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Swiss bosses bully their workers

The first ever study into workplace bullying in Switzerland has revealed that up to eight per cent of Swiss are victims.

The research, carried out by the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (Seco), showed that middle managers were the main perpetrators of bullying. Nearly one in ten workers is bullied by their bosses.

Seco talked to 3200 people by telephone for the study. Respondents were told they were taking part in a general survey about health and the workplace, and were only asked about bullying towards the end of the interview.

Although only 4.4 per cent of those responding actually described themselves as victims of bullying, the answers from almost eight per cent showed they were in fact suffering systematic bullying in the workplace. Alain Kiener, who is responsible for issues relating to health and the workplace at Seco, says many people don't recognise that they are

being bullied at first.

"It is a peculiar form of violence," Kiener told swissinfo, "and many employees don't realise it is happening. They just think perhaps they have done something wrong and they try to improve their work."

Workplace bullying, also called mobbing, is defined as a form of treatment which takes place regularly at least once a week, for at least six months.

"It can be something as simple as being interrupted as soon as you start to speak," said Kiener. "If this were to happen only once or twice it wouldn't be so bad, but if it happens regularly it can have serious consequences, in particular psychologically." The survey found that immediate superiors were the main authors of workplace bullying, with most workers having few problems with their ordinary colleagues.

"I think Swiss middle management has to be better trained," said Kiener. "It's not an easy

problem, but managers need to be aware that they are obliged to protect the physical and psychological health of their people."

The survey also found that neither men nor women were more likely to be the victims of workplace bullying, and that the phenomenon was equally spread throughout the linguistic regions of Switzerland. However, the survey did reveal that foreign workers are twice as likely to be the victims of bullying as Swiss ones.

"This was a surprise to us," admitted Kiener. "But I think it is explained by the very nature of bullying. People who are in any way different, whether they are fatter, or thinner, or have a different skin colour, are more likely to suffer bullying."

Victims of bullying are three times as likely to be depressed, and are twice as likely to have problems sleeping.

source: swissinfo.org.

Swiss hospital to begin human Aids vaccine trials

A hospital in the Swiss city of Lausanne has announced it will conduct human trials of potential new Aids vaccines.

Together with a hospital in London, the University Hospital in canton Vaud will begin the first vaccine tests on humans early next year.

Giuseppe Pantaleo, head of the immunology and allergy unit at canton Vaud's University Hospital (CHUV) in Lausanne, said several vaccines would be tested during the preliminary stages of the trials.

Further tests will then be conducted on a selected number of the most promising vaccines.

Those in charge of the trials say they will soon begin the process of recruiting around 80 volunteers from the Lausanne region to take part in the trials.

Medical authorities in Lausanne stress that none of the candidate vaccines lined up for use during the test stage poses any risk to those who sign up to participate in the trial process.

Pantaleo - considered to be one of the world's

leading scientific experts in the field of Aids research - warned that the trials would not automatically lead to the development of a successful vaccine.

"The first step is to test the security and tolerance of our candidate vaccines," said Pantaleo in an interview with the Swiss newspaper, "24 Heures".

"We will then select the best of the lot in order to conduct [further] analysis of the capacity of the vaccine to induce a response of immunity," he continued.

Experts warn that the preliminary trials - even if they are successful - are unlikely to lead to the commercial development of a vaccine for several years.

"Even if we work quickly," cautioned Pantaleo, "we would need six to eight years."

"If one of the [candidate vaccines] shows potential, you would then need three to four years to evaluate the efficiency of it."

Though scientists are anticipating a long-term trial programme, Pantaleo is optimistic that "several" candidate vaccines could potentially have a major impact on the future treatment

of Aids.

"Perhaps the vaccines will never be 100 per cent efficient. But I would be happy if we obtained a vaccine with an efficiency rate of 50 to 60 per cent," said Pantaleo.

"For developing countries with all the social and economic problems associated with Aids, that would already be progress."

If and when the team of researchers in Lausanne succeeds in singling out a particular vaccine for further study, an extensive programme of tests would still have to be conducted in the developing world.

"In order to determine the efficiency of a product, we must conduct tests outside Europe, in developing countries where the frequency of infections is much higher," said Pantaleo.

"This research will be conducted in co-operation with the international scientific community in Europe and the United States. If people believe we're going to quietly develop a vaccine just in our corner of Lausanne, they are very much mistaken."