snyman, 2020; Coyne et al., 2017).

In general terms, power often appears to be biased towards men. Some studies show that gender inequality in organisations not only creates barriers to women's career advancement (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015), but also such advancement can be seen as challenging patriarchal power structures and therefore increase negative behaviours against women (Cortina et al., 2002). Due to the gender-related imbalance of power, and similar to what happens with face-to-face bullying, it is reasonable to believe that women are also more exposed to cyberbullying at work.

Based on the literature presented above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H<sub>4</sub>: Women are more likely to experience cyberbullying at work than men.

#### 2.2.7. Age differences

Cyberbullying is traditionally associated with children and adolescents, but more and more studies show that it is becoming a problem among adults, specifically in the workplace (Privitera & Campbell, 2009; Farley et al., 2015). Regarding the age differences of cyberbullying victims at work, the literature is still very scarce, but some authors indicate that they do exist. According to Wang et al. (2019), the prevalence of cyberbullying is lower as age is more advanced. In this study, the authors conclude that cyberbullying behaviours are more common among young adults (18-25 years old) and in the 30-40 age group, which can be justified by the fact that these individuals were born - or were very young - when technology became widely available, in the early 21st century. In turn, the prevalence of cyberbullying is lower in the 66-year-old age group (Wang et al., 2019).

The research on age differences in workplace cyberbullying is indeed almost non-existent, which increases the importance of conducting more studies examining this issue.

Based on the literature presented above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H<sub>5</sub>: Younger employees are more likely to experience cyberbullying at work than older employees.

### 2.2.8. Academic qualifications differences

There is a lack of scientific research on the differences in exposure to cyberbullying at work based on academic qualifications. Hence the importance of conducting studies in this area. As previously mentioned about workplace bullying, there are studies that suggest that the lower the workers' skill level the more likely they are to be victims of bullying at work (Cunniff & Mostert, 2012). However, there is also evidence that workplace bullying increases with academic qualifications (Dobbins, 2001; Vilas Boas, 2005).

Drawing on the existing literature on differences in exposure to workplace bullying based on academic qualifications, we can assume that cyberbullying follows the same patterns and also differs according to the educational level of employees. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H<sub>6</sub>: Employees with higher academic qualifications are more likely to experience cyberbullying at work.

### 2.3. Remote Working

In the last year, the crisis arising from the COVID-19 disease forced many companies to rethink their way of working and adopt safer working practices. In order to reduce the spread of the virus, ensure the safety of workers and continue economic activity, several companies have used remote working on a massive scale (Belzunegui-Eraso & Erro-Garcés, 2020). Remote working consists of the use of ICT (e.g., smartphones, laptops) to work away from the employer's premises (Eurofound & ILO, 2017). Regarding the advantages of remote working, employees report a reduction in commuting time, greater flexibility in organising working time, a better work-life balance, and increased productivity. On the other hand, frequently reported disadvantages are longer working hours, overlap between work and personal life, and work intensification (Eurofound & ILO, 2017).

Taking so many employees out of the workplace environment to work remotely from home has accelerated digital transformation. Some companies may have discovered a smarter way of working, while others, who are not culturally prepared to home working, may have become more susceptible of workplace cyberbullying (theHRD, 2020). Thus, if on the one hand, remote working can contribute to a decrease in traditional bullying behaviours, as there is a reduction in face-to-face work; on the other hand it can favour cyberbullying behaviours, since there is an increased use of digital tools.

Therefore, based on the literature presented above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H<sub>7</sub>: Employees in remote working are less likely to experience workplace bullying.

H<sub>8</sub>: Employees in remote working are more likely to experience cyberbullying at work.

## 2.4. Job Autonomy

As mentioned before, high workload associated with low autonomy has been pointed out as an antecedent of bullying at work (Baillien et al., 2011). Job autonomy can be defined as "*the worker's self-determination, discretion or freedom, inherent in the job, to determine several task elements*" (De Jonge, 1995, p.13), namely work scheduling, decision-making and working methods (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). The research on the relationship between job autonomy and bullying at work is still limited, but the existing literature seems to indicate that when employees perceive more autonomy in the execution of their work, their levels of stress and anxiety decrease and, consequently, the risk of exposure to workplace bullying is lower (Baillien et al., 2011).

Specifically in relation to remote working, according to Gajendran, Harrison and Delaney-Klinger (2014), the more time employees work remotely, the greater their perceived autonomy is. The flexibility associated with remote working can increase workers' perceptions that they make more independent decisions. Considering the existing literature on job autonomy and workplace bullying, we can assume that job autonomy also plays a relevant role on cyberbullying at work

Based on the literature presented above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H<sub>9</sub>: High job autonomy decreases workplace bullying.

H<sub>10</sub>: High job autonomy decreases cyberbullying at work.

## 2.5. The Role of Culture

The prevalence rates of workplace bullying are quite different between countries, which might be partly a result of cultural differences (Harvey et al., 2009). While reporting different findings on the prevalence of workplace bullying through extensive reviews, Samnani and Singh (2012) highlighted the relevance of Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1983). Culture is defined as the "*collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others*" (Hofstede, 2001, p. 9). Albeit Hofstede differentiated cultures based on six broad dimensions (power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long term orientation, and indulgence) (Hofstede Insights, 2021), studies on international differences in the prevalence of workplace bullying are traditionally based on only three dimensions: power distance, individualism-collectivism, and masculinity-femininity (Samnani & Singh, 2012).

*Power distance* refers to the degree to which people accept and expect unequal distribution of power within organizations (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede Insights, 2021). This dimension in particular provides an important perspective because imbalance of power is a defining feature of workplace bullying (Einarsen et al., 2011). In high power distance cultures, workplace bullying is seen as a top-down phenomenon perpetrated by those in

power, for example bullying of subordinates by their supervisors/managers (D’Cruz et al., 2016). In terms of organisational hierarchy, in high power distance countries, those with power advocate for the retention of power, which contributes to a greater power gap between superiors and subordinates (Vogel et al., 2015).

*Individualism* refers to a society in which people are expected to look after themselves and their immediate families, whereas in collectivist societies people belong to 'in groups' that protect them in exchange for loyalty (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede Insights, 2021). It has been stated that individualistic countries (e.g., USA, UK, Australia) have a higher incidence of workplace bullying because “*the individual takes a more idiosyncratic orientation to behaviour and is less likely to be protective of others in the group*” according to their values (Harvey, Treadway, & Heames, 2006, p. 195).

In turn, *masculinity* represents a society that is driven by competition, achievement, and success (dominant masculine values), while a feminine society is one that values quality of life, care, and interpersonal cooperation (dominant feminine values) (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede Insights, 2021). The feminine values in Scandinavian countries imply a greater emphasis on the quality of life and lesser aggressive behaviour, thus explaining a lower prevalence of workplace bullying in their culture (Einarsen, 2000). Thus, the prevalence of workplace bullying is likely to be higher in masculine, individualistic, and high power distance cultures.

When analysing the national scores (from 1 for the lowest to 100 for the highest) of the aforementioned Hofstede dimensions specifically in Portugal, we find that Portugal is considered to be in general terms a collectivist and feminine country with a relatively high power distance. With regard to the individualism-collectivism dimension, Portugal scores 27, which means there is a close commitment to the ‘group’, be that family, friends or extended relationships (Hofstede Insights, 2021). In the case of the masculinity-femininity dimension, Portugal scores 31, meaning it is a country where managers’ consensus prevails, excessive competitiveness is not appreciated, and people value quality in their working lives (Hofstede Insights, 2021). Concerning the power distance dimension, Portugal scores 63, which means that hierarchical distance is accepted. Usually, bosses demand information from their subordinates and subordinates in turn expect their boss to control them (Hofstede Insights, 2021).

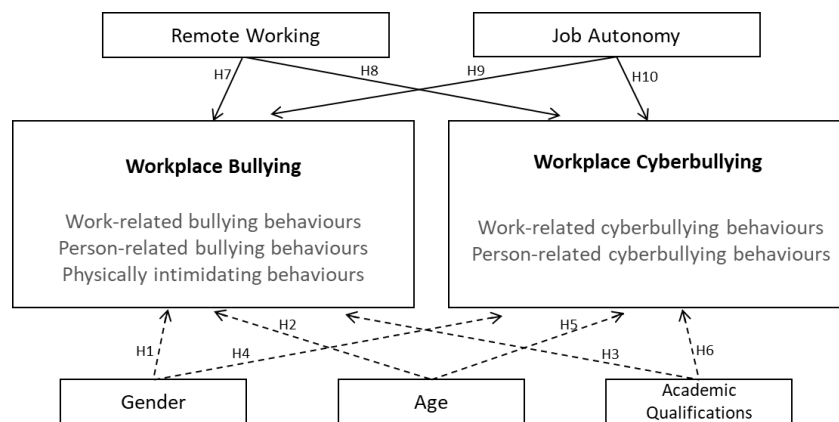
Considering the previous international research on cultural differences in the prevalence of workplace bullying and the description of the national Portuguese culture, it would appear that Portugal is not a country where bullying at work is very frequent. However, if we compare Portugal culturally with countries where the prevalence of bullying at work is lower, for example Sweden or Norway, we find some differences. In the case of the individualism-collectivism dimension, both Sweden and Norway are individualist societies (respectively with 71 and 69) (Hofstede Insights, 2021), therefore there is a need to address

the inconsistency in the literature. In relation to the masculinity-femininity dimension, both countries' scores are significantly lower than Portugal's (respectively 5 and 8) (Hofstede Insights, 2021). As for power distance, both countries present significantly lower scores (both 31), which means they are more egalitarian cultures, power is decentralised and superiors are more accessible (Hofstede Insights, 2021).

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Research Model and Hypotheses

The aim of this research, as stated above, is to understand the prevalence of workplace bullying and cyberbullying in Portugal, as well as the most frequently perpetrated negative behaviours, specifically in the last 12 months (peak of the COVID-19 pandemic). It is intended to analyse whether or not job autonomy decreases the exposure to bullying and cyberbullying at work, as well as the influence of remote working. It is also aimed to analyse the demographic variables 'age', 'gender' and 'academic qualifications'. Based on the literature presented above, the following research model was developed (see *Figure 1*).



*Figure 1 – Research Model*

Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1 (H<sub>1</sub>): Women are more likely to experience workplace bullying than men.

H<sub>2</sub>: Younger employees are more likely to experience workplace bullying than older employees.

H<sub>3</sub>: Employees with higher academic qualifications are more likely to experience workplace bullying.

H<sub>4</sub>: Women are more likely to experience cyberbullying at work than men.

H<sub>5</sub>: Younger employees are more likely to experience cyberbullying at work than older employees.

H<sub>6</sub>: Employees with higher academic qualifications are more likely to experience cyberbullying at work.

H<sub>7</sub>: Employees in remote working are less likely to experience workplace bullying.

H<sub>8</sub>: Employees in remote working are more likely to experience cyberbullying at work.

H<sub>9</sub>: High job autonomy decreases workplace bullying.

