



## **Surviving emotional abuse at workplace**

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## Abstract

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<p>Emotional abuse at work can be seen e.g., as rude humour, constant criticism and aggravating or isolating the victim. Emotional abuse at work is a long-term circumstance, which creates long-term effects on the victim's physical and mental health. The effects of emotional abuse can stay with the victim even after years, and they can affect individual's ability to cope in their professional and personal life. In addition, emotional abuse cases are financially, reputationally and societally costly for organisations. In Finland organisations have a legal obligation to prevent emotional abuse at work. Still, unfortunately, it is not uncommon to experience emotional abuse at work.</p> <p>The aim of this study was to find out what are the outcomes of emotional abuse at work for individual and how surviving emotional abuse has changed them individually, professionally and personality wise. The study was executed from May 2022 until May 2023. The study included qualitative and quantitative research methods. Questionnaire was shared on LinkedIn on February-March 2023. Questionnaire was answered by 29 respondents. One interview was conducted on Teams in April 2023. Interviewee was a professional who has worked for years in health, safety and security field.</p> <p>The collected data indicated three main entities of surviving emotional abuse at work: the contradictory of feelings after emotional abuse, receiving help from the loved ones and using quitting as a way of overcoming the emotional abuse. While most participants felt emotionally stronger than before the experience, approximately 1/3 of them still felt like the experience limits their life in one way or another. This study is also no exception from the previous ones about the topic, when finding out that quitting is the best alternative to survive emotional abuse at work. Even though positively more than half of the participants received help from their loved ones, the study also showed that 70 % of the victims never received any help from their organisation. This indicates that organisations still have a lot to do when preventing and terminating emotional abuse at workplaces.</p>
<b>Keywords</b> emotional abuse, workplace bullying, surviving emotional abuse

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# 1 Introduction

Emotional abuse at work is the topic that affects people around the world. Emotional abuse at work can be seen as one person or a group, e.g., humiliating, isolating, aggravating or invalidating another person. It is a long-term inappropriate behavior towards another person. Long-term emotional abuse affects the victim's physical and mental health. In Finland organisations have the responsibility to take care of their employees and prevent any emotional abuse happening at their organisation. Unfortunately, emotional abuse is often so subtle, that sometimes even organisations do not know it is happening before the victim is leaving the organisation.

Accepting emotional abuse at organisations is financially, reputationally, and societally costly. In the most cases, the victims do not leave organisations immediately but rather rely on shorter sick leaves. These sick leaves can cost hundreds of euros per person yearly. If the organisational culture is accepting emotional abuse as a part of it, the organisation takes a risk on e.g., ending up in the media. This creates an image of an organisation which does not care about their employee's or their health and safety, but also potentially creates unattractive image as an employer.

Some victims of emotional abuse might not be able to work again after experiencing emotional abuse at work. This means that even younger people might end up retiring involuntarily, because of getting too severe and long-term physical or mental health issues from the abuse. The effects of emotional abuse at work can follow the victim even after quitting at the workplace they have been abused at. It can affect the victim in their professional, but also in their personal life. In the worst-case scenario, the victims of emotional abuse at work might end up ending their life. Luckily most of the victims survive and are even able to create a joyful career after the abuse - this thesis is focusing on those survivors.

I chose the topic of emotional abuse at work because I wanted to learn how we as individuals see and experience emotional abuse at work. As I didn't want to focus on the whole phenomenon but rather on the individual's perspective of it, I chose to research what are the outcomes of emotional abuse at work for individual and how surviving emotional abuse has changed them individually, professionally and personality wise. This thesis focuses on the individual's post-traumatic growth that can be possible after emotional abuse, which in this case can be seen as e.g., gaining resilience and stronger self-worth.

In this study I have three research questions:

Q1. How does emotional abuse at work affects individual's self-image individually, professionally and personality wise?

Q2. How does one overcome emotional abuse at workplace?

Q3. What are the common nominators of survivors of emotional abuse at workplace?

As a demarcation, this thesis does not research the abuser's side of emotional abuse situations at work. This thesis does not focus on the characteristics of abuser, the development from individual to an abuser, more closely on the situations that leads to emotional abuse at workplace or what organisations have done to prevent emotional abuse at workplaces. While all these topics would be interesting and make the research even more in-depth, this demarcation makes it easier to focus on the victim's side of the story and do purposeful research on surviving emotional abuse at work. Nevertheless, the topics that are left out of this thesis, should be researched in order to understand the phenomenon of emotional abuse in the workplace better from all perspectives.

As a result, this thesis will show individual how to survive emotional abuse at work and give employers a better understanding what are the real costs on accepting emotional abuse at work – and why they should have zero tolerance against emotional abuse at their organisation.

## 2 Emotional abuse

In this chapter I will focus on what emotional abuse is and how it appears at workplaces. I introduce the varying terminology used of emotional abuse and why I chose the term emotional abuse. I also go through different ways of how a person can be abusive and what is the difference between conflict and abuse. On the last subchapter I will demonstrate how emotional abuse effects on the victim's mental and physical health, their ability to work and their life as a whole.

Emotional abuse is frightening, controlling, and isolating way of trying to shame, humiliate, accuse, blame, and invalidate you (Pietrangelo & Raypole 2022). Emotional abuse is behaviour pattern which causes humiliation, offense and distress or an unwelcoming (working) environment for the victim. Victims must tolerate offensive comments, constant criticism, and other ways of insulting. (Einarsen, Hoel, Dieter & Cooper 2004, 7–8.) Emotional abuse can be disguised as name-calling, judgmental comments, spreading rumours or isolating them and leaving them out of any social contact at work. Isolation is the cruellest way of emotional abuse because it has e.g., an enormously crumbling effect on the victim's self-esteem (Pärssinen 2006, 13). Pärssinen (2006, 13) also notes that long-term isolation makes the victim more exposed to mental health issues. Unfortunately, social isolation is also one of the main types of emotional abuse at work (Einarsen & al. 2004, 9).

Emotional abuse at workplace can be shown as direct actions but also as indirect acts (Penttinen, E. Marjut Jyrkinen, M., Wide, E., 2019, 18). It can also be so subtle that it becomes hard to recognize as emotional abuse. This means e.g., face expressions, joking, rude humour, not greeting the victim, and even total silent treatment. Emotional abuse is a subjective matter, and therefore it should be recognized from the subjective emotions, not only from objective notes from the outsiders. (Einarsen & al. 2004, 12.; Keashy 2001, 235.)

In Keashly's research (2001.) the victim's had hard time on verbalizing what happened due to the subtle way the perpetrator would have been abusive. Victims said that they could not even say they have been abused, they just noticed the feeling of self-doubt, humiliation and their mental well-being getting worse day by day. They might have not gotten yelled at, but perpetrator's choice of words was indicated to hurt the victim. Victims also experienced e.g., disbelief, shock, fear, and denial that they even are being the target of emotional abuse at work (Eastel & Ballard, 2017, 49).

Even though sometimes emotional abuse at work is referred as a conflict, it isn't one. It can be a traumatizing crisis for individual. (Mieli Ry, 2021.) Emotional abuse makes you feel the same way as physical violence – just without the bruises. In emotional abuse, the abuser's aim is to hurt the

victim and it makes their act a form of aggression (Salmivalli 1998, 29). Emotional abuse happens usually in an involuntary social group form that are semi-steady and unchangeable. This means e.g., schools, workplaces, or other forms of institutions. (Salmivalli 1998, 30–31.)

Emotional abuse can be, but is normally not, a single event (Einarsen & al. 2004, 7). Emotional abuse in general is hard to recognize as such because it can involve incidents that might not seem as abuse on their own, at least compared to the physical bruises as evidence of physical abuse (Penttinen & al. 2019, 23). When these incidents happen over a long period of time and are combined, they develop a bigger picture of emotional abuse. Research have shown that emotional abuse usually lasts more than a year (Einarsen & al. 2004, 8). It is done repeatedly, consciously or unconsciously by the abuser (Einarsen & al. 2004, 6). Even if done unconsciously, the aim is still causing the victim some kind of harm, mainly reputational and psychological harm.

Emotional abuse isn't based on gender, age, or any specific characteristic and anyone can experience it or be an abuser (Pietrangelo & Raypole 2022). Emotional abuse is not that rare, up to 20% have experienced it at workplaces across the countries (van Heugten 2021, 291). Emotional abuse appears the same way in any given circumstances, would it be e.g., in a relationship or at work. Emotional abuse increases when there is an uncertainty in any socioeconomic factors (van Heugten 2021, 292). The more uncertain people are about themselves and their situation, the more they might push their fears on others in the form of emotional abuse. This means that nowadays there might be an ever-increasing peak on emotional abuse cases due to the on-going war, upcoming inflation, and the marks that coronavirus has left among us.

## **2.1 Varying terminology, same phenomenon**

Usually, when people are talking about the people management problems at workplace, they focus on the word *workplace bullying*. Emotional abuse has been combined with relationships including a family member or a partner but in recent years the term *emotional abuse* has risen in the professional setting and verified its place in research (Pietrangelo & Raypole 2022).

Terminology on workplace violence can depend on the continent. In European countries it is called bullying, mobbing and workplace harassment, while in United States it is workplace mistreatment, verbal abuse, psychological abuse, emotional abuse, or generalized workplace harassment. (Keashly 2001, 234) Sexual harassment is also considered as psychological terror. (Keashly 2001, 234; Pärssinen 2006, 15). In addition, Keashly (2001, 234) mentions racial harassment as a form of emotional abuse. Hostile and unethical communication at workplaces is called psychical terror. It is mainly done by a group against one individual. (Leymann 1990, 120.) Whatever the used terminology is, the phenomenon is always the same.

I have read different research on this topic and have noticed that workplace bullying is still the most common term to use. I have read articles about how the dialog should be turned into talking more about emotional abuse because it is violence, just the same as physical one. In this study I will use the term *emotional abuse* as it is a term that, in my opinion, includes all the descriptions mentioned before. Emotional abuse is psychological violence/terror, bullying, mobbing, mistreatment, and sexual and racial harassment. All these causes the victim above all emotional pain, which is my starting point in this thesis.

## **2.2 Conflicts as a part of human interaction**

Experiencing emotional abuse is subjective emotion. Therefore, it is important that the victim is seen, heard, and taken seriously when they are talking about their experiences. However, even though it is not pleasant, conflicts belong to human interaction, and they should not be assumed as emotional abuse right away (Einarsen & al. 2004, 19).

The difference between conflict and emotional abuse is that conflict can be solved between the parties in common understanding – while emotionally abusive situation feels unsolvable due to totally infected relationship between the abuser and the victim. Frequency of occurrence is one of the methods to examine emotional abuse (Keashly 2001, 235). In order to differentiate conflict from emotional abuse, emotional abuse must happen on repetition, daily or weekly (Lutgen-Sandvik 2006, 408; Einarsen & al. 2004, 19). Therefore, one bad day – or even an unpleasant phase – with a colleague is not described as emotional abuse, but rather a conflict.

Individual's perception of abusiveness can be affected by the actual interactive situation. For example, if the colleague's way of communicating is straight-forward and generally thought blunt, but without the intention to harm the recipient, it is not an abusive situation. Bad behaviour is non-acceptable, but it is not abuse. Also, the recipient's prior history with being abused affects their perception on unacceptable interactive circumstances – this might create misunderstandings that lead to mistreatment cases in vain. Therefore, there should be a way to address the situation on behalf of impartial party, where the participant's feelings are assessed and not minimized. (Keashly 2001, 236–237.)

Organisations and other employees should be careful not to invalidate the person's feelings. Inappropriate behavior and harassment have their own decree on the Finnish law, and it indicates that companies should have their own preventable measures on these subjects. Therefore, in many organisations, they have written form of an operating model on inappropriate behaviour and harassment at work. This operating model includes for example what is emotional abuse, what it is not

and how the employee should act when facing it. Having this kind of operating model is not compulsory for companies but according to law they still must have instructions on how to prevent, identify and terminate emotional abuse at their organisation.

On the website of Finnish Occupational Health and Safety Administration (2022.) it is said that even if it could feel like it, emotional abuse is not the following:

- the appropriate and justifiable matters considering employer's work and management's decisions and instructions
- the processing of problems at work or in the work community together
- interfering with work performance on justifiable grounds
- giving a notice on justified reason
- directing the employee to assessment on their work performance on justified reason

As the subjective matters, such as emotions, are hard for the other person to validate as a truth, this model gives the opportunity to find a common ground where to start. While this model helps organisations to identify the situations that are emotionally abusive, it also leaves room for interpretation. If the interpretations the parties are making, are differentiating a lot from each other, there is a possibility that the organisation itself does not recognize the situation and leaves the victim without help. As well, it helps the employee to categorize their feelings of the situation better and make an informative decision if their emotions are correct or if they have interpreted the situation on wrong assumption.

### **2.3 Effects of emotional abuse**

Emotional abuse at work is the root which causes the most serious health problems to individuals (van Heugten 2021, 291). Emotional abuse causes psychic, psychosomatic (physical) and social anguish that can last a long time (Leymann 1990, 120). Emotional abuse at work breaks the boundaries of professional and personal life. It attacks on both at the same time, in a public scene – and it hurts the person's self-image as well as their image of themselves as a competent employee. For the victim it is challenging to differentiate if the abuser is attacking them as a person or as a professional. (Penttinen & al. 2019, 49.)

Effects of emotional abuse can be easily detected, or they can appear as invisible symptoms to other people. While mental health problems, especially depression and anxiety, are the most common effects of emotional abuse, it can also have effects that complicates victim's everyday life. These effects can be seen as e.g., fundamental trust issues with people, insomnia and declining immune system. Emotional abuse at work harms victim's overall health and can have irreversible effects on it.

## **The effects on individual's health**

Emotional abuse has short and long-term effects on victim's mental health. These effects are, according to Einarsen & al. (2004, 128, 134) and Leymann (1990, 122–123), e.g., anxiety and depression. Einarsen & al. (2004, 134) and Duffy and Sperry (2014, 76) have identified PTSD-cases among the victims of emotional abuse at work. Experiencing emotional abuse and declining mental health rises the risk for compulsive behaviour and worst-case scenario, suicides (Leymann 1990, 124; Einarsen & al. 2004, 128.).

In very rare cases emotional abuse involves psychical abuse (Einarsen & al. 2004, 9). However, even though emotional abuse has the most effects on individual's mental health, it has serious effects on their psychical health as well. Researchers have found that long-term emotional abuse can lead e.g., higher blood pressure and coronary heart disease (Duffy & Sperry 2014, 76, 78). In addition, excluding individual from social situations can lead to declining immune system other psychosomatic illnesses, such as chronic pain and exhaustion. (Einarsen & al. 2004, 128–129.; Leymann 1990, 122–123.)

In addition to the different physical and psychological symptoms the victims of emotional abuse at workplace may experience, they also experience social-psychological effects. Social-psychological effects are the loss of coping resources and mechanisms. This means that individual cannot cope in the abusive situation due their social realm being abolished from them, and most of the coping resources being strongly linked to social situations. Being alone or feeling alone in the abusive situation enhances the other mental health problems that are already evolving in the background. (Leymann 1990, 123.) However, like Einarsen & al. (2004, 132) wrote, no matter what the person's health diagnosis is after being emotionally abused, the most important thing is trying to understand the destructiveness emotional abused can cause on the victim's all over health.

## **The effects on the ability to work**

Emotional abuse at work creates social stress that is more damaging than any other kind of work-related stress (Einarsen & al. 2004, 127). Emotional abuse has the intention of causing damage for the victim, such as ruining victim's reputation at work, manipulate the communication towards the victim, e.g., silent treatment, isolate the victim from any social circumstances and aggravate victim's ability to perform correctly (Leymann 1990, 121). Constant exposure to negative approach against the victim can be a self-fulfilling prophecy, where the victim becomes less able to cope with their work, by believing that they are not good enough. This can lead the person to be unmotivated and unwilling to do their job. In addition, when the person is careless at their workplace, it can have effects also on the occupational safety. (Einarsen & al. 2004, 145–146.)

Emotional abuse forms an imbalanced power dynamic between the abuser and the victim. This means that the victim is somehow dependable on the abuser. (Einarsen & al. 2004, 10–11.) It can be e.g., an employee–supervisor, team project–individual or even just older colleague–younger colleague situation. Emotional abuse is a social phenomenon, where interaction happens between all the members in the organisation (Vartia-Väänänen 2003, 51). This means that even the so-called bystander effect is a part of the emotional abuse, because others are then accepting it silently. It gives the victim an idea that they are less worthy and other people not caring. (Vartia-Väänänen 2003, 27.)

Keashly (2001, 237), Lutgen-Sandvik (2006, 414) and several other researchers found out that victims usually tend not to act on the abuse nor stand against the abuser. Most common obstacle for doing so is fear of losing job, losing the support of colleagues or things getting even worse than they already are. Some people might even stay at their current work and just keep taking longer sick leaves in order to have some kind of financial security.

