



Police staff
bullying survey

1. Introduction

In the summer of 2015, UNISON undertook an online survey of its police staff members in England, Scotland and Wales to find out about the experience of bullying and harassment within the police staff workforce.

Just over 1,000 police staff members responded to the survey. Their responses show very clearly that there is a problem with bullying and harassment in the workplace:

- 6% of respondents say that bullying is a very serious problem at work
- 20% of respondents say that bullying is quite a serious problem at work
- 36% of respondents say that bullying is a minor problem at work.

UNISON also investigated whether there was a gender dimension to bullying in the workplace, by separating out the responses of male and female police staff. On all counts, women were more likely than their male counterparts to say that bullying was a problem in their workplace. UNISON takes this very seriously, and section 7 of this reports looks at this very worrying aspect to our findings in more detail.

UNISON is calling upon the Service to acknowledge that there is a problem with bullying in the workplace and work with us to find a permanent solution.

2. Synopsis

This report is split into the following sections:

- Background
- Police code of ethics and bullying
- Survey Responses
- Summary and overview
- Gender split of key survey findings
- Conclusions and action

3. Background

The issue of bullying and harassment has been recognised as an issue for the police service for some time.

In 2002, UNISON undertook a wide-ranging survey into the attitudes of our police staff members¹. At that time, 28 per cent of members indicated that they had either been the subject of bullying personally, or witnessed a colleague being subjected to bullying. UNISON repeated the survey in 2008 and found that 21 per cent of police staff respondents reported being bullied themselves, and 26 per cent had witnessed a colleague being bullied.

In February 2013 the report of the Independent Police Commission, chaired by Sir John Stevens, was published. It reported that a total of 57% per cent of police staff respondents, to a survey of police staff undertaken on behalf of the Commission, had experienced bullying some of the time, and 30 per cent always, or some of the time.

At UNISON's 2014 police and justice conference, a motion was passed calling for a survey of members into workplace bullying, with reference to the Home Secretary's police integrity programme and the College of policing code of ethics. The plan was then

to develop policy that would help UNISON police branches address any problems identified in the survey. A copy of the motion can be found at appendix A.

4. Police code of ethics and bullying

In February 2013, Theresa May announced the framework for her reform programme to improve police integrity. A key part of the programme was to be the development of a policing code of ethics, underpinned by a single set of professional standards.

The Home Secretary subsequently commissioned the new College of Policing to develop the *Code of Ethics: Principles and Standards of Service of Professional Behaviour for the Police Service of England and Wales*.

As part of the consultation process to produce the code, UNISON lobbied hard to get the issue of workplace bullying and harassment recognised as an issue which the code should address.

UNISON is pleased that the College accepted the need for the code to address bullying behaviour in the workplace. In particular, Section 2 makes it clear that such behaviour is no longer to be tolerated in the police service in England and Wales. It states that all those in the police workforce must ensure that their:

'...behaviour and language could not reasonably be perceived to be abusive, oppressive, harassing, bullying, victimising or offensive by the public, or your policing colleagues.'

UNISON branches can now challenge bullying in the workplace under the terms of the new code of ethics 'authority and respect' standard, as well as via other pre-existing force policies.

5. Survey responses

Here are the results of UNISON's 2015 police staff bullying survey:

- **Number of respondents:** 1,015
- **Female respondents:** 60%
- **Male respondents:** 40%
- **Employer**
 - Police Force England: 84%
 - Police Scotland: 10%
 - Police Force Wales: 6%
- **Level of responsibility**
 - Senior manager: 3%
 - Manager: 7%
 - Supervisor: 7%
 - Non-managerial: 83%
- **Is bullying a problem where you work?**
 - Yes, a big problem: 6%
 - Yes, quite a serious problem: 20%
 - Yes, a minor problem: 36%
 - No, not a problem: 38%

- **Have you personally ever been bullied at your current place of work?**
 - Yes 53%
 - No 47%

- **Are you currently being bullied?**
 - Yes 16%
 - No 84%

- **If you have not personally been bullied, have you ever witnessed another colleague being bullied in your workplace?**
 - Yes 59%
 - No 41%

