



Violence Against the Ageing Workforce

- a report by the Scottish Pensioners' Forum

February 2019

Foreword



As a result of changes to state pension arrangements by the UK government in 2016, many people find themselves having to work longer than they had ever planned to.

In Scotland, we have an ageing workforce in a labour market where precarious work and work intensification place intolerable pressures on workers of all ages, young and old.

However, in many cases, working practices, job design and job demands are not adequately evaluated to meet the demands of ageing workers, factors that can leave older people feeling isolated in the workplace, feeling undervalued and left open to bullying and harassment by their managers and colleagues.

The Scottish Pensioners Forum is fully committed to the Scottish Government's Fair Work Agenda and believe that the laudable concept of fair work applies to everyone and that older workers should be valued for who they are and the experience they bring to the labour market - experience that could be lost if employers do not protect their ageing workforce from the harm caused by bullying and harassment.

Bullying and harassment can take many forms and workers often suffer in silence with many older workers having tolerated unacceptable behaviour in the past because their release from this, and workplace stress, was in sight as retirement loomed.

The results of our survey clearly show that older people are suffering from unacceptable bullying behaviours that not only impact on their productivity in the workplace but also on their health and wellbeing.

We look forward to working with the Scottish Government, trade unions and other stakeholders to ensure our workplaces are safer, healthier and fairer for our ageing workforce, now and in the future.

**Maureen Gardner
Chairperson
Scottish Pensioners' Forum**

Introduction

Over the past decade many older people have had to make decisions over their retirement. These decisions, particularly in relation to women whose state pension entitlement was changed without their prior knowledge, have culminated in many people having to resign themselves to a longer working life.

The Scottish Pensioners' Forum were concerned that with many older people having to face the prospect of working longer than their anticipated retirement age that the world of work may not be adequately equipped to deal with a rapidly expanding ageing workforce. The impact of austerity in Scotland has seen severe cuts to the public sector workforce with more work being demanded from less people. This work intensification can have a massive impact on the wellbeing of individuals of all ages, potentially more so for older workers who may be unable to cope with the physical and psychological demands of an increasingly pressurised work environment.

The private sector has not escaped the impact of austerity, with many well-known names disappearing from the economic landscape, particularly on the high street, a trend that looks set to continue in the years to come. The private sector also inflicted on workers some of the harshest and most draconian workplace policies ever witnessed in our labour market including performance and sickness absence management procedures.

Our fear is that both will have a discriminatory impact on older workers and others with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. Alongside these discriminatory policies, a culture is developing in the work environment that can leave older workers open to bullying, harassment and other acceptable behaviours often based on age.

ACAS defines bullying as, "any unwanted behaviour that makes someone feel intimidated, degraded, humiliated or offended. It is not necessarily always obvious or apparent to others and may happen in the workplace without an employer's awareness".

Demanding more for less, having work where many workers are isolated, where employment policies and implementation make no allowances for the requirements of an ageing workforce and where older workers do not feel valued are becoming increasingly common. It is often the case that older

workers have little or no voice in the workplace and this can lead to an unhealthy breeding ground for the kinds of behaviours that constitute bullying.

The Scottish Government's vision for an economy built on fair work is welcome, the Fair Work Framework and the work of the Fair Work Convention provide the foundation for challenging bullying behaviour against older workers.

Older workers should have the right to feel respected at work, to have secure and fulfilling work if they need or want it, to have the same opportunity as others in learning development and promotion and the right to have their voices heard in the workplace.

Sadly, our survey would suggest we have a long way to go to ensure fair work for older people and the Scottish Pensioners' Forum is committed to working with the Scottish Government, trade unions and others to make our workplaces safer, healthier and fairer for all older workers, for those who wish to continue to work as well as those who have no choice due to economic necessity.

The Scottish Pensioners' Forum acknowledges the support of the Scottish Government in helping us to develop this work in order to inform their Older People's Framework.

We would also like to thank Scottish Hazards for providing their expertise in helping to create this survey and for their contribution to this report.

Our survey

Our survey was launched on 29th January 2019 with a closing date of 25th February 2019. During that time, we received 474 responses, an average of 118 per week.

Views were sought from individuals in three age categories; 55 to 59, 60 to 65 and 65+. All respondents were still in active employment.

The survey was designed to substantiate existing anecdotal evidence that bullying against older workers was a growing concern. We also wanted to find out which individuals were most at risk, in which fields they were working, the specific forms any unwanted behaviour towards them was taking, who was carrying out this unwanted behaviour and the impact this was having on their mental health.