Van Heugten found out (2021, 296) that taking absence from work and then going back to it was rarely, if never, the solution to the emotional abuse at work. It can help e.g., to regain the victim's confidence and ability to go back to work but being there reduces their health as soon as they start working again. For most of the victims, the trauma from emotional abuse has been so severe that going back to work – even in a different organisation – is an overwhelming idea (Pärssinen 2006, 53).

Emotional abuse at work, like any other bullying, evolves over time. Einarsen & al. (2004, 14.) identify four steps in evolving process of emotional abuse at work: aggressive behaviour, bullying, stigmatization, and severe trauma. Leymann (1990, 121–122) identified the same process, with fifth step which is personnel administration. In this step, management should step forward and try to stop bullying. Nevertheless, both researchers thought the same; after stigmatization, the victim has harder time on defending themselves and might begin to isolate themselves on their own willingness. It begins harder for the victim to be able to go to work and when sick leaves began to come more frequent, their ability to perform at work suffers and they might be left with little to no work – until they are finally left with no choice than to leave the whole workplace involuntarily (Einarsen & al. 2004, 14).

One of the social effects of emotional abuse Field (2011, 16) mentions is the co-worker resentment. Despite the abusive co-workers being left behind when moving onto a new job, according to Field (2011, 6) emotional abuse at work can leave the individual with trust issues that follow them onto another workplace. This means, that while individual's overall health could improve, they still

cannot trust people with the same naivety than before. They might be more cautious and appear more silent and avoidable when it comes to e.g., team assignments.

### **The effects on the individual's life outside the work environment**

The effect of emotional abuse at work goes way beyond work environment and affects the individual's life in their free time as well (Priesemuth 2020; Leymann 1990, 123). The effects of emotional abuse can last for months or even years after the abuse has ended. Likewise, the negative consequences (e.g., psychosomatic symptoms) remain even after leaving the organisation. (van Heugten 2021, 298.)

Emotional abuse can create an obstacle for social, psychological, and professional development, e.g., by leaving the person out of training days and group assignment. This can lead to incapability of social interaction, social exclusion and failing in the norms of societal expectations. (Pärssinen 2006, 60–66.) This indicates that victim's personality traits can be permanently affected by emotional abuse. Avoidance might become a permanent way of surviving and communicating. (Liikanen & Sirviö 2015, 13.) Strong self-esteem, self-efficacy and negative affectivity can turn to contrary when individual is exposed to a traumatic event – such as emotional abuse at work (Einarsen & al. 2004, 133–134).

Victims who have endured emotional abuse at work seem to have the most serious cases of mental health problems and especially having to be diagnosed with long-term depression. Victims also feel fundamental emotion of failure and therefore see themselves as failures. (Pärssinen 2006, 50–51.) In Hodgins' and Mannix-McNamara's (2017, 200) research the participants described a destructive effect of losing the sense of self by losing the ability to cope with the emotional abuse. Sometimes victims do not even know why they are being abused. According to Liikanen & Sirviö (2015, 6) in these cases the anxiety and fear could be hard to process and understand, which furthermore harms the victim's mental health and self-image. In van Heugten's research (2021, 295) participants felt constant fear over losing their job and their financial security, fear that they lose self-confidence and ability to speak up – and ultimately the emotional abuse taking over all aspects of their life.

Emotional abuse affects the way individual views the world and other people. This can lead to accidentally damaging the healthy relationships the individual has outside the work, due to distrust and anger they are feeling towards other people. Victim can unconsciously distance themselves from the people they love due to fear of them leaving, which also emphasizes the worry, anxiety, and sadness they are feeling. They can also displace their anger from work towards their partner, family, or friends. (Duffy & Sperry 2014, 75, 101.) This can lead to e.g., divorce or losing friends.

The emotional abuse at workplace can also change how the victims see and experience their environment. Respondents in Penttinen & al. (2019, 50–51) study told that the experience they had at work followed them as a feeling of unsafety in their spare time too. This means, according to Penttinen & al. (2019, 51), that experiencing emotional abuse at work can disrupt the victim's feel of safety in their work environment but also in their immediate environment outside work. This also enhances the extensive and complete effect emotional abuse at work has on the victim's overall health.

In addition to psychosomatic and physiological effects, the victims have the tendency to have nightmares and insomnia, due to constant reruns they are having about the abusive situation. Victims might e.g., keep counting their losses: lost reputation, lost career, lost relationships and so on. (Duffy & Sperry 2014, 90–93.) As a result of psychosomatic and physiological symptoms, victims have a higher tendency to use sedative or other sleep-inducing drugs (Vartia-Väänänen 2003, 45). If the victim blames themselves about the situation, it can also lead scaring social situations, drinking problem and ultimately suicide (Leymann 1990, 24).

### **3 Organisation's responsibilities on preventing, identifying, and terminating emotional abuse**

In this chapter I will go through the most important Finnish law decrees against emotional abuse and harassment at work. In addition, I will provide other resources to use, if the law is not on the side of the victim. I propose the ways organisations can prevent emotional abuse and what are the human, financial and reputational costs of ignoring emotional abuse at organisation. I also demonstrate how organisations could create a more ethical working environment, why identifying and naming emotional abuse correctly is essential, and how to terminate emotional abuse at their organisation.

In addition to the effects emotional abuse has on the individual, emotional abuse cases damage organisations from financial and reputational aspects. It has especially time-consuming and costly effects on human resources, occupational health care and organisational culture. It can also have harming or damaging effects on the organisation's reputation – especially if emotional abuse cases end up in the media. In Finland, media has written about emotional abuse cases steadily from year to year. How it affects the organisation depends on the organisation's response and their ability make corrective actions publicly.

In Finland there are laws and instructions on how to prevent emotional abuse at work. According to research mentioned later, preventable measures are the most effective ones against emotional abuse at work. Still, organisations have hard time on preventing, identifying and terminating emotional abuse. This can emerge from the lack of knowledge, resources, or the fear of harming the organisation's talent attraction or stakeholder relations.

#### **3.1 Law on emotional abuse**

Emotional abuse at work is an organisational problem, not only a people management problem (Pärssinen 2006, 11). According to Einarsen & al. (2004, 17) neither work-environment or organisational factors completely explain emotional abuse at work but it rather to be caused by multiple factors on organisational, individual, group and even societal levels. Still, preventing emotional abuse should be every organisation's high priority (Pärssinen 2006, 11).

In the Finnish law, there is no direct mention on emotional abuse but there are some paragraphs that can be used in these situations. In the Occupational Safety and Health Act, Section 8, it is said that

Employees shall avoid such harassment and other inappropriate treatment of other employees in the workplace that cause risk or hazard to their safety or health. — If harassment or other inappropriate treatment of an employee occurs at work and causes risk or hazard to the employee's health, the employer, after becoming aware of the matter, shall by available means take measures for remedying this situation.

The Criminal Code of Finland (39/1889), Section 5, Assault (578/1995) is written as

A person who employs physical violence on another or, without such violence, injures the health of another, causes pain to another or renders another unconscious or into a comparable condition, shall be sentenced for assault to a fine or to imprisonment for at most two years. An attempt is punishable.

Non-discrimination Act (1325/2014), Section 14, Harassment says

(1) The deliberate or de facto infringement of the dignity of a person is harassment, if the infringing behaviour relates to a reason referred to in section 8(1), and as a result of the reason, a degrading or humiliating, intimidating, hostile or offensive environment towards the person is created by the behaviour.

(2) An employer's actions are to be considered discrimination if the employer, after having been informed that an employee in their employment was subjected to harassment as referred to in subsection 1, neglects to take action to remove the harassment

These different law decrees do not seem to recognize emotional abuse or emotional abuse at workplace. For example, in some cases, possibility is that it is not clear enough that The Criminal Code of Finland, Section 5 includes also emotional abuse. Even if organisations know their obligations due to the law, employees might not be aware that there is actually a section in the law saying that harming others should be avoided.

Hence, if law isn't on the side of the victim, there are also another helpful resources that they could use to get their matter taken seriously of. These are their manager, human resources, occupational health and safety organisation (in workplaces that have more than 10 employees), occupational health and safety authorities, unions, occupational health professionals and finally police.

The only way of stopping emotional abuse, is for the organisation to act when it's notified of it. If the organisation does not take actions against emotional abuse, it deepens the victim's desperation, depression and decreases their trust in people in general. (Pärssinen 2006, 67.) In Finland,

organisation's obligation on acting immediately as it is notified on the emotional abuse, is included in the Non-discrimination Act (1325/2014), Section 14 (2) mentioned above. For the organisation to be better at preventing emotional abuse at their workplace, first and foremost they should provide enough information on the topic and its effects on the individual, groups, and the whole organisation. The organisation is responsible for providing enough information of what is acceptable behaviour and what is not. Preventable measures are most effecting against emotional abuse at work also due to bullying process been identified to grow worse in time (Pärssinen 2006, 67–68.; Zapf & Gross 2001, 501). The earlier in the process it's stopped and terminated, the more positive effect it has on the victim's mental health.

Einarsen & al. (2004, 13) recognizes also organisational abuse as a form of emotional abuse at work. It means organisation's practices are seemed to be abusive against the employees. Keashly (2001, 254–255) identifies three ways how company could express responsibility in emotional abuse cases. One way is to work around the problem – as harsh as it sounds. This means supporting the victim, by helping them to adjust or survive at work. Another way is to promise action but no significant outcome. This helps the victim to feel heard but still, no follow-up leads to unsolved cases. Third way is to take direct actions. The actions vary between having a conversation with the abuser to even firing them. While this might sound the best-case scenario, if the abuser still stays in the same work environment with the victim, it was noted that there was no significant improvement between those two.

While the victims of emotional abuse at work suffers the most, also bystanders or witnesses of emotional abuse can be affected seriously. Witnessing emotional abuse can create feeling of a toxic working environment, the fear of conflicts emerging and being/getting involved in the situation. It also increases work-related stress and complicates teamwork by lowering the cohesiveness between different groups. The witnesses also think about quitting, even if they are not in any way involved in the case. (Einarsen & al. 2004, 151–152.)

Organisation has a zero-tolerance policy against emotional abuse when management communicates that any kind of emotional abuse isn't tolerated, supervisors intervene immediately after acknowledging any emotional abuse in the workplace, and employees are encouraged to speak up if they themselves experience emotional abuse at work or see that happening to someone else. (Työterveyslaitos 2022.)

### **3.2 Monetary value of preventing emotional abuse at workplaces**

The financial costs are hard to count because they can shift from case to case. Nevertheless, it has been counted that every individual that has been a victim of emotional abuse at work costs at

least tens of thousands, even hundreds of thousands, dollars to the company annually. (Einarsen & al. 2004, 154.) Therefore, emotional abuse at workplace has substantial financial costs for the organisation. The financial cost can be shown in the organisations also in other ways than direct monetary value. Einarsen & al. (2004, 146–154.) has shown that emotional abuse affects organisations in the matters of absenteeism, turnover-rate, and overall productivity – and it also has effects on the bystanders and witnesses' mental health.

Absenteeism from sickness has been proven to be rather low in the bullying cases (around 2% variation, or 7 more sick days, compared to normal rates). These results might have been affected by people telling their symptoms in a specific matter, not focusing on the whole picture. The costs of sudden absenteeism can be significant when organisation must hire replacement staff in a rush or have the current employees work overtime. (Einarsen & al. 2004, 146–147.) By telling their symptoms in a specific matter, e.g., not only that they are having insomnia, but that they have insomnia due to the fear of going back to work, victims of emotional abuse at work could also alert the organisation of the wrong doing they have been experienced in a timelier manner. This could prevent the sudden absenteeism occurring due to emotional abuse.

According to OP Media (2018), the cost of sick leaves is around 350 euros/day/person. This includes e.g., hiring a substitute for the needed period. This does not include occupational health professionals' visits which are not that expensive if used the so-called normal amount but if employee needs a specialist's appointment (e.g., psychologist), it can lead to a bigger number quickly. OP Media (2018) has counted that mediocre sick leave period per employee is five to seven days yearly. These kinds of short sick leaves are the most expensive for the companies because the Social Insurance Institution of Finland does not compensate shorter sick leave. This means that the company is paying all costs that comes from the employee being away from work until two weeks. For example, seven days away from work costs roughly 2500 euros per person.

Research have found that the victims of emotional abuse at work do not take longer sick leaves but rather often the shorter ones. Therefore, the organisation should try to prevent emotional abuse happening in their company to cut down unnecessary sick leaves. Organisation should never aim for 0% sick leave rate because due to e.g., yearly influenzas – and unfortunately sudden epidemics, as seen with covid-19 – but they should prevent the sick leaves they can.

Turnover-rates have been the strongest way to measure the effects of bullying in organisations, but it has more to do with the victim's intention of quitting than them to look for a new job before quitting. Quitting can also be results of mental health problems getting too severe to stay, or organisation forcing out victims that seem to be unproductive and unsuitable for the company. There are

also victims that are unwilling to leave the workplace unless they get compensation from the organisation or the abuser. This can be financial or emotional compensation as long as it feels rightful to the victim. (Einarsen & al. 2004, 149.)

Recruiting a new employee is costly and time-consuming process. According to aTalent (2021), a recruitment company, just to recruit a person for the job can cost up to 15 000 euros. Even though this is an example of an outsourced recruitment, it gives an idea how much recruiting could cost when done as an in-house project. Recruitment takes away the organisation's resources and time when current employees have to prioritise recruitment over their work by creating work advertisements, reading applications, interviewing, deciding on the best candidate etc. After all this, the possible candidate could still decline the offered job or for example, leave on probationary period – which would start the process all over again. Therefore, it is extremely important for the company to recruit right employees, who can work in a safe and healthy environment and stay motivated to remain in the company for a longer period. Furthermore, if the recruitment would be successful, the training period of a new employee still takes time and resources for a while. This means that during the training period, two employees are not productive resources for the company, when one is still learning how to do the work and the other one is doing less of their own work to help train the new one.

When the person is faced with such strong emotional abuse that it affects the person's mental health, it is hard to be creative, initiative or even productive. The person can be so strongly focused on surviving the workday – going there, being there, leaving there – that they are incapable of being efficient in any other way. The same way as unmotivated employee can affect the occupational safety at workplace, unproductive individuals can have so-called domino-effect on productivity across the organisation. Organisation's productivity rates can decrease severely if the abuse affects more than one individual (which is usually the case in bigger companies). (Einarsen & al. 2004, 150.)

If there will be further investigations by e.g., the union representatives or legal counselling, the case will become expensive in the matter of human resources, time, and finance. In many cases victims will need the help of occupational health professionals even after the case is solved, and the organisation may have to use their service in the conflict management. (Einarsen & al. 2004, 152–153.) Even if the cases would be solved through official internal procedures, they are damaging for the employees and for the employer.

The dysfunctional relationships can still stay there even if the victim and the abuser are physically separated. This can cause the case to go on for years after it has seemingly ended, when the two

individuals will keep telling their side of the story and might be forced to see at some point even at workplace. (Einarsen & al. 2004, 152–153.) Pattern of behaviour, long-term occurrence, the aim and intent to hurt the target and obstruct their coping mechanisms and feeling the unbalanced power dynamics block their ability to resolve the situation (Keashly 2001, 259). This can also lead to word-of-mouth marketing and possibly cause some reputational threat for the whole company.

Identifying if the person is being abused is difficult. There are still elements that indicates emotional abuse. Pärssinen (2006, 15) recommends that organisations should acknowledge more of people's changed behaviour, sick leave rates and any minor conflict in team working, to recognize the signs of increasing risk of emotional abuse. The ways of practicing emotional abuse grow bigger and coarse in time (Einarsen & al. 2004, 8). Ergo, organisation's role in preventing the escalation of conflicts into frequent abuse is vital. The most stigmatic situation at work for individuals in Scandinavian countries is long sick leaves, disponsibility, relocation, degrading tasks, and psychiatric treatment (Leymann 1990, 122). So, while it is all about money for the organisation, it is also about the possibility to prevent stigmatization through preventative process.

### **3.3 Reputational threat**

Hodgins and Mannix-McNamara (2017, 202) found in their research that organisations are not capable of addressing emotional abuse in an efficient matter. Emotional abuse can go unrecognized in organisations, due organisations' habit to normalize it to be a part of stressful times or identifying it to one person, but still naming it as a difficult personality and not emotional abuse (Penttinen & al., 2019, 17). According to Penttinen & al. (2019, 19) it is necessary for organisations to identify and name emotional abuse as what it is, so that they could positively contribute to employee's well-being and organisation's success.

Penttinen & al. (2019, 35) identified that it would be beneficial for the organisations to use correct terminology, emotional workplace abuse, as it might help the employees recognize and come forward with their experiences more often when they know about what and how to talk about it. In the research in question, the participants avoided the correct term and referred it as e.g., "situation", likely due to fear of their own career. Penttinen & al. (2019, 25) also point out that sometimes even organisations might not admit that there is emotional abusive environment in their organisations, due to fear of damaging their reputation as employer or harming their stakeholder relations.

According to Einarsen & al. (2004, 154) negative publicity affects the stakeholder relationships and the talent attraction for the organisation. One threat is that if emotional abuse cases are not handled well or at least accordingly, they might end up in the media. This has happened in Finland as well, e.g., in the cases of some fast-food restaurants & cafes, retails, unions and so on. The list

seems to be endless when it comes to the workplaces that have ended up in media for poor management and emotional abuse cases.