- **If bullying is a problem where you work, what are the main sources?**
 - Police staff line managers 48%
 - Police staff colleagues 40%
 - Police officer line managers 25%
 - Police staff senior managers 25%
 - Police officer senior managers 25%
 - Police officer colleagues 14%
 - The public 7%
 - Private contractor managers 0.5%
 - Private contractor colleagues 0.5%

- **If bullying is a problem in your workplace, what form does it take?**
 - Humiliation 63%
 - Excessive criticism 56%
 - Victimisation 42%
 - Exclusion 41%
 - Excessive monitoring 40%
 - Setting unrealistic targets 37%
 - Intimidation 36%
 - Gossiping/malicious rumours 35%
 - Refusing reasonable requests 24%
 - Taking away work 23%
 - Altering targets 19%
 - Verbal abuse 18%
 - Overruling decisions 17%
 - Manipulating shift rotas 13%
 - Making threats 10%
 - Blocking promotion 8%

- **How often does bullying take place?**
 - Less than monthly 29%
 - Weekly 28%
 - Daily 26%
 - Monthly 17%

- **What do you think causes the bullying in your workplace?**

- Poor management 73%
- Workplace culture 47%
- Staff cuts 36%
- Inadequate managerial training 36%
- Stressed managers 30%
- Excessive workloads 27%
- Stressed colleagues 26%
- Deadline pressures 22%
- Work targets 21%
- Pressure to work when ill 21%
- Inadequate staff training 17%

- **How confident are you that your force would deal fairly with a complaint about bullying?**

- Not very confident 40%
- Not at all confident 29%
- Confident 24%
- Very confident 8%

- **Has your force taken any action to address bullying in your workplace in the last 12 months?**

- Yes 23%
- No 77%

6. Summary and overview

The results of UNISON's police staff bullying survey make for worrying reading for a police service that is aiming to improve standards of integrity both to the public and its workforce.

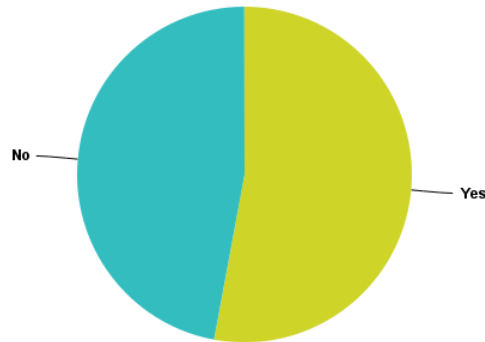
There were just over 1,000 respondents and the sample is broadly representative of the gender mix of the police staff workforce that has a majority female workforce (65% female/35% male)ⁱⁱ.

Over half the police staff who responded to the survey have been bullied themselves at some time during their time with their current employer.

Although a lower figure of 16 per cent of staff indicated that they were actually being bullied at the time of the survey, neither statistic is acceptable in the police service in 2016.

Q5 Have you personally ever been bullied at your current place of work?

Answered: 1,009 Skipped: 6

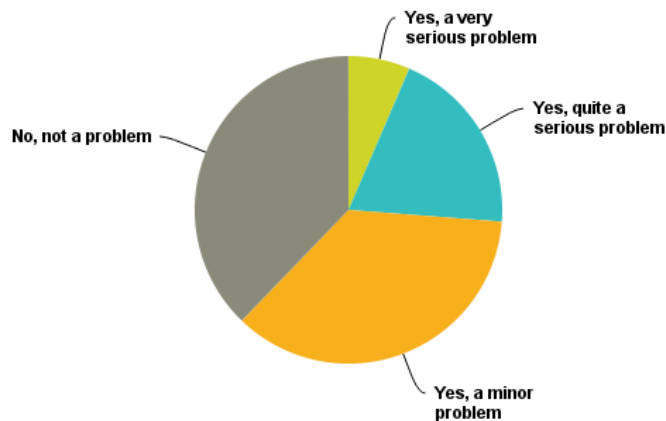


Sixty two per cent of the police staff workforce say that bullying is a problem where they work:

Thirty six per cent say that it is a minor problem, 20 per cent say it is quite a serious problem and 6% per cent that it is a very serious problem. Whilst there is a large group of police staff who characterise bullying as a minor problem, over a quarter indicate that it is 'quite a serious'/'very serious' problem.

