

**Workplace Harassment: A Global Organizational Issue**

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### **Abstract**

The extensive research conducted about the impact of workplace harassment within the organizational arena and its targets, has attracted more academic and organizational attention. This behavior happens when an individual maliciously humiliates a co-worker or subordinate. Studies have demonstrated that is a global issue that affects millions of people that suffer emotional and physical consequences. It also has tremendous costs to the organizations due to the lost of productivity, sick leave and turnover, among others. This paper aims to explore the prevalence of workplace harassment worldwide and its consequences.

**Keywords:** Workplace Harassment, bullying, mobbing, prevalence, effects of workplace harassment, costs of workplace harassment

### **Introduction**

Studies undertaken in the past two decades have increased the awareness of other organizational problem that seems to be affecting millions of employees worldwide: workplace harassment. In contrast with other specific discrimination forms, such as gender, nationality, age, among others, workplace harassment could happen to anyone. It often involves using harassing, offensive and repeatedly terrorizing behaviors, such as being yelled at, or being exposed to degrading or demeaning behavior, without explicit reference to gender or other legally protected social status characteristics (Davenport, Schwartz & Elliot, 1999; Keashly, Hunter, & Harvey, 1997; Richman et al., 1999).

According to Chappell & Di Martino (2000), workplace harassment “constitutes offensive behavior through vindictive, cruel, malicious or humiliating attempts to undermine an individual or groups of employees. These persistently negative attacks on their personal and professional performance are typically unpredictable, irrational and unfair” (p.13). Brodsky (1976) affirms that, “this behavior involves repeated and persistent attempts by one person to torment, wear down, frustrate, or get a reaction from

another. It is behavior that persistently provokes, pressures, frightens, intimidates, or otherwise discomforts another person” (p.2). The victims of this mistreatment are identified as the targets, while the harassers are called the perpetrator (Namie & Namie, 2000). The targets may experience this oppression by their supervisors, another coworker (Davenport et al., 1999, Einarsen, 2000; Leymann 1990), or from a group of coworkers (Leymann, 1990). It could also include other discriminating behaviors such as abuse, prejudice, persecution, conflict and violence in the work environment (Field, 1996).

One distinctive characteristic of workplace harassment behavior is that it happens on a regular basis, often daily, and the target can recognize a pattern (Brodsky, 1976; Davenport et al., 1999, Keashly, 1998; Leymann, 1990). Field (1996) believes that workplace harassment happens when the targets experience a series of incidents in a constant manner. He argues that a single incident may not be considered as workplace harassment.

Workplace harassment has various names. Some call it bullying (Adams, 1992; Field, 1996, Hoel, Rayner & Cooper, 1999; Namie & Namie, 2000), mobbing (Davenport et al., 1999; Leymann, 1990), psychological abuse (Hirigoyen, 1999; Keashly, Trott, & MacLean, 1994), workplace aggression/violence (Baron & Neuman, 1996), workplace mistreatment (Price Spratlen, 1994), counterproductive-deviant workplace behavior (Robinson & Bennett, 1995), victimization (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997), psychological harassment (Chappell & Di Martino, 2000; Luzio-Lockett, 1995; Piñuel y Zabala, 2001) and workplace harassment (Bjorkqvist, Osterman, & Hjelt-Back, 1994; Brodsky, 1976), among other names. Hornstein (1996) goes so far as describing the situation as nearly epidemic, while Namie and Namie (2000) refer to it as a silent epidemic.

The author hopes to contribute to the knowledge of workplace harassment by a literature review that shows it's global pervasiveness as well as the costs and effects that this phenomena has on the organizational environment.

### **Problem Background**

In the eighties Dr. Heinz Leymann pioneered the studies in workplace harassment. Back then; he investigated this conduct in Sweden. After his research, he identified his behavior as mobbing, his term for workplace harassment, and declared:

Psychological terror or mobbing in working life involves hostile and unethical communication, which is directed in a systematic manner by one or more individuals, mainly toward one individual, who, due to mobbing, is pushed into a helpless and defenseless position and held there by means of continuing *mobbing activities*. These actions occur on a very frequent basis (statistical definition: at least once a week) and over a long period of time (statistical definition: at least six months duration). Because of the high frequency and long duration of hostile behavior, this maltreatment results in considerable mental, psychosomatic and social misery (Leymann, 1990, ¶ 1).