Reputational threat, when things like these end up in the media, is unavoidable and the damage is certain. Especially, if they end up in social media and get distributed across different platforms. This can mean bad reputation in a matter of seconds. Bad reputation in people management equals toxic work environment when people create associations of the company. Image restoration of the company is costly, time-consuming, and not certain to work.

If the organisation does not react to these feelings appropriately, the victim's perception of being abused is emphasized and the image of the organisation as an employer change towards negative (Keashly 2001, 236–237). Unfortunately, it has been found out that if the abuser is doing their work appropriately, it does not matter if they are not acting the same. Furthermore, this means that official internal processes, e.g., mediation processes, usually seem to favour the abuser instead the victim. Ergo, for greater extent, emotional abuse is still silently accepted and tolerated in organisations. (Keashly 2001, 258.) It seems that it is easier to condemn physical violence and we are still too used to accept emotional abuse when we see it.

Organisation has a power in changing the culture from one where the emotional abuse cases are silenced, to one where they are listened and eliminated. Organisation must encourage people to speak up when they experience emotional abuse and find out the reason behind why they are not. If the organisation doesn't know about the emotional abuse cases, they cannot do anything about them – this also means that they are silently accepting the toxic workplace culture and might act as an enabler for the abuser's behaviour. (Eastel & Ballard, 53.)

The study of Penttinen & al. (2019, 63–64) shows that organisations should create long term strategies on how to prevent emotional abuse rather than rely on so-called quick fixes. This means that having only formal policies on preventing emotional abuse at work rather than doing concrete actions such, as creating an organisational culture based on ethical leadership, is not enough. Preventing emotional abuse at work starts by critically valuing organisational culture management and leadership.

Organisation is responsible on creating non-abusive and non-violent workplace culture, not the individuals. Blaming the victim as having interpersonal problems or being the problem needs to stop because it is never the victim's fault and seldom has the abuser changed their behaviour when the victim leaves – there will be another target and another victim of emotional abuse. This reinforces the abusive environment at the organisation rather than fixes the root issue. (Penttinen & al. 2019, 64.)

Abusive behaviour can affect the whole organisation by turning the working culture acceptable for emotional abuse. That's why organisational norms, such as emphasizing fairness, have an essential impact on how emotional abuse is seen and act on in the organisation. By valuing good culture at workplace and widely disapproving emotional abuse at work, it can lead the abuser to self-correct their behaviour to avoid the social abandonment of colleagues. (Priesemuth 2020.)

In addition, Rai and Agarwal (2019, 1078, 1081–1082) used the method called 'The Big Five' to examine possible personality traits that can encourage emotional abuse at work towards the person. They found out that if the person has low conscientiousness, agreeableness, extraversion, and openness to experience, it can act as a provocation to the abusers and lead to emotional abuse at work. Therefore, it is crucial also for the managers to identify different personality traits in order to know how to prevent emotional abuse at work on individual level. MacIntosh & al. (2011, 62) note that it is extremely important also for every organisational level to recognize the behavioral patterns that are emotional abuse. In this way the organisation and its staff could intervene immediately when they see, hear, or suspect emotional abuse case.

Van Heugten, D'Cruz & Mishra (2018, 25) recommend that companies should acknowledge exit interviews as a part of reputational damage control. Exit interviews can provide crucial information about company culture – and if it is turning into a negative one. It can also reveal cases of emotional abuse that have been happened in subtle ways e.g., silent treatment. Exit interviews should be held for the company to learn more about their mistakes and hopefully improve their preventable, intervening and terminating processes against emotional abuse at work.

## **4 Surviving, recovering, and healing from emotional abuse at work**

In this chapter I will focus on the outcome phase, in other words how individual finally survives from the emotional abuse at work. I introduce few theoretical methods that can help the victims during and after the abuse and differentiate the methods that can be used collectively and individually. Individual resources and individual's personal coping mechanisms will be discussed in the second subchapter. Furthermore, as quitting is the last alternative when other options have not worked, in the last subchapter I will demonstrate why sometimes quitting might be the only, and the best, option for healing.

Vaaranen (2017) wonders why organisations nowadays seem to require the victims to act on stopping their abusers, e.g., by asking them to solve the problem directly with the abuser – rather than handling the situation as it is: an occupational safety and health offense. Most common recommendation for the victims is to avoid the abuser and any engage with them (Vaaranen 2017; Pietrangelo & Raypole 2022; Fletcher & Sissons, 2022). Nevertheless, avoiding the situation also leads to bigger health issues than trying to solve it (van Heugten 2021, 296).

Ciby and Raya (2014, 72–76.) have conceptualized emotional abuse at work in three phases. These phases are antecedent phase, bullying phase and outcome phase. In the first phase, antecedent phase, the victim might have hard time to adapt to changes that are happening in job demands, leadership and management styles of the supervisor or in interpersonal conflicts. For example, having an unprofessional supervisor to stand against, might trigger an interpersonal conflict that leads to bullying phase. Bullying phase includes, e.g., unnecessary criticism towards work and person or their personality, and it can go on for years. In the outcome phase, victim has regained their coping mechanisms and knows how to survive the situation or have already exited it. The victim can realize changes in their emotional reactions, their personal consequences such as deteriorated sleep, work consequences such as doing the bare minimum, and starting to detach from the organisation all in all.

### **4.1 Methods on how to survive emotional abuse at work**

In a study of MacIntosh, O'Donnell, Wuest and Merritt-Gray (2011.) women who had experienced emotional abuse at work were interviewed about their experience. What they found out was the same as in many research before; the victim cannot comprehend why they are abused, because in their eyes they are a professional and an ethical employee. This creates a cognitive dissonance for them, when the victim's perception of themselves is not the same that the abuser claims it to be. Ciby and Raya (2014, 75–76.) also found out that many had difficulties in identifying that they were

bullied because they thought it was a part of a normal culture. Thinking that emotional abuse is a part of normal work culture is alarming.

Duffy and Sperry (2014, 116–141) have created Ten Mobbing Recovery Principles -model, that helps the victim to overcome emotional abuse experience. While they emphasize that one-size-fits-all treatment is not possible in these cases, this model includes steps that should be the same for all. The model focuses e.g. on grieving the losses, restoring the sense of belonging, the criticality of social support, need for psychotherapy, medical care and career coaching, reclaiming personal agency and power and finding meaningfulness and connection with others outside work.

While still at work, the victim can use the fight, flight, or freeze response to help their recovery process. If the victim decides to fight with official complaint or equivalent, they may get some justice but usually it just causes further harm. The flight response is the most common one, and it means quitting or increasing sick leaves, keeping low profile, or actively trying to get another job. Even though either one of the previous responses could help the victim, the most likely for the victim is to use the freeze response. It means that the victim is not doing anything to the situation, for example due to severe mental health issues and the victim not to have enough personal resources to confront the abuser or to quit their job. In this case the victim needs professional help and social support to decide on one of the options to help them recover. (Duffy & Sperry 2014, 122–127.)

MacIntosh & al. (2011, 53–60) have identified a three-step social-psychological process of managing disruption when being emotionally abused at work. The first step is called protecting. In this step the victim is trying to control the work environment in a way that would help them maintain their health. It can show as getting a reassurance from the abuser that they would not attempt them later (e.g., asking permission on doing something), avoiding the abuser completely or calling in sick as much as it seems appropriate to the employer. Step two is mobilizing, where the victim starts to seek solutions to the problem instead of avoiding it. They can e.g., start talking about the abuse in their support network or trying to solve the problem through an official complaint. The third step is rebuilding. If the victim receives organisational support against the abuser, they can do the rebuilding stage at their current organisation. If not, the rebuilding happens outside the organisation, in a form of quitting their current job or finding support outside the organisation, e.g., from a new hobby.

Lutgen-Sandvik (2006, 412, 415–420) identified so-called resistance codes that victims would use when experiencing emotional abuse. Resistance helps the victim to cope in the situation. Resistance codes are e.g., exodus, collective voice, reverse discourse, subversive (dis)obedience and confrontation. Exodus means quitting, helping others to quit, and making heroes of those who

had already quitted. When exodus is the resistance method, the person experiences also extreme amount of anger, resentment and hurt against the organisation. Collective voice helps the person to transfer their stress into action-oriented strategy with others and provide emotional support and validation on their perceptions. Reverse discourse is e.g., owning the labelling oppressor has used of them (e.g., calling themselves troublemakers in a humorous way). It can also be contacting the union or filing an official complaint or documenting everything that happens. Subversive (dis)obedience is e.g., instead of working as hard as they could, they would do the bare minimum, do only the exact what was asked and not deviate from the orders, using avoidance to get distance to the abuser or even retaliation and harming the abuser (fantasizing, not acting on it). Confrontation is an effort to resolve the issues with bully face-to-face, even though they are not seen to be effective. D'Cruz and Noronha (2010, 110–114.) found out in their research that the victims even felt the compelling need to solve the situation because it didn't seem logical for their abuser to have any reason to abuse them. These participants felt that voicing the problems would lead to resolutions, and that created a feeling of hope for them.

Humour is one way of confronting and minimizing the effect of abuse. Lutgen-Sandvik (2006, 414, 423) found out that collective ways of resistance are more effective than individual ones. Using collective voice as a resistance to abusive behaviour was seen problematic, because even though it could help the situation, it could also worsen it. Abusers tend to be in manager positions, in which it is possible to fire the people who stand against them. In this case, victims assume that using their voice would lead to escalation rather than resolution.

More than often, the ones who use resistance codes, are being punished in the form of negative outcomes, such as firing. Organisation should learn to recognize resistance codes to being able to intervene in the early stages of emotional abuse. Even though victims say that they had to do something to fight the injustice, at the end they might not have had no choice than to leave the company due to the lack of support from the organisation. (Lutgen-Sandvik 2006, 429.) In addition, people resigning without another place to go mostly do it because they cannot contemplate the conflicts at workplace anymore (Leymann 1990, 122; Pärssinen 2006, 53).

Bystanders usually fear of being bullied themselves or would like to help but do not know how. Victims themselves also can refuse any help due to high distress the situation creates for them – even though they report of lacking the social support at work (Einarsen & al. 2004, 136–137). Therefore, according to van Heugten (2021, 296), organisation must have people who have been trained to assess these kinds of situations, e.g., human resources specialists. Van Heugten (2021, 297–298) also recommends adapting a genuinely supportive environment for diversity, equality, and inclusivity to workplaces, where they offer training to eliminate roles of so-called active bystanders. This

means that employees are taught how to develop open communications, break down even an early sign of isolation and how to intervene bullying, if they are witnessing it.

#### **4.2 Using individual resources during the process of recovering**

Recovering from emotional abuse does not happen in a linear path and the recovery can take up to years. The victim can feel themselves getting better but also feel their mental health issues arising simultaneously. Having to face everything that has happened maybe even during several years, might worsen their mental health problems and psychosomatic illnesses for a while. Understanding that emotional abuse has destructive effects on all aspects of life helps to understand why the recovery is extremely slow. (Liikanen & Sirviö 2015, 10–11.; Duffy & Sperry 2014, 135–136.)

Einarsen & al. (2004, 134–136.) have found that victims of emotional abuse at workplace usually use the same coping skills that employees who have never been bullied would use if they were in their situation. That said, only around 20 % of the victims in a British study e.g., went to the manager, when 60% non-bullied employees claimed to do that. It is therefore to be proven that people are more likely to use problem-solving strategies only when they feel in control of the situation. In emotional abuse situation this is not the case and rather the victim is drained out of their coping mechanisms and is unable to use them.

According to Coetzee and van Dyk (2018, 387–388.), if the victim finds their work meaningful and engaging for themselves, they are less like to experience emotional abuse at work. If they would experience emotional abuse at work, their work engagement would be a so-called buffer for the negative outcomes, and they still would be less likely to quit their job. This indicates that work engagement can have positive effects against emotional abuse at work and increase victim's health in such situations. Ergo, organisations should consider this as a preventable method against emotional abuse at work.

The victims of emotional abuse at work may use passive coping strategies like silence due to feelings of psychological contract violation from the side of the organisation (Rai & Agarwal 2018, 242). One way to survive emotional abuse at work, according to Eastel and Ballard (2017, 48) is so called 'active silent voice'. This means that the victim is silently voicing their opinion about the ongoing abuse but not taking any concrete action against the abuse. Active silent voice can be shown as switching jobs inside the organisation, withdraw from any engagement with co-workers or just coming to work in order to be able to defend themselves if they have to. Eastel and Ballard (2017, 52) continue that so-called self-silencing has many negative health effects because it is suppressing your emotions which can lead to severe mental health issues but also continuous feeling of guilt, anger and frustration.

If the victim is still in the abusive situation, finding out they are not alone but rather just one of many victims of the same abuser, it does create reassurance and self-confidence. (van Heugten 2021, 297–298.; Keashly 2001, 247.) According to research, if there is a common abuser in the work environment, it seems to be more acceptable than if they would abuse just one victim. Surely, it is easier to handle abuse if you have people to stand against them with and building resilience together. Even so, it should not be acceptable, and in the light of research it is still affecting the victim's mental health.

Access to a strong social support helps building resilience. That is why, more than anything, victim needs strong social support outside the work environment. The social support during the abuse can be family and friends – and hopefully after finding a new job, it could also be the new colleagues. Social support helps to externalize the situation, which can encourage the victim to strategize how to face it. (van Heugten & al. 2018, 21.; Duffy & Sperry 2014, 128–129.) Social support helps the victim to create the feeling of trust, give them perspective, and helps to build back their self-esteem. The victim can also rebuild their social network completely by e.g., meeting new people amongst a new hobby. New networks give the victim a break from abusive interactions and help them to discover healthy relationships. (Duffy & Sperry 2014, 128–129.) Rai and Agarwal (2018, 242) learned that friendships with coworkers are not that helpful on surviving the emotional abuse at work. Even though they can provide emotional support, they cannot usually give concrete solutions to the matter.

There might be some personality traits that helps to deal with emotional abuse and that is why all the victims do not get health issues (van Heugten 2021, 292). Resilience is a personality trait which helps an individual adapt to emotionally draining situations. It can be a process or a resistance to adapt to injustice. Resilience helps to survive and thrive during emotional abuse situations but also can be found after being abused. (van Heugten & al. 2018, 19–20.) Few personality traits enhance the ability to have resilience, e.g., optimism, pragmatism, self-efficacy, or usage of intrapsychic mechanisms. While resilience might have been attained from other life crisis, also being able to prepare and imagine the future helps the victims to survive and gain resilience. (van Heugten & al. 2018, 19.)

It seems like low self-esteem is a direct effect of any kind of bullying, when surviving it has a positive effect on self-esteem. Even though abuse leaves a mark on their victims, it might also be a positive one. They discovered resilience in their personal and professional life. The resilience appeared e.g., as finding their boundaries and limits, regaining a stronger self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-efficacy, and grown emotional intelligence towards others (van Heugten 2021, 298). Self-es-

teem, empowerment, and people finding their personal resources seem to have a strong connection to each other (Pärssinen 2006, 53–54). Liikanen and Sirviö (2015, 11) emphasizes the inner motivation the victim must have to recover from emotional abuse. This means that victim must be proactive in wanting to recover, on moving forward and searching the coping mechanisms that help them to recover the most efficiently.

According to van Heugten & al. (2018, 3) being a victim of abuse can lead to a desire to acquire post-traumatic growth. They categorize victim's survival from emotional abuse to five steps: resistance, counteraggression, revenge and retaliation, forgiveness, identity work and resilience and post-traumatic growth. Resistance can be shown e.g., as confronting the abuser, executing official or unofficial complaint processes or by quitting. It can also be contacting the labour unions or lawyers, creating a record of what is happening (taking notes, recording, saving offensive emails etc.), using humour as a coping mechanism and reversing discourses, or talking to trustworthy colleagues, friends or family about the situation. Victims always use one of mentioned resistance methods, but usually subtly, in a fear of losing their job. (van Heugten & al. 2018, 4–5.)

Counteraggression, revenge and retaliation are ways for individual to create a feeling of justice and getting even with the one who hurt them. These behaviours unfortunately can also hurt the victim's case in the eyes of witnesses and lead to disciplinary actions on the victim. Victims using counteraggression as coping mechanism can also accidentally displace their actions towards other colleagues and not the perpetrator themselves. This does not help the victim to regain their self-worth but rather hurt them even more when they assess their actions later. (van Heugten & al. 2018, 7–9.) Some victims did not pursue revenge as a closure to all they've endured because they believed justice would be served in other way at some point. Their coping mechanism in the situation was to keep their feeling of pride and integrity for not acting as their perpetrator has towards them. (van Heugten & al. 2018, 9.) Simply put, by using revenge or by avoiding using it as a survival method, both are as effective in the perspective of sustaining or regaining victim's well-being.