Q4 Is bullying a problem where you work:

Answered: 1,003 Skipped: 12

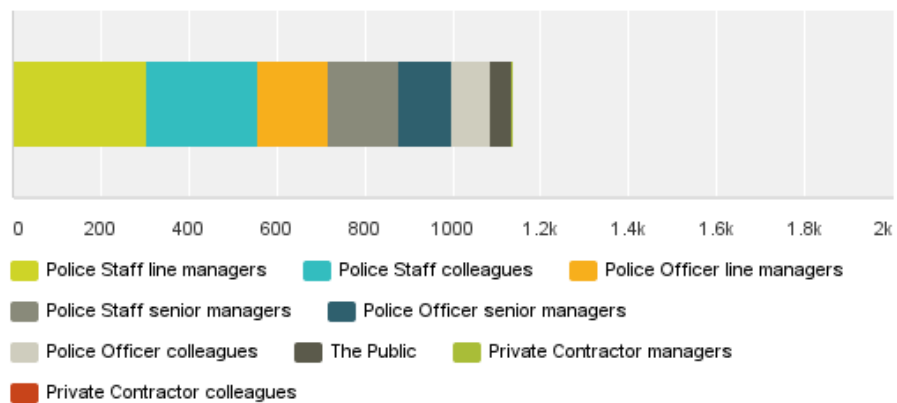


Police staff line managers (49 per cent) and police staff colleagues (40 per cent) were responsible for the majority of the bullying experienced by police staff responding to the survey.

Police officer line managers (25 per cent) and police staff senior managers (25 per cent) were next in line, as the perpetrators of bullying, followed by police officer senior managers (19 per cent) and police officer colleagues (14 per cent). This appears to indicate that there is a real problem with bullying within the police staff workforce itself. The existence of a high level of peer-to-peer bullying by police staff was an unexpected outcome of the survey.

Q8 If bullying is a problem where you work, what are the main sources? Please tick all that apply

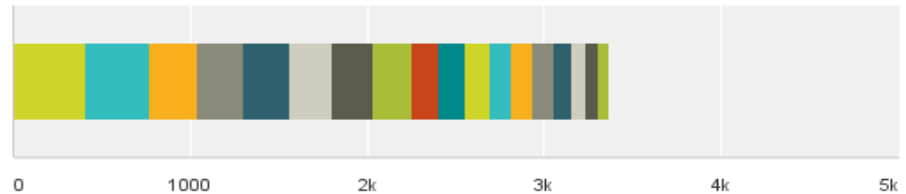
Answered: 637 Skipped: 378



Humiliation, excessive criticism, victimisation and exclusion appear to be the most common forms of bullying experienced by respondents to the survey.

Q9 If bullying is a problem in your workplace, what form does it take? Please tick all that apply.

Answered: 645 Skipped: 370

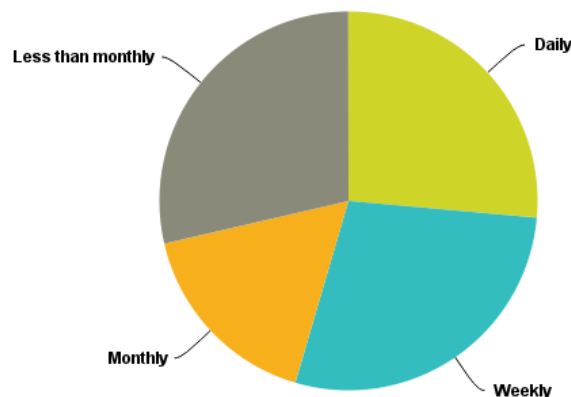


- Humiliation - belittling or embarrassing you or a colleague in front of others
- Excessive criticism
- Victimising - singling you or a colleague out for unfair treatment
- Excluding you from things
- Excessive work monitoring
- Setting unrealistic targets or deadlines
- Intimidation - frightening, menacing or scaring you or a colleague into complying
- Gossiping or spreading malicious lies or rumours about you or a colleague
- Refusing reasonable requests (such as leave)
- Taking away work or responsibilities
- Withholding information or equipment you need for your job
- Altering targets, deadlines etc
- Shouting
- Verbal abuse
- Overruling your decisions
- Manipulation of shift rotas
- Making threats
- Blocking promotion

Twenty nine per cent of respondents say that bullying takes place less than monthly, but 28 per cent say that it takes place weekly.

