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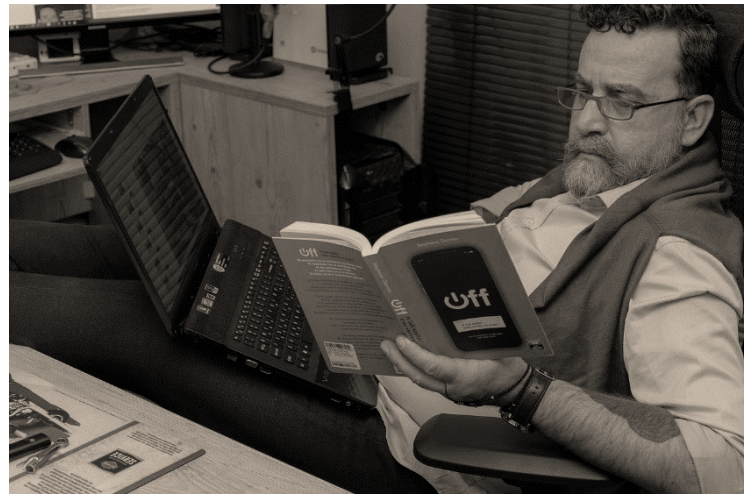
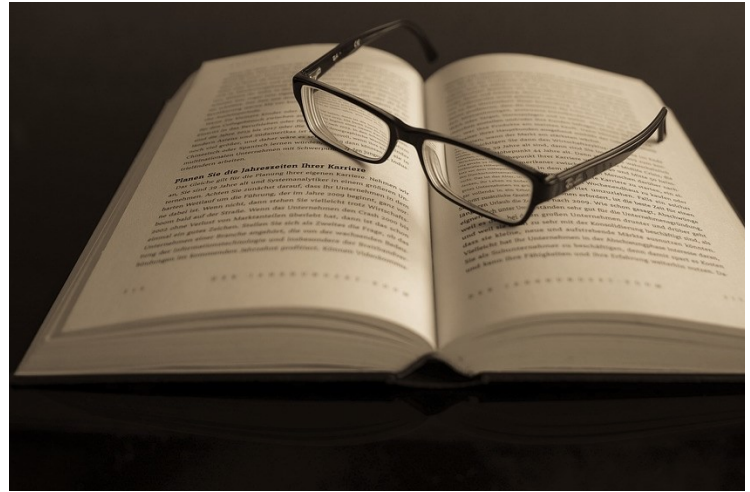
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ΓΗΡΑΣΚΩ ΑΕΙ ΔΙΔΑΣΚΟΜΕΝΟΣ

LEARNING THROUGH THE LIFE SPAN

Trends, dimensions, practices and reflections

Editors: Katerina Kedraka & Eirini Tzovla

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LEARNING THROUGH THE LIFE SPAN
Trends, Dimensions, Practices, and Reflections

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ΓΗΡΑΣΚΩ ΑΕΙ ΔΙΔΑΣΚΟΜΕΝΟΣ**LEARNING THROUGH THE LIFE SPAN*****Trends, Dimensions, Practices, and Reflections***

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Workplace Mobbing, Bullying, and Sexual Harassment, and the role of Lifelong learning programs**Anna TSIBOUKLI***National and Kapodistrian University of Athens***Introduction**

Workplace mobbing, bullying and sexual harassment are not new phenomena. There were always there. Nonetheless, the recent few years more studies have highlighted their significance for the well-being of the employees and the workplace.

First and foremost, it is apparent to clarify the differences between mobbing, bullying and sexual harassment. In the first part of this paper, we are going to focus on workplace mobbing and bullying and in the second part on sexual harassment.

The term workplace bullying is usually encountered more often than mobbing. The differences between the two, mainly represent the differences between two schools of thought: a) the British School, where the term workplace bullying prevails and b) the Scandinavian countries and Germany, where the term mobbing is more commonly used.

Workplace bullying includes mobbing, that is the moral and emotional violation of another person, but it also expands to include the physical and sexual violation that derives from abuse of power. Workplace bullying refers to direct repeated aggressive behavior towards a person. This behavior results in the victim suffering psychological, physical, financial and/or sexual harassment.

Mobbing is a more passive aggressive form of moral and emotional harassment that offends the dignity of an individual and may cause him/her emotional damage. Mobbing, or else, moral, and emotional harassment, has several consequences for the person exposed to this experience but furthermore for the workplace as well.