According to Davenport et al. (1999), as early as 1976, Dr. Carroll Brodsky, a psychiatrist and anthropologist, wrote *The Harassed Worker*, based on claims filed with the California Workers' Compensation Appeals Board and the Nevada Industrial Commission. These claims noted that the workers were often "ill and unable to work because of ill-treatment by employers, co-workers, or consumers or because of excessive demands for work output" (Brodsky, 1976, p.2). Although Brodsky (1976) recognized a

mistreatment, at that time workplace harassment was not yet identified as an organizational problem in the United States.

Adams, a journalist, was the first person to draw attention to the workplace harassment phenomenon in the United Kingdom through a BBC series transmitted in 1988. She defined bullying as “persistently finding fault” and “belittling individuals,” often with consenting management (Adams, 1992). In order to help with this problem, Tim Field founded, in 1996, the UK National Workplace Bullying Advice Line. He affirms that the rate of calls increased after the Advice Line was featured in Paul Gosling's article *Workplace Bullies Under the Cosh* in the *Independent on Sunday* on January 28, 1996. Statistics for the period January 1, 1996 to March 31, 2003 reflected 7,449 inquiries on the subject and 6,911 incidents of workplace harassment were reported.

Precisely, it was not until the early 1990s that formal discussions started regarding workplace harassment. From 1992 onward, a large body of evidence has developed focusing on this behavior (Lewis, 1998). Extensive research conducted on this topic in Europe and United States has demonstrated that millions of workers are victims of workplace harassment (Leymann, 1990; Hoel, et al., 1999). These investigations have revealed some prominent similarities. In the majority of the cases, the perpetrator was the immediate line manager or someone holding a managerial position in the organization. For example, a study performed by the Nursing Times Survey (1995) showed that 61% of perpetrators were line managers, compared to 15.5% being colleagues. Similarly, Rayner's (1995) study also revealed that 71% of the perpetrators are at the line or senior manager levels, compared to only 12% being at the same level within the organization.

Some examples of workplace harassment include, name or epithet calling, jokes, offensive and disrespectful comments, obstruction and sabotage of another's job, being constantly victim of curses, rumors, calumnies, critics or public discrediting (Leymann, 1990; Davenport et al., 1999; Luzio-Lockett, 1995, Merrick, 2001). Other manifestations of workplace harassment may include "fault-finding, also exclusion, isolation, being singled out and treated differently, being shouted at, humiliated, excessive monitoring, having verbal and written warnings imposed" (Field, 1996 ¶ 1). Additional tactics of workplace harassment are taking credit for another's work, soliciting unrealistic work demands, being asked to perform humiliating and silly tasks, removal of responsibilities, or simply not assigning any job at all (Leymann 1990, Keashly, 2001, Chappell & Di Martino, 2000).

A large amount of studies have evidence of the negative impact of workplace harassment on the health of the targets (Leymann, 1990; McCarthy, Sheehan, Wilkie & Wilkie, 1995; Niedl, 1996; O'Moore, Seigne, McGuire & Smith, 1998). This behavior also has a tremendous impact on organizational costs in terms of lost productivity, among other sources (Brodsky, 1976; Davenport et al., 1999; Freiberg, 1998; Hoel et al., 1999; Keashly, 2001). It also represents costs for the targets (Brodsky, 1976; Davenport et al., 1999; Leymann, 1990; Yamada, 2000).

### **Workplace Harassment around the World**

Many studies and surveys globally indicate that workplace harassment is a widespread organizational problem. Extensive studies undertaken in this field support that the psychological forms of violent behaviors, such as workplace harassment from coworkers or supervisors, are more common than physical assaults, and equally, if not

more disturbing, for employees and organizations than physical violence (Baron & Neuman, 1996; Keashly, 1998; Richman et al, 1999)

The International Labor Organization (ILO) has even identified that psychological violence is one of the fastest growing forms of workplace violence (Chappell & Di Martino, 1998). They believe that “the new profile of violence at work which emerges is one which gives equal emphasis to physical and psychological behavior, and one which gives full recognition to the significance of minor acts” (Chappell & Di Martino, 2000, p.14), which may be small incidents such as criticizing and humiliating a person constantly.

In 2010 The Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI) through the polling firm Zogby International performed an extensive survey aimed to be representative study of the prevalence of this problem in the United States.

They found out the 35% of the 4,210 participants of the survey, reported to have experienced first hand bullying, the name they use to describe workplace harassment. Namie and Namie (2010) extrapolated those numbers to the U.S working force and estimated that 53.5 million of workers in that country are victims of this mistreatment.