Q10 How often does bullying take place?

Answered: 636 Skipped: 379



Poor management (74 per cent) was by far and away the most commonly chosen reason that respondents gave for the existence of bullying in the workplace, followed by workplace culture (47% per cent) and staff cuts (36 per cent).

This evidence of poor management leading to bullying is another wake-up call to the service to address deficiencies in the way that managers and supervisors treat staff. These results also indicate that, despite the College of Policing code of ethics being in place since April 2014, there has been a failure on the part of the police service to tackle a workplace culture that appears, from these results, to allow bullying in the workplace, whether by managers or colleagues.

Q11 What do you think causes the bullying in your workplace? Please tick all that apply

Answered: 618 Skipped: 397

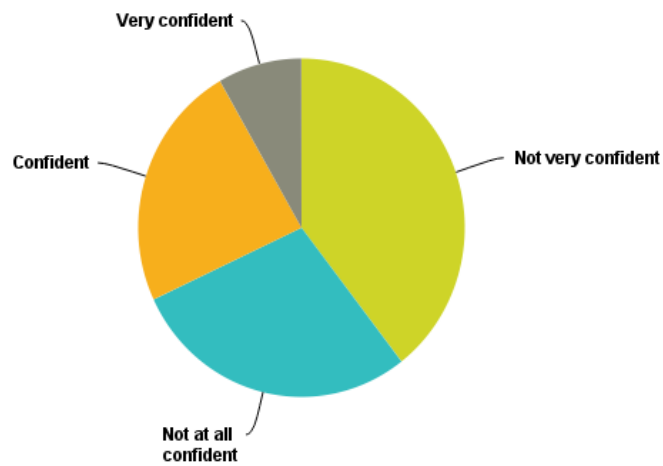


Finally, only 32 per cent (less than a third) of respondents were confident to any degree that their force would deal fairly with a complaint about bullying.

Forty per cent were not very confident that this would happen, and 28 per cent were not at all confident. Clearly forces have a way to go to convince staff that the prohibition of bullying in the College of Policing code of ethics is going to be delivered and enforced in their workplace.

Q12 How confident are you that your Force or employer would deal fairly with a complaint about bullying?

Answered: 782 Skipped: 233

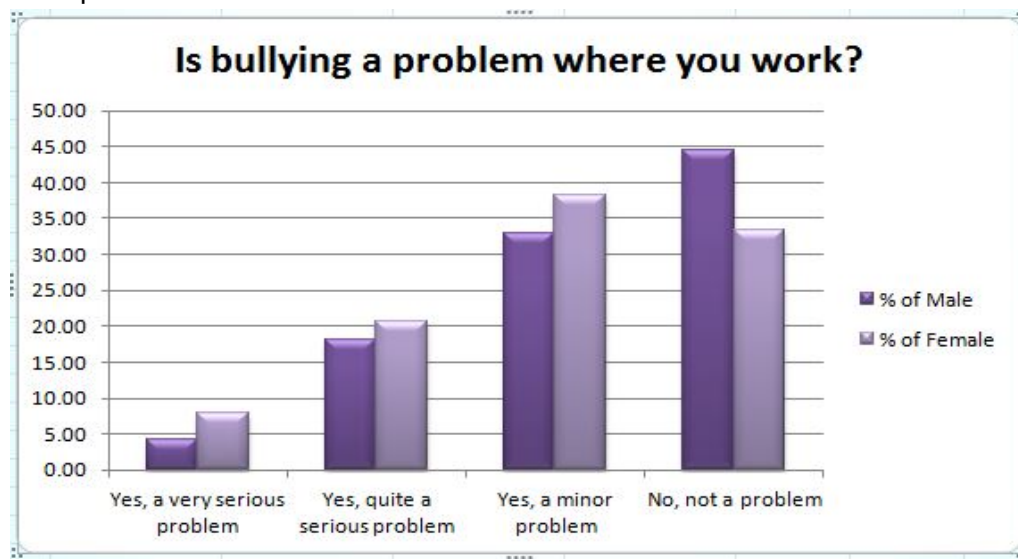


7. Gender split of key survey findings

The survey results combine the answers of both male and female respondents, but UNISON was interested to find out whether there was a gender dimension to the outcome of the survey. This proved to be the case, with female respondents reporting that bullying was more of an issue for them in their workplace, and that bullying had more of an impact on them as individuals.