Both, mobbing and bullying, can happen either, a) vertically, from top to bottom, b) horizontally, amongst colleagues and c) bottom up. Most reported cases are vertical (65%), around 21% of cases are horizontal and 14% are bottom-up. The most used questionnaire for measuring workplace mobbing and bullying is the *Negative Acts Inventory*, that measures the frequency with which a person can experience mobbing or bullying at the workplace (Einarsen et.al., 2009).

Studies relevant to workplace mobbing, bullying and sexual harassment have been carried out mostly in corporate America where the above phenomena received significant attention. Focusing on workplace mobbing, a recent study by the Institute for Workplace Bullying (2021) revealed that almost 80 million Americans, are exposed to this phenomenon even when they are working remotely. The perpetrators are in their majority (67%) men, however a 37% are women and most of them (65%), target other women. Similar

data also derives from UK, where one (1) out of 4 employees report having experienced workplace mobbing. Relevant studies (Hoel & Vartia, 2018) have been also carried out in Europe for the European Parliament FEMM Committee, suggesting that at the European level, 5% of all employees have experienced workplace mobbing. In some countries, such as France, workplace mobbing was the case for more than 12% of the employees. Overall, the highest rates of mobbing are reported in the North European countries and the lowest in South of Europe and especially in Bulgaria, Portugal, Hungary, and Greece. Does this lead to the conclusion that the phenomenon is under-represented in these countries? It is most likely that cultural variations and higher tolerance lead to under-reporting. In fact, in Greece, mobbing at work is a rather recently introduced term. The recent law 4088/2021, recognizes the phenomena of workplace mobbing and suggests several prevention and intervention measures to create a safe working environment. However, there is only one NGO, «*No Mobbing at Work*», currently established. A study carried out by this organization, suggests that amongst the young people aged 18-24 years old, who took part in their study, 75% were exposed to workplace mobbing.

Causes and consequences of workplace mobbing and bullying

Most research and theories demonstrate that there are many and different factors related to workplace harassment and/or bullying (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012).

The first approach developed to interpret the phenomenon is Leymann's model, which argues that mobbing is caused by the leadership style. Leymann (1996) argued that workplace harassment is the responsibility of the company and its management, and it should not be attributed to individual characteristics or personality. Leymann (1996), listed four (4) factors that seem to dominate businesses in which harassment phenomena are observed. These factors include deficiencies in the business plan combined with poor management of the conflicts that arise in the workplace, with an authoritarian and unethical leadership and the victim's socially vulnerable position. The list of morally and emotionally abusive behaviors is long. Leymann (1990; 1996), identified forty-five (45) different behaviors. Amongst these, malicious rumors and baseless accusations, disparaging comments in front of others, about a person's work, morals, motivations and/or behavior, or about a person's background, are included. Some of these behaviors may occur as isolated incidents, due to a work conflict or during a difficult workday. So quite often they cannot be regarded as mobbing or bullying. But in some instances, these behaviors are frequent and regular. Initially, they may appear gradually, through passive aggressive behavior that is not being easily noticed by the person experiencing it, who nevertheless begins to feel unpleasant. They then escalate and have several negative effects with the most negative being job resignation. Besides, Allport (1954), as early as the mid-1950s, had clearly described the process by which an individual is pressured in the workplace to eventually resign. This process includes four stages. The first stage involves underlying comments, the second, stigmatization of the victim, the third overt harassment, insults, and discrimination against the victim and the fourth, forcing the victim to resign. Mobbing in this occasion acquires a systematic and regular character and as it continues for a prolonged period, it limits a person's potential to develop healthy working relationships.

Einarsen (1999), who as early as the mid-1990s investigated the psychosocial dimensions of harassment, developed further Leymann's model, by adding other parameters that need to be considered in the

understanding of the causes of mobbing. Einarsen (1999) acknowledged that workplace conflicts are inevitable in the workplace and therefore mobbing may be due to a long-term conflict, between two people, which however one of the two parties cannot manage as they are in a vulnerable position at work or socially. Conflicts in the workplace can sometimes be useful as new ideas and solutions emerge from them. However, the victimization of an individual can also be the result of internal conflicts with unpleasant consequences for both, the person, and the organization. This happens when the dispute is prolonged, the two parties have forgotten how it started and from professional, it becomes personal.

Einarsen (1999) argues that mobbing is aggressive in nature when it comes from management. Usually the person who experiences it, cannot find justification for this kind of behavior. Einarsen et. al. (2003) concludes that the phenomenon of mobbing and workplace bullying is a dynamic, multi-factorial process that depends on a network of socio-economic and cultural factors. These factors concern both the workplace itself and the policy it adopts, as well as the individual, his/her personality, and the conditions in which he/she lives.