H<sub>10</sub>: High job autonomy decreases cyberbullying at work.



### 3.2. Research Design

According to Çaparlar & Dönmez (2016, p. 212), scientific research has “*the purpose of contributing towards science by systematic collection, interpretation and evaluation of data*”. We can say that it is an organized way of investigating a specific subject, seeking to find answers and/or solutions. The methodology is used to summarise the research techniques that were utilized. Thus, in this chapter, all phases of the research are explained, including the research design, data collection method, instruments used as well as data analysis methods.

The present research is both exploratory and conclusive. The exploratory research aims to understand and provide insights and information about a certain topic (Dudovskiy, 2021). In the exploratory phase, firstly, in-depth research was carried out in order to identify the main authors/researchers and the *status quo* of the area. Subsequently, secondary data were collected and analysed for the literature review. It was intended not only to acquire a more comprehensive knowledge about the theme, but also to obtain a well-founded theoretical basis to support the objectives and hypotheses formulated as well as future arguments.

The research was performed in the Scopus and Web of Science databases. Since, in scientific terms, the exposure to psychological aggression in the workplace has several designations, several keywords were used during the research. The keywords used to obtain data on workplace bullying were the following: (“bullying” OR “mobbing” OR “victimization” OR “victimisation” OR “psychological aggression” OR “psychological abuse” OR “psychological harassment” OR “emotional abuse” OR “incivility”) AND (“workplace” OR “at work”). In turn, the keywords used to obtain data on workplace cyberbullying were the following: (“cyberbullying” OR “cyber aggression” OR “cyber incivility”) AND (“workplace” OR “at work”).

After the literature review, quantitative research was carried out by means of an online survey (conclusive research through primary data collection). After validation, the survey was spread out through different online channels in order to reach the widest audience possible. According to Dudovskiy (2021), conclusive research aims to test specific hypotheses and examine relationships through quantitative data analysis. Hence, the main research paradigm followed by this study was positivism, often referred as the “scientific method” or “science research” (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006, p. 3). This paradigm aims to interpret reality objectively through a statistical analysis and then draw conclusions, preventing bias or misinterpretation by the researcher (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). Using statistics to analyse the collected data, it was possible to examine in a specific manner the prevalence of workplace bullying and cyberbullying in the Portuguese context, the most frequent negative behaviours, and the age and gender variables.

### 3.3. Data Collection Method

The survey was created using Google Forms, a tool that allows online data collection and automatically groups all the information into a database, which can later be downloaded for analysis. The questionnaire was created in Portuguese since the study is specifically conducted in Portugal. An online survey was the chosen method for this research as it allows to obtain a more heterogeneous sample, a faster and less expensive data collection, and also because it is the safest method in a pandemic context.

All scales were initially in English, which means that they had to be translated into Portuguese to be placed in the survey. The back-translation method was used, in which a bilingual speaker translates a questionnaire into the target language, and the second one translates it back. Then, the original and translated versions are compared and adjustments are made (Douglas & Craig, 2007). The scales were translated back and forth from English into Portuguese, by different individuals, until the result was the same, or had the same meaning.

Before spreading the survey, a pre-test with 8 respondents was conducted, both men and women, and of different ages, in order to identify potential mistakes and to make it as simple to understand as possible. A few changes and adjustments were made resulting in the final version. The survey was shared on social media and also sent to personal contacts. It was online for about six weeks (from 5 June 2021 to 16 July 2021) and a total of 403 valid responses were gathered.

The survey was divided into six parts. The first explaining the purpose of the research and asking for willingness and informed consent to participate in the study. The second part was about workplace bullying. An inventory of bullying behaviours was presented, as well as a definition of workplace bullying and the impact of these acts on respondents who considered themselves victims was asked. The third part dealt with cyberbullying in the workplace, presenting an inventory of cyberbullying behaviours, a definition of cyberbullying in the workplace, and also asking about the consequences for those who considered themselves as victims. The fourth part asked whether or not respondents had been working remotely during the last twelve months. Questions on autonomy at work were asked in the fifth part. Finally, the last part contained sociodemographic questions, such as age group, gender, district of residence and academic qualifications. The activity sector was also asked, as well as the size of the company and the respondents' hierarchical level within the organisation. The classification used for the activity sector was based on, and later adjusted from PORDATA & INE (2020). The complete questionnaire in Portuguese can be found in *Appendix 1*.

Participants in this study are fairly heterogeneous, working in different activity sectors, such as education, health, commerce, industry, among others. It is important to mention that this is a convenience sample and it is not representative.

### 3.4. Instruments

In order to assess workplace bullying, the Negative Acts Questionnaire Revised (NAQ-R) was used, an instrument designed to measure exposure to bullying behaviours at work (Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaers, 2009). The scale is composed of 22 items, divided into three dimensions: work-related bullying (7 items, e.g., "Being exposed to an unmanageable workload."), person-related bullying (12 items, e.g., "Being ignored or excluded"), and physically intimidating bullying (3 items, e.g., "Intimidating behaviours such as finger-pointing, invasion of personal space, shoving, blocking your way"). Respondents were asked how often over the last twelve months they had experienced each bullying item in their work context on a 5-point Likert scale. The response options were "never", "rarely", "sometimes", "often", and "very often". To ensure that respondents understood what workplace bullying is, a definition was added prior to the items. After completing the bullying items, respondents were presented with a definition of workplace bullying and were asked whether or not they have been bullied at work over the last twelve months. They were also asked whether or not they had ever experienced bullying at work other than in the last twelve months. A combination of behavioural items with a self-labelling definition question is recommended as this allows analysis of respondents who self-label as victims, as well as exposure to bullying behaviours (Nielsen, Matthiesen, & Einarsen, 2010).

In turn, workplace cyberbullying was assessed with the Workplace Cyberbullying Measure (WCM), which is an instrument designed to measure exposure to negative acts experienced through technology (Farley et al., 2016). The scale comprises 17 items, divided into two dimensions: work-related cyberbullying (10 items, e.g., "Been sent conflicting information") and person-related cyberbullying (7 items, e.g., "Received messages unfairly questioning your competence"). Respondents were asked how often over the last twelve months they had experienced each cyberbullying item on a 5-point Likert scale, whose options were "never", "rarely", "sometimes", "often", and "very often". Similar to traditional bullying, a definition was added before the items. After completing the behavioural items, respondents were given a definition of workplace cyberbullying and were asked whether or not they have been exposed to cyberbullying acts over the last twelve months. They were also asked whether or not they had ever experienced cyberbullying at work other than in the last twelve months. According to Farley et al. (2016, p. 311), *"it is important to include the self-labelling item when administering the WCM,*

*because it can capture the various ways that respondents may feel powerless compared with the perpetrator”.*

In addition, job autonomy was measured by the 9-item autonomy subscale of the Work Design Questionnaire (WDQ) that consists of the following dimensions: work scheduling autonomy (3 items, e.g., “The job allows me to plan how I do my work”), decision-making autonomy (3 items, e.g., “The job allows me to make a lot of decisions on my own”), and work methods autonomy (3 items, e.g., “The job allows me to make decisions about what methods I use to complete my work”) (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). Respondents were asked to indicate their autonomy degree on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “never” to “very often”.

### 3.5. Data Analysis Methods

In order to analyse the data, the software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27.0 was used.

First, a descriptive analysis was conducted to examine the sociodemographic characteristic of the respondents in this study. These characteristics included the variables of gender, age, district of residence, academic qualifications, sector of activity, company size, and hierarchical level. Furthermore, a reliability analysis was carried out in order to validate the scales used. The internal consistency was assessed through Cronbach’s alpha coefficient. According to Pestana and Gageiro (2014), the Cronbach Alpha is one of the most commonly used measure to analyse the internal consistency and reliability of a group of items. Thus, alpha values between 0.8 and 0.9 point to good scale consistency and values greater than 0.9 point to very good scale consistency (Pestana & Gageiro, 2014).

T-test and ANOVA (analysis of variance) were used to compare means between different groups. The t-test is a parametric test used to compare the means of two different groups for the same items. Its only limitation is that the sample must have a normal distribution (Kolmogorov-Smirnov test) if it has a dimension of 90 or under (Pestana & Gageiro, 2014). The independent t-test *“determines whether there is a statistically significant difference between the means in two unrelated (independent) groups”* (Mishra et al., 2019, p. 408). The t-test was used to compare means on the independent variables 'gender' and 'remote working'.

In turn, ANOVA is a parametric test used to compare the means between three or more groups. *“Its significant p value indicates that there is at least one pair in which the mean difference is statistically significant”* (Mishra et al., 2019, p. 409). One-way ANOVA, similarly to the independent t-test, compares means between independent groups (Mishra et al., 2019). For the ANOVA test to be applied, certain assumptions must be fulfilled, namely normality of the data (Kolmogorov-Smirnov test), homogeneity of variances (Levene’s

test), and independent and random sample (Larson, 2008). When the assumptions of equal variances and normality are not met, generally Welch's test is more recommended to compare group means (Delacre et al., 2019). ANOVA was used to compare means on the independent variables 'age' and 'academic qualifications'.

A correlation analysis was performed in order to analyse the relationship between workplace bullying, workplace cyberbullying and job autonomy. *"In statistical terms, correlation is a method of assessing a possible two-way linear association between two continuous variables"* (Mukaka, 2012, p. 69). The correlation coefficient can range from +1 to -1. A value of 0 suggests that there is no relationship between the two variables. A value greater than 0 indicates a positive correlation and a value below 0 indicates a negative correlation (Mukaka, 2012). According to Mukaka (2012, p. 71), *"when both variables are normally use Pearson's correlation coefficient, otherwise use Spearman's correlation coefficient"*. The correlation analysis is usually followed by regression analysis to identify the pattern of the existing relationship (Taylor, 1990). Regression analysis seeks to ascertain the causal effect of one variable on another (Sykes, 1993). However, it was not possible to perform the regression analysis in this study as the data distribution is not normal.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. Study Participants

A total of 403 individuals participated in this study. The sociodemographic characteristics of the participants are illustrated in *Table 5*. Starting by analysing the overall structure of the sample, 71.5% (N=288) of the respondents are female, 27.3% (N=110) are male, and 1.2% (N=5) prefer not to answer. As for age, 16.1% (N=65) of the respondents fall in the 18-30 age group, 13.4% (N=54) is in the 31-40 age group, 24.3% (N=98) of the respondents belong to the 40-50 age group, and 46.2% (N=186) of the sample is over 50 years old. Age follows a slightly skewed distribution, with the 41-50 and >50 age groups covering more than half of the sample.