Question 4: Is bullying a problem where you work?

On all counts, women were more likely than their male counterparts to say that bullying was a problem in their workplace: 67 per cent of women said it was a problem compared to 55 per cent of men.

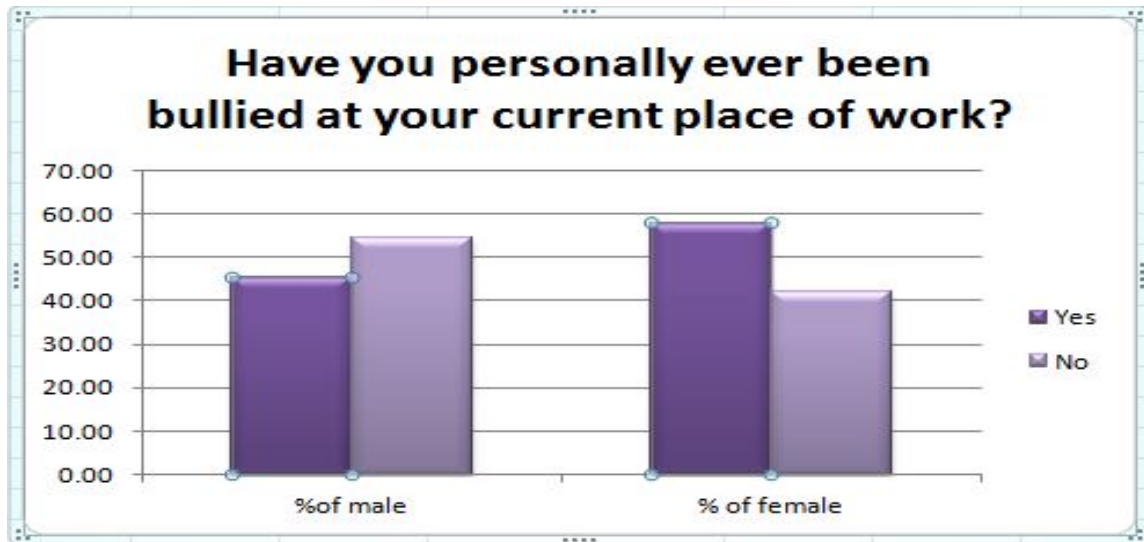


- 7.83 per cent of women say bullying is a very serious problem at work – almost 1 in 12 compared with 4.28 per cent of men, which is almost 1 in 22
- 28.5 per cent of women say bullying is either quite or a very serious problem at work – more than 1 in 4 compared with 22.42 per cent of men – over one in five.

	Male	Female	% of male	% of female
Yes, a very serious problem	17	47	4.28	7.83
Yes, quite a serious problem	72	124	18.14	20.67
Yes, a minor problem	131	229	33.00	38.17
No, not a problem	177	200	44.58	33.33
Total	397	600		

Question 5: Have you personally ever been bullied at your current place of work?

Fifty eight per cent of female respondents reported that they had been bullied compared to 45 per cent of men.



- 58 per cent of women say they have been personally bullied – almost three in five compared with 45.36% of men.
- Women are 28% more likely to have been personally bullied.

	Male	Female	% of male	% of female
Yes	181	350	45.36	57.95
No	218	254	54.64	42.05
Total	399	604		

Question 7: If you have not personally been bullied, have you ever witnessed another colleague being bullied in your workplace?

