In Germany they call it “psychoterror”. Here, we call it bullying. The International Labour Office (ILO) says it is “one of the fastest growing areas of workplace violence.” Most of us have witnessed it and alarming numbers have been on the receiving end of what TUC calls an “epidemic” of workplace bullying.

**Bully beef**

Almost half of Britain’s employees (47 per cent) have witnessed bullying at work, one in 10 (10.5 per cent) report having been bullied in the last six months, and one in four (24.6 per cent) have been bullied in the last five years, according to TUC research published in February. The findings of the biggest British bullying study suggest the bullying problem is significantly worse than elsewhere in Europe.

Based on a survey of 5,300 public, private and voluntary sector employees, the results suggest workplace bullying contributes to the loss of 18 million working days every year. And victims of workplace bullying take an average seven extra days off each year than those who are not bullied.

Those who reported being bullied within the last six months consistently reported the poorest health, the lowest work motivation and satisfaction, the highest absenteeism figures as well as the lowest productivity, compared to those who were not bullied.

Those who witnessed bullying at work were also more likely to report poor health and low morale than those who worked in bullying-free environments.

**Bossy bosses**

The TUC survey found that in most cases (75 per cent) a manager was identified as the bully. Victims of bullying were more likely to experience autocratic and divisive styles of management than those who hadn’t experienced bullying at work.

A July 1998 Institute of Management (IOM) report suggested harassment was part of the new management creed. It concluded that new “leaner” business practices are a breeding ground for “corporate bullying on a large scale.” (Hazards 67).

IOM added that people are expected to “work longer hours with fewer resources, put into head-to-head competition with colleagues and treated unsympathetically if they flag under the strain. This attitude starts at the top and filters down through an entire organisation spawning a whole brood of macho style managers in its wake.”

The TUC research also found that long hours and job insecurity has helped to fuel the epidemic of workplace bullying. TUC study author Professor Cary Cooper of UMIST linked the higher UK incidence compared to other European countries to the growth of long hours - we work the longest hours in Europe - job insecurity and the effects of “downsizing” on workloads.

Research published in April 2000 linked decreasing to higher sickness levels (page 11).

**Action**

The TUC report calls on employers to:

- Develop procedures for dealing with complaints.
- Train managers so they are aware of the negative effects of bullying and undertakex regular risk assessments or stress audits to identify bullying at work.
- Public service union UNISON says all workplaces should have a bullying policy covering all staff and agreed jointly by the employer and the union. It says unions should check whether the policy includes:
  - A commitment from senior managers
  - Acceptance that bullying is an organisational issue
  - A statement that bullying is unacceptable and will not be tolerated
  - Clear definitions of unacceptable behaviour

- A statement that bullying will be treated as a disciplinary offence
- Steps to assess and prevent bullying
- Duties of heads of departments and supervisors
- Confidentiality for complainants
- Guarantees for complainants will not be victimised
- Clear complaints procedure, separate from the normal grievance procedure
- Both informal and formal complaints procedures
- Information and training about bullying and the policy and review and monitoring.

**The law**

In July 1999 UK organisation ACAS issued workplace bullying guidance. The guidance for employees notes safety, discrimination, disability and stalking laws may all apply (Hazards 67).

It adds: “Employees are usually liable in law for the acts of their coworkers and this includes bullying or harassing behaviour.”

General duties under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 require employers to protect the health, safety and welfare of their employees, with these duties explained further in safety regulations including the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

Where employees have failed to take the required case of their staff, workers can claim compensation.

In 1996, UNISON won a major bullying victory in the courts, securing £66,000 in an out of court settlement for social worker Janet Ballantyne who suffered anxiety, depression and panic attacks caused by a bullying manager.

In March 2000, a former army private was awarded £745,000 at the High Court after an attack by a bullying corporal lead to mental collapse.