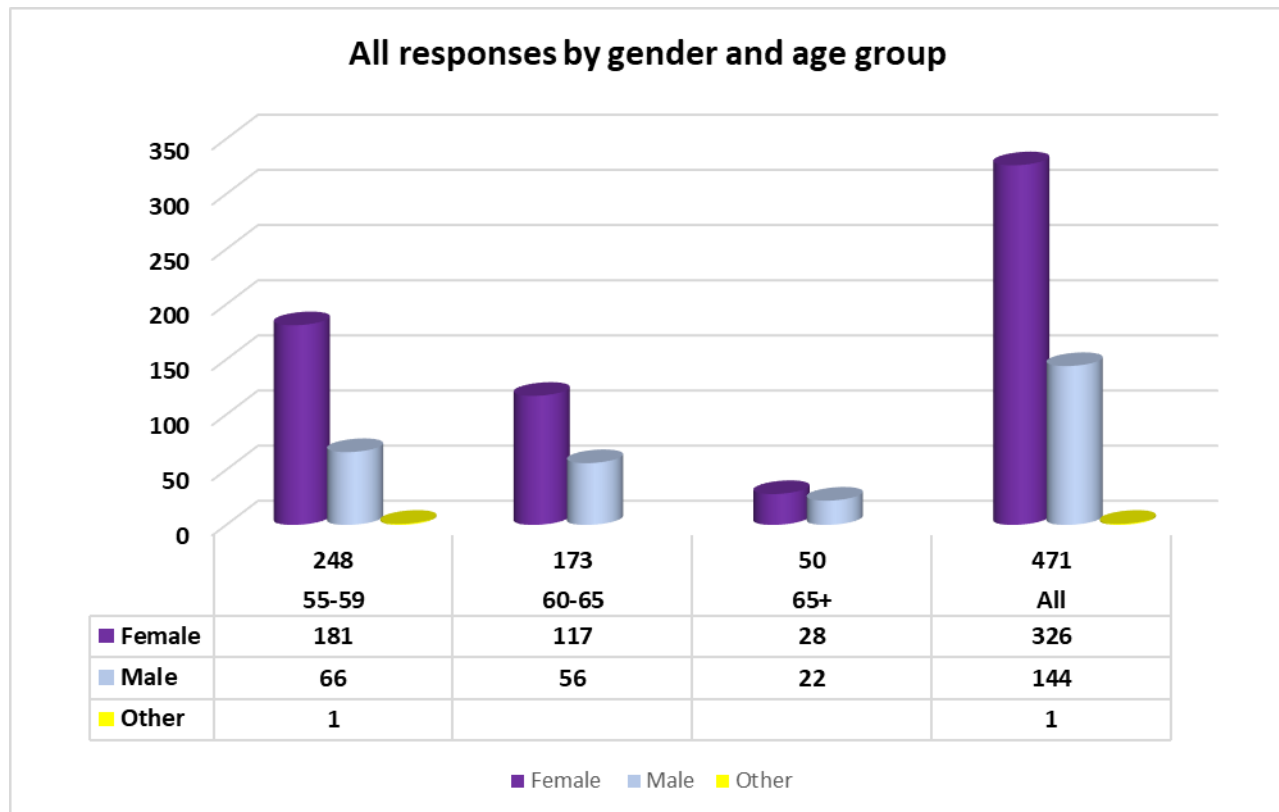
In addition to this, we also wanted to find out why older people were continuing in work and, for those under their normal retirement age, what their retirement prospects were for the future.

The survey was widely circulated throughout our networks, to our own membership, trade unions, local government, the Scottish Government, other public bodies, the private sector, women's organisations and health and safety activists working with the Scottish Hazards campaign.

The survey was designed to be completed online and was also promoted through our website and social media channels. Paper copies were made available to ensure individuals without access to digital services, or who chose to respond in this way, could do so.

Who completed the survey?

Out of the 474 responses received, 471 respondents identified their age bracket. The majority came from women, with 326 (67.16%); 144 (32.63%) responses came from men and one respondent identified as other.