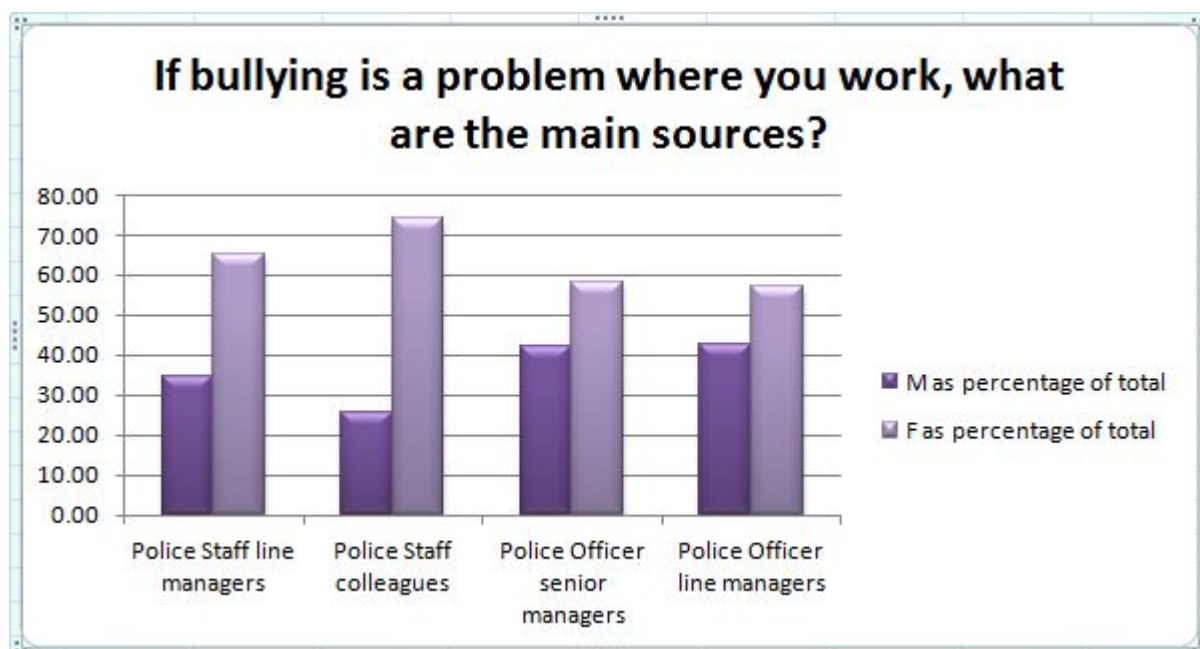
Sixty two per cent of women who responded to the survey had witnessed this, compared with 55 per cent of men.



	Male	Female	% of male	% of female
Yes	212	355	55.06	62.17
No	173	216	44.94	37.83
Total	385	571		

Question 8: If bullying is a problem where you work, what are the main sources?

The percentage of female and male police staff who reported bullying being carried out by police staff managers was similar (49 per cent and 45 per cent respectively). However, whereas 46 per cent of female police staff reported bullying being carried out by police staff colleagues, the percentage of male police staff reporting this was much lower, at 28 per cent.

