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Mobbing In The Workplace : A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Aim.: To investigate the Mobbing phenomenon in the workplace, **Material And Methods:** We investigated the Mobbing by reviewing previous international research over mobbing. The research material was accumulated after thoroughly examining former studies and reviewing the existing literature, as it was found in the bibliography, data bases, academic libraries, academic journals and the internet. **Results:** Through the research we tried to define this phenomenon and at the same time to study it in the workplace. Finally, we conducted a literature review from previous research in order to investigate this phenomenon and its factors. **Conclusions:** The current study has concluded that mobbing sadly negatively affects the recipient by creating both direct and indirect effects on various aspects of his daily life, one of which is the workplace.

Keywords: Mobbing, workplace, effects, Psychosocial Factors.

INTRODUCTION

Every person spends a significant amount of time in the workplace. The quality of the environment in which each person works is of particular and increasing importance in his or her daily life. It is the factor that directly and substantially affects the psychological state, mood and well-being and of course the state of health of every professional. Indeed, the work environment, as a term, is used to refer to a context of interactions between employees and the place where they perform their work. This framework certainly does not refer exclusively to the infrastructure and financial parameters of the job. On the contrary, it includes all the organizational structures of labor practices, but also the network of social relations between workers (Akella, 2016).

Importantly, the way in which work practices are structured and the relationships that develop in the workplace between employees- social and interpersonal - have a major impact on their work behavior. This is attributed to the fact that they are related, either directly or indirectly, to psycho-emotional states - both positive and negative - which similarly affect their performance and self-esteem of their professional skills - abilities. In this context, it is recognized that the phenomenon of moral harassment has become a form of psychological harassment in the workplace. This harassment includes acts of psychological violence, which are both repetitive and aimed at creating a hostile work environment and causing negative experiences and psycho-emotional states, either for a single employee or for several employees. The ultimate goal of all the above is the marginalization and the expulsion of the recipients of this harassment from the workplace (Al-Ghabeesh & Qattom, 2019).

In recent decades, the phenomenon of moral harassment in the workplace has become an increasingly common occurrence. This is a highly threatening phenomenon, which is associated with significant personal, family, professional and social consequences (Φουστέρης, 2013). Indeed, it is a social problem that many professionals face in the workplace, if not many times, at least at some point in their lives (Κοϊνης & Σαρίδη, 2013). Although moral harassment, also known as mobbing, is an unpleasant reality, both in Greece and abroad, it is unfortunately treated with mistrust both by employers as well by other professionals, and it is often difficult to identify it as a phenomenon. On the other hand, however, it is recognized that it is crucial to protect and defend workers and to ensure safe working conditions in every company, private body or public service (Κοϊνης et al., 2017· Τούκας et al., 2012).

In view of the above, it is important to study the phenomenon of moral harassment in the workplace, i.e. mobbing. Thus, the terms that have been formulated in the relevant literature and interpret as mobbing are presented, as well as the factors associated with its occurrence.

Materials and Methods

For the purpose of our research we have reviewed a significant number of published studies. The literature on this topic was studied thoroughly in order to create and compile a scientific study around this major problem. Both from the international and domestic literature, important results could be drawn.

Results and Discussion

In recent years, there has been increasing interest among researchers and academics in the issue of moral harassment and bullying in the workplace. In fact, it is a phenomenon that was first observed in the Nordic countries and gradually spread to the rest of Europe (Ariza-Montes et al., 2013). Therefore, this phenomenon has been studied in Scandinavian countries, and even in Norway, by Professor Olweus (Αναγνώστου & Σκορδιαλός, 2018). Thus, since the 1990s, the systematic study and analysis of the phenomenon of moral harassment in the workplace was initiated (Κοϊνης & Σαρίδη, 2013), while it was recognized that it has a significant impact on the work climate, has an impact on the reduction of employee productivity, contributes to the increase of absenteeism and is associated with the occurrence of psychological and physical problems.

It should be noted that in Greece too, mobbing is not an unknown phenomenon. On the contrary, in recent years it has been spreading rapidly in every work environment (Κοϊνης & Σαρίδη, 2013).

The phenomenon of moral harassment is attributed in the foreign-language literature in many terms. Thus, it is found as "aggression" and "emotional abuse" in the USA and Australia, as "workplace bullying" in English-speaking countries, as "harassment" in French-speaking countries, as "mobbing" in the rest of Europe and especially in Scandinavia, etc. (Saunders et al., 2007· Κατσουνάκη et al., 2018). Note that the term mobbing is adopted and used in this paper, while "mob" means "to abuse a person", "to harass" and "to surround" (Κατσουνάκη et al., 2018). The term "mobbing" comes from the verb "to mob", which derives from the Latin "mobile vulgus", which was used to refer to the words "mob", "mob", "crowd", "hordes of plebs" or even a group of disrespected individuals. Gradually and over time, this concept changed and acquired a negative connotation, as it was used to identify a group of people who provoke aggression, fear and submission (Τούκας et al., 2012).