Forgiveness might be the only way the victim is able to move on from the abuse. Forgiveness can be a one-way-street where the victim forgives the abuser just by accepting, forgetting, and letting go about what happened – or it can happen from the side of the organisation, e.g., at the mediation process. The sincerity of forgiveness – if it is willingly done or pressured to – affects the possibilities of healing from the abuse completely. Being able to forgive has enormously positive effects on individuals mental health. (van Heugten & al. 2018, 11–12., 14–15.) However, any research read for this theoretical framework did not consider a possibility that the abuser would ask for forgiveness.

Even though work does not construct the person's whole identity, it can be an essential part of it. Work contributes to the higher-level needs of a human, such as social status. Emotional abuse can be destructive due to its publicity, where the victim can be shamed in front of others, and it is still 'mandatory' to go back these people. Furthermore, while work is being in some way goal oriented, employees seek acknowledgement from others. The lack of this validation from others can be damaging for the victim's identity work. (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008, 113.)

Lutgen-Sandvik (2008, 104–106) found out that identity work, that has the same effect that rebuilding or regaining your identity after abuse, happens in three phases. Those phases are a part of pre-bullying phase, bullying phase and post-bullying phase. The victim's identity starts to shatter in the first phase due to feeling uncomfortable as the emotional abuse has just started. Victim might try to stabilize the situation by, e.g., avoiding the abuser. The victim might also try to make sense about what is happening. For example, trying to explain to themselves why the abuser is acting a certain way.

In the bullying phase, victim tries to remind themselves of their capabilities through reconciliation. This can mean, e.g., trying to find equilibrium on fearing the abuser but still knowing that their words are not a fact about who they themselves are. Victim or colleagues who decide to stand against the bully are doing so-called identity repairing together. Unfortunately, it can lead them to being stigmatized and feeling ashamed. Still, reconciliation and repairing are vital steps in identity work. (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008, 107–109.) If the abuse continues after the identity work phases mentioned earlier, the victim starts to create second-level stabilizing. With second-level stabilizing victim is already dealing with a trauma. They try to rebuild their identity narratives by creating altered beliefs, which helps them to regain equilibrium. This means e.g., detaching themselves from the organisation in a way that helps them to do their work but not be committed to the organisation with their own identity anymore. (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008, 109–110.)

Lutgen-Sandvik (2008, 110–112) noted that in post bullying face the identity work focuses on grieving and accepting all the losses e.g., their work reputation and believe in fairness of people and restructuring their identity based on a narrative that supports they're healing from the abuse, e.g., being a stronger person for it and finding a new purpose on standing against emotional abuse in other organisations. Even though this phase can be extremely helpful in healing process, some victims fail the restructuring. They cannot complete the identity work but rather stay grieving the identity they had before the abuse happened.

So, emotional abuse also has impact on person's work identity. Identity work can happen during or after bullying. Identity work rebuilds, supports, and heals person's sense of self by finding equilibrium and being able to create a closure and a meaningful narrative about what happened. Identity work is e.g., grieving the loss of career but believing that justice will happen eventually, and that better career is waiting ahead. (van Heugten & al. 2018, 15–16.) It is important for the victim to create a post-traumatic narrative that is helpful for them but also one that is realistic and honest. Therefore, the victim must name over all their losses, so that they would not stop them on moving forward on their experience. Not naming their losses could end up harming the victim in the process of restoring their identity. These losses can be e.g., financial, health-related, reputational, shattered beliefs or lost relationships. (Duffy & Sperry 2014, 119–120.) The victim then creates a life-story for themselves, where the emotional abuse has not been in vain. (van Heugten & al. 2018, 15–16.; Duffy and Sperry 2014, 132–133.)

This narrative is created in social context, which means that it is important that the people around the victim supports their narrative, and do not create a feeling of (self-)doubt or discouragement (van Heugten & al. 2018, 17). While identity work can be extremely helpful for the victim, rebuilding an identity does not happen in a split-second but rather continues after the emotional abuse. Identity can be so shattered that victim will require psychotherapeutic help even when the emotional abuse has stopped, abuser is not involved in their lives, and they have left the workplace where they once were abused. (van Heugten & al. 2018, 17–19.)

Considering the effects of emotional abuse on victim's mental and physical health it is recommended that the victim would meet a medical professional and a psychotherapist. They could give the needed help and resources for the victim to regain their health. (Duffy & Sperry 2014, 129–131.) Even though the victim would feel like they could use only the previously mentioned resources to recover on their own, professional help could reassure that the victim has the resources to genuinely move on – and have a career where the experienced emotional abuse does not define them in the future. Additionally, career coaching could be useful, if the victim wants to reconsider their career and opportunities outside their current field of work (Duffy & Sperry 2014, 131).

### **4.3 Quitting as a last alternative for healing**

Usually, people are leaving jobs voluntarily and it can be seen as a normal cycle of turnovers in organisations. (Rosander, Salin & Blomberg 2022, 125.) Still, victim of emotional abuse at work is usually forced to leave the workplace. Quitting or leaving by social pressure is result of a long term,

mentally draining, emotional abuse and in that situation the victim does not see staying as a possibility anymore (Leymann 1996, 172). Even though quitting might be one alternative for the victim to heal from the abuse, it should always be the last alternative. As Rosander & al. (2022, 134) reminds in their article; the underlying causes that enables emotional abuse in organisations should be solved, rather than reassure the victim that it is better for them to leave the organisation for good.

In many research, quitting their job and especially finding a new one was found to be a significant factor on improving the victim's confidence and overall health. Nevertheless, in the study of Rosander & al. (2022, 131-132) they found out that even though there is a significant reduction of exposure of emotional abuse if the employee decides to leave the workplace, there is no guarantee of improvement on their mental health. Even though exiting the company would be the best solution for regaining their mental health, in one research the participants mentioned that leaving the organisation was not as simple as they imagined. They felt that they had let themselves down by not being able to fight injustice and had lost their self-esteem – but in the other hand they were hopeful for the future, happy about their current lives and their regained well-being. (D'Cruz & Noronha 2010, 116.) This shows that the effects of emotional abuse at work can stay with the victim for a long time, in different ways. One way can be mental health problems or psychosomatic issues, but it can also be just an overwhelming feeling of failure or regret. Although reflecting back on what happened improves the victim's health by helping to create a positive narrative and finding the conclusion, eventually victim has to move on from reflecting to be able to fully heal. (MacIntosh & al. 2011, 61–62.)

Victims usually feel that quitting might be the only way of regaining control in an uncontrollable situation. They also tend to talk about learned lessons rather than emphasizing the negative experience (van Heugten & al. 2018, 25). Few researchers have shown that in addition to gaining resilience and better self-knowledge from the abuse, the victims also have extremely strong feeling of wanting to fight injustice – not only in the workplaces, but in life in general. Duffy and Sperry (2014, 134) note that helping others is something empowering, meaningful, and important for the victims to do. It helps them to recover, when at the same time they help others to recover.

According to Field (2011, 23) including hope in their own vocabulary by imagining what will happen after the victim is well again, will help them to understand that even though they were abused, they still have a better future ahead. After being able to accept what has happened and having created a positive narrative for themselves about the abuse, the victim is able to look forward and start recovering from those feelings and symptoms (Liikanen & Sirviö 2015, 10–11). The process of letting

go of the things that are not possible anymore, e.g., working again in the same organisation they were once abused in, is the strongest sign of recovering (Duffy & Sperry 2014, 129–135).

## 5 Methodology

In this section I will demonstrate how the research was made from the aspects of chosen research methods, data collection and analysis. I will argue why I chose mixed method of qualitative and quantitative methods to use on this research and what benefits it gave regarding the results.

As my focus is on the individuals and the phenomenon of surviving emotional abuse, I found three research questions I wanted to study more. These questions are:

Q1. How does emotional abuse at work affects individual's self-image individually, professionally and personality wise?

Q2. How does one overcome emotional abuse at workplace?

Q3. What are the common nominators of survivors of emotional abuse at workplace?

As a result, this thesis will give an picture how individuals survive emotional abuse at work and give employers a better understanding what are the real costs on accepting emotional abuse at work – and why they should have zero tolerance against emotional abuse at their organisation.

### 5.1 Research methods of my choice

The most known way of doing research is by using qualitative or quantitative research method. Quantitative method creates numerical data when qualitative method creates non-numerical data. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2017, chapter 5) Qualitative methods help to understand, when quantitative methods help to create generalisation and predictions (Kananen 2015, 66). Quantitative method can be used if the topic or phenomenon is known before, and it requires strong knowledge about it (Kananen 2015, 197). Quantitative research is usually done with a survey, which results create an answer to the research question, and helps to create an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon and its future. (Kananen 2015, 73.) As quantitative method is usually a standardized survey, it is crucial that the questions is formed in a way that they are understood the same by everyone. (Saunders & al. 2017, chapter 5) If the research topic is unfamiliar or a new phenomenon, research method cannot be quantitative. In this case quantitative method can provide false results due to wrong data collection method, compared to qualitative research data collection methods. (Kananen 2015, 70.)

Quantitative research usually tests a theory by collecting data and analysing it. This is called deductive approach. (Saunders & al. 2017, chapter 5) Quantitative method can collect answers in text

form, but the results are always presented in numbers (Kananen 2015, 82). Therefore, quantitative research focuses on numbers and their relationship (Saunders & al. 2017, chapter 5). Quantitative method focuses on finding the statistic regularities – not what they have common but rather how they are connected (Alasuutari 2011, 37). This does not mean that quantitative method cannot be reinforced with qualitative method or vice versa (Kananen 2015, 71).

Qualitative method creates narratives with words and sentences. It helps to understand the phenomenon and its relationship to events and interactions. (Kananen 2015, 82.) In qualitative research, the researcher finds meaning from the words and images. It contains a lot of interpretation because the researcher must understand socially constructed and subjective matters. (Saunders & al. 2017, chapter 5) In addition, qualitative research method is used when more in-depth understanding is wanted from a part of already known phenomenon (Kananen 2010, 41). As qualitative method helps to understand phenomenon, it is inherent that the phenomenon changes over time. This is why the results of qualitative research present the current time when the research has been made and cannot be understood as never-changing phenomenon. (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, chapter 1)

Qualitative method helps to understand the differences between people and makes the differences reasonable (Alasuutari 2011, 43). Hence, the main thing in qualitative research is human. However, in qualitative research, understanding a human completely can be difficult. Everyone has their own experiences, reality, and their own perception of them. This means that no other human can truly understand them. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 76, 81.)

In business and management research it is hard to differentiate these two methods, due that in reality they are like to be combined. (Saunders & al. 2017, chapter 5) Qualitative and quantitative methods can be mixed, in so-called blended method. This can be used if the researcher wants to study the phenomenon in different perspectives. Qualitative research is suitable for trying to find solutions to the phenomenon when quantitative research method can clarify its reasons. (Kananen 2010, 133.) Qualitative and quantitative methods can be used side-by-side e.g., by doing a survey and an interview. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2004, 30.) Mixed methods research can be used for creating a better understanding of the topic or mending the shortages of the methods when used by themselves. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 73.)

One research approach is phenomenological research approach. It focuses on people and especially their life in a past tense, and the research approach in question tries to find common nominators from their lives according to the researched phenomenon. (Kananen 2015, 79.) This is one approach that deserves mentioning, because it fits into my research topic. The research focuses on

people that has survived emotional abuse at work in the past and my aim is to find if there are common nominators in surviving emotional abuse – especially how it changes them as individuals.

Using two different methods still must be argued well (Kananen 2015, 323). This thesis will be research-oriented thesis, using qualitative and quantitative method as a research strategy. Qualitative research helps to understand social phenomenon, which e.g., emotional abuse (and surviving it) is. Workplace bullying is a phenomenon that has been studied before, but the part of it, post-traumatic growth, is an area that has not been studied as much. My reasoning for mixed methods is that even though I am studying human emotions, which can only be seen, written, or spoken and not bluntly measured – there are still material that can be measured. Therefore, my research will be mainly qualitative but collecting the needed data, e.g., the effects of emotional abuse, can be done more easily with a survey. Therefore, my research will include quantitative material.

The aim for the quantitative material is to provide answers to frequency and extent the emotional abuse at work has on the victim's health and their ability to survive from it. Quantitative material, such as data from the survey, helps me as a researcher to understand by numbers and percentages e.g., how common X is as a survival method. If 60 % of the participants answers that they used X as a survival method when experiencing emotional abuse at work, it means that the most common survival method amongst the participants of the research is X. When introducing a qualitative method, such as open-ended question, and asking e.g., "Why did you use this particular survival method?" I create a space for more in-depth understanding, which can come through answers like "I chose methods X because it was my employers' recommendation". These kinds of answers can indicate that the victim has not been able to choose the method themselves but rather chosen the one that has been given to them.

## **5.2 Data collection methods and their usage on this research**

In qualitative research method, data collection can be done with documents, observations, and interviews, when in quantitative research method, data collection is done with questionnaires/surveys or with statistics (Kananen 2015, 81). Questionnaire must have a strong link to theoretical framework in the research and it must cover only the questions that are relevant for solving the research questions (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 87). These methods can be used separately or together (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 83). Creating a questionnaire helps to find out the underlying emotions and letting the respondents think about their answer alone, with enough time. The questionnaire should create a space for a freely written form of individual thoughts. People's attitudes, reactions

and feelings cannot be understood without qualitative method, where people have the opportunity to write or tell out these things (Kananen 2015, 71).

As seen from Appendix 1, the questionnaire was formed on Webropol, and it included 10 questions, with one including 17 claims on a Likert-scale. The questionnaire started with background information from the participants that included the questions about age, sex and position at work. The first two questions were to indicate if the person had experienced emotional abuse or a conflict. I chose to measure this difference by frequency (how long did the abuse had lasted). Other questions focused on the emotions the participants felt during emotional abuse at work and after surviving it. It was also asked how they survived the emotional abuse. Last question was "Would you be willing to share your story in more depth way in an interview held by the researcher of this study?". If the participant answered yes, I would ask their contact information, in case I will do interviews. Nevertheless, I knew I would not be able to handle a great number of interviews in the time I have and therefore I will also add a limit for ten accepted interviewees for this study. The interviewees were to be selected so that there would be representation from all backgrounds (age, sex and position at work).

According to Saunders & al. (2017, chapter 11), it is important to consider the participant answering the questionnaire and especially how the questions flow through that. The flow means e.g., that the participants should be able to skip questions that are not applicable for them. This can be achieved by creating the questions so that the participant is automatically shift to the next question the current question is not applicable for them.

For the questionnaire I used close-ended questions or Likert-scale, but also left space for few open-ended questions that could clarify the Likert-scale claims. Open-ended questions are a part of qualitative research method (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 87). Across the questionnaire there will be some open-ended questions to clarify the Likert-scale claims but those are not mandatory to answer because of the claims already being sensitive enough, so I was afraid people would not answer the whole questionnaire through if there were too many open-ended questions for them to answer. In addition, I wanted to focus on the flow mentioned before, by creating rules on the questions, that help the participants skip the questions if the previous answer indicated that the next question was not applicable for them. For example, if the person answered that they quit their job, the next question would be why. However, if their answer were something else, they would not see the question asking why they did quit their job.

I constructed the questions straightforwardly based on the research questions and their appearance on my thesis. This means that first section of the questionnaire focuses on the individual's

feelings on how emotional abuse affected them individually and professionally. The next section asks about the resources the victim has used to being able to overcome emotional abuse. These two sections and participants answers for the questions will automatically create data for the third section, which focuses on the common nominators victims possess.

It is important that the target group is selected so that they are familiar with the phenomenon, or they have experience of it. Therefore, the target group should not be randomly chosen but rather consciously selected and valued. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 98.) I chose to do a questionnaire that I shared on my LinkedIn-profile. I expected to get answers from a target group that involves people who have experienced emotional abuse at work. While this might sound randomly chosen target group, LinkedIn is a social media platform that has hundreds of thousands of working age Finnish people at the same place. I assume many of them have unfortunately experienced emotional abuse at work. People have shared their stories about emotional abuse at work or workplace bullying on LinkedIn quite openly in the past few years. As from risk management side, I was still concerned if people would be willing to share their thoughts for this research about such a sensitive topic.

As I had to make sure that all the participants understood which the target group I am trying to find is and what I mean by emotional abuse at work, I created a cover letter that I posted along with the link for my questionnaire (Appendix 2). The cover letter was written in a way that it ensured that right target group would answer the questionnaire. The cover letter included my information, why I was doing the questionnaire and the study, what is emotional abuse at work and how long it takes to answer the questionnaire.

Questionnaire was shared on LinkedIn on the 20<sup>th</sup> of February 2023, and it was open until the 5<sup>th</sup> of March. It was structured as Kananen (2010, 92–93) advice: first there is cover letter that explains the background of the questionnaire, who is doing the questionnaire, and for what and why. After that the questions will be arranged so that the first questions will be general matters on the topic, while the rest of them will focus on the details. First there will be the harder questions and then the easier ones.