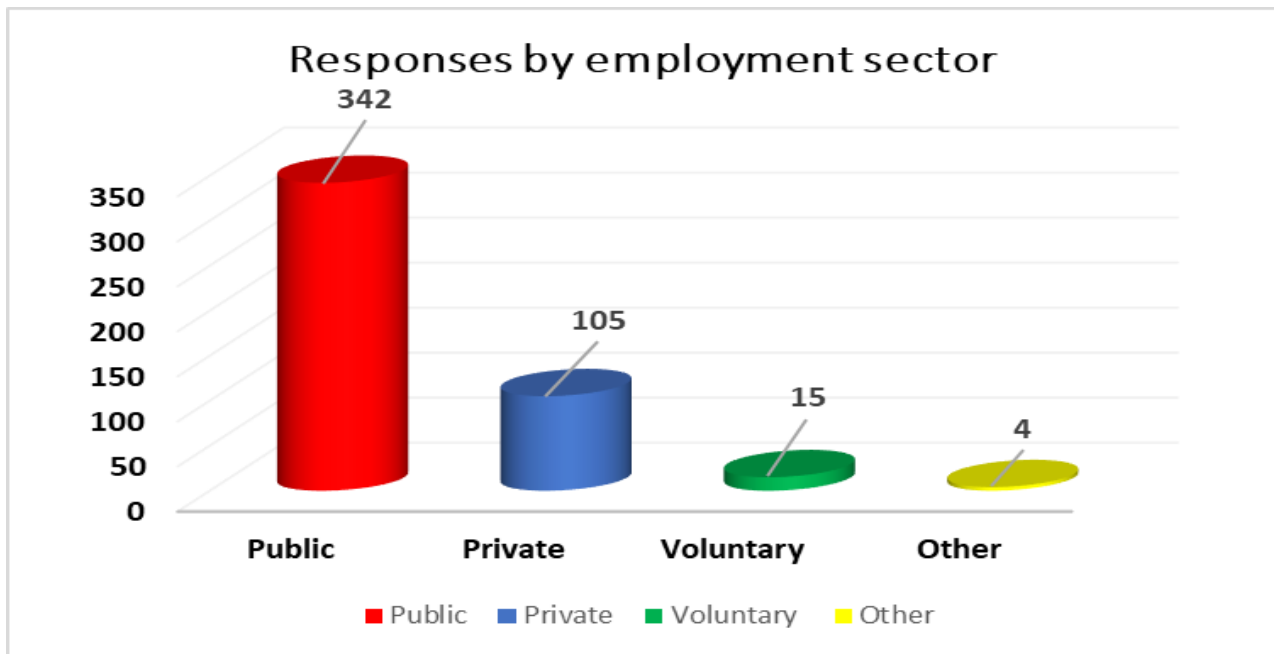
Most respondents came from those workers in the youngest age bracket, 55 to 59; 181 women, 66 men and one who identified as other. For workers between the ages of 60 to 65, 117 responses were received from women, 56 from men and those in the oldest age range, 65+, 28 responses were received from women and 22 from men.

Where did these responses come from?

Of the 466 respondents who identified their employment sector, the largest number of responses came from older workers employed within the public sector, with 342 (73.39%) respondents. The greatest number of those came from workers employed in local government (124); NHS Scotland (74), 22 of which came from one health authority; the Scottish Government (56); HMRC (32) and Further and Higher Education (34).

In the private sector which equated to 105 (22.53%) responses, there were comparatively fewer responses however one financial institution accounted for over 50% of those responses.

There were 15 (3.22%) responses from the voluntary/third sector and 4 responses (0.86%) from the other category.