|                                | Variables   | N   | %    |
|--------------------------------|---|-----|------|
| <b>Gender</b>                  | Feminine  | 288 | 71.5 |
|                                | Masculine   | 110 | 27.3 |
|                                | I prefer not to answer  | 5   | 1.2  |
| <b>Age</b>                     | 18 – 30   | 65  | 16.1 |
|                                | 31 – 40   | 54  | 13.4 |
|                                | 41 – 50   | 98  | 24.3 |
|                                | > 50  | 186 | 46.2 |
| <b>District of residence</b>   | Aveiro  | 73  | 18.1 |
|                                | Braga   | 86  | 21.3 |
|                                | Bragança  | 23  | 5.7  |
|                                | Castelo Branco  | 4   | 1.0  |
|                                | Coimbra   | 9   | 2.2  |
|                                | Évora   | 1   | .2   |
|                                | Faro  | 1   | .2   |
|                                | Funchal   | 1   | .2   |
|                                | Guarda  | 1   | .2   |
|                                | Leiria  | 4   | 1.0  |
|                                | Lisbon  | 29  | 7.2  |
|                                | Ponta Delgada   | 1   | .2   |
|                                | Portalegre  | 1   | .2   |
|                                | Porto   | 136 | 33.7 |
|                                | Santarém  | 2   | .5   |
|                                | Setúbal   | 7   | 1.7  |
|                                | Viana do Castelo  | 9   | 2.2  |
| Vila Real                      | 12  | 3.0 |      |
| Viseu                          | 3   | .7  |      |
| <b>Academic qualifications</b> | Basic Education (4 <sup>th</sup> , 6 <sup>th</sup> and 9 <sup>th</sup> grade) | 10  | 2.5  |
|                                | Secondary Education (12 <sup>th</sup> grade)                                  | 29  | 7.2  |
|                                | Bachelor's degree   | 203 | 50.4 |
|                                | Post-graduation   | 50  | 12.4 |
|                                | Master's degree   | 86  | 21.3 |

|                           |                                    |                       |      |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|------|
|                           | PhD                                | 22                    | 5.5  |
|                           | Post-doctoral                      | 3                     | .7   |
| <b>Sector of activity</b> | Agriculture                        | 1                     | .2   |
|                           | Accommodation and Catering         | 12                    | 3.0  |
|                           | Financial and Insurance            | 18                    | 4.5  |
|                           | Activities                         |                       |      |
|                           | Real Estate Activities             | 3                     | .7   |
|                           | Trade                              | 14                    | 3.5  |
|                           | Construction                       | 6                     | 1.5  |
|                           | Education                          | 281                   | 69.7 |
|                           | Industry                           | 24                    | 6.0  |
|                           | Health Care                        | 23                    | 5.7  |
|                           | Transportation                     | 3                     | .7   |
|                           | Not Specified                      | 18                    | 4.5  |
|                           | <b>Company Size</b>                | Micro (1-9 employees) | 39   |
| SMEs (10-249 employees)   |                                    | 209                   | 51.9 |
| Large (+250 employees)    |                                    | 155                   | 38.5 |
| <b>Hierarchical level</b> | Top management (strategic level)   | 12                    | 3.0  |
|                           | Middle management (tactical level) | 138                   | 34.2 |
|                           | Operational (operational level)    | 155                   | 38.5 |
|                           | I prefer not to answer             | 98                    | 24.3 |

*Table 5 – Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample*

Regarding the district of residence, the sample is quite diversified, including, to a greater or lesser extent, respondents from practically every district in Portugal and also from the islands of Madeira and the Azores. There is a higher number of respondents from Porto, Braga and Aveiro, respectively 33.7% (N=136), 21.3% (N=86) and 18.1% (N=73). Next come the respondents from the districts of Lisbon, Bragança and Vila Real, who represent respectively 7.2% (N=29), 5.7% (N=23) and 3.0% (N=12) of the sample. The districts of Coimbra and Viana do Castelo have both 9 respondents (2.2%), Setúbal has 7 respondents (1.7%), Castelo Branco and Leiria both have 4 respondents (1.0%), Viseu has 3 respondents (.7%), Santarém has 2 respondents (.5%) and, finally, Évora, Faro, Funchal, Guarda, Ponta Delgada and Portalegre all have 1 respondent (.2%).

In relation to academic qualifications, around 90% of the respondents have higher education degree, which means that the sample is mostly composed of highly qualified people. Thus, 50.4% (N=203), that is more than half of the sample, has a bachelor's degree, 21.3% (N=86) has a master's degree, 12.4% (N=50) has a post-graduation, 5.5% (N=22) has a PhD and 0.7% (N=3) has a post-doctoral. Additionally, 7.2% of the respondents (N=29) have secondary education (12<sup>th</sup> grade), and 2.5% have basic education, with 8 respondents having the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, 1 having the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, and 1 having the 4<sup>th</sup> grade.

Of the total respondents, 69.7% (N=281) belong to the education sector. The remaining respondents are employed in the following sectors: 6.0% (N=24) in industry; 5.7% (N=23) in health care; 4.5% (N=18) in financial and insurance activities; 3.5 (N=14) in trade; 3.0% (N=12) in accommodation and catering; 1.5% (N=6) in construction; 0.7% (N=3) in real estate activities; 0.7 (N=3) in transportation; 0.2% (N=1) in agriculture and 4.5% (N=18) did not specify their sector of activity. The respondents' jobs/positions are quite diverse due to the scope of the study. For instance, professors (N=190, 47.1%), interns (N=11, 2.7%), administrative assistants (N=8, 2.0%) stand out (see *Appendix 2*).

Regarding the company size, 51.9% of respondents (N=209) work in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), 38.5% (N=155) work in large companies and 9.7% (N=39) work in micro companies. As for the hierarchical level, 38.5% of respondents (N=155) are operational, 34.2% (N=138) have positions at a middle management level, 3.0% (N=12) belong to top management and 24.3% (N=98) prefer not to answer.

## 4.2. Reliability Analysis

*Table 6* presents the internal consistency of all scales used in this study through Cronbach's Alpha coefficients.

| Instruments         | N   | N of Items | Cronbach's alpha |
|---------------------|-----|------------|------------------|
| <b>NAQ-R</b>        | 403 | 22         | .970             |
| <b>WCM</b>          | 403 | 17         | .966             |
| <b>Job autonomy</b> | 403 | 9          | .969             |

*Table 6 – Cronbach's alpha coefficients*

As can be seen, the Cronbach Alpha reveals very high values for all scales (all greater than 0.9), which means the scales have a very good consistency, i.e., there is a high correlation between the items that make up the scales.

## 4.3. Workplace Bullying

### 4.3.1. Prevalence of WB based on exposure to bullying behaviours

In *Table 7* we can see the means and standard deviation for each negative behaviour measuring bullying at work in the last 12 months. The items with a relatively higher mean (all around 3, meaning a frequency of 'sometimes') are: "Being given tasks with unreasonable deadlines" (M=3.159; SD=1.336), "Being exposed to an unmanageable workload" (M=3.112; SD=1.384), "Having your opinions ignored" (M=3.102; SD=1.278), "Excessive monitoring of your work" (M=2.794; SD=1.418), "Someone withholding information which affects your performance" (M=2.712; SD=1.370), and "Being ordered to



do work below your level of competence” (M=2.620; SD=1.378). On the other hand, the negative acts with a lower mean are: “Threats of violence or physical abuse or actual abuse” (M=1.397; SD=.931) and “Intimidating behaviours such as finger-pointing, invasion of personal space, shoving, blocking your way” (M=1.603; SD=1.131).

| <b>Workplace Bullying Behaviours</b>    |  | <b>Mean</b> | <b>SD</b> |
|---|--|-------------|-----------|
| <b>Work-related bullying</b>            | Someone withholding information which affects your performance.  | 2.712       | 1.370     |
|   | Being ordered to do work below your level of competence.   | 2.620       | 1.378     |
|   | Having your opinions ignored.  | 3.102       | 1.278     |
|   | Being given tasks with unreasonable deadlines.   | 3.159       | 1.336     |
|   | Excessive monitoring of your work.   | 2.794       | 1.418     |
|   | Pressure not to claim something to which by right you are entitled (e.g., sick leave, holiday entitlement, travel expenses). | 2.419       | 1.490     |
|   | Being exposed to an unmanageable workload.   | 3.112       | 1.384     |
| <b>Person-related bullying</b>          | Being humiliated or ridiculed in connection with your work.  | 2.089       | 1.367     |
|   | Having key areas of responsibility removed or replaced with more trivial and unpleasant tasks.                               | 2.248       | 1.343     |
|   | Spreading of gossip and rumours about you.   | 2.412       | 1.408     |
|   | Being ignored or excluded.   | 2.412       | 1.382     |
|   | Having insulting or offensive remarks made about your person, attitudes, or your private life.                               | 2.020       | 1.366     |
|   | Hints or signals from others that you should quit your job.  | 1.888       | 1.333     |
|   | Repeated reminders of your errors or mistakes.   | 2.025       | 1.228     |
|   | Being ignored or facing a hostile reaction when you approach.  | 2.201       | 1.395     |
|   | Persistent criticism of your errors or mistakes.   | 2.087       | 1.274     |
|   | Practical jokes carried out by people you don't get along with.  | 1.973       | 1.245     |
| <b>Physically intimidating bullying</b> | Having allegations made against you.   | 2.099       | 1.335     |
|   | Being the subject of excessive teasing and sarcasm.  | 2.002       | 1.294     |
|   | Being shouted at or being the target of spontaneous anger.   | 1.888       | 1.207     |

|  |       |       |
|--|-------|-------|
| Intimidating behaviours such as finger-pointing, invasion of personal space, shoving, blocking your way. | 1.603 | 1.131 |
| Threats of violence or physical abuse or actual abuse.   | 1.397 | .931  |

*Table 7 – Workplace bullying behaviours: means and SD*

It can be seen, therefore, that the behaviours mentioned as occurring most frequently are related to the work itself and the behaviours that register a lower frequency are those related to physical intimidation.

|   | Mean  | SD    |
|---|-------|-------|
| <b>Workplace Bullying</b>               | 2.285 | 1.034 |
| <b>Work-related bullying</b>            | 2.845 | 1.108 |
| <b>Person-related bullying</b>          | 2.121 | 1.151 |
| <b>Physically intimidating bullying</b> | 1.629 | .967  |

*Table 8 – Workplace bullying: means and SD*

As shown in *Table 8*, work-related bullying behaviours have a mean of 2.845 (SD=1.108), person-related bullying behaviours show a mean of 2.121 (SD=.1.151) and physically intimidating bullying behaviours have a mean of 1.629 (SD=.967). Overall, the scale has a mean of 2.285 (SD=1.034), which shows that the frequency of bullying behaviours is relatively low.

#### 4.3.2. Prevalence of perceived workplace bullying

Of the 403 respondents who answered the question about whether they had felt victimized by workplace bullying during the last 12 months, based on the given definition, 249 (61.8%) stated that they had not been bullied, while 154 respondents (38.2%) reported being bullied during this period (see *Table 9*).

| Have you ever felt victim of bullying at work in the last 12 months? | N   | %    |
|--|-----|------|
| <b>Yes</b>   | 154 | 38.2 |
| <b>No</b>  | 249 | 61.8 |

*Table 9 – Perceived workplace bullying in the last 12 months*

Furthermore, 40.4% of the respondents (N=163) claimed to have been exposed to bullying at work on a previous occasion (see *Table 10*).

| <b>Have you ever felt bullied at work other than in the last 12 months?</b> | <b>N</b> | <b>%</b> |
|---|----------|----------|
| <b>Yes</b>  | 163      | 40.4     |
| <b>No</b>   | 240      | 59.6     |

*Table 10 – Perceived workplace bullying before the last 12 months*

In *Table 11* we can see the means and standard deviations (overall and by dimension) of workplace bullying specifically for the group of people who felt victimised by those negative acts in the last 12 months and for the group of people who felt victimised before the last 12 months.