Previous to this research, Keashly (2001) estimated that workplace harassment affected one in five workers in the U.S. workforce. In 1996 Hornstein even estimated that as many as 20 million Americans faced what he calls workplace abuse on a daily basis.

These earlier inferences as compare to this recent survey and with numerous studies conducted around the world furnishes a scenario of the prevalence of the phenomena.

In 2009, González and Grana published the results of the first prevalence study in Spain, which states that 14% of the 3,000 valid responses received suffered from psychological abuse or workplace harassment.

Also in Spain, the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living Conditions (2001) estimated that 800 thousand people had suffered workplace harassment, and the results on surveys conducted of 1,000 people by the Universidad de Alcalá in Spain showed that 11.44 per cent had experienced workplace harassment.

A study performed in Turkey by Cobanoglu (2005) established that incidence among the participants was 20%.

Niedhammer, David and Degioanni (2004) evaluated the occurrence of workplace harassment in France. They asked 19,655 employees to participate in survey in which 7,770 answered and from those 7,694 were valid, representing a 40% response rate. They found that one employee out of 10 (9% for men, 11% for women) had been exposed to workplace harassment within the last 12 months in the French general working population.

The Beyond Bullying Association of Australia estimated in 2003 that 2.5 to 5 million employees had experienced workplace harassment during their careers.

In the nineties when Leymann (1990), was one of the first scholars to study about this subject, he performed an extensive research conducted in Sweden and noted that approximately 3.5% of the labor force of 4.4 million persons were victims of what he called mobbing at that time.

Studies undertaken in Finland and England have also shown that approximately 10% of the workers interviewed had experienced some form of workplace harassment



(Vartia, 1995, Hoel & Cooper, 2000). Large-scale studies in Scandinavia have indicated that approximately 3-4% of the working population are affected on a regular basis (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996)

According to Leymann (1990, p.122) this workplace behavior affects 1% of the working population in Norway, and Nowosad (1995) reported similar data for Germany. Data from a survey from Staffordshire University (1994), carried out in the United Kingdom, found that 53% of employees had been harassed at work, and that 78% had witnessed such harassment. Beerman and Meschkutat (1995) believe that more than 8% of the employees in Austria had experienced workplace harassment.

A 1994 survey by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) revealed that for almost 70% of the respondents, verbal aggression was the leading form of violence against employees (Pizzino, 1994, p.9).

Einarsen and Skogstad (1996) also report data on the frequency of workplace harassment from 14 different Norwegian “quality of working life” surveys (n = 7,986), including a wide range of organizations and professions such as school teachers, university employees, hotel and restaurant workers, clerks, electricians, psychologists, health care workers and industrial workers. On an average, 8.6 per cent of the respondents reported ongoing workplace harassment during the last six months.

Lewis (1998) also notes that studies by the Trade Unions reveal a relatively high incidence of what he calls workplace bullying. He also mentions the following surveys: a MSF Survey (1994) of workplace representatives showing that 30% indicated they thought bullying was a significant problem, with 72% saying their employer had no policy for dealing with bullying; a NASUWT Survey (1995) of a sample of the

membership (3,500 questionnaires) showing that 72% reported either witnessing or being the subjects of serious bullying; a Survey of NHS Nurses (1995) showed that 71% were currently being bullied, with 31% reporting they had been bullied for more than 2 years.

A UK study also surveyed workers who belonged to the public sector trade union UNISON (UNISON, 1997). Seven hundred sixty-one individuals returned the postal questionnaire. All respondents were asked their experience of harassment behaviors at work in terms of frequency within the last six months. The UNISON definition provided to participants described this behavior as "offensive, intimidating, malicious, insulting or humiliating behavior, abuse of power or authority which attempts to undermine an individual or group of employees and which may cause them to suffer stress" (UNISON, 1997). Around two-thirds of respondents reported that they had some contact with workplace harassment either through having witnessed or directly experienced it in the past, and 18% labeled themselves as currently being the target (Rayner, 1997).