The organisation can encourage harassment, tolerate it, and even use it for its own benefit. A UK study (Rayner & Keashly, 2005) suggests that harassment occurs in workplaces where there is tolerance towards the abusers and victims are not justified even when they report the phenomenon. The European Organization for Safety and Health at Work since 2002 argues that the phenomenon of mobbing is due to a corporate culture that fails to recognize and prevent it. When the harassment comes from the business site, it is usually associated with inadequate management that is unable to resolve crises. In these cases, leadership is usually unethical, fails to build healthy relationships, and relies primarily on paranoia, passive-aggression, and intimidation. This type of leadership aims to maintain its power by any means and to lead to the withdrawal or resignation those executives from whom leadership feels that challenge or threaten its position. In this work environment the person feels powerless to ask for help, as the risk of being ridiculed for personal inability to manage the situation, is present. The constant negative comments and criticism, inevitably lead the person to isolation and eventually to resignation. Even when the workplace does not encourage harassment, in many cases it can remain apathetic and thus not discourage it. This is the case when the institutional reaction mechanisms are absent or when an organization or a business does not have the necessary procedures to prevent these phenomena. The consequences, however, are negative beyond the individual level, to the organizational level.

Gender and moral harassment

A particular form of harassment is gender discrimination in the workplace. Despite the progress achieved in recent years, the fact remains that women (Zapf et. al., 2020) are mainly those who experience workplace harassment as social and cultural stereotypes persist. In many organizations and businesses, women are still treated with stereotypes and prejudices (Rosander et. al., 2020; Misawa et. al., 2019), regarding their right to work, to be paid equally with men, to participate in decision-making and to claim positions of authority in the work environment. This results in women facing more barriers to advancement in the hierarchy of a company or organization, even though they may be numerically more than male employees. However, even when women rise in the hierarchy, they are criticized for this rise. Often the criticism can come from other women. In these cases, malicious rumors are spread about their potential for work, the quality of the work

they produce, but also about their morals and the means they have used to develop professionally. The passive aggressive behavior expressed towards women and the rumors spread are usually about moral and behavioral issues. These tools have been used many times in the past against women to harm them in various areas and with the main goal of total control over them.

Negative stereotypes and prejudices about the role of women in general and in the workplace, lead to questioning of women's knowledge, skills, and abilities, even when they are objectively more qualified than men occupying higher positions. Negative stereotypes also lead women either to a constant effort to prove their worth, or to frustration, resignation, and withdrawal. The glass ceiling phenomenon, i.e., the barriers a person faces due to its own gender to progress in the hierarchy, despite having all the necessary qualifications, is widely known and women are often exposed to it. The recent years the glass cliff phenomenon is also observed (Bechtoldt et al., 2019; Morgenroth et al., 2020), according to which, some companies allow women to occupy high positions in the hierarchy, but this happens when businesses are in crisis or already perform poorly. It also happens when women are offered jobs that are too demanding, in the hope that they won't be able to cope with them and resign. In both cases, women are exposed to criticism and stereotypes and prejudices against women are reinforced. The narrative that women are ultimately incapable of leadership prevails (Mulcahy & Linehan, 2014). In these cases, the fact that the specific companies were already facing serious sustainability problems and were looking for the scapegoat is kept silent.

In cases where women succeed in occupying high positions of power in the hierarchy of a company, they are often criticized for the management model they follow. When they are focused on their goal are seen as distant and they are criticized for adopting the "male model" of management. Therefore, even when women manage to succeed in roles or professions that are considered "masculine", or when their behavior and appearance do not conform to stereotypical notions, they are still more exposed than men (Salin, 2018) to criticisms, comments, and harassment.

When they are accessible, operate with empathy, care, and emphasis on working relationships, they are criticized for adopting the "feminine model" of management and are therefore considered ineffective and inadequate.

The ambiguity that still exists regarding the general position of women in the workplace poses further obstacles to women's professional advancement and reproduces the vicious cycle of stereotyping and the exclusion of women from the labor market and senior management positions. In Greece, gender stereotypes and social prejudices that still dominate the workplace have as a result that women's participation in the workplace is characterized by inequality of opportunities for professional development, with various implications at a social, economic, and professional level. According to a study by the European Organization for Safety and Health at Work, gender discrimination is related to work-based stress. Up to 81% of the women, claim that one of the main causes of stress they experience in the workplace is exposure to unacceptable behaviors such as bullying and harassment. Nielsen & Einarsen (2012), attempted to understand the effects of harassment on stress levels, especially for female workers. They carried out a meta-analysis of various studies on this topic, involving a total of 140,000 workers. The results showed that the

effects of workplace moral harassment and bullying, both on the individual's physical and mental health, are particularly important. Victims reported great anxiety, especially when they were women, who found it difficult to react believing that the reaction will worsen the situation. Therefore, most of the time, they tried to cope passively with the situation and ignore it. However, passive reactions are not effective.