In particular, in 1963 Konrad Lorenz used the verb "mob" in his work to describe aggressive behavior of animals within a herd in order to drive out an intruder (Κοϊνης & Σαρίδη, 2013). In 1972 the term "to mob" was used by the Swedish Heinemann to refer to the destructive behavior of a group of minors against a particular minor. In the field of work psychology, the term mobbing was used in the 1980s by Heinz Leymann, a German psychologist, to study and describe psychological violence in the workplace. In fact, Leymann and Gustavsson used the term mobbing in their work to describe psychological oppression, which is prolonged and repeated and which occurs in workplaces. Since then, the term has been used to refer to a "state of psychological violence that can cause psychological, psychosomatic and social problems" (Τούκας et al., 2012), is understood as the "set of negative effects on human health resulting from ethical harassment in the workplace" (Ρόμπολας & Μπρέντα, 2019), and as a phenomenon consisting of the existence of "systematic, unethical communication and antagonistic behavior by one or more individuals towards another individual" (Κοϊνης et al., 2016). It should be noted that there is no commonly accepted definition of mobbing. Thus, in the literature many views are found, which are based on certain common characteristics (Batsi & Karamanis, 2019). In particular: For Duffy and Sperry (2007), ethical harassment in the workplace is the non-sexual harassment of an employee by one or a group of colleagues or other members of an organization, aimed at displacing the former from the workplace.

Yildirim and Yildirim (2007) define mobbing as a process of displaying antagonistic behaviors in the workplace. Antep et al. (2012), attribute the concept of moral harassment at work as a form of coercion and oppression exercised on employees that can lead to negative consequences for the company itself and its employees.

Koinis and Saridis (2013), describe moral harassment in the workplace as "any abusive behaviour - manifested in words, actions, written messages - that may damage the personality, dignity or physical or mental integrity of the individual, endanger his or her work or disturb the working environment".

Bakella et al. (2013), describe mobbing as a communication of a hostile and unethical nature, which is directed in a systematic way towards a specific individual.

Cornoiu & Gyorgy (2013), refer to the destructive goal of mobbing and define it as the action of moving a person from a company, who is considered undesirable for some reason, by firing him or forcing him to resign. This phenomenon can be observed in all businesses and organisations, both in the private and public sector.

Somunoglu et al. (2013), define workplace harassment as an ongoing psychological terror inflicted on a particular person by one or more persons. This tactic makes the victim susceptible to feeling helpless and desperate.

Shakula et al. (2014), state that the term mobbing is used to describe a psychological attack, which is carried out in a systematic way and a strategy for marginalization, observed in the workplace either by hierarchical superiors or by colleagues and even subordinates.

Divincova & Sivakova (2014), refer to moral harassment in the workplace as a form of emotional abuse and psychological terror, in the place where a person provides his/her work, by colleagues.

Görgülü et al. (2014), argue that mobbing is an emotional attack. It starts with a disrespectful and harmful behaviour and can be described as forcing someone to resign by creating an aggressive behaviour and by provoking persons (with or without their consent) against a person by engaging in malicious actions, covert attacks, mockery and damage to the reputation of the recipient of this behaviour.

At the same time, Koini et al. (2016- 2017), state that mobbing is a social issue that is frequently encountered in the work environment and has a direct impact on the lives and performance of employees. It is an Anglo-Saxon term, which has been established to describe the phenomenon of abusive behaviour that is repeated and that comes either from the external or from the internal environment of an organisation - business. This phenomenon manifests itself in various forms, such as words, actions, threats, texts or gestures that aim and have the effect of offending the personality and dignity, integrity - physical and psychological - of a worker or any other person, when performing his/her work. It also jeopardizes his or her employment and creates an environment that is intimidating, hostile, which causes belittlement and humiliation and is characterized by an element of aggression.

Dede (2017) refers to mobbing noting that, "It is a systematic, methodical and continuous (at least once a week and for a long period of time) exercise of psychological violence, workplace abuse, the creation of a hostile, humiliating work environment and the imposition of discriminatory treatment and terror that offends the personality, dignity, physical and mental integrity of employees and often leads to total exhaustion of the target employee in order to force him/her to resign".

According to UNISON, one of the UK's trade unions, harassment, or workplace bullying, is defined as "persistent, abusive, threatening and humiliating behavior through which an attempt is made to weaken a worker or group of workers" (Κοϊνης et al., 2017).

The British Counselling Service's Code of Practice defines workplace harassment as "harassing, intimidating, bullying, malicious and offensive behavior, abuse of authority by means intended to undermine, humiliate, degrade or diminish the personality of the recipient of the harassment" (Ρόμπολας & Μπρέντα, 2019).

Batsi & Karamanis (2019), define mobbing as a form of psychological terrorism and harassment in the workplace and a type of negative social interaction in which one or more individuals within a work environment aim to involve another person in a number of different situations that are hostile and unethical and place them in a state of weakness.

Finally, Zapf & Einarsen (2005), argue that it is a concrete phenomenon - rather than a psychological theory - that constitutes a serious and highly stressful interpersonal conflict, where there is a differentiation in the power of the persons involved in it.