#### *Workplace Harassment in Puerto Rico*

In Puerto Rico, the first exploratory study about workplace harassment was conducted by the Industrial Psychological Department of the Carlos Albizu University (Martínez, Arroyo, Rodríguez, Seijo, Sepúlveda & Tirado, 2002), using two hundred twenty-seven subjects. Prior to this study, there was no empirical evidence regarding the problem in Puerto Rico. The results of this study suggested that 16% of the individuals who participated in the survey had experienced workplace harassment. They also found that 23 per cent of the respondents had experienced general harassment in the past, while 24 per cent had witnessed this behavior, and 37 per cent had witnessed this conduct in the past. According to Dr. Miguel E. Martínez (personal communication, March 20, 2003)

these percentages resemble other major studies performed about this behavior by Piñuel y Zabala (2002) in Spain.

In 2003, Carlos Albizu University conducted a second survey on Puerto Rican public employees. The results of this study also suggested that 16% of the three hundred forty-three individuals that participated in the survey had experienced workplace harassment. They also found that 35 had witnessed this behavior and 31 per cent had witnessed this conduct in the past (Martínez, Merle, Torres & Viera, 2003). Another study undertaken by Rodríguez and Martínez (2003) revealed that 11% (N=308) of the health care Puerto Rican health care professionals surveyed are targets of workplace harassment. Arroyo, Martínez and Pérez (2004) also investigated workplace harassment in Puerto Rican employees. Their research found that 7.2% (N=208) were confirmed to be victims of this behavior.

In 2005, Rosa-Vélez examined the perceptions of Puerto Rican University professors regarding the nature of workplace harassment they have experienced or witnessed with special emphasis on the characteristics of the victims, also. A scale developed by the Carlos Albizu University called “Escala de Acoso Psicológico en el Trabajo,” or EAPET by its initials in Spanish (Workplace Psychological Harassment Scale) was used. The characteristics used in the research were gender, age, national origin, seniority, position of the perpetrator, and kind of university (private or public).

The survey was distributed to a convenience sample of three hundred university professors in two universities (UPR-Mayagüez and IAU-San Germán). One hundred and thirty-two professors completed the questionnaires, which represent a forty-four percent (44%) overall participation rate. Ninety-eight of those participants were professors of the

UPR-Mayagüez and thirty-four were from IAU-San Germán. That represented a 45% and 43% participation rate, respectively, from each institution.

Of the one hundred thirty-two respondents, twenty-nine confirmed (21.97%) that they had been victims of workplace harassment. Thirty-six professors (27%) answered that they knew about co-workers who were victims of workplace harassment. Twenty-two respondents (17%) said that they had been victims of workplace harassment in other jobs. Thirty-eight (29%) indicated that they knew about co-workers who were victims of workplace harassment in the past.

Approximately forty-five percent (45.10%) of the participants who indicated that they had been victims of workplace harassment were in the age range from 46 to 55 years old. Also, 36.67% of the targets of workplace harassment had been in their jobs from 16 to 20 years. The period of time that participants that identify themselves as victims of this conduct ranged from six months to 11 years. The average time suffering from harassment among all the targets was four years.

### Profile of the Perpetrator

According to the Canada Safety Council (2004) perpetrators of workplace harassment tend to be “insecure people with poor or non-existent social skills and little empathy. They tend to turn this insecurity outward, finding satisfaction in their ability to attack and diminish the people around them” (2004, Profile of the bully, ¶ 14). Although, there is no empirical research known dealing with the psychology of the perpetrators,

their personality can be described as excessively controlling, cowardly, neurotic, and hungry of power. Many of their actions can be caused by jealousy and envy, as well as insecurity (Davenport et al. 1999, p.58).

According to Leymann (1993) the perpetrators find their victims because they need to cover up their own deficiencies. He explains that the perpetrator's fear and insecurity about their own reputation make him put down others.

Peck (1998) explains that perpetrators often would rather to sacrifice others to protect their self-image of perfection. He affirms that these people have an "evil personality" in which they use their power to destroy others, for the purpose of defending and preserving their own integrity. Peck even articulates that evil can be defined as a specific form of mental illness.

According to Baumeister, Smart and Boden (1995) what induces people to commit violent and oppressive actions may be called "threatened egotism" (p.5). Instead of feeling proud of having exceptional human resources, they feel threatened. The threatened egotism drives the perpetrator to have inflated self-appraisals. Baumeister et al. (1995) believe that such cases of anger are directed outward, as a way of avoiding downward revisions of self-concept.

Wyatt and Hare (1988) believe that perpetrators of harassment suffer from a mental disorder called "narcissistic personality disorder." They describe the perpetrators "as a socially dysfunctional person who feels entitled to use power to control others" (p.100).