Therefore, the most serious challenge, according to the European Organization for Safety and Health at Work FACTS 23 report, it is the increased workplace stress and the illnesses that accompany it, as a relevant study in which 16,622 people from 26 countries participated in telephone or face-to-face interviews, revealed.

The implications for the organization or the business are also not negligible. A recent study of 96 organizations in Norway in a sample of 10,627 employees (Nielsen et. al., 2020) highlighted that the phenomenon of mobbing is linked to continuous absences due to illness from the workplace and to issues of mental discomfort. No healthy organization would want to lose its staff after spending time and resources to train them. Human resources are not easily replaced as a significant part of the acquired know-how is lost. Time, financial and human resources need to be invested until new staff can acquire the required expertise that will help the organization or business evolve. At the same time, non-productive work hours are valuable and cannot be replaced. The vicious cycle of human resource loss is counterproductive for both, the organization, and the individual. Therefore, the empowerment of both, the individual and the organisation, will help prevent these phenomena and strengthen the institutional processes.

Workplace mobbing and bullying are not easily managed. In some organizations, the culture may even be such that it encourages harassment and bullying. In these cases, employees find it difficult to react, especially when there is no relative support from the work environment. The difficulty of reacting is due to many factors. Some workers may worry that they will lose their jobs, others, especially new entries, may feel that harassment is part of the company's and thus they should be subjected to it as part of their training, and others may find it difficult to manage these phenomena as they recall past experiences. In these cases, according to the Workplace Bullying Institute, perceptions that there is no harassment or bullying at work, prevail. Therefore, significant concern should be placed on how discrimination and harassment are dealt with in the workplace. Even more so, significant attention should be paid to sexual harassment as well.

Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment in the workplace is a well-hidden problem (Fitzgerald & Cortina, 2018), which has been perpetuated for many years. The *American Equal Employment Opportunity Commission* defines sexual harassment as "*single or repeated unwanted sexual challenges, such as requests for sexual favors, as well as other types of verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature*" (McLaughlin et.al., 2012). In this context, legislation in the US recognizes two forms of sexual harassment: a) the one based in the principle of exchange, i.e., the belief that when a person wishes to advance professionally, he should give in to the sexual propositions of his superiors and b) the one based in an aggressive work environment and a culture that encourages sexual harassment. In Greece, in 2010, Law 3896/2010 was passed, which was updated by Law 4808/2021, and provides that "*Harassment, sexual harassment, as well as any less favorable treatment due to the tolerance or rejection of this behavior, constitute gender discrimination and are prohibited.*"

Women are usually the victims of sexual harassment. However, men can also be victims of abuse of power and sexual harassment. Almost, 1/3 of the workforce considers sexual jokes and related comments to be forms of sexual harassment. Men, however, see sexist comments as a simple result of human nature. Conversely, women are more sensitive to this type of behavior, which they consider to be a form of power abuse in the workplace. The fear, which the victim has that he can be blamed for what he is suffering and experience additional stress, possibly also leads to the low rates of complaints.

Sexual harassment reflects relationships and phenomena of power abuse that prevail in specific work environments. Sexual harassment is accompanied by continuous attempts to devalue the work and dignity of the person who is usually in a weaker work position than the abuser. Power relations and abuse involve both moral and sexual harassment in the workplace. In the work environment, the number of people who are faced with abuse of power and sexual harassment, is not small. However, collecting data on the extent of the phenomenon is not easy. The recording of the phenomenon depends on many factors, that include social and cultural, as it often seems that the culture of stigmatization of the victim rather than the perpetrator is more dominant. Apparently only 13% of the victims, report it. Nonetheless, women report incidents of sexual harassment at twice the rate of men. Furthermore, up to 80% of victims report physical or mental health problems because of sexual harassment. Social and cultural stereotypes determine perceptions of what constitutes abuse of power and sexual harassment, so the problem remains well hidden.

The #MeToo movement succeeded in mobilizing several women to reveal their experiences (Raihani, 2017), resulting in moral and legal vindication. However, there are still several cases where women, who dared to disclose incidents of sexual harassment in the workplace, ended up being stigmatized (Solnit, 2018). Stigma is associated with distorted assumptions, which hold that the victim is responsible for what happens to her. That is, the victim's behavior and attitudes are targeted, and the perpetrator's actions are attributed to them. Besides, in the recent past, sexual harassment in the workplace was interpreted as a mere display of admiration or romantic interest. The individual's refusal to succumb to the pressures was also interpreted as a simple reaction, which could be bent over time. This interpretation, if not dangerous, is at least simplistic.