From all of the above, it is clear that workplace harassment, as described by the term mobbing, is not a creative and normal workplace conflict between colleagues, nor a dispute that is of limited duration and ends quickly. Instead, it is a series of persecutions, attacks and acts of ridicule of a person that occurs slowly, steadily and persists over a long period of time (more than six months). This phenomenon is so strong because of its duration and the forms in which it manifests itself that it renders the person unable to react.

However, when this phenomenon is detected in time, it is possible to intervene and end both it and its devastating consequences at the individual and operational level (Κοϊνης & Σαρίδη, 2013).

Although different views have been presented and different approaches have been developed on the concept of moral harassment and mobbing, it is clear that all of the above definitions share certain common characteristics, which are identified as factors of mobbing. In this context, Tukas et al. (2012) argue that, despite the fact that there is a variation in the frequency, duration and forms of mobbing, the common features of the above definitions are the following: 1. Acts of psychological violence against a professional, who is the victim, which are repeated in a systematic manner in perpetuity, 2. The worker-victim is at a disadvantage compared to the perpetrator and cannot defend himself or herself and 3. All these actions are directed towards a specific employee, or towards a specific group of employees, and are distinguished by the element of intention.

The same conclusions are reached by Robolas & Brenda (2019), stating that the common characteristics of these definitions are: 1. the psychological violence inflicted on the victim, which is repeated systematically in the temporal continuum 2. the disadvantaged position in which the harassed person is in relation to the perpetrator 3. the fact that he/she cannot defend himself/herself and 4. that the use of psychological violence is intentional, against one or a group of workers. In this context, Koinis & Saridi (2013) add that work employment becomes inhumane and intolerable and victims of moral harassment are faced with social exclusion and are asked to manage demands incompatible with their work, without being able to cope with them in a normal way.

Finally, of interest are the mobbing factors that have also been developed by Shallcross et al. (2010):

1. Systematic collusion and domination of a group of employees or one employee in order to isolate, belittle, ridicule another employee who is the victim,
2. This collusion is done with malicious intent to cause harm to the victim employee,
3. The behavior is common and usually lasts for months or even years,
4. In all of the above, there is an unofficial power imbalance, which is nevertheless strong,
5. Abusers directly abuse targets at every level of the organization,
6. Women are usually more vulnerable to this phenomenon,
7. The victims are usually people who are easily trusted, willing to cooperate, empathetic, highly efficient and loyal to the company,
8. A recurring pattern is identified, which starts with small conflicts that gradually escalate,
9. Management does not recognise the behaviour as moral harassment, usually sides with the perpetrator, and often supports - even unconsciously - the behaviour,
10. The group of workers presents the victim as the person responsible for the situation that has developed,
11. The abuser's behaviour causes the victim to be isolated, and excluded from the workplace
12. The victim suffers significant losses on many levels.

It can be concluded from the above that mobbing involves elements and actions of psychological violence, which are exerted on one or more persons by one or a group of persons. This exercise is carried out in a systematic way and is both long and deliberate. These acts of psychological violence have a negative impact on the recipient, who is put at a disadvantage and feels unprotected compared to the perpetrator. The consequences of this tactic are negative, not only for the mobbing recipient - who experiences social exclusion and may also experience physical and psychological symptoms - but also for the employing unit.

CONCLUSIONS

Mobbing is a phenomenon that is found to a large extent in all workplaces without exception. It is the phenomenon that consists of moral harassment exercised by an individual or a group of professionals towards a colleague or a group of colleagues in a systematic way and aims at causing negative emotions to the recipient

of this behavior and, in the long run, at removing this person from his/her workplace. Mobbing is an abusive behavior, consisting of words and actions that damage the personality and dignity of the victim.

The consequences of this tactic are negative, not only for the mobbing recipient - who experiences social exclusion and may also experience physical and psychological symptoms - but also for the employing unit.

The actions identified as belonging to the concept of mobbing refer to the violation of working conditions, isolation, exclusion and refusal to communicate, insulting the victim's dignity, verbal and physical or sexual violence, insults based on social norms, etc.

On the contrary, mobbing does not include conflicts between colleagues, remarks, instructions, criticisms, etc., which take place in the context of a professional relationship between two people. In any case, however, all the actions that constitute mobbing are a dynamic process, which evolves gradually and it is crucial to recognize it as such.

Mobbing can be attributed to various causes. In this context, the individual, sociological and ergonomic approaches have been developed. The first focuses on individual characteristics of the victim and the perpetrator, arguing that some of these are linked to the victim's appearance. The second studies the dynamics of the employee group, identifying a tendency towards mobbing because of these dynamics. Finally, the third approach looks at the work organization and working conditions that are the cause of mobbing. In any case, however, and regardless of the factors that contribute to the occurrence of mobbing, it is accepted that this phenomenon is associated with very important consequences, both for the recipient of mobbing and for the organization within which it occurs. Thus, mobbing affects the physical and mental health of the employee-victim, while it also reduces his/her efficiency and effectiveness.

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