According to Namie and Namie (2000) people become perpetrators following three different paths: through personality development, by reading cues in a competitive workplace and by accident.

Field (1996) describes the perpetrators of workplace harassment as “serial bullies”. He says a serial bully is:

selfish and acts out of self-interest, self-aggrandizement and self-preservation at all times... is insensitive, often callously indifferent to the needs of others, and especially when others are experiencing difficulty (vulnerability is a major stimulant to the serial bully) ...uses criticism, humiliation, etc. in the guise of addressing shortfalls in performance - in reality, these are for control and subjugation, *not* for performance enhancement (1996, Detailed profile of the serial bully, ¶ 1)

Field (1996) explains that when the perpetrators are called to account for the way they have chosen to behave, they often instinctively exhibit the following responses: “(1) Denial; (2) Retaliation: the perpetrator counterattacks; (3) Feigning victim-hood; (4) Reflection and (5) Projection” (1996, Avoiding acceptance of responsibility, ¶ 3).

Many studies have confirmed that most of the perpetrators are managers of supervisors (e.g. Hoel & Cooper, 2000, McCarthy et al., 1996, Rayner, 1995). The investigations conducted in Puerto Rico also revealed that the supervisors are mainly the perpetrators (e.g. Martínez et al. 2002, Martínez et al. 2003, Rodríguez & Martínez, 2003). Other studies have reported that perpetrators are usually older than their targets (e.g. UNISON, 1997). According to Rayner et al. (2000), Britain studies reveal that men harass more than women, although they explain that this could be because there are more men in managerial positions (p. 70).

## The Victims of Workplace Harassment

According to Field (1996) the targets of workplace harassment usually are competent, intelligent and loyal people, who's personal characteristics may stimulate envy and jealousy. Field (1996) also mentions that the victims are those who are willing to go that extra mile. That's why, he argues, targets of workplace harassment are usually "successful, tenacious, determined, imaginative, creative and innovative" among other characteristics.

A research project undertaken by the Campaign against Workplace Bullying (2000) involved 1,335 website visitors who voluntarily elected to complete an anonymous survey from March to May. The online sample for the US Hostile Workplace Survey 2000 was completed by individuals from a variety of employers: 35% corporate employers; 33% government (vs. 12% of the national workforce); 13% small or family-run businesses and 19% non-profit organizations. The following results were noted: women were mostly victims (77%). A majority of the respondents (62%) confirmed to be experiencing this behavior. The survey also showed that 77% of the perpetrators had harassed others at work also, and this rate rises to 88% for victims in the government sector.

According to the results of the survey, the average exposure to workplace harassment for the respondents was 16.5 months. The results pointed out that men report a significantly longer average exposure (18.38 months) than women (15.74 months).

According to Namie (2000):

This could be explained perhaps by women being more willing to take action and getting help sooner. It could also be that men are more tolerant of the accompanying shame and more frozen into inaction by it or perhaps generally less

willing to seek help for the embarrassing dilemma (2000, The targets individuals who suffer from a hostile workplace, ¶ 3).

A study undertaken by Hoel and Cooper (2000) at UMIST involved over 70 organizations in the public, private and voluntary sectors across Great Britain. During the spring of 1999 a total of 12,350 questionnaire packs were distributed throughout the participating organizations. More than 5,300 questionnaires were returned, of which 5,288 were used for analysis, representing a 43 per cent response rate. In this study gender differences were investigated for incidence. When looking at the results from people who said they had been harassed in the last six months, no statistically significant differences were found between men and women (at the 0.05 per cent level). The study results showed, however, that the highest level of victims were younger employees, followed by those in the 35 to 44 age band. Those in the age bracket above 55 years appeared to be least likely to report workplace harassment. Regarding the duration of this behavior, 39% reported more than two years ago; 28% reported between one and two years ago; 16% reported between six and 12 months ago; and 17% within the last six months. Related to the prevalence of workplace harassment by industry sectors, the researchers found the following (in the last 5 years): 38% Post/telecommunication; 32% prison service; 36% teaching; 21% higher education; 30% banking; 30% police sectors; among other sectors that showed a constant prevalence for this behavior. The research also addressed the actions taken by those who self reported as victims: 47% said they discussed these events with colleagues; 38% that they discussed them with friends and family; 34% confronted the perpetrator; 17% went to the union or staff association; 13% did nothing; 11% went to the human resources department; 8% made use of the



organization's grievance procedure; while only 3% reported using a welfare or occupational health department (Hoel & Cooper, 2000).