If we consider only the database of people who felt victimised by bullying in the last 12 months (154 respondents), the overall mean is 3.205 (SD=.880), slightly higher when comparing with the global database. As can be seen, work-related bullying has a mean of 3.803 (SD=.786), indicating that these behaviours happen "often".

|   | <b>People<br/>victimised by<br/>WB in the<br/>last 12<br/>months</b> |           | <b>People<br/>victimised by<br/>WB before<br/>the last 12<br/>months</b> |           |
|---|--|-----------|--|-----------|
|   | <b>Mean</b>  | <b>SD</b> | <b>Mean</b>  | <b>SD</b> |
| <b>Workplace Bullying</b>               | 3.205  | .880      | 2.905  | 1.041     |
| <b>Work-related bullying</b>            | 3.803  | .786      | 3.417  | .996      |
| <b>Person-related bullying</b>          | 3.103  | 1.075     | 2.811  | 1.209     |
| <b>Physically intimidating bullying</b> | 2.221  | 1.154     | 2.092  | 1.127     |

*Table 11 – People victimised by workplace bullying in the last 12 months and people victimised before: means and SD*

If we analyse the database of people who felt victimized by bullying before the last 12 months (163 respondents), the overall mean is 2.905 (SD=1.041) and the work-related negative behaviours, similarly to people who felt victimized in the last 12 months, are also the most frequent (M=3.417; SD=.996) (see *Table 11*).

#### 4.3.3. Impact on people who have felt victimised

*Table 12* shows the psychological/ emotional, physical, social, and work-related impact that exposure to workplace bullying had on people who felt victimised in the last 12 months (154 respondents) and on people who felt victimised in a period before the last 12 months (163 respondents).

| Consequences  | People victimised by WB<br>in the last 12 months |       | People victimised by WB<br>before the last 12 months |       |
|---|--|-------|--|-------|
|   | Mean   | SD    | Mean   | SD    |
| Psychological and/or emotional<br>(e.g., depression, low self-<br>esteem, sleep disturbances)     | 4.046  | 1.134 | 3.988  | 1.083 |
| Physical (e.g., ill health, anxiety,<br>concentration disorders)                                  | 4.026  | 1.060 | 3.926  | 1.080 |
| Social (e.g., isolation)  | 3.429  | 1.303 | 3.423  | 1.319 |
| Work-related (e.g., wanting to<br>leave the company, missing work,<br>decreased work performance) | 4.136  | 1.155 | 4.092  | 1.093 |

*Table 12 – Impact of WB on people who have felt victimised in the last 12 months and before*

As can be seen, the response means are similar for both groups. Psychological and/or emotional problems, physical problems and work-related problems are the ones with the highest means (around 4), which indicates a strong impact on the respondents. In turn, social problems have slightly lower means (around 3), indicating some impact.

#### 4.3.4. Differences based on gender

The t-test allowed us to evaluate if there are differences in the means of workplace bullying between men and women. *Table 13* shows the values of Levene's test and t-test. Through Levene's test we can check the homogeneity of variances. As can be seen, the variances are equal for both groups (men and women), since the significance level is greater than .05 ( $p=.063$ ). Thus, the t-test values for assumed equal variances are analysed.

| Variable | N      | Mean | SD    | Levene's p | t    | df    | sig |      |
|----------|--------|------|-------|------------|------|-------|-----|------|
| Gender   | Male   | 110  | 2.291 | .983       | .063 | -.141 | 396 | .888 |
|          | Female | 288  | 2.275 | 1.054      |      |       |     |      |

*Table 13 – T-test results: differences in WB based on gender*

The results indicate that there are no significant differences in exposure to bullying at work between men and women ( $p=.888 > .05$ ), so we reject  $H_1$ .

#### 4.3.5. Differences based on age

The independent variable 'age' includes four groups, so the ANOVA test was used, since it allows the comparison of the means of three or more groups. For the ANOVA test to be applied, certain assumptions must be fulfilled, namely normality of the data and homogeneity of variances. Regarding the normality of the data, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was performed and indicates a significance lower than .05, which means that the data

distribution is not normal. However, ANOVA is a robust test for type I error when there are deviations from normality (Blanca et al., 2017).

Regarding the assumption of homogeneity of variances, the Levene's test presents a significance level of  $p < .001 < .05$ , so the variances are not homogeneous. According to Delacre et al. (2019), when the assumption of equal variances and normality are not met, generally the Welch test outperforms the classic ANOVA F-test. Thus, in this case, Welch's test is recommended to compare groups means.

|            | <b>Variable</b> | <b>N</b> | <b>Mean</b> | <b>Standard Error</b> | <b>F</b> | <b>Sig</b> |
|------------|-----------------|----------|-------------|-----------------------|----------|------------|
| <b>Age</b> | 18 – 30         | 65       | 2.077       | .866                  | 2.037    | .111       |
|            | 31 – 40         | 54       | 2.161       | .940                  |          |            |
|            | 41 – 50         | 98       | 2.401       | 1.016                 |          |            |
|            | > 50            | 186      | 2.332       | 1.113                 |          |            |

*Table 14 – ANOVA results: differences in WB based on age*

Through *Table 14*, we can see that the Welch's test significance  $p = .111 > .05$ , so there is no statistically significant difference regarding exposure to workplace bullying based on age groups. Thus,  $H_2$  is rejected.

#### 4.3.6. Differences based on academic qualifications

The independent variable 'academic qualifications' includes seven groups, so the ANOVA test was used. For the ANOVA test to be applied, the normality and homogeneity assumptions must be fulfilled. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was performed and indicates a significance lower than .05, which means that the data distribution is not normal. Yet, ANOVA is a robust test for type I error in the case of deviations from normality (Blanca et al., 2017). Regarding the homogeneity of variances, the Levene's test presents a significance  $p = .124 > .05$ , so the variances are homogeneous.

|                                | <b>Variable</b>     | <b>N</b> | <b>Mean</b> | <b>Standard Error</b> | <b>F</b> | <b>sig</b> |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|----------|-------------|-----------------------|----------|------------|
| <b>Academic Qualifications</b> | Basic Education     | 10       | 2.436       | .548                  | 2.884    | .009       |
|                                | Secondary Education | 29       | 2.425       | .851                  |          |            |
|                                | Bachelor's degree   | 203      | 2.205       | .0725                 |          |            |
|                                | Post-graduation     | 50       | 2.198       | 1.011                 |          |            |
|                                | Master's degree     | 86       | 2.235       | 1.041                 |          |            |
|                                | PhD                 | 22       | 2.992       | 1.196                 |          |            |
|                                | Post-doctoral       | 3        | 3.485       | .801                  |          |            |

*Table 15 – ANOVA results: differences in WB based on academic qualifications*

Through *Table 15*, we can see that there are statistically significant differences regarding exposure to workplace bullying based on academic qualifications ( $p=.009 < .05$ ). The means are higher for respondents with PhD and post-doctoral, respectively 2.992 and 3.485. If we consider only the database of people who have felt victimised by bullying in the last 12 months, respondents with PhD and post-doctoral degrees have means of 3,539 and 3,932 respectively, indicating that these behaviours happen "often". Based on these results,  $H_3$  is accepted.

#### 4.4. Workplace Cyberbullying

##### 4.4.1. Prevalence of WC based on exposure to cyberbullying behaviours

In *Table 16* we can see the mean and standard deviation for each negative behaviour of cyberbullying at work. Overall, it can be seen that the mean response for almost all items is around 2, indicating that these negative behaviours occur rarely.

The item with a slightly higher average response is: "Been sent conflicting information" ( $M=2.524$ ;  $SD=1.309$ ). In contrast, the items with a slightly lower mean are: "Received threatening messages" ( $M=1.422$ ;  $SD=.949$ ) and "Received messages that contain abusive language aimed at you" ( $M=1.491$ ;  $SD=1.025$ ).

| Workplace Cyberbullying Behaviours |  | Mean  | SD    |
|------------------------------------|--|-------|-------|
| <b>Work-related bullying</b>       | Received messages that have a disrespectful tone.  | 1.819 | 1.195 |
|                                    | Been unfairly blamed for work problems.  | 2.129 | 1.292 |
|                                    | Received aggressively worded messages (e.g., using all capital letters, bold font, or multiple exclamation marks). | 1.635 | 1.078 |
|                                    | Had another organizational member copy people into messages that reflect negatively on you.                        | 1.710 | 1.167 |
|                                    | Had your work unfairly criticised.   | 2.283 | 1.312 |
|                                    | Received rude demands from a colleague.  | 2.007 | 1.311 |
|                                    | Been sent conflicting information.   | 2.524 | 1.309 |
|                                    | Been bypassed in group communications that are relevant to your work role.   | 2.243 | 1.337 |
|                                    | Been the subject of communications that undermine you.   | 2.027 | 1.264 |
|                                    | Received unreasonable work demands.  | 2.131 | 1.310 |

|                                |  |       |       |
|--------------------------------|--|-------|-------|
| <b>Person-related bullying</b> | Experienced unfair personal criticism (e.g., on your character, appearance, opinions). | 1.975 | 1.269 |
|                                | Had negative rumours or gossip spread about you.                                       | 1.963 | 1.274 |
|                                | Had personal information shared without your permission.                               | 1.600 | 1.111 |
|                                | Received messages that contain abusive language aimed at you.                          | 1.491 | 1.025 |
|                                | Received threatening messages.   | 1.422 | .949  |
|                                | Received messages unfairly questioning your competence.                                | 1.797 | 1.196 |
|                                | Been the only person excluded from social communications between colleagues.           | 1.667 | 1.094 |

*Table 16 – Workplace cyberbullying behaviours: means and SD*

It can be seen, therefore, that negative work-related behaviours are slightly more frequent than those related to the person. However, the difference is not very high.

|                                     | <b>Mean</b> | <b>SD</b> |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|-----------|
| <b>Workplace Cyberbullying</b>      | 1.907       | .972      |
| <b>Work-related cyberbullying</b>   | 2.051       | 1.044     |
| <b>Person-related cyberbullying</b> | 1.702       | .947      |

*Table 17 – Workplace cyberbullying: means and SD*

As shown in *Table 17*, work-related cyberbullying behaviours have a mean of 2.051 (SD=1.044) and person-related cyberbullying behaviours have a mean of 1.702 (SD=.947). Overall, the scale has a mean of 1.907 (SD=.972), which shows that the frequency of cyberbullying behaviours in Portugal is relatively low.