The causes of sexual harassment

The phenomenon of sexual harassment is multifactorial. A few theories, models and approaches have developed to understand its occurrence and effects in the workplace. An important factor is still the inequality of the two sexes, which formally or informally, consciously, or unconsciously, is cultivated in the context of the family, school, and social environment. The issue has thus preoccupied several women theorists since the 1970s.

Margaret Mead (1978), an important anthropologist and feminist, argued that the school and the family still raise boys in an old-fashioned way, even though social and economic conditions have changed. Goodman (1978), accordingly, considered that sexual harassment is a result of sociological history, which leads men to treat women primarily as "*sexual objects*" and secondarily, as workers. Therefore, as Russell (1986) states, the factors that reduce men's inhibitions are cultural (e.g., a woman's place is in the home) and foster acceptance of discrimination against women. In this context, sexual harassment is a consequence of the economically inferior position of the woman and the perpetrators are men who are in a better financial and

more secure job position. Farley (1978) also believed that the main reason for sexual harassment remains the conscious effort to keep the woman in an inferior work position.

The feminist approach considers sexual harassment to be an " *unwanted imposition of sexual demands, within a relational framework of unequal power*". So, in essence, it links it to phenomena of abuse of power. This approach was particularly developed by the feminist lawyer Catherine MacKinnon (1979). MacKinnon was the first to argue that sexual harassment in the workplace violates the constitutional principle of equal treatment of the two sexes. MacKinnon (1979) was able to influence in favor of the victim, court decisions on issues of sexual harassment in the workplace, as she strongly argued that sexual harassment functions as a mechanism of labor and economic oppression of women, denigrates the female gender and violates the Equality Act. Overall, the feminist approach considers that sexual harassment is directly related to the phenomena of abuse of power, inequality, and sexism, which are observed in the wider social, cultural, and political environment and which affect the culture formed in the workplace. As such, it is based on the ideology of male superiority and dominance, where men are usually rewarded when they show sexual activity, determination and persistence and are socialized based on these values, while on the contrary women are rewarded when they are submissive and passive (Superson, 1993; Samuel, 2003). In this context, the woman, although working, is treated as a "pleasure vessel" and is led to accept her degraded social position and inability to access power. Sexual harassment is directly related to the position women occupy in public life, where men dominate, and women are dominated.

Another model for understanding the phenomenon, is the organizational model (Tangri et. al., 2000), which also argues that sexual harassment is the result of hierarchical relations, professional opportunities, and power relations, cultivated and encouraged by the very structure of a business or an organization. Within this context, Silverman (1981) argued that sexual harassment begins in the recruitment process, where the criteria are not always related to the objective qualifications of the candidates. Berdahl (2007) tried to investigate through his studies, the causes of sexual harassment and concluded that women who experience sexual harassment work in male-dominated environments and adopt the male work model, breaking away from what is considered classic female behavior.

Fitzgerald and Cortina (2018) argue that sexual harassment is a purely female issue, although other groups in the population, such as members of the LGBTQ+ community, may experience it. The authors believe that in this case too, sexual harassment occurs because members of the community are perceived as '*feminine*'.

The prevalence of the phenomenon and the profile of victims and perpetrators

The phenomenon of sexual harassment has significant dimensions; however, the incidents are not always recorded with the corresponding frequency with which they occur. A recent study by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA _ Fundamental Rights Agency, Europe) was carried out in 2014 on a sample of 42,000 women from 28 member states. The results showed that 55% of women in Europe have experienced sexual harassment at least once in their lifetime and one in five in the last year before the study. Sexual harassment can be verbal, non-verbal, or even online. Specifically, 29 % of women have experienced unwanted touching, hugging and/or kissing, 24% of women have been exposed to sexist comments or jokes that they found offensive, 11 % of women have received offensive, spam messages or SMS. When the study

focused on incidents of repeat victimization, one in five women (19 %) reported unwanted touching, hugging, or kissing at least twice and 6 % of women reported that this has happened more than six times. 37 % of victims have been exposed to two or more types of sexual harassment, 27 % in 4-6 types and 8 % in 7 or more forms of sexual harassment. The risk of exposure to sexual harassment is increased when women are 18 to 29 years old. Also, women at this age are more exposed to sexual harassment through the internet. One in three (38 %) in this age group has been a victim of sexual harassment and 1 in 4 women aged 30 to 39 years have suffered sexual harassment (24 %). Sexual harassment is reported more often by university-educated women and by women in senior management jobs. Fitzgerald and his colleagues (1995), also tried to record the prevalence of the phenomenon, through a questionnaire, known as " *The Questionnaire of Sexual Experiences in the Workplace*" (*The Sexual Experiences Questionnaire - Workplace - SEQ - W*). The questionnaire explores gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion. Leskinen and Cortina (2014) relatively recently expanded the field and constructed the *Gender Experiences Questionnaire*.