The reason why I chose this order for the questionnaire, is mentioned before. The first questions should – and in this case are – harder. These questions make the victim in a way travel back through time and think about the abuse they experienced, the effects it had on them and the hurt they had to go through. After that, the victim come across easier questions which ask how they survived. These questions are more general and does not cover the personal and private emotions the victim has or had. Lastly, the chance for an interview gives the victim a possibility to create and

tell their own narrative of what happened which can even help the victim – if they haven't had a chance to tell their story before. However, if they are not ready to share their story or don't want to give more detailed answers for the questions, they can do so. By focusing on the willingness to answer from the participants side and the flow of the questions I was able to create a clear enough data analysis and get explicit data from the questionnaire.

In addition, I wanted to focus more on the victims stories through interviews, to gain better understanding of the chronological aspect how emotional abuse starts, how it develops and starts to affect the victim and how the victim finally survives. Narrative, semi-structured interview will help with that. Semi-structured interview has thematic structure made before hand, with ready questions, but if the interviewee decides to tell something outside the structured question, the interview can change its structure and focus more on that. Likewise, this kind of interview method already has the expectation that all the interviewees have experienced the phenomenon in question and the researcher has structured the interview according to its themes. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2004, 47.)

Interview is the best way to gain knowledge about people's thoughts and the reasoning behind their behaviour (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 84). It is a way to add more depth and understanding to the data collected in the survey. Interview also helps to understand the non-verbal communication behind the answers. It is a way to create an image of people's opinions, perceptions, experiences, and overall emotions. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2004, 34, 41.) Both methods, interview and survey, focuses on the people's world of thoughts and consciousness, and it helps to gain different perspectives on the topic. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2004, 35). Finalized interview base can be found as Appendix 3.

### **5.3 Methods of data analysis**

The data analysis from quantitative material can be done after the questionnaire has closed or simultaneously when the questionnaire is still open (Vilkka 2007, 106). Analysing quantitative material begins with excluding all the material that does not provide information. This means for example blank answers or only half-way through answered sheets. (Vilkka 2021, chapter 3) According to Vilkka (2021, chapter 3) the blank or insufficient material can be added to the analysis, but it should be analysed why the material is insufficient. For example, has the researcher been too careless when creating the questionnaire, in a way that e.g., questions are too hard to understand for the participant.

Quantitative research is based on numbers and analysing the data happens through mathematics, e.g., analysing possibilities and percents. Cross tabulation helps to find correlation between these

different variables. (Vilkka 2021, chapter 3) When doing cross tabulation, the researcher must be careful not to assume causal relation between things. If done assumingly, the result of causality can be a guess rather than a fact. (Vilkka 2007, 131.) One way to analyse the numbers is to find kurtosis between the range of e.g., age (Vilkka 2007, 128). For my research this could mean e.g., focusing on if one age group experiences more emotional abuse at work than other.

Qualitative material can be never-ending process of finding new knowledge. (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, chapter 1) For the data analysing phase for the qualitative material, the researcher must remember to choose their point of view for the study. Qualitative research creates material that could be examined from many different perspectives but should always be examined from one perspective – from the theoretical framework (Alasuutari 2011, 40, 84). According to Puusa & Juuti (2020, chapter 4) the researcher can decide the angle what they choose to analyse the material from. This can be e.g., analysing the material from the interviews with the perspective of facts, which means analysing what the interviewees are saying – or analyse the sample they have gotten from the interviews as such, which means analysing how the interviewees are saying things rather than what they are saying. Analysing the qualitative material from interviews starts with transcribing. The transcription of the interviews can be done specifically, by e.g., writing out every pause from the dialog or doing the transcription by filming the interview and making the interpretation from that. (Puusa & Juuti 2020, chapter 4)

In the content analysis, the main aim is to create concepts. Content analysis creates a framework for the analysis rather than a strict process to follow. That is why it is considered as a great way of analysing data from mixed method. Content analysis is interpretation and rationalization of the results arising from the data. Even though analysing is based on researcher's own interpretation of the material, it must also be based on logicity and veracity. The choices for the chosen interpretation should be argued well. (Puusa & Juuti 2020, chapter 4)

According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018, 104) qualitative analysis happens in four phases: deciding what to focus on, marking everything that includes the matter you decided to focus on and leaving everything else out, thematizing and reducing data, and finally, summarizing the findings into results. Researcher's aim is to collect data as long as it needs to solve the research problem. Researcher might not even know how much data would be enough beforehand. Therefore, researcher must find saturation from the data. Saturation means that there is no more new information coming from the data and they began to repeat themselves. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 99.) In qualitative research the point of saturation can fluctuate, and it can be decided during the re-

search, according to Eskola & Suoranta (1998, chapter 2). This can mean sometimes that the researcher finds the saturation point faster than expected and then can stop collecting data from there.

After finding saturation from the data, qualitative material is abstracted. This means that the data is made simpler by summarizing and e.g., finding synonyms from the answers that can be further on acknowledged as common nominators in the phenomenon. (Kananen 2015, 130–131.) Also, the material can be reduced. This means that the researcher tries to find similarities and regularities from the material – and in my case, between people. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2004, 149.)

Analysing qualitative material is based on logical thinking and interpretation (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 122). Finding the meanings behind the answers is the essence of qualitative research (Alasuutari 2011, 53). Thematizing is a form of analysing, and it means finding common attributes that are exactly same to several participants. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2004, 173.) Researcher will interpret the abstracted material, where they try find so-called hidden clues between the spoken or written sentences. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2004, 137.)

In the analysis the aim is to find synthesis, which creates general view on the topic. This is found by categorizing and interpreting the material. After that the researcher can present the phenomenon from new perspective. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2004, 143.) Presenting the new knowledge happens through describing the people, events or the objectives and their attributes (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2004, 145).

### **Webropol as one tool for data analysis**

Webropol is an application for creating questionnaires. I chose this application because it is a Finnish company, and it is recommended by Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences. I wanted to use an application that is based in Finland due to its higher demands for GDPR. Creating a questionnaire on Webropol is quite simple: you can use their ready built-in program to create questions on Likert-scale, matrix, certain scope etc or basic open- or close-ended questions. After you have created the questions, you can save the questionnaire and it automatically creates an internet link for you to share. This is how I created the questionnaire for this study.

I had to ask for contact information for the participant who wanted to take part in the interviews, so I also needed to add another page for the questionnaire. This way I could make sure that the answers they were giving in the interview could not be traced back to information they might give before on the questionnaire. This was done to respect the participants anonymity but also to respect GDPR. On the last page the participants who gave their contact information for the interview, were

informed that their personal information will be deleted from all platforms the latest on 1<sup>st</sup> of May 2023.

I was using Webropol for analysing the questionnaire I create. Webropol offers automatic statistics from the questions that are on Likert-scale or close-ended, so for the researcher it is quite simple to analyse the data from there. There are different ways the researcher can present quantitative analyse in their study. According to Vilkka (2007, 135.) the material can be presented in the form of text, characteristics or diagrams and other visual forms. Vilkka (2021, chapter 3) reminds, however, that even quantitative material should not only be represented by diagrams, but also in written form that explains the findings to a reader that does not know how to interpret the diagrams. This means that as answers is first turned into numbers, the numbers must also be turned into text that explains the quality and meaning behind these numbers.

Why I mention the possibilities that Webropol offers, is that in every book I've read about quantitative research method, unfortunately still focuses on the fact that researcher would have to create the data by examine the results one by one. This is where Webropol's analysing tool is beneficial because nowadays it is up to the researcher to find out what could be the correlation or causation between different answers or number, but they don't have to count e.g., the percentages or the average value of different answers.

### **Expert opinion statement to expand the findings of the questionnaire**

As I started analysing my material, I unfortunately realized that the questionnaire did not get as many participants as I would have hoped for. The questionnaire was open for two weeks and I also shared a reminder post on the second week the questionnaire was open. Also, due to a glitch on closing the questionnaire, two answers came after the questionnaire were supposed to be ended, on 23<sup>rd</sup> of March. I accepted these answers into my analysis because the number of participants all in all was so low. Unfortunately, I cannot assume I found saturation with this many answers – I can only say what I found out for this small group of participants. These answers cannot be generalized as common nominators for all the survivors of emotional abuse at work.

All in all, 29 people answered the questionnaire with four persons willing to share their story more in-depth through an interview. Also, from the report I noticed that 38 persons had started to answer the questionnaire and 61 persons had open the questionnaire. As a researcher this made me wonder if the questionnaire was in the end too complicated to understand or if it was just pure curiosity when opening the questionnaire without answering it.

Also, I struggled to get interviewees, which unfortunately in the end made me admit that I had to find another way to verify my results and give me more in-depth information about the topic through experience. This led me to have an interview with an expert on health, safety, and security matters. The interview was planned and executed as it would have been with the survivors of emotional abuse, but it had a different angle, where the expert compared his own experiences to the results of my questionnaire about emotional abuse at work, how it has been handled in different organisations and how he sees it affects individuals and organisations, and what organisations should do to prevent emotional abuse at work. The interview was conducted through Teams on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2023 and was recorded in written form. Interview questions can be found on Appendix 3 and more about the interview results can be read from subchapter 6.2.

My analysis of the material focuses mainly on finding synthesis through categorizing and interpreting the material I acquired through the survey and with an expert opinion interview. My main way of interpreting the material was using content analysis for creating concepts, correlations, and regularities. As mentioned in the theory of data analysis, I will also base my interpretation on open logicity and veracity.

## 6 Results

In this chapter I will go through the results from the data collection and data analysis. I will first focus on the results from the questionnaire. I will demonstrate the results in written form and in diagrams. After this the reader can get to know the expert opinion statement I received through an interview. These results and my own opinion of them will continue in the chapter 7, Discussion.

### 6.1 Results from the questionnaire

As seen from Table 1, the answers from the background info indicated that most of the participants were 21–30-year-olds, females or working in a specialist position. Furthermore, 82,7 % of the participants had experienced emotional abuse at work for a longer period of time. Table 1 demonstrates how in this case longer period of time is counted from the answers of 24 participants, who answered that they have been experienced emotional abuse “inconstantly in a longer period of time” or “repeatedly for months”. The answers that said “few times” were included in this study, but these answers can also indicate a situation of conflict rather than emotional abuse, as learned from the theory before.

Table 1. Background information of the participants

Background info	Variable	n	%
Time period	Repeatedly for months	13	44,8
	Inconstantly in a longer period of time	11	37,9
	Few times	5	17,3
Sex	Prefer not to say	1	3,5
	Other	0	0
	Man	9	31
	Female	19	65,5
Position	Management	3	10,4
	Team leader	5	17,2
	Specialist	14	48,3
	Employee	7	24,1
Age	60+	0	0
	51-60	2	6,9

41-50	3	10,4
31-40	7	24,1
21-30	17	58,6
16-20	0	0

Table 2 represents how emotional abuse at the victim's organisation had been directed towards them mostly (44,8 %) with hurtful comments, rude humour, public humiliation and gossiping. Secondly, as 27,6 % of the participants have answered, their work has been intentionally aggravated by the abuser. Other ways of being targeted were mentioned as constant negativity towards the victim, diminishing, concealing important information, disrespecting, or discriminating the victim – or even all the above.

Table 2. How victims have experienced emotional abuse at work

How emotional abuse was targeted towards the victims	n	%
isolation from any social context	2	6,9
hurtful comments, rude humour, public humiliation or gossiping	13	44,8
work being intentionally aggravated by the abuser	8	27,6
some other way	6	20,7
in total	29	100,0

While 51,7 % of the participants did not suffer the physical or psychological symptoms the experience had caused them anymore (Table 3), 44,8 % felt like those symptoms affect their ability to cope in professional. About third of the victims (34,5%) felt like the whole experience still limits their life (Table 4). Also, 75,9 % are still thinking about what happened to them and it creates negative emotions.

Table 3. The effects of emotional abuse on victim's physical or mental health after the abuse

Participants still suffering from physical and psychological symptoms	n	%
agree or strongly agree	10	34,5
neutral	4	13,8
disagree or strongly disagree	15	51,7
in total	29	100,0

Table 4. Experiencing emotional abuse at work limiting victim's life

Experiencing abuse still limiting participant's life	n	%
agree or strongly agree	10	34,5
neutral	4	13,8
disagree or strongly disagree	15	51,7
in total	29	100,0

Most of the participants (51,7 %) felt that the experience has not damaged the relationships they have with their loved ones, but 37,9 % felt that it did do just that (Table 5). However, when asked where the participants received help for the emotional abuse they were experiencing at work, they mostly received help from their loved ones (62,1 %) compared to the other possibilities (Table 6).

Table 5. Victim's relationship with their loved ones after the abuse

Victim's relationship with their loved one due to the abuse	n	%
has suffered or somewhat suffered	11	37,9
has not changed either way	3	10,4
has not suffered at all	15	51,7
in total	29	100,0

Additionally, 41,4 % of the victims got help from occupational healthcare and only 24,2 % from their organisation (Table 6). Few of the participants answered that they have been in therapy due to the emotional abuse at work, suffered from panic attacks and have used an anxiety medication. It was not sure if the therapy was from occupational health care or from the public health care, and if the therapy had helped them overcome the emotional abuse or if it was still an ongoing situation.

Yet, 68,9 % of the participants did not receive any help from their organisation (Table 6). However, organisations in Finland have the obligations on acting immediately when notified on emotional abuse according to Non-discrimination Act (1325/2014). If the organisation was notified of the cases which the 68,9 % of the participants are referring to, the organisation acted against the law. However, if the organisation was never notified, it is not obligated to act, nor could the victims anticipate any help from the organisation.

Table 6. Representation of people receiving help from their organisation

Receiving help from organisation	n	%
the victim has not received any help	20	68,9
can't say if received help or not	2	6,9
the victim has received help from the organisation	7	24,2
in total	29	100,0

It can be seen from Table 7 that the ways of receiving help can overlap with different possibilities. People could have been receiving help from their loved ones, but also from the occupational health care or from their organisation itself. Hence, these answers for the questions were not excluding each other. In the best-case scenario, the same individual could have received help from all the parties mentioned in Table 7.

Table 7. The ways victim's mostly received help for emotional abuse

The ways of receiving help	n	(n in total)	%	(% in total)
loved ones	18	(29)	62,1	(100)
occupational health care	12	(29)	41,4	(100)
from the organisation	7	(29)	24,2	(100)

For 63,6 % of the participants, the only solution to surviving from the emotional abuse, was to quit their job. New environment and new colleagues were the main reasons that helped them get through the experience of emotional abuse. This finding suggests that quitting might become the only alternative because the victims could not receive any help from their current organisation. As help coming from outside might not be an option for all the victims, they have also sought help within themselves and tried to use their personal coping mechanisms. For example, 18,2 % have found out that personal interests or hobbies have been helpful on the way of recovering from emotional abuse at work, if other ways have not been helpful or on hand. Nevertheless, 58,6 % of the participants feel like they still haven't gotten enough help for surviving the emotional abuse (Figure 1).

Co-worker resentment can be one effect of experiencing emotional abuse at work. This resentment can follow even though the victim would change their job, because the experience has left the victims with trust issues. However, according to the questionnaire of this thesis, 48,3 % of the participants feel like they can trust their co-workers even though they have been through emotional abuse at work in their past (Table 8). This is a positive indication that for a big number of the participants the experience has not left trust issues or resentments towards new colleagues – even though there would be some towards the old ones.

Table 8. Co-worker resentment after emotional abuse at work

Experiencing co-worker resentment at the new organisation	n	%
agree or strongly agree	8	27,6
neutral	7	24,1
disagree or strongly disagree	14	48,3
in total	29	100,0

For both claims citing

If I would be in the same situation again, I myself would act differently

and

If I would be in the same situation again, I would act differently towards my abuser

around 80 % of the participants answered “agree” or “strongly agree”. Unfortunately, at this point I did not offer the opportunity to answer why or how they would act differently, so this study cannot answer why the participants felt so strongly on doing something differently and what they would have done differently if they got the chance. When asked, what is the topmost emotion when thinking about the emotional abuse they experienced at work, 24,1 % of the participants answered hate or bitterness and 31 % of the participants relief with one participant especially writing thankfulness (Table 9). This answer indicates that while the victims no doubt feels hate and bitterness, they can also find positiveness from the experience.

Table 9. The topmost feelings victim's feel after the abuse has ended

Feelings victims feel after the abuse	n	%
hate or bitterness	7	24,1
sadness	2	6,9
anxiety or shame	5	17,3
fear	0	0
relief	9	31
hopeful	0	0
other	6	20,7
in total	29	100,0

This can also be seen when the participants answered on the Likert-scale to the claim "I feel like I am emotionally stronger than before this experience" (Table 10). On that claim 51,7 % of the participant answered the options "agree" or "strongly agree", with only 34,5 % answering "disagree" or "strongly disagree". However, 37,9 % of the participants still felt like they have lost their self-esteem due to emotional abuse at work and same amount also felt unsure about their professional abilities after the abuse (Figure 1).

Table 10. Victim feeling emotionally stronger than before the abuse

Victim feeling emotionally stronger that before the abuse	n	%
agree or strongly agree	15	51,7
neutral	4	13,8
disagree or strongly disagree	10	34,5
in total	29	100,0

Most of the participants are hopeful in their future at working life, but 41,4 % still fear that they will experience emotional abuse at work again (Figure 1). In addition, Figure 1 represents how 65,5 % feel like they still haven't gotten enough justice for the wrongdoing they have experienced. This represents the contradictory of experiencing emotional abuse at work. As acknowledged before,

experiencing emotional abuse can leave the victim with very mixed feelings towards the organisation, people involved in the experience and even towards themselves. This comes across strongly throughout the whole questionnaire and the answers for the questions provided by the participants.

