

# **"The Moral / Psychological Harassment and its Dimensions in the Mental Health of the Employee in the Modern Workplace"**

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## **ABSTRACT**

**KEY WORDS:** moral / psychological harassment, violence, employee, workplace, mental and physical health.

The present paper describes the existence of Moral/Psychological Harassment in the workplace, a phenomenon little known and evaluated in Greece.

The moral harassment or Mobbing is a "hidden violence" involving repeated abusive behavior (oral, physical, attitude ...) in small amounts. Usually, it isn't initially realized by the receiver and works cumulatively being very destructive to the mental and physical health as well as the quality of working life of the employee.

More specifically, the study aims to highlight on the nature & the characteristics (definition, causes, consequences and treatment) of the phenomenon while aims to act proactively informing and sensitizing students, graduates & employees towards the issue.

## **Introduction**

The moral / psychological harassment in the workplace is a very old phenomenon in all societies. The identification and investigation of the problem began in the early 80's in Scandinavia and then in other European countries, USA, Canada, Australia. The German psychologist H. Leymann established in Sweden observed and named this phenomenon the term mobbing from the English verb «to mob» lash, bother.

The phenomenon of moral harassment is little known in our country as there is no systematic research in Greece.

The moral harassment is a key feature of the inconspicuous nature. This is an aggressive tactic is implemented through psychological manipulation, which

gradually may destabilize the individual. Causes serious impact on mental and physical health and quality of life of the worker.

The World Health Organization (2003) & the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (2012) through research aimed at legislation to prevent and combat the phenomenon of moral harassment.

## **Term Moral Harassment**

As moral harassment in the workplace is defined as any abusive behavior (gesture, speech, behavior, attitude ...) that affects, by repeating or systematic, dignity or psychological or physical integrity of the person, putting at risk the work or degrading work climate.

The moral harassment is a violence in small doses, not localized, however it is very destructive. It is the cumulative effect of frequent and repeated trauma constituting the attack (Hirigoyen 2002).

In this presentation, I borrow the term moral harassment used by the French psychiatrist M.F. Hirigoyen who studied the nature, dimensions and consequences of the phenomenon and gave rise to the legal treatment in France. The same term is used by the institutions of the European Commission.

In Greek articles it is described by the terms mobbing & bullying as well as the conditions moral or psychological harassment and sometimes the terms moral terror or intimidation at work (A.X. Tsiamas, 2013).

At the international level there is no commonly accepted term for bullying. Researchers refer to the same phenomenon, allowing the common features (A.X. Tsiamas, 2013).

Some terms in which attributed the particular form of expression of aggression in the workplace are:

Bullying, mobbing, harassment, harcèlement moral, emotional abuse, victimization, harcèlement psychologique.

## **Segregation between Moral Harassment and Professional Stress**

In the workplace by the word stress we mean an excessive workload. Professional stress puts extra pressure due heavy working schedule and can lead to burn out, in a depression due to exhaustion.

However, for the person with anxiety, resting is mostly therapeutic because there is no bad intention of the work.

In the contrary, moral harassment goes far beyond the stress. The actual phase of moral harassment occurs when a person becomes subject to unfavorable treatment by damaging him. The harassment indicates the size of humiliation and disrespect (Hirigoyen,2002).

## **Segregation between Conflict and Moral Harassment**

A conflict is a source of renewal and reorganization, giving rise to reflection and new ways of operating. What characterizes the conflict is a theoretical equality of respondents. Admitting the conflict, recognize the existence of the other as a partner that belongs to the same reference system. It promotes honest communication and clear interpersonal relationships.

As long as the conflict remains unresolved it is likely to move in the process of moral harassment.

In contrast, what differentiates moral harassment from conflict that is characterized by recurrent, long, unethical behavior (Hirigoyen,2002).

## **Ways of Expressing Moral Harassment**

Surveys have recorded some behaviors which usually express aggressive behavior directly or indirectly.

### **Indicative behaviors that harm the reputation of the employee and the negative image of the weight:**

- Create malicious comments /rumors through hints related to their personality, personal data.
- They slander to create a bad image against him.
- They attack him with shouts and insulting words, treat him with contempt, etc.

### **Indicative Behaviors affecting work performance:**

- They do not assign him tasks or assign him tasks of lower responsibilities.
- Removes assignment in which he was productive and which enjoyed.
- They do not provide him with the appropriate tools and withhold information which is necessary for the execution of the project.

- They do not inform him about developments in the workplace.
- They watch him too closely in order to keep him in tense etc.

**Indicative behaviors that block the ability of expression and communication in the work environment and negatively affect the ability to socialize with colleagues:**

- Regular follow alliances and isolating the employee from the workplace to make him vulnerable. This can also take the form of spatial isolation.
- In group meetings they ignore him and act as if he is not present, etc.

**Indicative Behaviors aimed at discomfort, punishment, intimidation or endanger the physical integrity:**

- They refuse him of vacation or provide it the last moment.
- They threaten him with disciplinary action, firing or bad rating.
- Close the door on his face, etc. (A.X. Tsiana,2013).

**Profile of Victim - General Characteristics**

The moral harassment can occur when there is prejudice against an employee. Usually the refusal of diversity - some difference that the person has in relation to others and because of this he has different treatment from the management or the colleagues.

Such differences relate to gender, origin, religious or political beliefs, age, a physical disability, etc.

Other characteristics of the victim, which may cause envy, jealousy, competition is the appearance of some features of his personality, his financial situation, his skills, his studies, his salary, the service of development.