#### 4.4.2. Prevalence of perceived workplace cyberbullying

Based on the given definition, of the 403 respondents who answered the question about whether they had felt victimized by workplace cyberbullying during the last 12 months, 311 (77.2%) reported that they had not been cyberbullied, while 92 respondents (22.8%) stated they have been victimized by such behaviours during this period (see *Table 18*).

| <b>Have you ever felt victim of cyberbullying at work in the last 12 months?</b> | <b>N</b> | <b>%</b> |
|--|----------|----------|
| <b>Yes</b>   | 92       | 22.8     |
| <b>No</b>  | 311      | 77.2     |

*Table 18 – Perceived workplace cyberbullying in the last 12 months*

Also, 22.3% of the respondents (N=90) claimed to have been exposed to cyberbullying at work on an earlier occasion than the last 12 months (see *Table 19*).

| <b>Have you ever felt cyberbullied at work other than in the last 12 months?</b> | <b>N</b> | <b>%</b> |
|--|----------|----------|
| <b>Yes</b>   | 90       | 22.3     |
| <b>No</b>  | 313      | 77.7     |

*Table 19 – Perceived workplace cyberbullying before the last 12 months*

In *Table 20* we can see the means and standard deviations (overall and by dimension) of workplace cyberbullying, in particular for the group of people who felt cyberbullied in the last 12 months and for the group of people who felt cyberbullied before the last 12 months.

If we consider only the database of people who have felt victimised by cyberbullying in the last 12 months (92 respondents), the overall mean is 2.974 (SD=1.005), relatively higher when comparing with the general database. As can be seen, work-related cyberbullying has a mean of 3.174 (SD=1.025) and person-related cyberbullying a mean of 2.689 (SD=1.110).

|                                     | <b>People victimised by WC in the last 12 months</b> |           | <b>People victimised by WC before the last 12 months</b> |           |
|-------------------------------------|--|-----------|--|-----------|
|                                     | <b>Mean</b>  | <b>SD</b> | <b>Mean</b>  | <b>SD</b> |
| <b>Workplace Cyberbullying</b>      | 2.974  | 1.005     | 2.929  | 1.053     |
| <b>Work-related cyberbullying</b>   | 3.174  | 1.025     | 3.103  | 1.062     |
| <b>Person-related cyberbullying</b> | 2.689  | 1.110     | 2.681  | 1.155     |

*Table 20 – People victimised by workplace cyberbullying in the last 12 months and people victimised before: means and SD*

If we look at the database of people who have felt victimized by cyberbullying before the last 12 months (90 respondents), the overall mean is 2.929 (SD=1.053), with the mean for work-related cyberbullying being 3.103 (SD=1.062) and the mean for person-related cyberbullying being 2.681 (SD=1.155). As can be seen, the means of workplace cyberbullying are very similar in the last 12 months and before.

#### 4.4.3. Impact on people who have felt victimised

Through *Table 21* it is possible to see the psychological/ emotional, physical, social, and work-related impact that exposure to workplace cyberbullying had on people who felt victimised in the last 12 months (92 respondents) and on people who felt victimised in a period before the last 12 months (90 respondents).



| Consequences  | People victimised by WC in the last 12 months |       | People victimised by WC before the last 12 months |       |
|---|---|-------|---|-------|
|   | Mean  | SD    | Mean  | SD    |
| Psychological and/or emotional (e.g., depression, low self-esteem, sleep disturbances)      | 3.967   | 1.185 | 3.935   | 1.212 |
| Physical (e.g., ill health, anxiety, concentration disorders)                               | 4.000   | 1.190 | 3.935   | 1.221 |
| Social (e.g., isolation)  | 3.578   | 1.357 | 3.457   | 1.417 |
| Work-related (e.g., wanting to leave the company, missing work, decreased work performance) | 4.144   | 1.127 | 4.130   | 1.206 |

Table 21 – Impact of WC on people who have felt victimised in the last 12 months and before

As with workplace bullying, the response means are also similar for both, people who felt cyberbullied in the last 12 months and people who felt cyberbullied before. Psychological and/or emotional problems, physical problems and work-related problems are also the ones with the highest means (around 4), indicating a strong impact on individuals. Social problems show slightly lower means (around 3), although in the group of people cyberbullied in the last 12 months, the mean is also close to 4 (M=3.578).

#### 4.4.4. Differences based on gender

The t-test was used to evaluate if there were differences in the means of the workplace cyberbullying between men and women. Table 22 shows the values of Levene's test, which allows us to check the homogeneity of variances. As can be seen,  $p=.088 > .05$  meaning that the variances are equal in both groups (men and women). Thus, the t-test values for assumed equal variances are analysed.

| Variable | N      | Mean | SD    | Levene's p | t    | df     | Sig |
|----------|--------|------|-------|------------|------|--------|-----|
| Gender   | Male   | 110  | 1.976 | .902       | .088 | -0.952 | 396 |
|          | Female | 288  | 1.872 | .996       |      |        |     |

Table 22 – T-test results: differences in WC based on gender

The results indicate that there are no differences in exposure to cyberbullying at work between men and women. The test showed no statistically significant differences for a 95% confidence interval. The significance associated with the t-test is greater than .05 ( $p=.342$ ), which leads to the rejection of  $H_4$ .

#### 4.4.5. Differences based on age

The independent variable 'age' includes four groups, so the ANOVA test was used. The normality and homogeneity assumptions must be fulfilled. Concerning the normality of the data, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicates a significance lower than .05, so the data distribution is not normal. Yet, ANOVA is a robust test for type I error when there are deviations from normality (Blanca et al., 2017).

Regarding the homogeneity of variances, the Levene's test presents a significance  $p < .001 < .05$ , so the variances are not homogeneous. Delacre et al. (2019) state that when the assumption of equal variances and normality are not met, generally the Welch test outperforms the classic ANOVA F-test. Hence, Welch's test is recommended to compare groups means.

| Variable |         | N   | Mean  | Standard Error | F     | Sig  |
|----------|---------|-----|-------|----------------|-------|------|
| Age      | 18 – 30 | 65  | 1.703 | .705           | 2.218 | .088 |
|          | 31 – 40 | 54  | 1.885 | .902           |       |      |
|          | 41 – 50 | 98  | 2.040 | 1.021          |       |      |
|          | > 50    | 186 | 1.915 | 1.039          |       |      |

Table 23 – ANOVA results: differences in WC based on age

In Table 23, we can see that the Welch's test significance  $p = .088 > .05$ , so there is no statistically significant difference regarding exposure to cyberbullying at work based on age groups. Hence,  $H_5$  is rejected.

#### 4.4.6. Differences based on academic qualifications

The independent variable 'academic qualifications' includes seven groups, so the ANOVA test was used. For the ANOVA test to be applied, the normality and homogeneity assumptions must be fulfilled. Regarding the normality of the data, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test shows a significance lower than .05, which means the data distribution is not normal. However, ANOVA is a robust test for type I error in the case of deviations from normality (Blanca et al., 2017).

Considering the homogeneity of variances, the Levene's test presents a significance  $p = .031 < .05$ , so the variances are not homogeneous. Since the assumptions of equal variances and normality are violated, Welch's test is more recommended to compare the means of the groups (Delacre et al., 2019).

| Variable                       |                     | N   | Mean  | Standard Error | F     | Sig  |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|-----|-------|----------------|-------|------|
| <b>Academic Qualifications</b> | Basic Education     | 10  | 2.288 | .745           | 3.042 | .024 |
|                                | Secondary Education | 29  | 2.205 | .902           |       |      |
|                                | Bachelor's degree   | 203 | 1.790 | .898           |       |      |
|                                | Post-graduation     | 50  | 1.878 | .976           |       |      |
|                                | Master's degree     | 86  | 1.806 | .953           |       |      |
|                                | PhD                 | 22  | 2.773 | 1.318          |       |      |
|                                | Post-doctoral       | 3   | 2.726 | 1.192          |       |      |

Table 24 – ANOVA results: differences in WC based on academic qualifications

In Table 24 it is possible to see that there are statistically significant differences regarding exposure to cyberbullying at work based on academic qualifications ( $p=.024 < .05$ ). Like workplace bullying, the means are higher for respondents with PhD and post-doctoral, respectively 2.773 and 2.726. If we consider only the database of people who have felt victimised by cyberbullying in the last 12 months, respondents with higher academic qualifications have also higher means (around 3). Based on these results,  $H_6$  is accepted.

#### 4.5. Remote Working

Using the t-test, we assessed whether there are differences in the means of workplace bullying and cyberbullying between people who, in the last 12 months, have worked remotely for a given period of time (answered 'yes') and people who have always worked face-to-face (answered 'no').

In Table 25 we can see the values of Levene's test and t-test concerning workplace bullying. The Levene's p-value is lower than .05 ( $p=.005$ ), which means that the variances are not equal for both groups (people who worked remotely and those who don't). Thus, the t-test values for equal variances not assumed are analysed.

|                       |     | Workplace Bullying |       |       |            |       |         |      |
|-----------------------|-----|--------------------|-------|-------|------------|-------|---------|------|
| Variable              |     | N                  | Mean  | SD    | Levene's p | t     | df      | Sig  |
| <b>Remote working</b> | Yes | 294                | 2.277 | 1.077 | .005       | -.251 | 225.894 | .802 |
|                       | No  | 109                | 2.304 | .913  |            |       |         |      |

Table 25 – T-test results: differences in WB based on remote working

The results suggest that there are no significant differences in exposure to workplace bullying between people who worked remotely for a given period and people who did not ( $p=.802 > .05$ ). Thus,  $H_7$  is rejected.

Table 26 shows the values of Levene’s test and t-test in relation to workplace cyberbullying. As can be seen, the Levene's p-value is higher than .05 ( $p=.407$ ), meaning that the variances are homogeneous. Thus, the t-test values for assumed equal variances are analysed.

|                |     | Workplace Cyberbullying |       |       |            |       |     |      |
|----------------|-----|-------------------------|-------|-------|------------|-------|-----|------|
| Variable       |     | N                       | Mean  | SD    | Levene’s p | t     | df  | Sig  |
| Remote working | Yes | 294                     | 1.882 | 1.005 | .407       | -.859 | 401 | .391 |
|                | No  | 109                     | 1.976 | .878  |            |       |     |      |

Table 26 – T-test results: differences in WC based on remote working

There are no significant differences in exposure to cyberbullying at work between people who worked remotely and people who did not ( $p=.391 > .05$ ), leading to the rejection of  $H_8$ .

#### 4.6. Job Autonomy

In order to analyse the relationship between workplace bullying, workplace cyberbullying and job autonomy, a correlation analysis was carried out using Spearman's coefficient (a non-parametric correlation) since the data distribution is not normal. “Correlation coefficients are used to assess the strength and direction of the relationships between pairs of variables” (Mukaka, 2012, p. 71).