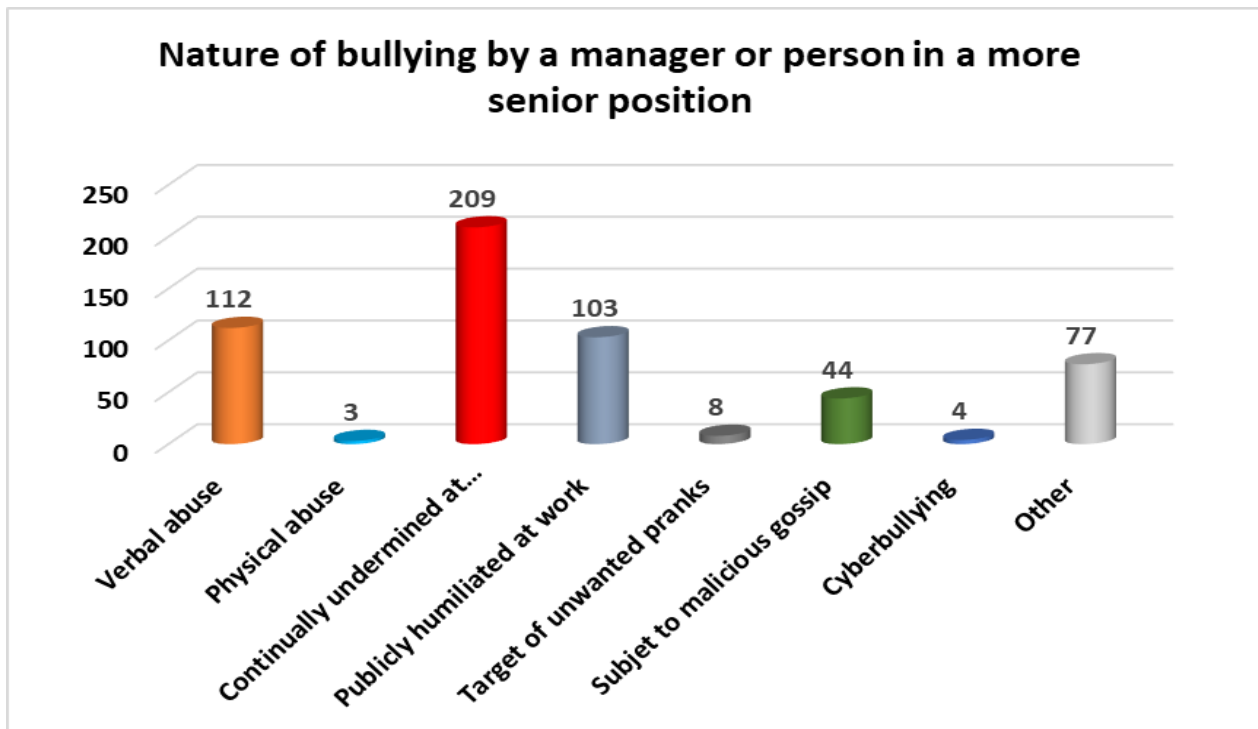
Management Bullying

461 people responded to the question of whether they had ever been bullied at work by a manager or someone more senior to them, 270 (59%) said yes, 191 said they had not. In response to the question on the nature of the bullying, 291 respondents provided examples of the types of unwanted behaviour they had been subjected to in the workplace. The main bullying behaviours they had encountered were continually being undermined at work, being publicly humiliated at work and verbal abuse.

Women and men both highlighted the same top three bullying behaviours outlined in the previous paragraph although verbal abuse was the second most common bullying behaviour encountered by men, just edging out being humiliated by managers into the third most common unwanted behaviour.

Of 146 responses from women 146 (83%) reported continually being undermined at work as the most common bullying behaviour followed by 71 (40%) saying they had been publicly humiliated at work and 70 (40%) saying

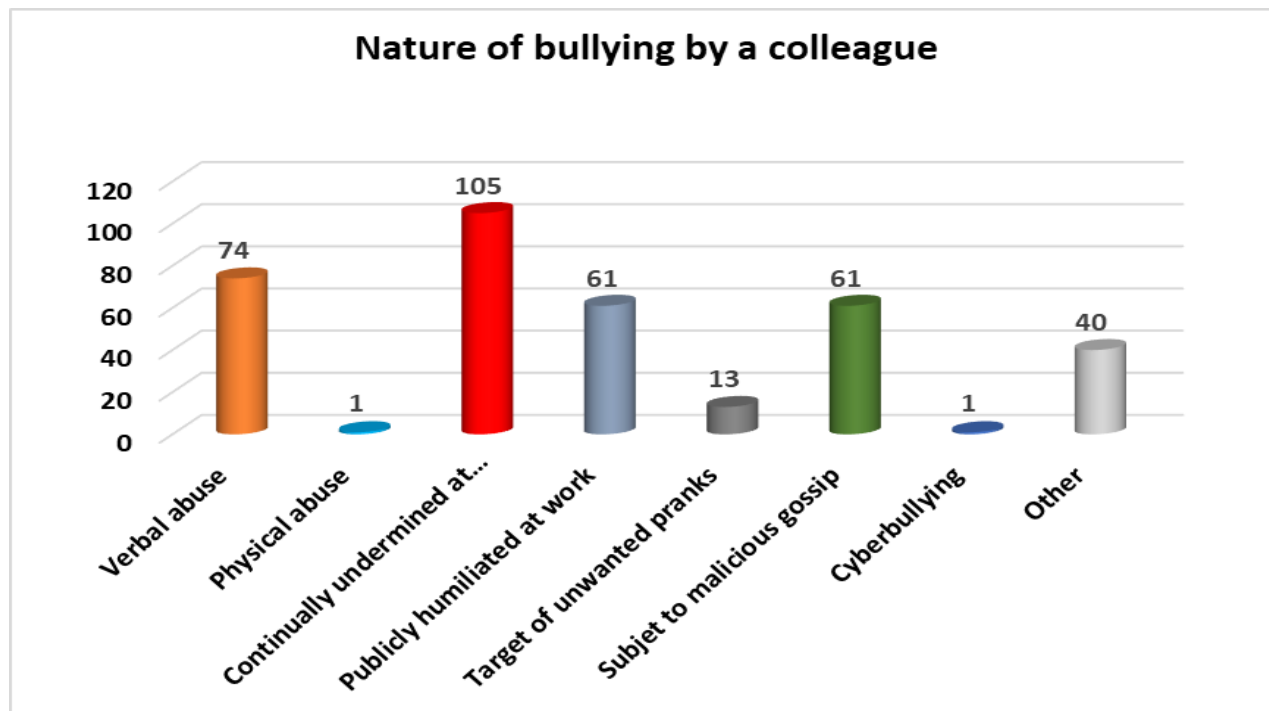
they had been subjected to verbal abuse. Management bullying experienced by males produced roughly similar results with 62 of 78 respondents (80%) saying they had felt continually undermined at work, 42 (54%) having suffered verbal abuse and 31 (40%) having felt publicly humiliated in the workplace. From this it would appear that males are slightly more likely to be subjected to verbal abuse than their female counterparts.



Bullying by Peers

Respondents were also asked if they had experienced bullying by their peers or someone of a lower grade, 467 people responded to this question, 35 % (164) confirmed they had, 65% (303) said they had not. The nature of the bullying encountered at the hands of peers followed the same pattern as that carried out by management with the same three issues receiving the highest responses, 209 reported being undermined at work, 112 having suffered verbal abuse and 103 being publicly humiliated in the workplace. For women 63 (66%) felt undermined at work, (54%) had suffered verbal abuse and 38 (40%) felt they had been subjected to public humiliation in the workplace at the hand of colleagues. For males 20 (60%) felt undermined, 19

(58%) had suffered verbal abuse by colleagues and 16 had felt publicly humiliated by their peers behaviour.