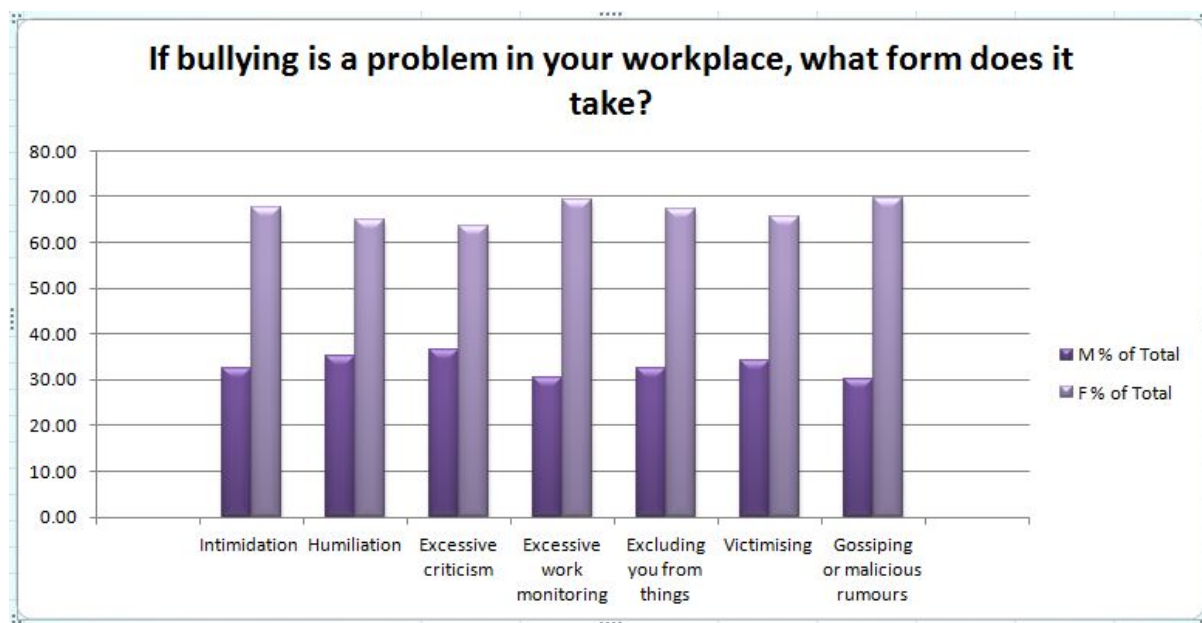


- *Women are more likely to feel they have been bullied by police staff colleagues and by police staff line managers*

	Male	Female	Total	M % of total	F % of total
Police Staff line managers	105	197	302	34.77	65.23
Police Staff colleagues	65	187	252	25.79	74.21
Police Officer senior managers	50	69	119	42.02	57.98
Police Officer line managers	69	92	161	42.86	57.14

Question 9: If bullying is a problem in your workplace, what form does it take?

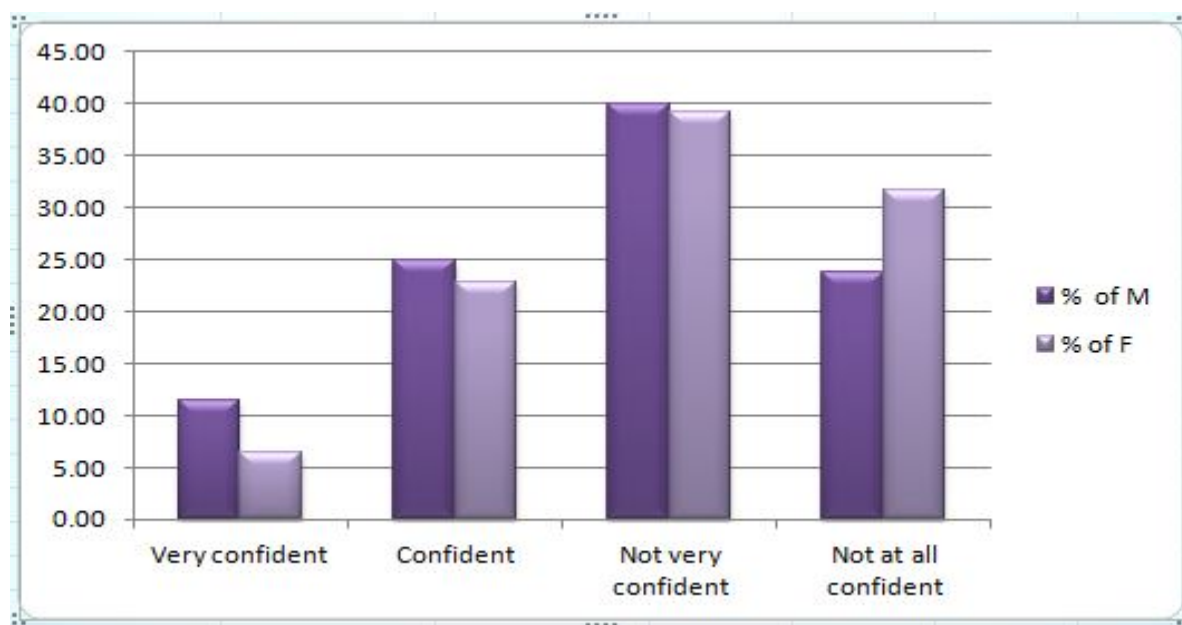
The differences between female and male respondents' answers to this question were less divergent than other answers. However, by comparison, women were more likely to cite humiliation, excessive criticism and victimisation as the form of bullying compared to men.