As can be seen in Table 27, the Spearman's coefficient suggests that there is a significant negative correlation between job autonomy and workplace bullying ( $r_s = -.429$ ;  $p = <.001$ ), as well as between job autonomy and workplace cyberbullying ( $r_s = -.328$ ;  $p = <.001$ ). These results indicate that when one variable increases, the other one decreases. Thus, there is a relationship between job autonomy and bullying/cyberbullying.

|              |                      | Workplace Bullying | Workplace Cyberbullying |
|--------------|----------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|
| Job Autonomy | Spearman Correlation | -.429              | -.328                   |
|              | Sig.                 | <.001              | <.001                   |
|              | N                    | 403                | 403                     |

Table 27 – Spearman correlation results: relationship between WB, WC, and job autonomy

To identify the cause-effect relationship between the variables (causality), usually a regression analysis is carried out (Taylor, 1990). However, as the data distribution is not normal, it is not possible to perform regression analysis in this study. Thus, we cannot accept  $H_9$  and  $H_{10}$ .

## 5. DISCUSSION

In this section, a critical and interpretative analysis of the results is made. It is important to mention that the sample of this study is not representative, so the comparisons with other studies will only be tendential. However, based on this assumption, we intend to enrich the discussion of the results by comparing them with existing literature and previous research conducted in the same context.

Starting with the prevalence of workplace bullying in Portugal, the results indicate that 38.2% of the respondents felt victimized by workplace bullying during the last 12 months and 40.4% claimed to have been exposed to bullying at work on a previous occasion. These values are much higher than the results of other studies carried out in Portugal, namely Vilas Boas (2005) who found a prevalence rate of 10.3% or the 6<sup>th</sup> EWCS, where Portugal has one of the lowest prevalence rates in the European Union with only 0.9% reported being victims of workplace bullying (Eurofound, 2016). Regarding the 6<sup>th</sup> EWCS, the low value found in Portugal may be related to the way in which exposure to bullying was questioned (a single question with no definition) and also to the fact that the survey does not focus on workplace bullying, but rather studies working conditions in general. The findings of the present research are close to the study of Privitera & Campbell (2009). A possible reason for the result obtained may be due to the type of sample used (convenience sample) and the fact that victims of bullying were more willing to answer the questionnaire.

Although the percentage of people who perceived themselves as victims of workplace bullying is high, the frequency of bullying behaviours is relatively low ( $M=2.285$ ). Work-related behaviours are more frequent (e.g., “Being given tasks with unreasonable deadlines” and “Being exposed to an unmanageable workload”), while physical intimidating behaviours register a lower frequency. Considering only the people who felt victimised by bullying in the last 12 months, the mean is 3.205, indicating that these behaviours happen ‘sometimes’. Some possible explanations why people consider themselves to be bullied even though the frequency of bullying behaviours is low may perhaps be people's lower tolerance of negative behaviours in the workplace, i.e., even if the person is exposed to certain behaviours 'rarely' or 'sometimes', this frequency is enough for them to feel victim of bullying because of the negative impact it has. Also, it can be that there are bullying behaviours that are not well represented in the scale used.

The results of the present study indicate that workplace bullying had a strong impact in psychological and/or emotional, physical, and work-related terms, and some impact in social terms in those who felt victimized. These results are in line with previous studies on the consequences of workplace bullying (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018; Gupta, Gupta, & Wadhwa, 2020). In fact, workplace bullying can cause victims to suffer deeply, damaging their professional lives and exhausting them emotionally (Ahmad & Sheehan, 2017).

Behaviours such as lack of commitment, job frustration, absenteeism and intention to leave the organization are quite frequent (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). The negative impact of exposure to bullying behaviours seems to reinforce the need to adjust the definition of bullying in terms of frequency and duration.

A widely accepted definition of workplace bullying and the one used in this study is the following: *“harassing, offending, or socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone’s work. In order for the label ‘bullying’ to be applied to a particular activity, interaction, or process, the bullying behaviour has to occur repeatedly and regularly (e.g., weekly) and over a period of time (e.g., about six months)”* (Einarsen et al., 2011, p. 22). In general terms, there is consensus in the literature that to be considered workplace bullying, the negative acts must happen repeatedly and regularly and for a period of 6 months (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018; Leymann, 1990). However, as the results of the present study show, for victims of negative behaviour to feel bullied, such a high frequency or extended period of time is not necessary. This suggests that there is a need to re-evaluate and possibly adjust the definition of workplace bullying.

Concerning the prevalence of cyberbullying at work, the results indicate that 22.8% of the total respondents felt cyberbullied at work during the last 12 months and 22.3% claimed to have been exposed to cyberbullying at work on a previous occasion. If we compare with research conducted in other countries, these values are higher. For example, Privitera & Campbell (2009) found a prevalence rate of 10.7% and Coyne et al. (2017) a prevalence of 13.6%. In Portugal, no previous studies were found on the subject of cyberbullying at work, so it is not possible to establish a comparison. However, the results obtained allow us to conclude that cyberbullying does in fact occur among adults and in the workplace.

Although the percentage of people who perceived themselves as cyberbullied at work is relatively high, the frequency of cyberbullying behaviours is low ( $M=1.907$ ). Considering only the people who felt victimised by cyberbullying in the last 12 months, the mean is 2.974, indicating that these behaviours happen ‘sometimes’. The negative work-related behaviours (e.g., “Been sent conflicting information” and “Had your work unfairly criticised”) are slightly more frequent than those related to the person. Similar to bullying, some possible justifications for these results may perhaps be people’s lower tolerance of negative acts at work. In other words, even if the frequency of cyberbullying behaviours is not regular, the consequences and impact on victims can be quickly felt. In addition, there may be other cyberbullying behaviours that are not well represented in the scale used.

The results indicate that cyberbullying at work also had a strong impact in psychological and/or emotional, physical, and work-related terms, and some impact in social terms in those who felt victimized. These results are in line with previous studies on the consequences of cyberbullying at work (Farley et al., 2015; Coyne et al., 2017; Park & Choi,

2019). Besides affecting physical and mental well-being and increasing victims' stress and anxiety, victims tend to develop negative mindsets and attitudes towards the organisation, decrease their performance, and intend to leave the organization (D'Cruz, 2016; Kowalski, Toth, & Morgan, 2018). Moreover, cyberbullying can occur anywhere and anytime, during and after working hours (Jönsson et al., 2017), so it is more difficult for victims to escape (Slonje & Smith, 2008).

Cyberbullying at work is often defined as “*all negative behaviour stemming from the work context and occurring through the use of ICTs, which is either (a) carried out repeatedly and over a period of time or (b) conducted at least once but forms an intrusion into someone's private life, (potentially) exposing it to a wide online audience. This behaviour leaves the target feeling helpless and unable to defend*” (Vranjes et al., 2017, p.326). From this definition it can be seen that, while repetition and regularity are important characteristics of traditional bullying, when it comes to cyberbullying a single negative act can be destructive enough due to the reach the act may have (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008). Albeit the results of this study show that the prevalence of cyberbullying at work in Portugal is low, it should be noted that this phenomenon exists and that it may increase as work becomes increasingly digital and ICT-dependent (Jönsson et al., 2017; Kowalski, Toth & Morgan, 2018).

The results of the present research indicate that there are no significant differences in exposure to workplace bullying between men and women neither in exposure to cyberbullying. Hence, H<sub>1</sub> (*women are more likely to experience workplace bullying than men*) and H<sub>4</sub> (*women are more likely to experience cyberbullying at work than men*) are rejected. Even though the majority of studies tend to point to women as being more bullied and cyberbullied than men (Salin, 2018; Wang et al., 2019; Loh & Snyman, 2020), previous studies have also reported non-significant gender differences in terms of bullying prevalence (Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Nielsen et al., 2009; Belgium Notelaers et al., 2011; Tsuno et al., 2015). In Portugal, Vilas Boas (2005) also found no significant gender differences in bullying rates. These findings are quite positive and may perhaps mean that society, organizations, and culture in general are evolving and that women, even if slowly, are breaking the stereotypes that they are the most fragile and sensitive gender and therefore more vulnerable to this type of negative behaviours.

With regard to age, the results show that there are no significant differences in exposure to workplace bullying neither to cyberbullying based on age groups. Thus, H<sub>2</sub> (*younger employees are more likely to experience workplace bullying than older employees*) and H<sub>5</sub> (*younger employees are more likely to experience cyberbullying at work than older employees*) are rejected. These results diverge from previous studies that point to young people as having an increased risk of experiencing workplace bullying (Vilas Boas, 2005;

Cunniff & Mostert, 2012) and cyberbullying (Wang et al., 2019). Younger workers are considered the most vulnerable age group, as exposure to bullying can be understood as a rite of passage that young people are supposed to learn to deal with (Østvik & Rudmin, 2001). Also, young workers usually feel less protected within organizations (Ariza-Montes et al., 2017). The fact that age follows a slightly skewed distribution, with the 41-50 and >50 age groups covering more than half of the sample, may perhaps have some influence on these results, as young people are not well represented.

According to the results of this study, there are significant differences in exposure to workplace bullying and cyberbullying based on academic qualifications. It was found that respondents with higher qualifications, namely PhD and post-doctoral, are more often victims of negative acts at work. Hence, H<sub>3</sub> (*employees with higher academic qualifications are more likely to experience workplace bullying*) and H<sub>6</sub> (*employees with higher academic qualifications are more likely to experience cyberbullying at work*) are accepted. These findings are in accordance with previous research suggesting that the risk of workplace bullying increases with academic qualifications (Dobbins, 2001; Vilas Boas, 2005). One possible justification could be that “*people with higher qualifications may have higher levels of expectations regarding treatment in the workplace and/or be more sensitive to incidents that tend to undermine their dignity*” (Vilas Boas, 2005, p. 840). Also, they may perhaps be seen as more capable and therefore “*targets to take down*”. Being more literate, they may have a better understanding of what bullying and cyberbullying at work is and thus better identify these negative behaviours. Despite the results obtained, it is important to mention that the sample is mostly composed of people with higher education, which means that people with fewer qualifications are not well represented.

The pandemic caused by the COVID-19 disease has forced many companies to adopt remote working on a massive scale (Belzunegui-Eraso & Erro-Garcés, 2020). Given this situation, another aim of this research was to analyse the incidence of workplace bullying and cyberbullying in those who, over a period of time, have worked remotely in the last 12 months. The results suggest that there are no significant differences in exposure to workplace bullying and cyberbullying between people who worked remotely and people who did not. Hence, H<sub>7</sub> (*employees in remote working are less likely to experience workplace bullying*) and H<sub>8</sub> (*employees in remote working are more likely to experience cyberbullying at work*) are rejected. However, we assume these results to be quite limited. Firstly, people's remote working duration has not been considered in this analysis. Moreover, individuals react differently to remote working, there are those who love it and those who hate it. In this sense, if for some people working remotely for 12 months can be wonderful (more flexibility, better work-life balance, increased productivity); for others 1 month working from home can be a total hell (overlap between work and personal life, longer working hours, more stress) (Eurofound & ILO, 2017). Thus, we suggest that exposure to bullying



and cyberbullying in the context of remote working should be further investigated in the future.