Most respondents reported having been subjected to more than one type of bullying behaviour and many reported other examples such as:-

Sexual harassment; unwanted attention from clients; unfair disciplinary procedures against them; unfair work schedules; denial of compassionate leave; being reprimanded for taking sickness leave and not being paid for working longer hours.

'There was a take it or leave it mentality, I was told that if I didn't like what I was being told to do I should get my things and go'

(Respondent Age 60-65)

'The worst thing was that after I had been shouted at in front of my colleagues, they all started sniggering behind my back'

(Respondent Age 65+)

'I just felt that I had no-one to talk to at work, I was constantly being left out and my health suffered'

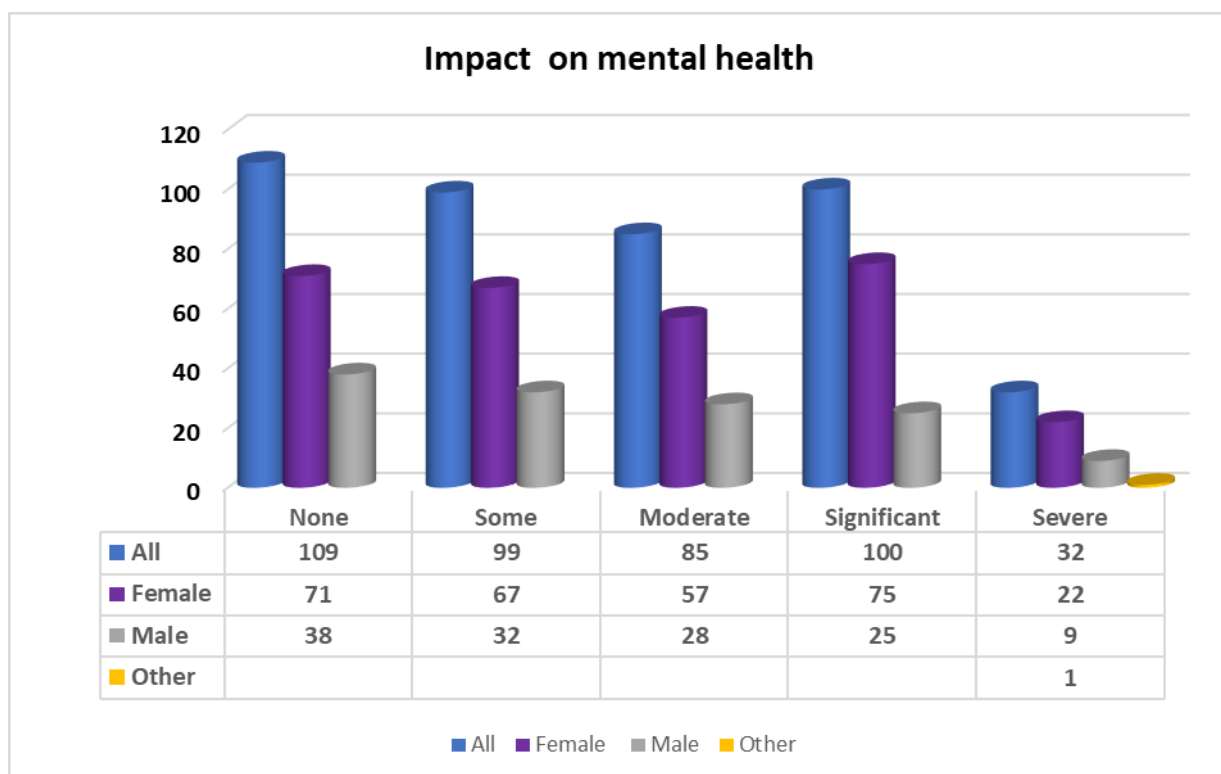
(Respondent Age 60-65)

Bullying and the Impact on Mental Health

Respondents were asked if the bullying behaviour had any impact on their mental health and for this question, the survey introduced a star grade from one to 5, with 1 being no impact and 5 being the most severe. Of the 425 respondents only 25%, 71 women and 38 men, said that the bullying behaviour had no impact at all on their mental health. 23% of respondents, 67 women and 32 men, said that there had been some impact with 20%, 57 women and 28 men having suffered moderate impact.

However the most notable findings were that the majority of respondents had suffered a moderate to severe impact on their mental health with a combined total of 132 (32%), 97 women, 34 men and 1 respondent identifying as other.

By combining the results of those who had suffered at least some impact to their mental health this equates to a staggering 75% , 221 women, 94 men and 1 other. This clearly shows that there is a significant problem when looking at bullying in the workplace and the impact it has on the health and safety of older workers.