- *Women are more likely to feel they have been bullied by gossiping and spreading malicious rumours, excessive work monitoring and by intimidation and exclusion*

	Male	Female	Total	M % of total	F % of total
Intimidation – being frightening, menaced or scared into complying	75	156	231	32.47	67.53
Humiliation – being belittled or embarrassed	142	263	405	35.06	64.94
Excessive criticism	131	228	359	36.49	63.51
Setting unrealistic targets or deadlines	91	146	237	38.40	61.60
Excessive work monitoring	78	177	255	30.59	69.41
Being excluding from things	86	178	264	32.58	67.42
Victimising – being singled out for unfair treatment	93	178	271	34.32	65.68
Gossiping or spreading malicious lies or rumours	68	157	225	30.22	69.78

Question 12: How confident are you that your force or employer would deal fairly with a complaint about bullying?



A total of 72 per cent of female respondents, compared with 63 per cent of male respondents, were either not at all confident or not very confident that their force would deal fairly with a complaint about bullying.

The above figures appear to show that proportionately more female police staff than their male colleagues:

- perceive bullying to be a problem in their workplace
- have been bullied in the workplace
- had been witnesses to bullying in the workplace affecting other colleagues
- were much more likely to report peer-to-peer bullying by police staff on other police staff colleagues
- were less confident that their force would deal fairly with a complaint about bullying

This is a real problem for the police service and shows that women are more vulnerable to bullying than their male counterparts and more likely to have witnessed peer-to-peer bullying. This might suggest that forces need to undertake work to uncover the reasons for this gender dimension to bullying and undertake positive work to root out any discriminatory practice that might lead to its occurrence.

8. Conclusion and actions

UNISON wants the results of this survey to be taken seriously by the police service. The research suggests that bullying behaviour is deeply rooted in the workplace culture of policing in England, Scotland and Wales. As this report highlights, the service has known for some time that it has a problem with bullying, but has been unable, or unwilling, to address the issue effectively.

Undoubtedly, the pressures of five years of government police cuts have exacerbated this unsavoury aspect of policing culture. With another five years of declining budgets the potential for bullying to increase is a real risk. The service would do well to address this issue now.

The work that the College of Policing is overseeing in respect of the wellbeing agenda for the police workforce provides an opportunity for the results of this UNISON survey to be taken seriously by senior leaders within the service. UNISON calls upon the leadership of the service to:

- accept that there is a problem with workplace bullying in the police service
- seek to understand why it is that female respondents highlight more problems with bullying than their male colleagues
- acknowledge that bullying behaviour is specifically prohibited by the College of Policing code of ethics
- work with the police staff unions, and other workplace representatives, to devise a joint strategy to root out bullying behaviour in the police.
- focus particular attention on the potential for gender discrimination to have an impact on the markedly different experience of bullying by female and male police staff, and take direct action to remove any discriminatory practice.

Bullying in the workplace

Conference, due to overwhelming cuts in policing, police staff are facing increased pressure due to the reductions in the workforce. Police staff are being disproportionately affected and bearing the full brunt of this governments cuts agenda. This has lead to managers being under increasing pressure to deliver a service with an ever decreasing workforce. We have seen a massive increase in bullying cases within the police service due to poor management styles, lack of training and increased pressure to delivery more with less. Forces' own policies in relation to bullying are ineffective and don't address the wider issue and the impact this is having on our members' health.

Conference calls on the Service Group Executive to:

- 1) work with Police forces to highlight the importance of retaining police staff numbers
- 2) carry out a survey of our members to find out the true extent of the problem.
- 3) develop a unison policy available to branches to help them deal with the issue of bullying.

West Midlands Police Staff Branch

ⁱ *'Equal Before the Law': Attitudes and Aspirations of UNISON's Police Staff Members (March 2003)*

ⁱⁱ *Home Office police strength figures: March 2015*