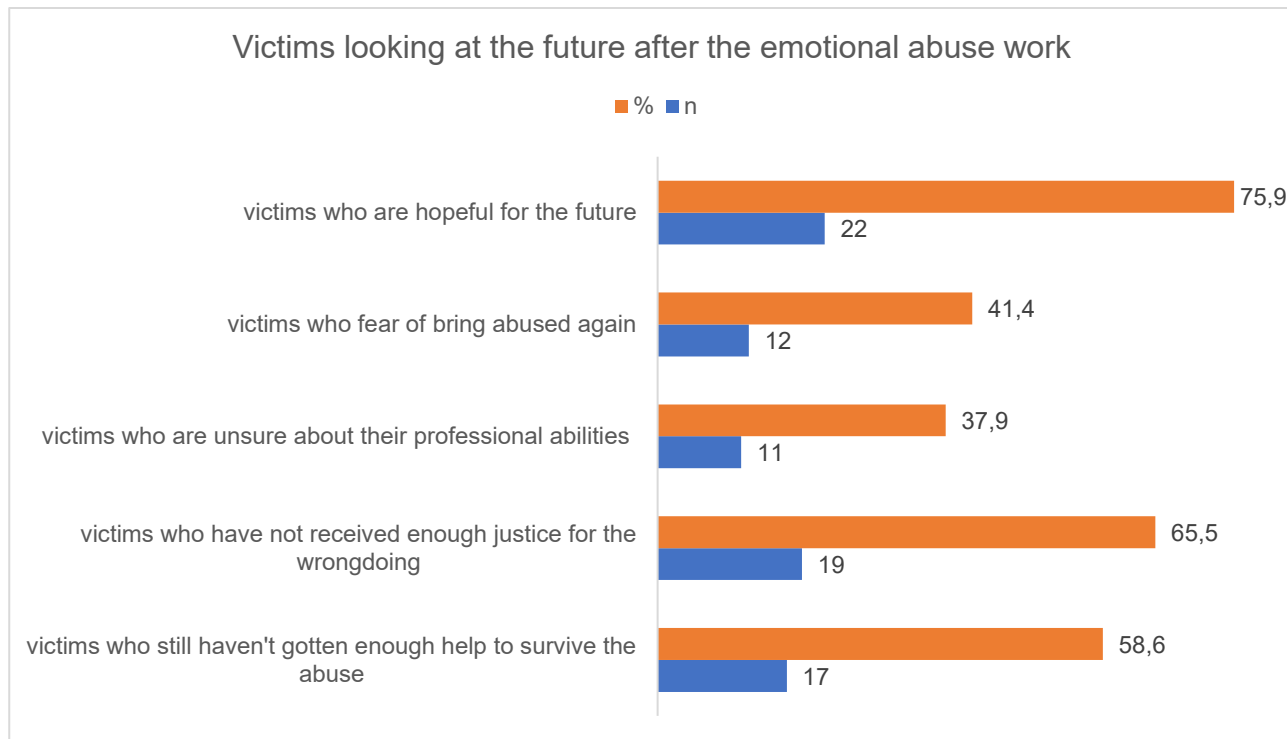


Figure 1. Victim's thoughts about their future after the abuse

## 6.2 Expert opinion statement through an interview

Due to not getting through with the possible interviewees, I decided to include expert opinion to analyse my survey's results in more-depth way. For these statements I interviewed a specialist who has worked e.g., as a Occupational Safety and Health Manager and has a strong background from health, safety and security matters in working life. The interview was conducted through Teams and recorded in written form by the researcher. After the interview, the summary was made and put into its final form as seen here below. Interview questions can be seen in Appendix 3.

First in the beginning in the interview I asked general comments from the results of the survey (Appendix 3, question 1). The expert emphasized that the most alarming result is that 75,9 % still feel negative thoughts after the experience has ended. Nevertheless, all things considered, the expert was not surprised by the results of the survey and has seen similar effects while working in health, safety and security in different organisations.

According to the expert and what he has witnessed in his positions at different workplaces, the results of not have experienced isolation but rather hurtful comments, rude humour, public humiliation and especially gossiping as a main form of emotional abuse are true (Appendix 3, question 2). Inappropriate language and attacking the person's personality and the way they work is common. The expert pointed out that isolation also would be easier to detect and prevent than e.g., gossiping. "It is tremendously hard to find the first source of the rumours", expert reminded, "and the rumours are also the harder to detect, the longer they have been going on". According to the expert, even though it can be easy to identify how the emotional abuse was conducted in one form, usually the situations and the way emotional abuse is happening is way more complex and ambiguous.

The expert had not directly seen the effects of emotional abuse (physical or psychological symptoms) affect the victim's ability to cope in their professional life, even though approximately 45 % of the participants in the survey said it had (Appendix 3, question 3). Still, the expert admits that there is a link between having to experience emotional abuse and it leaving symptoms that can affect your ability to cope, especially if the emotional abuse has been long-term. The ability to endure emotional abuse is different with every victim and if the situation has enough time to reach a more personal level of hurt, it can have long-term effects on every aspect of life, pondered the expert.

The expert said that even though this research found out that most of the participants did not have any trust issues towards their new colleagues, prior experiences of emotional abuse can be also seen at the new workplace as distrust in the new colleagues (Appendix 3, question 4). One sign can be that the person likes to isolate themselves from their colleagues, or for someone who has been outgoing and social to suddenly turn quiet and voluntarily isolates themselves. "Of course, the person's personality also affects how they are acting in the work environment all in all and does not necessarily mean they have been abused", adds the expert.

For the expert, it was surprising and saddening that only approximately 42 % got help from occupational health care and that almost 70 % did not receive any help from their organisation (Appendix 3, question 5 & 6). The reason for not using occupational health care as much for situations like these might be, according to the expert, that occupational health care is seen more as a place where employees go to when they have something wrong with their physical health. To verify these results, it should be clarified how many of the victims asked for help to their experience of emotional abuse at work from occupational health care, and if it was recorded as emotional workplace abuse case. The expert wanted to highlight that even though occupational health care is a great companion in solving emotional abuse cases, it is unfortunately too easy for the organisations to outsource these situations to occupational health care, when mainly they should be assessed and

solved inside the organisations. “The responsibility for emotional abuse cases inside the organisations should not be shifted to occupational health care.”, emphasizes the expert.

As for the almost 70 % of participants who never received any help from organisation, the expert had few points. It is likely true, because this high percent can mostly be due the organisation not having any knowledge of the ongoing situation. According to the expert, usually emotional abuse cases get left in the dark during the employees’ contract and only come in the light in e.g., so called exit interviews. Another issue might be anonymity and confidentiality. “If the organisation is aware of the issues or even the emotional abuse cases that are happening in their organisation, but the knowledge has come through anonymous employee survey, organisation has a little to go on”, expert clarifies, “in this case organisation can be aware and address the situation generally but is unable to help the individual”.

Also, if the victim decides to speak up about their situation, it is unfortunately usually done with the victim asking the conversation to be kept confidential, expert notifies. As the conversation is confidential, the organisation comes aware of the situation but is again unable to help – without breaking the confidentiality, which might be crucial for the victim in their already fragile situation. According to the expert, these situations can create false image and make the victim feel like even though they address the situation, the organisation did not act like they should have and that they were left without any help. “And for the 24 % who received help from the organisation, that might have actually been all the organisation could have offered, before guiding them to occupational health care.”, reminds the expert.

According to the survey, best way to survive from emotional abuse is to quit their job. Despite the expert admitting that he understands why people feel this way, he wants to emphasize that it should not be the best alternative for surviving (Appendix 3, question 8). “It just talks so much about how bad the situation is and how it has been handled in the organisation.”, says the expert. He adds that if the organisation has been notified about the situation, it has not reacted to it accordingly and the victim ends quitting their job, it is culpable. “It says that something is profoundly wrong in the organisation at that point”.

According to the expert, easing the fear of getting emotionally abused at work again starts with the organisation focusing on their culture more closely (Appendix 3, question 7). “No organisation will tell you that the health and safety of employees would not be their top priority or that inappropriate behaviour would be acceptable”, says the expert, “but unfortunately more than once this is just a sentence in e.g., organisation’s strategy and not concrete actions”. The expert mentioned that great organisation culture starts with management acting as example because organisation culture is

created by actions, not automatically by different scripts. Keeping condemnation of emotional abuse at their organisation on display as a preventable method is one effective way to affect positively on the organisation's culture, notifies the expert. This means also that organisations should bring up how they want to be presented as an organisation and what kind of behaviour they expect from everyone working there because of that.

As for the fear of individual is feeling, the expert asks, if the victims have examined the organisation's culture before accepting the job offer from there. "If the organisation has an actual good culture, organisation is able to tell that in the interview. It might be that the victim has not have enough courage to ask about their culture and is afraid because of that.", the expert pondered. He also adds that the fear might arise from previous situation, if speaking up has led to escalation and more harm for the victim.

## 7 Discussion

In this chapter I will summarize the study, results from the survey and interview and what main points were found throughout the process. In addition, I will talk about the ethicality, validity, and reliability of this study. Furthermore, I will discuss the conclusions, limitations and further research recommendations. Lastly, I open up my own Thesis process and self-development I received from doing this research.

### 7.1 Summary

Emotional abuse at work has the same elements than any other abuse; it is a way to humiliate and invalidate the victim and their feelings. As learned from this study, emotional abuse at work rarely, if ever, happens only once. It is a long-term circumstance, which also has long-term effects on the victim's physical and mental health. In Finland organisations have a legal obligation in Finland to prevent emotional abuse at work. Still, unfortunately, it is not uncommon to experience emotional abuse at work.

Emotional abuse at work has been studied quite a lot during the last three decades. The studies usually focus on what emotional abuse is and how it appears in the organisations, or what kind of effects it has on the victim. The goal of this study was to find out what the victim experiences after the abuse has ended. This included e.g., how the experience has affected them individually and as a professional, if they suffer any long-term effects after the abuse, how did they overcome the abuse experience and how they see their future after the abuse.

The data collection was conducted through a survey on February-March 2023, which got total of 29 answers. In addition, to get an expert opinion statement, one interview was held on April 2023. Based on the results of the survey, most of the participants experienced long-term emotional abuse at work and it was mostly done by hurtful comments, rude humour, public humiliation and gossiping. This confirms what Einarsen & al. (2004, 7) wrote, that emotional abuse at work usually does not happen as a single event but rather on a longer period. Nevertheless, even though Einarsen & al. (2004, 9) found isolation the most common way of practicing emotional abuse at work, in this study only 6,9 % of the participant experienced isolation as a form of emotional abuse.

Even though it might not have created long-term physical or mental health effects for the participants, it was still seen as a limiting factor on their individual and professional life. As Penttinen & al. (2019, 49) cited, for the victim it might be hard to differentiate if the abuser is attacking the victim as a person or as a professional. Also, Leymann (1990, 123.) pointed out that emotional abuse at work creates social-psychological effects that are the loss of coping mechanisms. That is why,

even though the victim has survived emotional abuse at work and the actual survival made them feel stronger, the traces of the abuse on their mental health can affect how they see themselves as a person and as a professional. Their view of themselves and their abilities affects their skills to cope after the abuse.

MacIntosh & al. (2011, 61–62) pointed out, that even though it is good for the victim to reflect on the events that has happened, they cannot be fully healed until they stop reflecting and start genuinely move on from the experience. Hence, there might be a correlation between still thinking about the abuse and having negative emotions, which can affect their ability to cope in their private and professional life – and due to that those 34,5 % of the participants feel that their experience limits their life after survival.

Surprising and most affecting note for the researcher and the expert was, that most of the participant felt like they have not gotten any help from their organisation during the emotional abuse experience. Unfortunately, in the survey, there were no option for an open-ended question or any other clarification, so the final truth behind this remains mystery. Few points were made during the interview:

- If a representative of the organisation was never notified of the situation, they cannot have acted on it.
- If the representative of the organisation was notified of the situation, but the conversation was asked to be kept confidential, the organisation could not have done anything even with the acknowledgement of the situation.
- If the organisation has directed the victim to e.g., occupational health care due to that being their only ability to help the victim, that might have made the victim still feeling that they did not receive help at all.

Still, even after their experience, most of the participants were hopeful for the future and felt that they were mentally stronger than before the experience. What this study found out was that all in all, emotional abuse leaves it victim's feeling contradictory feelings towards themselves and their abilities to survive it. More about the conclusions can be found on the subchapter 7.4.

## **7.2 Reliability and validity**

Research must be convincing in the way that it is logical, and the reader can follow how the researcher came to certain conclusion. In qualitative research it is especially important that the researcher themselves can be objective and can reflect their own feelings towards the topic and results they have done. (Puusa & Juuti 2020, chapter 5) The researcher should stay objective as possible, at least in a way that they will not add their own believes, attitude and values into their

study (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, chapter 1). This creates credibility for the research. Considering the topic of my research it means that I had to separate my own ideas, feeling and expectations about the topic. For my thesis I stayed as objective as possible without adding my own beliefs into my study. This can be seen, e.g., from some of the answers for the questionnaire because even though they surprised me, I did not change the outcome to match my own thoughts about the subject. I also stayed objective even though some answers could have been interpreted otherwise. For example, the answers that said the organisation has not help the victim at all could have interpreted completely as organisations fault, even though as a researcher I cannot be sure, without a further investigation, if the organisation was ever notified about the emotional abuse cases the participants were referring to.

In a general view, the trustworthiness of the research comes from the researcher being honest also from the mistakes they have made. They have been transparent on how the research was planned, executed and how they came to the conclusions they did. (Vilkkä 2007, 154.) For my thesis, I must be transparent for few mistakes. First one was my time management. I noticed my time management was not what it should be when e.g., focusing on creating a survey. My problem for finding time for my thesis lead to, e.g., creating survey in a few days and posting it at the wrong time. By this I mean that I first posted my survey on LinkedIn during the national winter holiday week. I also did the reposting just few days before I ended up closing the questionnaire, when actually, I should have posted the reminder at least a week before closing. These two things might have affected on the final participant rate because e.g., I noticed people commenting on my post two weeks later that they only saw it then.

This also means that I should have been more straightforward to ask people to repost and share the link for the questionnaire. I do not myself have a huge number of connections, which can also be a factor on the number of participants I got for the questionnaire. Reposting by others could have increased the participation rate and the visibility of the questionnaire at LinkedIn – and it was actually proven when one person shared the link and the questionnaire got two more answers in a matter of an hour.

In addition, even though the original post itself was seen 1618 times, according to the LinkedIn statistics, it might be that this questionnaire was not applicable for them, or they did not want to answer for this topic even though they would have experienced emotional abuse at work. Also, for social media platforms such as LinkedIn, it is easy to look at a post but not really internalize the information that it's covering. This means that for the 1618 there might be few or rather many who just scrolled by.

When reflecting back I noticed that on my questionnaire I had few unclarities. For example, I asked the participants if they had received help from occupational health care. Over 40 % answered that they have. For the next question I asked that if the person has received help from outside and what has that help included. The choices were listening and conversations, occupational health care services, intervention from the organisation, something else, and I have not received help from outside the process my experience. This was clear for me as a researcher, but when going through the answers I realized that for example some people did not include therapy as occupational services, as I had in my mind. Occupational health care services of course can include only sick leaves, and now as a researcher, as I have simplified the services and not differentiate what I meant, I cannot be sure what the actual help was what the victims got from occupational health care.

When assessing the reliability and validity of the research, it must be done differently for quantitative and qualitative research. For the quantitative research, the reliability comes from not letting random variables affect the results of the research. Validity on the other hand can be measured by asking if e.g., the questions on the survey are relevant compared to research topic. (Puusa & Juuti 2020, chapter 5) For the qualitative research, assessing these things are a bit harder. According to Puusa & Juuti (2020, chapter 5) validity and reliability for qualitative research comes from its transferability to another research environment. In qualitative research, the researcher must be transparent how they came to their conclusions in analysing and interpreting the material. This makes qualitative research reliable. I feel like my questionnaire and the interview did not help me to answer my research questions in a profound way I wanted to. I did get the answers for the questions in general, but due to the insufficient material, such as lack of participants, it made this research hard to e.g., transfer to another research environment which means that my research's validity and reliability are not on point on the qualitative research material.

### **7.3 Ethicality of the research**

Ethicality in research as such, has few things to think about. First, not to have such relationship between the researcher and the participant that could affect the willingness of the participants to give information for the recipient. This means for example that a therapist cannot interview their patient for a study. Also, the participant must be informed of all the why's, how's and the risks of participating in this study. Thirdly the researcher must evaluate what information they need for the study and what is out of the scope of it. For example, if the answer brings out sensitive or confidential material and if it is genuinely valuable for the study, even if it would be interesting as such. (Eskola &

Suoranta 1998, chapter 2) As for the ethicality in the survey, the participant was not forced to answer the open-ended questions. I chose this view because I didn't want the participant to feel like they had to answer or tell matters that are personal and sensitive.