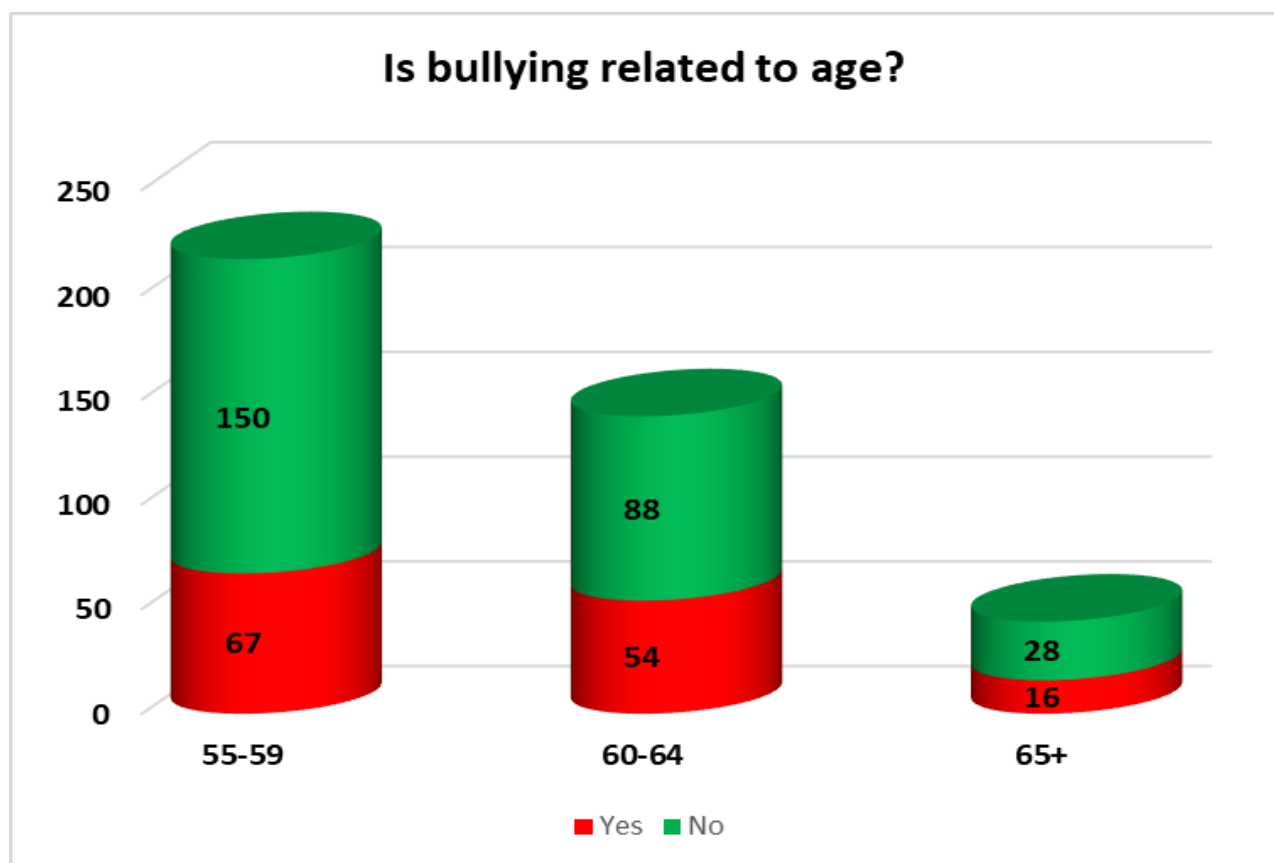


Bullying in Relation to Age

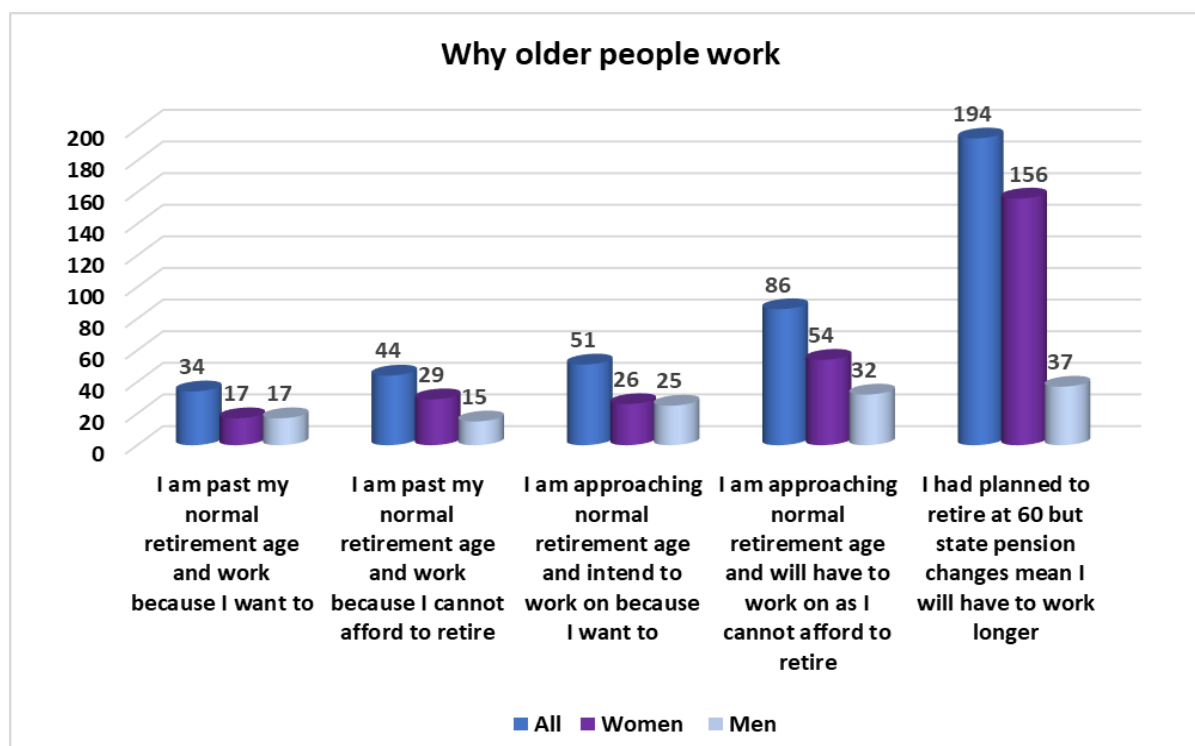
Of the 403 people responding to this question, just over one third (34%) of those believed that the bullying behaviour was directly related to their age.

As the chart below clearly demonstrates, the likelihood of bullying behaviour becomes more commonplace as workers age, rising from 31% of those respondents in the 55-59 age bracket to 39% of those in the 60-65 and 65+ age brackets.

It may also prove significant that 71 respondents declined to answer this particular question.



Why Older People Remain in the Workplace



68% of all responses indicated that their retirement choice had been altered, with the majority of workers remaining in work. or facing the prospect of having to remain at work against their choice after their planned retirement, being women (73%).

Only 18% of total respondents indicated that they had remained in, or planned to remain, in work because they wanted to with over a quarter of them (28%) stating that they could not afford to retire. However as over 46% stated that they had planned to retire at 60 but now could not, this inaffordability to retire could prove to be a lot higher.

The number of respondents who indicated they had never received any form of bullying in the workplace, either from managers or colleagues was 156, exactly the number of women who indicated state pension changes were resulting in them working longer than planned.

The broader health and safety impact of enforced longer working was not within the remit of this piece of work although it is clear workplace violence and behaviour is having a significant impact on the mental health of the ageing workforce.

The Scottish Pensioners' Forum would urge the Scottish Government to consider this as a possible piece of work moving forward.

Conclusion

Our survey indicates that many older people are being exposed to bullying and harassment in the workplace, mainly from managers but sometimes from colleagues. Where workers are in customer facing roles, many experienced bullying from customers and clients.