In several cases the abuser was someone the woman knew. Specifically, 35 % of cases, the abuser came from the workplace (colleague, supervisor, or customer) and 31st % of cases it was a friend or acquaintance. However, it is interesting that 35 % of women never talked about the event, 28 % talked to a friend, 24th % to a family member and 14th % informed their partner. Only 4 % reported it to the police, 4 % to the employer or supervisor at the workplace and less than 1 % approached a lawyer or some relevant organization or the workers' union. Other studies in Europe also show that 45–55% of women have been victims of sexual harassment. In Finland, Sweden, France and the Netherlands, the percentages recorded are particularly high and range from 71–81 % (Latcheva, 2017). A recent study in the US showed that 40.9% of women working to private field and 15 % of students have been subjected to sexual harassment (McKinsey, 2021). Also, studies by the American Equal Employment Opportunity Commission-E EOC claim that 78.2% of sexual harassment complaints come from women. In fact, 17% of them have suffered repeated violations, 14% repeated slight unwanted touching and 18% have been sexually assaulted, by touching an erogenous area or the area of the genital organs. However, there are still many cases of sexual harassment that are not reported due to fear. In Greece, a recent study by Dianeosis (2022) showed that 87.8 % of Greeks thinks that sexual harassment has reached great proportions.

The working situation of women seems to play an important role in their vulnerability. Rates are higher among women with irregular or precarious employment contracts, in places of dependent work with temporary or fixed-term contracts. However, the fact remains that many women are still reluctant to report incidents of sexual harassment. But in this way, they empower the abuser. This empowerment allows the cycle of abuse and silence to continue and leads to the lack of sufficient empirical data.

Exposure to incidents of sexual harassment is traumatic and has been linked to symptoms of post-traumatic stress and depression, which overall affect a person's ability to make decisions. In fact, recent research claims that if the psychological trauma is not treated, the person is at risk mentally and physically (Thurston et al., 2019). Sensitizing the abusers to stop the harassment seems to have no effect. Most theories hold that abusers lack empathy for their victims. Empathy is particularly important for human communication and a key ingredient for social justice. Therefore, to cultivate it, it is necessary that interventions are not simply based on information campaigns (Romero, 2018). Systematic prevention programs, legal treatment of the

phenomenon and intervention from the working environment are required. For this reason, it is worth focusing on the effects of sexual harassment in the workplace as they are not negligible. The first large-scale study in the US of sexual harassment, the Merit study Systems carried out in 1981 in the public services of America with the participation of 20,000 employees, showed that, with modest estimates, the cost to the Federal government, due to incidents of sexual harassment, amounted to 189 million dollars per two years. The high cost is due to lost hours of work and productivity due to the physical and emotional state of the victims. A recent study in Australia in 2019 by Deloitte shows that the cost is extremely high. Sexual harassment is therefore a serious individual, work and social issue that needs to be addressed promptly.

Coping with mobbing, bullying and sexual harassment through Lifelong learning programs

Most victims of mobbing, bullying and sexual harassment try to deal with the situation passively, simply trying to ignore it. This attitude is linked to the phenomenon of internalized oppression, according to which responsibility is transferred from the abuser to the victim. The phenomenon of *internalized oppression* (Tappan, 2006) explains to a significant extent the ways in which the dominant culture reproduces stereotypical perceptions of the role of women in the workplace and prevents them from claiming a hierarchically superior position. It also pressures them to be unable to respond directly to comments that offend their dignity and principles. The result is the cultivation of the culture of silence, a concept introduced by Paulo Freire (Edwards, 2017). The culture of silence reinforces the passive and suppressed self-image of women. The woman turning against herself, feels guilt and shame, fear and anxiety and is unable to defend herself openly. The culture of silence is not a solution. It encourages the abuser to continue the harassment and/or escalate the violence and isolates the victim. Therefore, it is of great importance that the workplace itself takes a primary role in dealing with the phenomenon, with specific actions and policies to strengthen human resources.