Studies have found that low autonomy is associated with higher levels of bullying at work (Baillien et al., 2011). The results of the present study show that a significant negative correlation exists between job autonomy and workplace bullying, as well as between job autonomy and cyberbullying at work, meaning that when one variable increases, the other decreases. We can conclude that there is indeed a relationship between job autonomy and bullying/cyberbullying. However, we were not able to examine the causal relationship between the variables. Hence, H<sub>9</sub> (*high job autonomy decreases workplace bullying*) and H<sub>10</sub> (*high job autonomy decreases cyberbullying at work*) cannot be accepted. Since our results are not conclusive, we suggest that this issue be investigated further in the future. The existing literature seems to indicate that when employees perceive more autonomy in their work, their levels of stress and anxiety decrease and, consequently, the risk of exposure to negative behaviours is lower (Baillien et al., 2011). With this in mind, future research should consider studying the cause-effect relationship between the variables.

The incidence of workplace bullying is quite different between countries, which might be partly a result of cultural differences (Harvey et al., 2009). Previous literature states that the prevalence of workplace bullying is likely to be higher in masculine, individualistic, and high power distance cultures (Einarsen, 2000; Harvey, Treadway, & Heames, 2006). According to Hofstede's dimensions, Portugal is a collectivist and feminine country with a relatively high power distance (Hofstede Insights, 2021). In high power distance cultures, workplace bullying is seen as a top-down phenomenon perpetrated by those in power (D'Cruz et al., 2016). This is in line with the study of Vilas Boas (2005, p. 881), conducted in Portugal, which found that "*among the perpetrators [of workplace bullying] the managers stand out clearly (56.8%)*".

Bullying and cyberbullying may indeed vary between countries, as what is perceived as negative acts in one culture may not be in another. Tolerance for undesirable behaviours may differ, as may the problem of not reporting (Eurofound, 2016). Victims may feel ashamed to report such situations, especially if public awareness is low or non-existent (Eurofound, 2016). Therefore, it is important that studies like this one are carried out so that these issues are talked about and investigated, thus contributing to people's growing awareness.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study was carried out with the purpose of deepening the knowledge about workplace bullying and cyberbullying in the Portuguese context, by analysing the respective prevalence rates, the negative behaviours most frequently committed and the impact on the victims. It was intended to examine whether or not workplace bullying and cyberbullying vary by gender, age groups and academic qualifications.

The research was conducted over the last 12 months (from June 2020 to June 2021), that is, in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, including the massive adoption of remote working. Thus, another objective was to analyse the incidence of workplace bullying and cyberbullying in those who, during the last 12 months, have worked remotely for a given period of time. Moreover, we aimed to understand whether job autonomy decreases the exposure to bullying and cyberbullying behaviours at work. In order to achieve the established objectives, a questionnaire was applied, and 403 valid responses were collected.

It was found that 38.2% of the respondents felt victimized by workplace bullying during the last 12 months and 40.4% on a previous occasion. However, the incidence of bullying behaviours is relatively low. The work-related behaviours are more frequent, while physical intimidating behaviours register a lower frequency. It was shown that workplace bullying has a strong impact in psychological and/or emotional, physical, and work-related terms in those who felt victimized.

Regarding cyberbullying at work, it was found that 22.8% of the respondents felt cyberbullied during the last 12 months and 22.3% on a previous occasion. Yet, the regularity of cyberbullying behaviours is low. The negative work-related behaviours are slightly more frequent than those related to the person. Cyberbullying at work also has a strong impact in psychological and/or emotional, physical, and work-related terms in those who felt victimized. Similar to previous studies that have measured traditional bullying along with cyberbullying (Privitera & Campbell, 2009; Coyne et al., 2017), in this study the former was more prevalent.

It was found that there are no differences in exposure to workplace bullying neither to cyberbullying based on gender and age groups ( $H_1$ ,  $H_2$ ,  $H_4$  and  $H_5$  are rejected). In turn, differences in exposure to workplace bullying and cyberbullying based on academic qualifications do exist. People with higher qualifications, namely PhD and post-doctoral, are more often victims of negative acts at work ( $H_3$  and  $H_6$  are accepted).

No differences were found in the incidence of workplace bullying and cyberbullying between people who worked remotely and people who did not ( $H_7$  and  $H_8$  are rejected). However, we assume these results to be quite limited.

With regard to job autonomy, the results show that a negative correlation exists between job autonomy and workplace bullying, as well as between job autonomy and cyberbullying at work, meaning that when one variable increases, the other decreases. We can conclude that there is a relationship between job autonomy and bullying/cyberbullying. However, we were not able to examine the causal relationship between the variables ( $H_9$  and  $H_{10}$  cannot be accepted).

### 6.1. Theoretical contribution

This research allowed deepening the knowledge about workplace bullying and cyberbullying in Portugal, contributing especially to the literature of the latter phenomenon that seems to be non-existent in the national context. One of the main contributions to the existing research is the fact that evidence was found that exposure to bullying and cyberbullying behaviours at work differ according to academic qualifications, with more qualified people being those who have a higher risk of suffering these negative acts.

We can say that research is constantly evolving. Thus, this study also contributes in the sense that it leaves some bases and questions that can be further explored in future studies, namely the issues of remote working and job autonomy.

### 6.2. Limitations

It is worth to mention that this study has some limitations. Firstly, we used a convenience and not representative sample, so comparisons with previous studies are only tendential and sometimes even a little speculative. Also, more than half of the sample consists of people in the age groups 41-50 and >50, meaning that young people are not well represented. This fact may have implications for the results on the incidence of workplace bullying and cyberbullying based on age. Another limitation is that the sample is mostly composed of highly qualified people (90% of the respondents have a higher education degree), which means that people with fewer qualifications are not well represented. In addition, there is an overrepresentation of people from the education sector (69.7% of the sample).

We consider that the results regarding exposure to bullying and cyberbullying in the context of remote working are limited, since aspects such as the duration of remote working and whether people like working in this context were not considered in this analysis and may have some influence. We recognise that questions about remote working were not optimally asked in the questionnaire.

This study also has limitations in the statistical analysis of the data. Since the data distribution is not normal, it was not possible to perform certain tests and analyses that

were important to reach more robust conclusions. For instance, it was not possible to perform a regression analysis to understand the causal relationship between job autonomy and workplace bullying/ cyberbullying. Thus, the results concerning the influence of job autonomy on the incidence of bullying and cyberbullying behaviours are not conclusive.

### 6.3. Recommendations for future research

The results of the present study on exposure to workplace bullying and cyberbullying in remote working context are quite limited. Firstly, people's remote working duration has not been considered in this analysis. Moreover, individuals react differently to remote working, there are people who love it and others who hate it (Eurofound & ILO, 2017). Thus, we suggest that this question should be further investigated in the future, considering aspects such as the duration of remote working and whether people enjoy working in this context or not.

Our findings allow us to assume that there is indeed a relationship between job autonomy and bullying/cyberbullying. Yet, it was not possible to perform a regression analysis and examine the causal relationship between the variables since the data distribution is not normal. Hence, we suggest that this issue should be further investigated. According to Baillien et al. (2011), when people perceive greater job autonomy, their stress and anxiety decrease and therefore the risk of exposure to negative behaviours is lower. In light of this, future studies should consider investigating the cause-effect relationship between the variables.

We also recommend further studies on cyberbullying at work, as there is still little research internationally and in Portugal there seems to be a gap in the literature. We suggest that younger samples should be used to better understand the prevalence of bullying and cyberbullying behaviours in these age groups. Furthermore, we suggest that future studies investigate, for example through interviews, whether there are other negative behaviours that are not included in the scales we used to assess bullying and cyberbullying. Future research could study the incidence of workplace bullying and cyberbullying based on other individual differences, for example sexual orientation, religion, disability, nationality (foreign workers), employment status (permanent contract, temporary), among others.

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## Appendixes

### Appendix 1: Complete questionnaire in Portuguese

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#### I. Assédio Moral no Trabalho

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1. Numa escala de 1 a 5, em que 1 significa 'nunca', 2 'raramente', 3 'algumas vezes', 4 'com frequência' e 5 'com muita frequência', indique a frequência com que foi vítima dos seguintes comportamentos no seu trabalho. A sua resposta deve ser relativa aos últimos 12 meses?

- Alguém reter/esconder informação que afeta o seu desempenho.
- Receber ordens para fazer algum trabalho abaixo do seu nível de competência.
- Ter as suas opiniões ignoradas.
- Receber tarefas com prazos não razoáveis.
- Controlo/Monitoramento excessivo do seu trabalho.
- Pressão para não pedir/reivindicar algo a que tenha direito (ex.: baixa médica, direito a férias, despesas de viagens).
- Estar exposto a uma carga de trabalho incontrolável.
- Ser humilhado ou ridicularizado em relação ao seu trabalho.
- Ter as principais áreas de responsabilidade removidas, ou substituídas por tarefas mais triviais e desagradáveis.
- Espalharem mexericos e rumores sobre si.
- Ser ignorado ou excluído.
- Ouvir comentários insultuosos ou ofensivos sobre a sua pessoa, as suas atitudes ou sobre a sua vida privada.
- Sugestões ou sinais de outras pessoas de que devia sair do seu emprego.
- Lembretes repetidos dos seus erros ou enganos.
- Ser ignorado ou enfrentar uma reação hostil ao aproximar-se.
- Criticismo persistente em relação aos seus erros ou enganos.
- Ser alvo de piadas feitas por pessoas com quem não se dá bem.
- Fazerem alegações contra si.
- Ser alvo de provocações excessivas e sarcasmo.
- Gritarem consigo ou ser alvo de raiva espontânea.
- Ser alvo de comportamentos intimidantes, como apontar o dedo, invasão do espaço pessoal, empurrar, bloquear o seu caminho.
- Ser alvo de ameaças de violência ou de abuso físico, ou alvo de abuso real.

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#### II. Assédio Moral no Trabalho

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O assédio moral no trabalho é definido como "Ofender, excluir socialmente ou afetar negativamente o trabalho de alguém. Para que o termo 'assédio moral' seja aplicado a uma determinada atividade, interação ou processo, esses comportamentos negativos devem ocorrer repetidamente e regularmente (semanalmente) e durante um período de tempo (cerca de seis meses)" (Einarsen et al., 2011, p. 22).

2. Tendo em conta a definição apresentada, alguma vez se sentiu vítima de assédio moral no trabalho nos últimos 12 meses? (Escolha múltipla: Sim/Não)

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## **II. Assédio Moral no Trabalho - Impacto (A)**

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2.1. Se respondeu 'sim' à questão anterior, que impacto teve essa experiência em si, numa escala de 1 a 5, em que 1 significa 'nenhum impacto' e 5 significa 'impacto muito forte'?

- Problemas psicológicos e/ou emocionais (ex.: depressão, baixa autoestima, perturbações de sono)
  - Problemas físicos (ex.: problemas de saúde, ansiedade, distúrbios de concentração)
  - Problemas sociais (ex.: isolamento)
  - Problemas relacionados com o trabalho (ex.: vontade de abandonar a empresa, faltas ao trabalho; diminuição do meu desempenho no trabalho)
- 

## **III. Assédio Moral no Trabalho**

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3. Alguma vez se sentiu vítima de assédio moral no trabalho sem ser nos últimos 12 meses? (Escolha múltipla: Sim/Não)

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## **III. Assédio Moral no Trabalho - Impacto (B)**

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3.1. Se respondeu 'sim' à questão anterior, que impacto teve essa experiência em si, numa escala de 1 a 5, em que 1 significa 'nenhum impacto' e 5 significa 'impacto muito forte'?