This is having an impact on the health and well-being of those in the ageing workforce, three quarters of respondents said their experience of bullying was having an impact on their mental health, ranging from mild to severe. One third of the respondents believed the behaviour they were subjected to was directly related to their age. Half of the respondents reported they are being forced to work longer because of changes to the state pension age and others stated that they were past, or approaching, normal retirement age however could not afford to retire.

It would appear that this problem is likely to get much worse unless we ensure our workplaces and work environments meet the needs of the ageing workforce, needs that are incompatible with an economy where the needs and rights of individuals are often ignored and undermined by precarious work and job intensification and employment policies that often discriminate against older workers as well as other groups with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

In Scotland we can challenge unacceptable behaviours towards older workers through the Scottish Government's Fair Work Agenda and the work of the Fair Work convention.

Older workers should have equality of *opportunity* in the workplace; it is clear from the responses to our survey that bullying of older workers and their continually being undermined at work is not making the best use of their talents and experience. There may be job roles or demands that older people may struggle to meet but this can be addressed by focusing more on the functional capacity of workers throughout their working life, redesigning jobs to suit older people and not striving for the impossible, redesigning older workers to suit modern day workplaces.

Employment policies that aim to discipline workers rather than support them will have a disproportionate and discriminatory impact on an ageing workforce. Older workers may struggle to meet ever increasing targets

synonymous with job intensification, new technologies and systems of work, leaving themselves more exposed to performance management and being managed out of work by employers who believe a 67-year-old worker should deliver the same output as a 27-year-old. This is just not going to happen in a rapidly changing labour market without redesigning jobs and roles that match the needs and capabilities of older workers.