Sexual harassment should be dealt with by the workplace itself, as defined by the relevant law 3896/2010 on "*Implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and the equal treatment of men and women in matters of work and employment*", according to which sexual harassment constitutes gender discrimination. The employer can be considered jointly responsible for incidents of harassment, even when they do not come from him but from other employees towards their colleagues (Commission of the European Communities, 1993). He is therefore obliged to take the necessary measures and sexual harassment needs to be addressed within the organization or business, through appropriate interventions and personnel policies. In this area, lifelong learning has a significant role to play. These include the establishment of a committee of professional ethics and ethics to study and record the phenomenon in the workplace and to submit proposals to deal with it, to the administration. Employees need to be informed of the procedures they can follow to report an incident through specifically designed lifelong learning programs. However, it is of great importance that the process is not limited only to the possibility of reporting incidents, which may not be resolved. In this case, the risk of perpetuating the problem, especially when the company does not provide solutions, is great. The victim remains exposed and mentally and morally traumatized, but the climate in the business is also pathological. It can also perpetuate the cycle of confrontation between different work groups, culminating in the strengthening of prejudice, stigma, and depersonalization.

Therefore, lifelong learning programs for preventing the phenomena and coping with trauma when necessary are urgently needed.

A risk often encountered in business is that the victim is held responsible for the behavior of the abuser. This phenomenon is based on the psychological principle of the *fundamental attribution error*.

The term, *fundamental attribution error*, was introduced by Ross (1977) and it is referred on how individuals tend to judge a situation, based on a person's characteristics, and ignoring the circumstances under which the event has occurred (McLeod, 2018). For example, some women can easily be accused of causing sexual harassment because of their dress or general behavior. Especially when a group of employees has rallied around the abuser for various reasons (e.g., he is a boss, etc.), they may give their own interpretation of the incident, blaming the victim. In this case, the group sees only their own perspective, is influenced by their emotions, and holds the victim accountable, rather than the perpetrator. The fundamental attribution error explains why we may criticize some people for unethical behavior and at the same time excuse others for the exact same behavior. In this context, sexual harassment, when it comes from a powerful member of a group, is rationalized, and justified, with the result that the victim remains exposed, her complaint is devalued and socially is isolated. The group rallies around the abuser, and the victim remains helpless. Therefore, lifelong training programs on the causes and the etiology of the phenomenon from the different theoretical perspectives are needed to ensure that the risks for the fundamental attribution error are minimized.

Sometimes, the paradoxical phenomenon occurs, that the group feels satisfaction for the abuse of the victim, identifies with the abuser and expresses its empathy towards him (Bongiorno et al., 2019). However, when the group rallies around the victim, recognizes, and understands their problems, becomes emotionally attached to them, and the victim feels part of the group, then the issue of sexual harassment becomes the issue of the whole group and not just one individual and can be easier to solve. The group is essentially involved in solving the problem, social and mental stress is reduced, the results are positive and " *Social Therapy* " occurs (Haslam et. al., 2018). In this context lifelong learning training programs introducing empathy, self-help, and mutual help, can be of fundamental value.

Coping with the phenomena of harassment and bullying is also important for the organizations themselves, as labor relations are characterized by mutual interdependence. Their effective and sustainable operation needs to be based on trusting relationships than on harassment and intimidation, as the feelings of anxiety, anger and fear eventually lead the individual to turn against the leadership, spread throughout the business and "contaminate" (Klein, 1985) work relations by dominating logic.

For a person to be able to deal with a behavior, they must first be able to recognize it. Many times, the recognition of a negative behavior, especially when it is expressed in underground ways, is not easy. We may often wonder if we are really "on target" or if we are exaggerating our thoughts and reactions. After all, each person perceives experiences differently, has a different degree of tolerance and resistance to stress. In this context, lifelong learning programs can assist in separating what is considered harassment from what is to be considered an innocent flirt or a bad moment in the communication process.

It is interesting to note that, especially in the case of harassment, due to various forms of discrimination, the effects, depending on the personal situation of each person, the resistances, endurances, and identifications

they make, are different. One person can react effectively while another experiences sadness, anger and guilt and these feelings gradually lead him to a state where she/he finally internalizes the oppression she/he is under. This phenomenon is *called internalized oppression* (Tappan, 2006) and occurs when, for example, the person who is in a socially vulnerable position or experiences harassment due to her/his different characteristics from the dominant group, gradually begins to believe that the prevailing negative social stereotypes about the group from which she/he originates is correct. Typical is the example of a woman who finds it difficult to claim a higher hierarchical position, ultimately believing that she will not be able to respond to her multiple roles. This has the effect of accepting, turning against herself, the prejudices of the dominant group about the position of women in the workplace, unconsciously considering that she is in an inferior professional position (Griffin, 1997). Lifelong learning programs focusing on transformation theory, critical thinking and critical education are significant for understanding and changing the roots of internalized oppression.