According to Eskola & Suoranta (1998, chapter 2) confidentiality and anonymity are essential when handling participants information. This means that after the study has been published the participants should not be recognized from the material or from the answers they have given for the study. The questionnaire was anonymous and there was no way possible to track who has answered from which LinkedIn-profile to this questionnaire. The ones who wanted to take part in the interview were directed to another questionnaire site where they then could leave their contact information. This was made due to the GDPR, so that their answers for the questionnaire could not be linked to their contact information and in that way also could be able to link the answers to certain person. For the expert opinion statement interview, I also decided to anonymize the expert's identity.

## 7.4 Conclusions

The three research questions I had chosen for my thesis were:

Q1. How does emotional abuse at work affects individual's self-image individually, professionally and personality wise?

Q2. How does one overcome emotional abuse at workplace?

Q3. What are the common nominators of survivors of emotional abuse at workplace?

I first learned from the theory that emotional abuse affects individual's physical, psychological, and social-psychological health. As I asked how emotional abuse effects individual's image of themselves and as a professional, from my study I learned that around 40 % of the participants felt like they have lost their self-esteem and are unsure about their professional abilities. This means that almost half of the 29 participants are still suffering from the lack of believing in themselves individually and professionally – as well as 44,8 % felt like the physical or psychological symptoms they have gotten from the emotional abuse at work are still affecting their daily life even outside the office. In addition, 10 out of the 29 participants (34,5 %) feel like this experience limits their life in a way or another. Still, 51,7 % felt like they are emotionally stronger than before experiencing emotional abuse at work. This means that 15 out of the 29 participants might have found something positive out of the experience.

As learned before from Einarsen & al. (2004, 145–146.), the constant negative exposure has affected the victim's ability to see the good in them. This also supports the previous findings that when individual experiences emotional abuse at work, it affects them way longer than only for the time they are abused. As for emotions, bitterness and hate and relief got the same number of answers. As seen from Table 3 and 4 before, there might be a strong correlation on still feeling that the experience limits victim's life in whole, as they might suffer physical or mental health issues – even long after the abuse has ended. Hence, emotional abuse at work affects individual's self-image, professional image, and personality in a negative way. It can be seen in a form of lost self-esteem and lost belief in their own capabilities as professionals, and also can create a contradictory feeling for the victim being strong enough to survive emotional abuse, but still letting the experience effect how they see themselves and having to cope with the symptoms the experience has left them with.

For the second question I came to the same conclusion that many researchers have come before me; the victims of emotional abuse at work mostly overcome experience by quitting the job they

have been abused at. In my questionnaire I saw a correlation between 70 % of the participants not receiving any help from their organisation and 64 % of the participants quitting their job as a way of overcoming the emotional abuse at work. This means that out of 20 participants who did not receive any help from the organisation, 19 of them might have used quitting as a method of surviving emotional abuse. In addition, more than 60 % of the participants received help from their loved ones. As also mentioned before by van Heugten & al. (2018, 17), creating a narrative in a social context e.g., by having conversations with loved ones about the situation, can help the victim heal. Hence, creating a positive narrative or structuring their thoughts on about what is happening at their workplace can help the victim overcome emotional abuse at work. If the current situation does not get better or the victim does not receive any help from the organisation itself, the victims usually tend quit their job. Quitting seems to be the most effective way to overcome the emotional abuse at work, according to my study.

For the third question, the most percentages were found in the three main entities: the contradictory of feelings after emotional abuse, receiving help from the loved ones and using quitting as a way of overcoming the emotional abuse. The answers for the questionnaire when asked about feelings were alternating from confidence to insecurity or hate to hopefulness. There were no one strong emotion found from my research that could have been explained as a common nominator of the victims of emotional abuse. Secondly, more than half of the participants received help from their loved ones, more than 40 % (12 participants out of 29) from occupational health care and 24 % (7 participants out of 29) from their organisation. This indicates that most of the victims turn to and receive help from the loved ones and it might be seen as the best way to receive help. Thirdly, quitting has been before and still is the most common way for the victims to overcome emotional abuse at work. When 70% of the participants of this study did not receive any help from the organisation it is no wonder that quitting is seen as an only working alternative.

## **7.5 Limitations and further research**

As the limitations for this study, the main limitation was not getting enough participants for the survey to create more in-depth results of this topic but also not getting interviewees to create a better knowledge of the common nominators of emotional abuse victims at work. Therefore, this study can be used as generalized view on the topic but cannot be specialized to include all the victims of emotional abuse at work.

For further research I have two recommendations. Firstly, this study focuses on different timelines after the emotional abuse at work. For further research I would recommend the researcher to focus on a more profound matter on the time after the abuse. The time that emotional abuse has just

ended throughout the change of mind of the individual to feel they have survived. This means a long-term study on how victim's mindset transforms from being a victim to being a survivor.

I would also find out the answers for the new question that arises from this study, "Why and how would the victims of emotional abuse act differently in the situations in the past if they now had another chance?". The participants for the survey felt so strongly about this question, with approximately 80% of the participants answering they would act differently. Unfortunately, as mentioned before, I did not leave space for an open-ended question here, so this question remains unsolved until further research.

## **7.6 Thesis process and self-development**

This study managed to do what I hope it would; it gave the research an opportunity to learn more about a topic that is close to her heart, answered the research questions and gave new acknowledgements about emotional abuse at work – and hopefully inspires someone else to study this topic with even more profound way. Only thing that made this Thesis journey a little bit more challenging was the lack of participation on behalf of the survey and interviews. It was discouraging not receiving enough data or interviewees to conduct a study fitting the standards I would have preferred. Still, I enjoyed collecting information for the theoretical framework and analysing the amount of data I received after all.

Looking back, I trusted the so-called power of social media more than I should have had, because I did not realize how slow algorithms work on LinkedIn if you have not posted anything prior. Now if I would do this questionnaire and posts on LinkedIn, I would focus more on marketing the topic with e.g., starting conversations about it weeks before I would post about the questionnaire. This way the questionnaire when posted would have automatically reached more people.

Other than that, my thesis was planned and executed the way I first thought, excluding the time management problems I had throughout writing my thesis. I have let the reader know how and why I came to the conclusions I did, I reflected my own thoughts to my theoretical framework and answered my research questions. As mentioned before, I made sure to keep participants anonymity safe while doing the questionnaire or the interview. All the material from questionnaire and interview that included personal information have been deleted on 1<sup>st</sup> of May 2023 as promised.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1. Questionnaire on Webropol

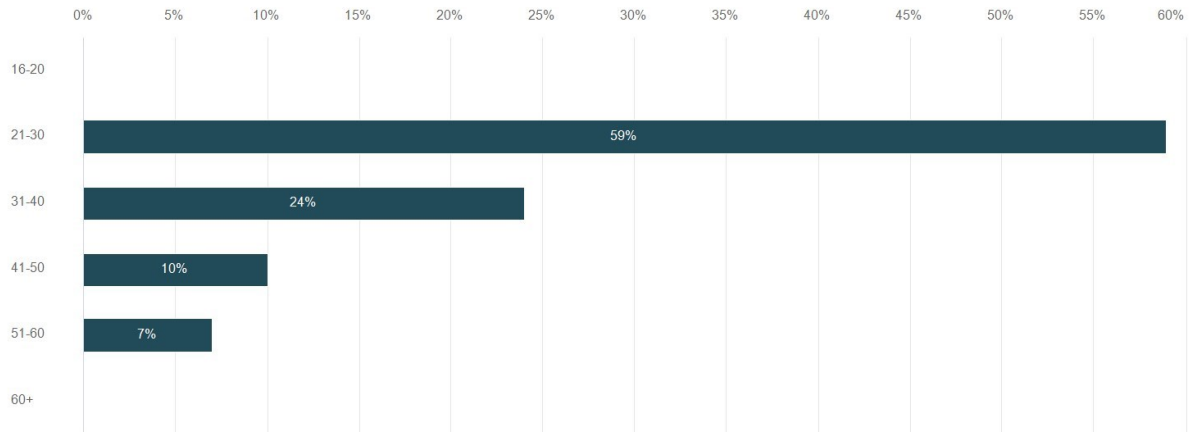
### Perusraportti\_ONT

#### Henkinen väkivalta työelämässä

Vastaajien kokonaismäärä: 29

#### 1. Ikä

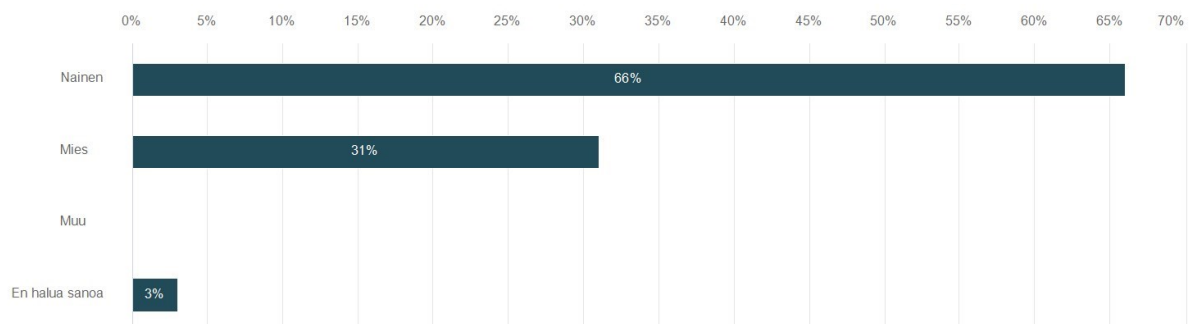
Vastaajien määrä: 29



	n	Prosentti
16-20	0	0,0%
21-30	17	58,6%
31-40	7	24,1%
41-50	3	10,4%
51-60	2	6,9%
60+	0	0,0%

#### 2. Sukupuoli

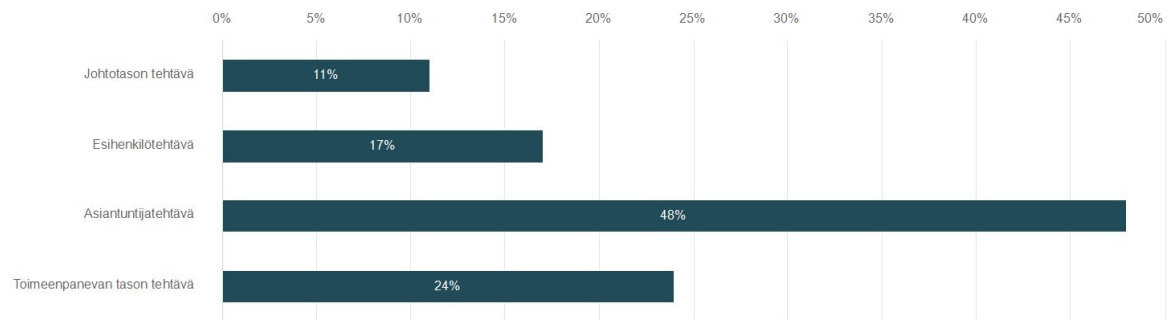
Vastaajien määrä: 29



	n	Prosentti
Nainen	19	65,5%
Mies	9	31,0%
Muu	0	0,0%
En halua sanoa	1	3,5%

### 3. Asema työpaikalla

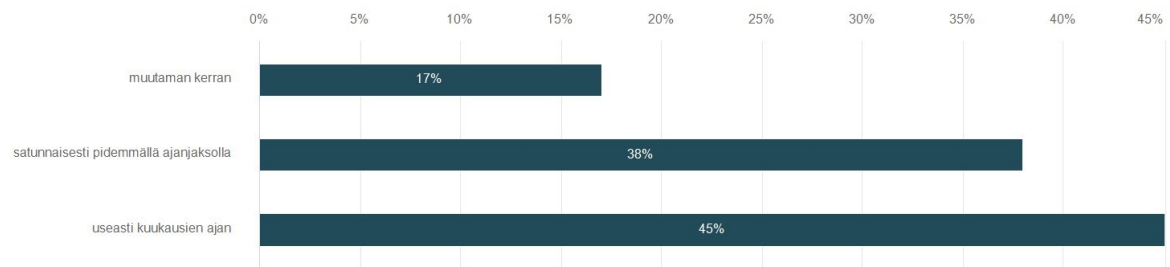
Vastaajien määrä: 29



	n	Prosentti
Johtotason tehtävä	3	10,4%
Esihenkilötehtävä	5	17,2%
Asiantuntijatehtävä	14	48,3%
Toimeenpanevan tason tehtävä	7	24,1%

### 4. Kokemani henkinen väkivalta työpaikalla tapahtui

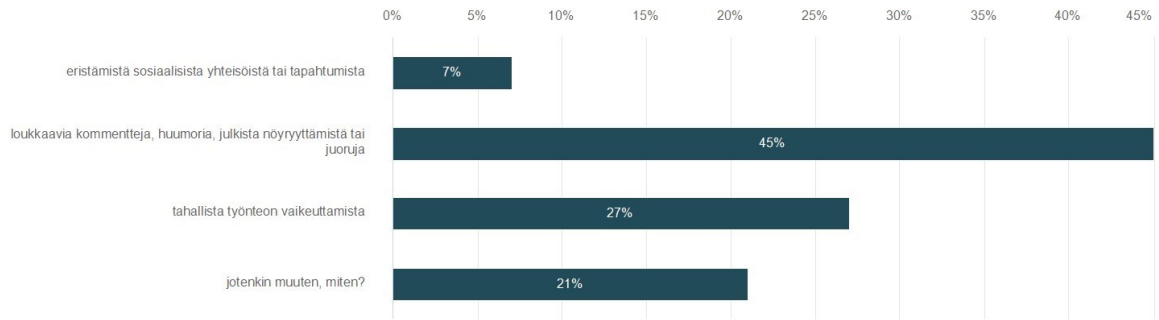
Vastaajien määrä: 29



	n	Prosentti
muutaman kerran	5	17,3%
satunnaisesti pidemmällä ajanjaksolla	11	37,9%
useasti kuukausien ajan	13	44,8%

## 5. Miten henkistä väkivaltaa kohdistettiin sinuun työpaikallasi?

Vastaajien määrä: 29



	n	Prosentti
eristämistä sosiaalisista yhteisöistä tai tapahtumista	2	6,9%
loukkaavia kommentteja, huumoria, julkista nöyryyttämistä tai juoruja	13	44,8%
tahallista työnteon vaikeuttamista	8	27,6%
jotenkin muuten, miten?	6	20,7%

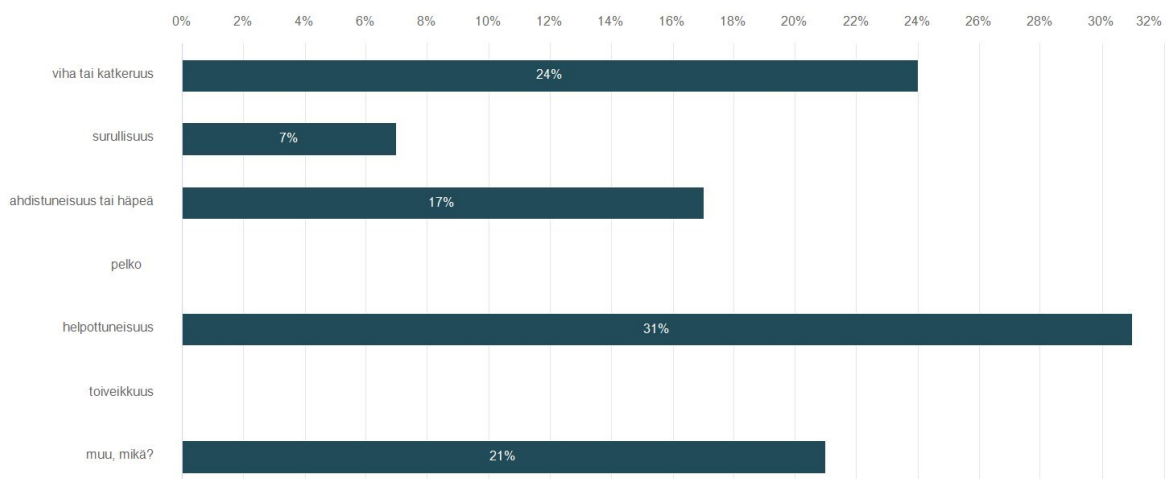
### Lisätekstikenttään annetut vastaukset

Näytä kaikki

Vastausvaihtoehdot	Teksti
jotenkin muuten, miten?	Tylyä kommentointia, aina negatiivisen kautta asiaan
jotenkin muuten, miten?	2. ja 3. vaihtoehto
jotenkin muuten, miten?	Kaikki yllämainitut
jotenkin muuten, miten?	Vähättelyä, tiedon pimittämistä, nöyryyttämistä
jotenkin muuten, miten?	ammattillista epäkunnioitusta (mielipide sivutettiin toistuvasti, vaikka olin yksin vastuussa asiasta), sukupuoleen tai/iä ikään perustuvaa syrjintää (jätettiin kutsumatta tapahtumaan, johon kaikki muut johtajat kutsuttiin), maalittamista (nuhtelua vastaavasta käytöksestä kuin muilla)
jotenkin muuten, miten?	Kaikki yllä mainitut