The Scottish Pensioners Forum believes the Scottish Government's Framework for Older People should address issues around lack of opportunity provided to older workers in the workplace focusing on inclusion in person development for older workers, not exclusion from training on the grounds of age. Excluding older workers from training and development could lead to isolation, exclusion and the skill gap between young and old widening, factors that breed, and could lead to, an increase in bullying behaviour.

Our results show that in many cases older workers are not *respected* in the workplace, many of the comments in our survey and the results themselves show that respondents feel they are not treated with dignity and their experience in the workplace and the labour market is not recognised or valued.

Disrespectful working relationships and workplaces can have a significant impact on the self esteem of individuals which can in turn lead to poorer workplace performance, again opening the opportunity for bullying and unwanted behaviours to be directed towards older workers.

The Older People's Framework should encourage employers to ensure workplace policies and working practices promote inclusion of older workers based on mutual respect and dignity in the workplace. Employers should be encouraged to develop management, supervisors training and employees on the needs and capabilities of the ageing workforce. There should also be more significant workplace and labour market planning to ensure jobs are designed for aging workers instead of vice versa.

Security

Most older workers who participated in the survey indicated they were working past, or would have to work past, their expected retirement because they could not afford to retire.

Security of income can have a positive impact on health and wellbeing of all workers, but that security of employment and the associated remuneration can only be guaranteed if older workers can achieve targets and stay well enough to deliver the performance demanded by employers.

Older people are more likely to develop physical and long-term health conditions that could both affect their performance and result in them having more time off work. This leaves them more likely to be exposed to discriminatory workplace performance and sickness absence management procedures, both of which threaten the employment and security of income of workers faced with the prospect of working longer.

These workplace policies attract stigma, those subject to their often draconian and subjective application often feel isolated and demotivated leading to the prospect of older workers being subjected to bullying as a result.

Older workers dismissed for poor performance or unacceptable sickness absence levels will place an increased burden on our social security system as well as reducing the income tax receivable from these workers.

The Scottish Pensioners Forum would like to see the Framework encouraging employers to carry out an equality audit of their employment policies and work practices, starting with the impact on all workers protected under the Equality Act. Fair employment policies fairly implemented in a non-discriminatory way, can help to create a work environment and culture whereby bullying behaviour is eliminated or dealt with appropriately should it occur.

Front the result it is clear many workers aged 55 or over who took part in our survey are not finding their work fulfilling mainly because of bullying behaviour. There are many reasons older workers will not feel fulfilled in the workplace including feeling undervalued or not valued at all, disrespected in

the workplace, facing intolerable pressures due to work intensification and the need to meet unrealistic targets.

The redesigning of jobs and workplace policies focusing on the functional capacity of job holders would recognise that the pace and intensity of work may be impacted by age or any other protected characteristic.

Moving away from the one size fits all approach to job design will require a culture change to ensure recognising individual capabilities of older workers, and others, is not seen as their receiving preferential treatment, which could potentially leave them open to bullying as a result. The Scottish Pensioners Forum sees a clear conflict between providing fulfilling work and rigid application of sickness and performance improvement procedures.

The Scottish Government's Older People's Framework should encourage employers to review employment policies and practices and remove any potential discriminatory impact they may have on older workers. More encouragement should be given to employers to redesign work, cultures and jobs to make the workplace more inclusive and less divisive as it tends to be when success is measured by individual performance.

The key to addressing bullying in the workplace is by giving older people an effective voice in the workplace, a voice that is heard by employers and which influences their organisational decision making. Trade unions provide that voice in workplaces as they have recognition agreements, however many older workers do not have that protection.

The Scottish Pensioners Forum is an organisation of older people, many of whom have a background in trade unions and the voluntary and third sector. When considering how an effective voice can be developed and used to challenge bullying behaviour, our members have a role to play based on their experience, having been an older worker themselves and having gone through the transition from working life into retirement.

Trade union representatives also support older workers and these unions recognise the ageing workforce and the need to ensure the modern workplace meets the needs of older people in all aspects of their employment. The Scottish Pensioners' Forum, Scottish Hazards and TUC Education in Scotland are currently looking at developing workplace learning on the ageing workforce, ensuring reps and older people are aware of their

rights in the workplace, the issues older workers face including bullying and how to resolve them effectively.

However, as the Fair Work Framework points out there are a lack of organisations that can provide advice and support to older workers who find themselves subject to bullying. Of the few available, Scottish Hazards has a helpline, Support@Work can provide support to workers in Edinburgh, Inverclyde Employment Rights Centre provides a similar resource to workers in that authority and a few Citizens Advice Bureaux can provide advice to clients. This is not ideal, and due to this lack of resources many older workers may in fact suffer from bullying practices but remain silent.

The Scottish Pensioners Forum believes the Framework should recognise the role trade unions have in providing support for older workers when they have workplace issues. It should also look at how advice centres can be supported to increase the amount of support and representation they can provide for non-union members. Finally, the Framework should encourage the Fair Work Convention to investigate working environments and the ageing workforce and what needs to be done to provide fairer, healthier and safer workplaces for older workers.