The inability to deal with a dysfunctional situation in a toxic work environment is also associated with feelings of shame that are often felt by people who are the recipients of harassment, but also with the feeling of fear and anxiety. These feelings prevent them from functioning effectively and directly confronting the person who is harassing them. When the person tries to deal with the situation, it is important that she/he manages her/his emotions in principle, so that she/he can openly and without fear confront the people who are harassing her/him. In this context, anger management programs can be useful in preparing for direct confrontation.

In any case, however, it should be noted that in addition to the individual, each company has responsibility for dealing with mobbing, bullying and sexual harassment in the workplace and this responsibility also derives from the relevant legislation. It is therefore no coincidence that many modern companies emphasize the development of human resources departments and the utilization of human resources. Their choice is not random. It is based on the understanding of the need to create a positive work climate that encourages positive communication and bonding between staff members and is linked to increased productivity.

The culture of any business or organization is usually reflected in their structure and management. In toxic cultures, behaviors are toxic and often lead employees to quit. However, this does not mean that the culture cannot be changed. Lifelong training programs can offer pathways to change in the way of management but also in the approach and training of human resources. Adult educators and organizational psychologists who recognize the importance of culture in organizations and businesses can play an important role in this field.

The social support network that develops within a company or organization has a special role. The continuous supervision of the leadership team ensures the development of a positive culture in an organization or business to reduce the phenomena of harassment and workplace mobbing and bullying. In addition, organizations and businesses should include the development of social support networks in interventions that deal with workplace mobbing and bullying (Nielsen et. al., 2020), as is also required by modern legislation. Handling harassment incidents by executives who are unable to address the issues brought by employees, possibly because they do not have the authority to resolve various work-related issues, is ineffective.

Conclusion

Each organization or company needs to assume the responsibility of creating mechanisms to prevent the phenomenon, to protect both the victim and the working environment. However, several times more emphasis is placed on how to protect the organization than the victim. In these cases, there is a risk that the perpetrator will be treated better than the victim, and the case will be covered up so that it does not reach the courts. The situation then gets worse. Therefore, when an organization truly wishes to deal with the phenomenon of mobbing, bullying and sexual harassment in the workplace, it is necessary to take the following measures:

- Conduct regular surveys to record the phenomenon but also investigate the prevailing culture to identify the risk of discrimination against women and/or other groups.
- Compile a code of professional ethics and conduct for workplace behavior, of which all staff will be aware from the beginning of their employment.
- Establish a Professional Ethics and Ethics Committee where victims will be able to report incidents, with respect for confidentiality and privacy of information.
- Conduct regular information-awareness seminars for staff and leadership on ways to deal with the phenomenon in the workplace.

Training and re-training of staff and leadership on ethical and sexual harassment issues. Tippet (2018) points out that in the design of training programs, it is worth considering various parameters that will allow the dysfunctional assumptions of different participants on the issue of sexual harassment to be explored in depth and presented, beyond theory and legislation and actual incidents of sexual harassment from the workplace.

Investigate reported incidents and resolve issues in collaboration with management and the labor union where possible.

Organizational culture can change for the better. The recent law envisages zero tolerance towards violence and harassment and working with labor unions can go a long way towards this. Nevertheless, the fact remains that until today not enough steps have been taken in the workplace to deal with sexual harassment and the stress that accompanies the people who experience it. There is much room for improvement and change, but the cooperation of all employers, workers and labor unions is required to tackle the problem as a whole and to make organizations and businesses safe working environments, with respect for diversity and with a vision for harnessing new ideas and innovation. Addressing the phenomenon of sexual harassment will help beyond the employees, the organization itself to transform from a pathological system to an organization of learning, development, innovation and change and to ensure its long-term sustainability.

Therefore, companies and organizations that want to deal with the phenomena should follow a series of interventions within Lifelong learning programs, such as employee awareness seminars, systematic group supervision by an external supervisor for issues of harassment and/or other incidents of violence, publication of an information leaflet on tackling discrimination in the workplace and cooperation with labor unions to deal with the phenomenon. Also, labor unions can play a vital role in placing the issues of harassment and workplace mobbing and bullying at the center of collective bargaining. Elected representatives of the workers

who enjoy trust, can be trained to recognize these incidents, and offer immediate support to the workers in case of protest and carry out campaigns to inform the workers about the phenomenon.

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