## 6. Kun mietin kokemaani, päällimmäinen tunteeni tällä hetkellä on

Vastaajien määrä: 29



	n	Prosentti
viha tai katkeruus	7	24,1%

	n	Prosentti
surullisuus	2	6,9%
ahdistuneisuus tai häpeä	5	17,3%
pelko	0	0,0%
helpottuneisuus	9	31,0%
toiveikkuus	0	0,0%
muu, mikä?	6	20,7%

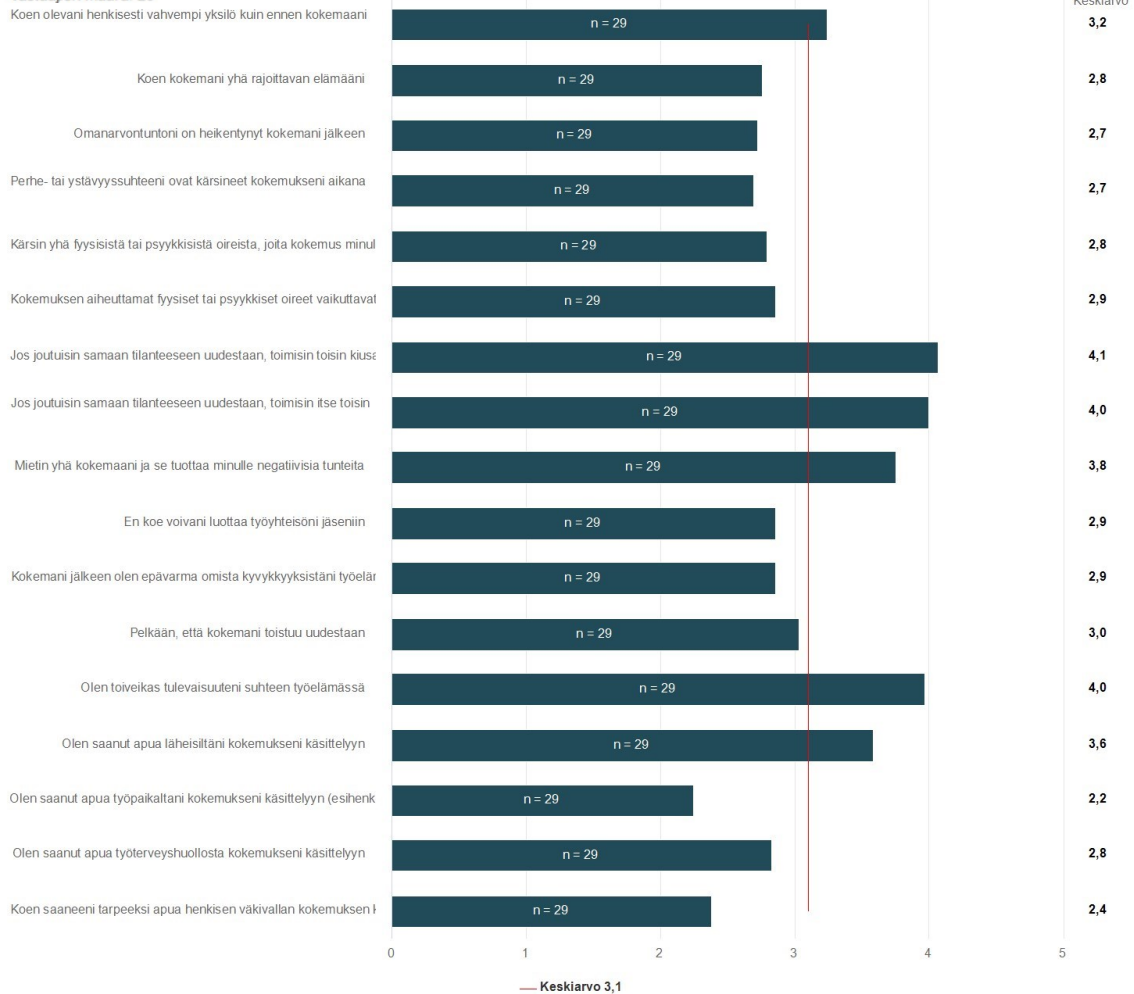
Lisätekstikenttään annetut vastaukset

Näytä kaikki

Vastausvaihtoehdot	Teksti
muu, mikä?	Neutraali
muu, mikä?	uupumus, väsymys
muu, mikä?	Sääli kiusaaja kohtaan
muu, mikä?	hankala määrittää
muu, mikä?	Kitollisuus
muu, mikä?	Tapahtuneesta on pitkä aika, joten ei enää juuri mitään

## 7. Arvio seuraavia väittämiä

Vastaajien määrä: 29

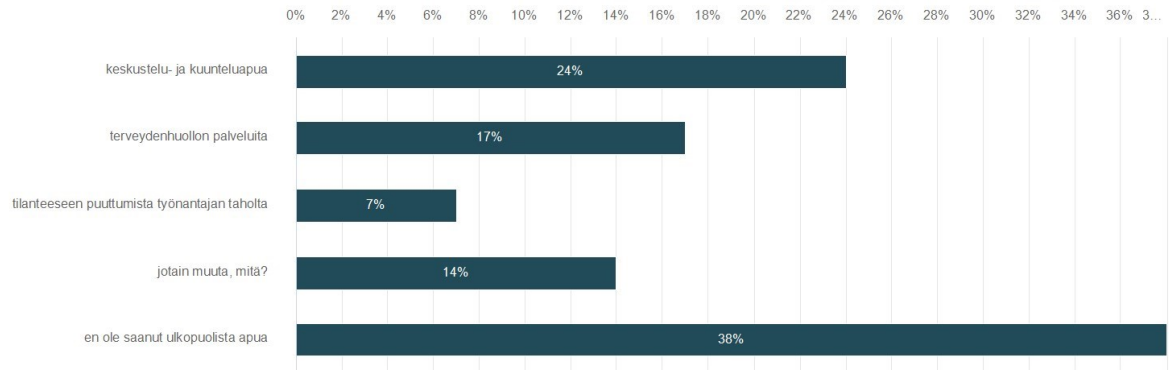


	täysin eri mieltä	eri mieltä	ei samaa eikä eri mieltä	samaa mieltä	täysin samaa mieltä	Keskiarvo	Mediaani
Koen olevani henkisesti vahvempi yksilö kuin ennen kokemaani	10,4%	24,1%	13,8%	34,5%	17,2%	3,2	4,0
Koen kokemani yhä rajoittavan elämäni	13,8%	37,9%	13,8%	27,6%	6,9%	2,8	2,0
Omanarvontuntoni on heikentynyt kokemani jälkeen	17,3%	31,0%	13,8%	37,9%	0,0%	2,7	3,0
Perhe- tai ystävyysuhteeni ovat kärsineet kokemukseni aikana	31,0%	20,7%	10,4%	24,1%	13,8%	2,7	2,0
Kärsin yhä fyysisistä tai psyykkisistä oireista, joita kokemus minulle on aiheuttanut	10,3%	41,4%	13,8%	27,6%	6,9%	2,8	2,0
Kokemuksen aiheuttamat fyysiset tai psyykkiset oireet vaikuttavat kykyyni suoriutua tyo- tai yksityiselämässä	24,1%	20,7%	10,4%	34,5%	10,3%	2,9	3,0
Jos joutuisin samaan tilanteeseen uudestaan, toimitais toisin kiusaajaani kohtaan	0,0%	6,9%	13,8%	44,8%	34,5%	4,1	4,0
Jos joutuisin samaan tilanteeseen uudestaan, toimitais itse toisin	0,0%	6,9%	10,4%	58,6%	24,1%	4,0	4,0
Mietin yhä kokemaani ja se tuottaa minulle negatiivisia tunteita	3,4%	6,9%	13,8%	62,1%	13,8%	3,8	4,0
En koe voivani luottaa työyhteisöni jäseniin	6,9%	41,4%	24,1%	13,8%	13,8%	2,9	3,0
Kokemani jälkeen olen epävarma omista kyvykkyyksistäni työelämässä	17,2%	27,6%	13,8%	34,5%	6,9%	2,9	3,0
Pelkään, että kokemani toistuu uudestaan	10,4%	31,0%	17,2%	27,6%	13,8%	3,0	3,0
Olen toiveikas tulevaisuuteni suhteen työelämässä	3,4%	6,9%	13,8%	41,4%	34,5%	4,0	4,0
Olen saanut apua läheisiltäni kokemukseni käsittelyyn	6,9%	10,3%	20,7%	41,4%	20,7%	3,6	4,0
Olen saanut apua työpaikaltani kokemukseni käsittelyyn (esimerkiksi esimiehen, HR tai muu työnantajan edustaja)	37,9%	31,0%	6,9%	17,3%	6,9%	2,2	2,0
Olen saanut apua työterveyshuollosta kokemukseni käsittelyyn	24,1%	17,3%	17,2%	34,5%	6,9%	2,8	3,0

	täysin eri mieltä	eri mieltä	ei samaa eikä eri mieltä	samaa mieltä	täysin samaa mieltä	Keskiarvo	Mediaani
Koen saaneeni tarpeeksi apua henkisen väkivallan kokemuksen käsittelyyn	24,1%	34,5%	20,7%	20,7%	0,0%	2,4	2,0

### 8. Jos olet saanut ulkopuolista apua kokemuksesi käsittelyyn, on saamasi apu sisältänyt

Vastaajien määrä: 29



	n	Prosentti
keskustelu- ja kuunteluapua	7	24,1%
terveydenhuollon palveluita	5	17,3%
tilanteeseen puuttumista työnantajan taholta	2	6,9%
jotain muuta, mitä?	4	13,8%
en ole saanut ulkopuolista apua	11	37,9%

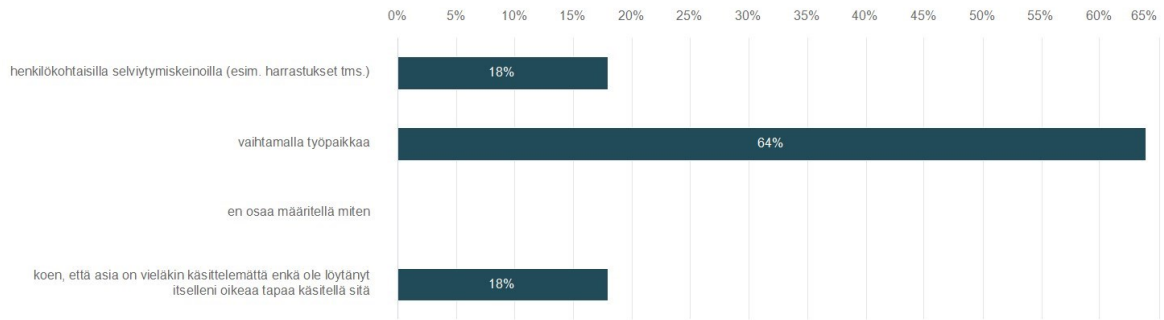
#### Lisätekstikenttään annetut vastaukset

Näytä kaikki

Vastausvaihtoehdot	Teksti
jotain muuta, mitä?	Olen ostanut psykoterapiaa (pitkäkestoista) itse
jotain muuta, mitä?	Vaihtamalla työnantajaa
jotain muuta, mitä?	Psykoterapia (KELA)
jotain muuta, mitä?	terapiaa ja ahdistuslääkitys

### 9. En ole saanut ulkopuolista apua kokemuksi käsittelyyn, vaan selvinnyt siitä

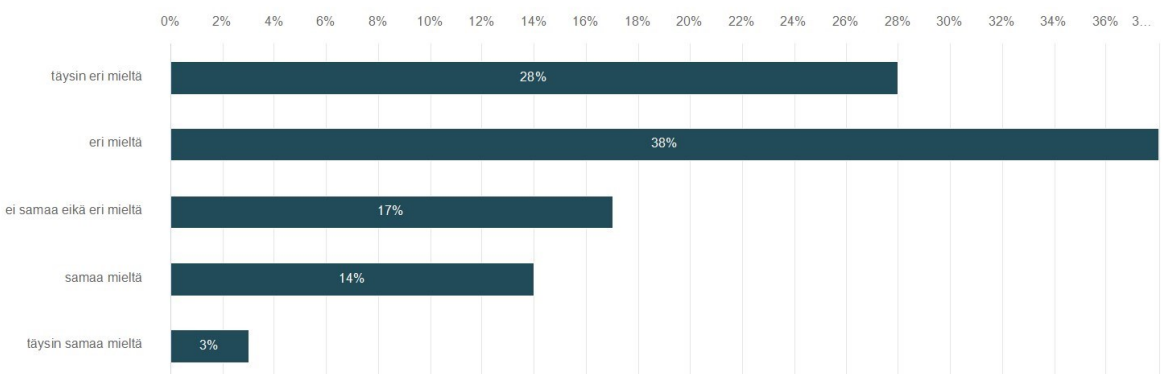
Vastaajien määrä: 11



	n	Prosentti
henkilökohtaisilla selvitysmiskeinoilla (esim. harrastukset tms.)	2	18,2%
vaihtamalla työpaikkaa	7	63,6%
en osaa määritellä miten	0	0,0%
koen, että asia on vieläkin käsittelemättä enkä ole löytänyt itselleni oikeaa tapaa käsitellä sitä	2	18,2%

### 10. Koen saaneeni oikeutta kokemaani vääryyteen

Vastaajien määrä: 29



	n	Prosentti
täysin eri mieltä	8	27,6%
eri mieltä	11	37,9%
ei samaa eikä eri mieltä	5	17,2%
samaa mieltä	4	13,8%
täysin samaa mieltä	1	3,5%

Appendix 2. Cover letter for the questionnaire (shared and reposted on my personal LinkedIn-profile)



**Janika Raitopuro** · You

Project Coordinator

13h · 🌐

Hei,

Olen Janika Raitopuro, Haaga-Helia ammattikorkeakoulun opiskelija, Liiketoiminnan uudistamisen ja johtamisen koulutuksesta (YAMK). Opinnäytetyöni aihe on Työpaikan henkisestä väkivallasta selviytyminen.

Henkinen väkivalta työpaikalla tarkoittaa systemaattista ja pitkäkestoista kielteistä kohtelua, loukkaamista, alistamista ja mitätöintiä. Muun muassa työpaikkakiusaaminen on täten henkistä väkivaltaa. Tämän kyselyn tarkoituksena on selvittää miten henkinen väkivalta työelämässä vaikuttaa yksilöön, miten hän siitä selviytyy ja mitkä ovat yhteisiä tekijöitä henkisen väkivallan kokeneille työntekijöille.

Oletko sinä kokenut työpaikallasi henkistä väkivaltaa ja selvinnyt siitä? Vastaa kyselyyni! Kysely toteutetaan täysin anonymisti eikä vastauksiasi voi jäljittää takaisin sinuun tai LinkedIn-profiiliisi. Kysymykset ovat joko väittämiä tai avoimia kysymyksiä. Kyselyyn vastaamiseen menee noin 5 minuuttia.

Kiitos, että käytät aikaasi kyselyyni vastaamiseen!

v

### Appendix 3. Interview question for the expert opinion statement

1. Mikä yllätti eniten tutkimustuloksissani, kun vertaat niitä omiin kokemuksiisi organisaatioissa esiintyvään henkiseen väkivaltaan?
2. Miten koet, että henkinen väkivalta esiintyy työpaikoilla? Oletko samaa mieltä tutkimukseni kanssa vai näetkö, että jokin toinen tapa käyttää henkistä väkivaltaa esiintyisi vahvemmin työpaikoilla?
3. Noin 45 % vastaajista koki, että heidän kykynsä suoriutua yksityis- ja työelämässä on alenut. Näkökö henkisen väkivallan kokeminen työpaikalla esim. työntekijöiden suoriutumissa työtehtävistä?
4. Melkein puolet vastaajista kokee voivansa luottaa uusiin kollegoihinsa kokemuksen jälkeen. Näkökö henkisen väkivallan kokeneen ihmisen käytös kuitenkin epäluottamuksena työyhteisössä vai pitääkö tulos yleisesti paikkansa?
5. Tutkimukseni mukaan vain 41,4 % sai apua työterveyshuollosta ja suurin osa (51 %) tukeutui ”vain” läheisiinsä. Mistä henkisen väkivaltaa kokeneet yleisesti saavat apua organisaatioissa – vai saavatko ollenkaan?
6. Miten tulkitset sen, että kyselyyn vastanneista melkein 70 % eivät koskaan saaneet mitään apua organisaatioltaan tilanteeseensa? Mistä tämä johtuu?
7. Miten näet, että organisaatio voisi helpottaa näiden 41 % vastaajien pelkoa siitä, että henkinen väkivalta toistuisi esim. uudessa organisaatiossa?
8. Tutkimukseni osoitti, että irtisanoutuminen on ns. paras vaihtoehto henkisestä väkivallasta selviytymiseen. Oletko samaa mieltä? Miksi kyllä tai miksi ei?