- Problemas psicológicos e/ou emocionais (ex.: depressão, baixa autoestima, perturbações de sono)
  - Problemas físicos (ex.: problemas de saúde, ansiedade, distúrbios de concentração)
  - Problemas sociais (ex.: isolamento)
  - Problemas relacionados com o trabalho (ex.: vontade de abandonar a empresa, faltas ao trabalho; diminuição do meu desempenho no trabalho)
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## **I. Cyberbullying no Trabalho**

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1. Numa escala de 1 a 5, em que 1 significa 'nunca', 2 'raramente', 3 'algumas vezes', 4 'com frequência' e 5 'com muita frequência', indique a frequência com que foi vítima dos seguintes comportamentos no seu trabalho. A sua resposta deve ser relativa aos últimos 12 meses.

- Receber mensagens com tom desrespeitoso.
  - Ser injustamente culpado por problemas de trabalho.
  - Receber mensagens com palavras agressivas (ex.: todas as letras maiúsculas, fonte em negrito ou vários pontos de exclamação).
  - Ter tido um colega a enviar mensagens com um impacto negativo em si, que incluíam outras pessoas em cópia.
  - Ter o seu trabalho injustamente criticado.
  - Receber solicitações rudes de um colega.
  - Receber informações contraditórias.
  - Ser contornado/ignorado nas comunicações de grupo que são relevantes para o seu papel de trabalho.
  - Ser alvo de comunicações que o prejudicam.
  - Receber solicitações de trabalho irracionais.
  - Experimentar críticas pessoais injustas (ex.: sobre o seu carácter, aparência, opiniões).
  - Ter rumores negativos e boatos espalhados sobre si.
  - Ter informações pessoais partilhadas sem a sua permissão.
  - Receber mensagens que contêm linguagem abusiva dirigidas a si.
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- 
- Receber mensagens ameaçadoras.
  - Receber mensagens que questionam injustamente a sua competência.
  - Ser a única pessoa excluída das comunicações sociais entre colegas.
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## **II. Cyberbullying no Trabalho**

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O *cyberbullying* no trabalho é definido como: “Todo o comportamento negativo decorrente do contexto de trabalho que ocorre por meio do uso das TIC - Tecnologias de Informação e Comunicação (ex.: mensagens, emails, redes sociais, comunidades virtuais), que (a) é realizado repetidamente e durante um período de tempo ou (b) ocorre pelo menos uma vez, mas constitui uma intrusão na vida privada de alguém, (potencialmente) expondo-o a um vasto público online” (Vranjes et al., 2017, p.326).

2. Tendo em conta a definição apresentada, alguma vez se sentiu vítima de *cyberbullying* no trabalho nos últimos 12 meses? (Escolha múltipla: Sim/Não)

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### **II. Cyberbullying no Trabalho - Impacto (A)**

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2.1. Se respondeu ‘sim’ à questão anterior, que impacto teve essa experiência em si, numa escala de 1 a 5, em que 1 significa ‘nenhum impacto’ e 5 significa ‘impacto muito forte’?

- Problemas psicológicos e/ou emocionais (ex.: depressão, baixa autoestima, perturbações de sono)
  - Problemas físicos (ex.: problemas de saúde, ansiedade, distúrbios de concentração)
  - Problemas sociais (ex.: isolamento)
  - Problemas relacionados com o trabalho (ex.: vontade de abandonar a empresa, faltas ao trabalho; diminuição do meu desempenho no trabalho)
- 

### **III. Cyberbullying no Trabalho**

---

3. Alguma vez se sentiu vítima de *cyberbullying* no trabalho sem ser nos últimos 12 meses? (Escolha múltipla: Sim/Não)

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### **III. Cyberbullying no Trabalho - Impacto (B)**

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3.1. Se respondeu ‘sim’ à questão anterior, que impacto teve essa experiência em si, numa escala de 1 a 5, em que 1 significa ‘nenhum impacto’ e 5 significa ‘impacto muito forte’?

- Problemas psicológicos e/ou emocionais (ex.: depressão, baixa autoestima, perturbações de sono)
  - Problemas físicos (ex.: problemas de saúde, ansiedade, distúrbios de concentração)
  - Problemas sociais (ex.: isolamento)
  - Problemas relacionados com o trabalho (ex.: vontade de abandonar a empresa, faltas ao trabalho; diminuição do meu desempenho no trabalho)
- 

### **Teletrabalho**

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1. No último ano, esteve em regime de teletrabalho? (Escolha múltipla: Sim/Não)
  2. Se respondeu ‘sim’ à questão anterior, por quanto tempo? (Resposta aberta)
- 

### **Autonomia no Trabalho**

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1. Numa escala de 1 a 5, em que 1 significa ‘nunca’, 2 ‘raramente’, 3 ‘algumas vezes’, 4 ‘com frequência’ e 5 ‘com muita frequência’, indique qual é o seu grau de autonomia no que diz respeito à liberdade que tem ao nível do agendamento do trabalho, tomada de decisões e escolha de métodos de trabalho no seu emprego atual.

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- Permite-me tomar as minhas próprias decisões sobre a forma como agendar o meu trabalho
- Permite-me decidir sobre a ordem em que as coisas são feitas no trabalho.
- Permite-me planear a forma como faço o meu trabalho.
- Permite-me usar a minha iniciativa pessoal ou julgamento na realização do meu trabalho.
- Permite-me tomar muitas decisões por conta própria.
- Permite-me ter autonomia significativa na tomada de decisões.
- Permite-me tomar decisões sobre os métodos a utilizar para realizar o meu trabalho.
- Possibilita-me ter bastante independência e liberdade na forma como faço o trabalho.
- Permite-me decidir por mim mesmo/a como fazer o meu trabalho.

#### Dados Pessoais

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Idade  | Escolha múltipla: 18-30; 31-40; 41-50; >50  |
| Género                                       | Escolha múltipla: Feminino; Masculino; Prefiro não responder; Outro (especificar)   |
| Distrito de Residência                       | Escolha múltipla: Aveiro; Beja; Braga; Bragança; Castelo Branco; Coimbra; Évora; Faro; Guarda; Leiria; Lisboa; Portalegre; Porto; Santarém; Setúbal; Viana do Castelo; Vila Real; Viseu; Outro (especificar)  |
| Habilitações Académicas                      | Escolha múltipla: 1º Ciclo do Ensino Básico (4º ano); 2º Ciclo do Ensino Básico (6º ano); 3º Ciclo do Ensino Básico (9ºano); Ensino Secundário (12º ano); Licenciatura; Pós-graduação; Mestrado; Doutoramento; Pós-doutoramento; Outro (especificar)  |
| Setor de Atividade                           | Escolha múltipla: Agricultura, Pecuária, Pesca, Silvicultura, Extração Mineira; Alojamento e Restauração; Atividades Financeiras e de Seguros; Atividades Imobiliárias; Construção; Comércio; Fornecimento de Água, Gás, Eletricidade; Educação; Indústria; Saúde; Transportes; Outro (especificar) |
| Tamanho da empresa onde trabalha             | Escolha múltipla: Micro (1-9 funcionários); PME (10-249 funcionários); Grande (+250 funcionários)   |
| Cargo na empresa onde trabalha               | Resposta aberta (não obrigatória)   |
| Nível na hierarquia da empresa onde trabalha | Escolha múltipla: Gestão de topo (nível estratégico); Gestão intermédia (nível tático); Operacionais (nível operacional); Prefiro não responder   |

## Appendix 2: Respondents' jobs/positions

|                                       | Variable                      | N    | %   |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|------|-----|
| <b>Job/Position</b>                   | Accounting Assistant          | 1    | .2  |
|                                       | Administrative Assistant      | 8    | 2.0 |
|                                       | Assistant Director            | 1    | .2  |
|                                       | Banking                       | 1    | .2  |
|                                       | Beautician                    | 1    | .2  |
|                                       | Bus Driver                    | 2    | .5  |
|                                       | Business Developer            | 1    | .2  |
|                                       | Civil Engineer                | 2    | .5  |
|                                       | Commander                     | 1    | .2  |
|                                       | Commercial                    | 5    | 1.2 |
|                                       | Computer Technician           | 2    | .5  |
|                                       | Credit Analyst                | 1    | .2  |
|                                       | Customer Manager              | 3    | .7  |
|                                       | Dental Assistant              | 2    | .5  |
|                                       | Dentist                       | 1    | .2  |
|                                       | Designer                      | 2    | .5  |
|                                       | Editor and Coordinator        | 1    | .2  |
|                                       | Educational Assistant         | 5    | 1.2 |
|                                       | Educator of Children          | 8    | 2.0 |
|                                       | Electrician                   | 1    | .2  |
|                                       | Electronics Technician        | 1    | .2  |
|                                       | Executive Director            | 1    | .2  |
|                                       | Financial Manager             | 1    | .2  |
|                                       | Fitness Coach                 | 1    | .2  |
|                                       | Geriatric Assistant           | 1    | .2  |
|                                       | Head of Human Resources       | 2    | .5  |
|                                       | Head of Marketing             | 2    | .5  |
|                                       | Head of Post-Sales Department | 1    | .2  |
|                                       | Healthcare Assistant          | 1    | .2  |
|                                       | Healthcare Higher Technician  | 1    | .2  |
|                                       | Hotel Technician              | 1    | .2  |
|                                       | Household Services Provider   | 1    | .2  |
|                                       | Human Resources Technician    | 2    | .5  |
|                                       | Industrial Worker             | 2    | .5  |
|                                       | Intern                        | 11   | 2.7 |
|                                       | International Account Manager | 1    | .2  |
|                                       | Marketing Assistant           | 1    | .2  |
|                                       | Nurse                         | 6    | 1.5 |
|                                       | Operational Assistant         | 2    | .5  |
|                                       | Optometrist                   | 1    | .2  |
| Pedagogical Coordinator               | 4                             | 1.0  |     |
| Professor                             | 190                           | 47.1 |     |
| Professor and Pedagogical Coordinator | 4                             | 1.0  |     |
| Quality Manager                       | 2                             | .5   |     |
| Quality Technician                    | 1                             | .2   |     |
| Real Estate Consultant                | 1                             | .2   |     |

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|                      |    |      |
|----------------------|----|------|
| Researcher           | 7  | 1.7  |
| Service Controller   | 1  | .2   |
| Social Educator      | 1  | .2   |
| Store Operator       | 1  | .2   |
| Table Waiter         | 1  | .2   |
| Teleoperator         | 1  | .2   |
| Treasurer            | 1  | .2   |
| Union work           | 1  | .2   |
| Unspecified/ Omitted | 98 | 24.3 |

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