Fear causes the attack we are hurting the other person to protect ourselves from a risk. Basically, the fear of the attacker cannot stand up to the challenge, of the change, not to be liked by the boss (Hirigoyen,2002).

Also, the difference lies in a different code values or way of thinking and experiencing things (eg the person cannot follow the rules imposed by a group, resist manipulation or the group for any reason treat him as alien).

Other factors that strengthen the weakness of the victim is poor self - esteem, excessive conscientious people, people who are very committed to their work, sensitive people (Hirigoyen,2002).

It is important to point out that, as several studies have reported that bullying occurs suddenly, the victim is shocked when she realizes she has been chosen as the target of repeated abuse.

Moreover, as noted by several researchers in most cases the person - victim mentions the problem, those who attack try to distort reality and reverse responsibility, presenting the victim as a person with "difficult" character. They attempt to show the protest as evidence of problematic personality (A.X. Tsiamas, 2013).

## **The profile of the Abuser - General Characteristics**

The moral harassment is characterized by an attack and not a conflict, there is deliberate damage. The goal of the abuser is to dominate and to control the other person by trampling his mental status. There is loss of self-control, but instead is a desire to control another.

Some psychological profile predisposes more. Others know how to resist, no doubt because they have stable moral values and mental balance (Hirigoyen, 2002).

## **How come the Moral Harassment in the Workplace**

### **1) From Manager to Employee**

It is considered as the most common form and involves the abuse of power in the sense of overcoming the authority that someone has due to his position and arbitrary behavior which overcomes the legislative framework.

### **2) Among his Peers Colleagues**

The moral harassment between colleagues may be due to reasons such as feelings of competition and jealousy. Observed phenomenon in business places particularly competitive.

### **3) From Employee or Group of employees to the Manager**

It is less common than other forms of bullying. It occurs mainly when there is no recognition in the face of the head.

### **4) Among Managers**

These behaviors aim to affect the victim's job performance.

### **5) From the Executives of the Organization to the Employees**

Planned and directed by the management of the organization itself. It is directed against one or more employees, with the aim of forcing him to resignate (A.X. Tsiamas, 2013).

## **International Incidence of Moral Harassment**

The investigation of Di Martino, Hoel and Cooper (2003) in the European Union on the ratio of the incidence rates of physical violence, sexual harassment and bullying. The moral harassment shows much higher percentages than the other two forms of violence in the workplace. (A.X. Tsiamas, 2013).

According to the Greek survey, conducted by the University of Athens in an economically and in particular graduate program in human resources management, which was completed in 2010, 13.2% can be classified clearly as victims of moral harassment. 47% are in a gray zone, suffering negative behaviors but less frequently. Only 39.3% can be assumed that there are victims (Papalexandri, Galanaki 2011).

According to a survey by Workplace Bullying Institute in 2010, 35% of workers in the United States say they have suffered harassment in the workplace.

Of interest are the results of research in France of M.F. Hirigoyen 2002 on harassment and discrimination in equality. There is a clear gender difference: 70% of women have been victims of bullying, compared with 30% of men.

Moreover, compared with the origin of harassment in France, 58% of cases of moral harassment came from a superior, 29% came from many people, 12% from their colleagues.

## **Health Effects for the Employee**

The moral harassment when it lasts for a short time and there is the possibility of hope for solving the problem leads to anxiety and stress.

These symptoms are associated with functional disorders, anxiety disorders such as fatigue, nervousness, insomnia, migraines, stomach disorders, lumbar pain.

If the moral harassment continues for long periods, psychosomatic disorders are present in a substantial proportion of cases and are usually the first symptoms

(dizziness, skin diseases, stomach and hormonal disorders, blood pressure), (Hirigoyen,2002).

At the end of time and repetition of the phenomenon of violence, symptoms converted to an apparent mental disorder because the victims receive an ongoing destabilization.

- neurosis is created since the aggressive behaviors revive in different forms eg nightmare even many years later.
- There is a time distortion. Memory is blocked on the in traumatic event and the person neglects the simple things of everyday life.
- Victims feel a sense of loneliness, it is very difficult for them to express something for which they are not certain.
- Usually when a person is emotionally over - invested in their work understands the investment as a failure and is incriminated.
- A severe depression may develop into a large 69% of employees according to a survey by the French psychiatrist Hirigoyen 2002 in France.
- The long and brutal humiliation of the person in some cases can cause rupture of the psyche and make certain forms of psychosis.

## **Prevention of Moral Harassment**

An employee is harassed in the workplace to the problem of trust must choose who to trust. Within the working potential these people are human resources managers, doctors of the company, unions. However, both in Greece and in other countries, there is often the difficulty of these agents to cope with operating in a phenomenon that requires delicate handling and specific knowledge.

Victims of moral harassment will require more easily help from professionals outside of their work and usually addressed:

- In lawyers
- In psychologist or psychiatrist
- The labor inspectors
- The doctor
- In professional associations

## **Proposals Intervention within the Workplace**

Steps for prevention include:

- 1) awareness among all employees about harassment, a great lecture or training groups.
- 2) training of specialists in the workplace socio-medical group, trade union representatives who selflessly want to become "trusting people."
- 3) training of directors of human resources management for conditions already existing.
- 4) The elaboration of a social law on harassment and discrimination.
- 5) When the health consequences are serious enough, moral harassment should be recognized as an occupational accident. It should be included in the prevention of occupational hazards because health at work is a fundamental right of employees.
- 6) A law should remind to everyone that it is an unacceptable violence.

An effective prevention of the global phenomenon of moral harassment should be imposed by the state, but it still is our responsibility. We can all be potential perpetrators, potential future victims of the supervisor or the employees (Hirigoyen, 2002).

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