Regarding, the ways the targets managed the situation, the UNISON (1997) study showed that 60% confronted the perpetrator; 46% informed the situation to the supervisor of the perpetrator; while 24% consulted the Human Resources Department. This contrast with the strategies undertaken by a sample of Puerto Rican public employees; 54% talked to family, 52% talked to friends, 46% talked with co-workers, and 46% avoided contact with the perpetrator (Martínez et al. 2003, p.2)

#### Impact of Workplace Harassment: Effects and Costs

Many studies confirm that the effects of workplace harassment are devastating for its targets (e.g. Brodsky, 1976; Davenport et al., 1999; Leymann, 1990; Yamada, 2000). Also, it has major economical consequences to the organizations. (Brodsky, 1976; Davenport et al., 1999; Freiberg, 1998; Hoel et al., 1999; Keashly, 2001).

#### *Effects*

Namie and Namie (2000) divide the possible effects of workplace harassment in four categories: emotional-psychological damage; physical health damage; damage to social relations; and economic financial damage.

These effects may include psychosomatic stress (Leymann, 1990), anxiety (McCarthy, et al., 1995; Niedl, 1996) depression (O'Moore, et al., 1998) and burnout (Einarsen et al., 1998). Many victims seem to suffer from symptoms under the domain of post-traumatic stress syndrome (Leymann & Gustafsson, 1996; Wilson, 1991). Davenport et al. (1999) also suggest that the repetitive attacks to the target may change their normal reasoning and ways of communicating. They declare that: "victims become defensive,

attempting to make sense of what seems senseless. Their fear and their feeling of betrayal impact their behavior and self control” (1999, p.85). Other effects may include poor concentration, loss of sleep, fatigue, feeling of insecurity, mood swings, panic attacks, shame, self destructive habits, damage to social relations, suicidal thoughts (Namie & Namie, 2000), suicide (Namie & Namie, 2000, Leymann, 1990), and even homicide (Davenport et al., Freiberg, 1998; Leymann, 1990). A Norwegian study concluded that 40% of the targets of workplace harassment have admitted that they have considered suicide (Einarsen et al. 1994).

The following quotation from Field (1996) captures some of the detrimental effects that workplace harassment brings to the targets:

The person becomes withdrawn, reluctant to communicate for further criticism; this results in accusations of ‘withdrawal’, ‘sullenness’, ‘not-cooperating or communicating’, ‘lack of team spirit’, etc. Dependence on alcohol or other substances leads to impoverished performance, poor concentration and failing memory, which brings accusations of ‘poor performance’ (1996, p.128).

According to Keashly (2001), targets of emotional abuse, her term for workplace harassment, experience the same effects of those physically assaulted or sexually harassed. She states:

victims seem to experience immediate reactions such as anger, humiliation, fear, and/or tension; physical symptoms such as nausea, headaches, sleep difficulties, and/or weight loss/gain; emotional ailments such as decreased levels of self-esteem and/or increased levels of anxiety or depression; and organizational

outcomes such as increased intentions to leave the job and/or decreased levels of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and/or morale (2001, ¶ 3).

Björkqvist et al. (1994) interviewed 17 victims of harassment employed at a Finnish university. They found that all subjects reported insomnia, various nervous symptoms, melancholy, apathy, lack of concentration and socio-phobia. Hornstein (1996) surveyed nearly a thousand people and he found there were meaningful and statistically significant correlations between disrespect and depression, anxiety and loss of self-esteem among people who reported harassment. Vartia (2001) also found that targets of workplace harassment report more general stress, mental pressure, lower self-confidence, and are more likely to use sleep-inducing drugs and sedatives, than those respondents not exposed to harassment. The results of the research also showed that workplace harassment had a negative impact not only on victims, but also on the observers of this behavior; both groups reported greater stress than employees who were not exposed to or did not witness this maltreatment. In that study Vartia (2001) surveyed 949 municipal workers, of whom 10% identified themselves as victims, 9% expressed had witnessed harassment in the workplace. Eighty per cent (80%) of targets indicated that this was their first experience with workplace harassment, and that this mistreatment began unexpectedly. The study also showed 18% of victims had been absent from work at least once as consequence of the harassment (Vartia, 2001).

A British study by Quine (1999) in health care concluded that workplace harassment resulted in severe psychological distress and reduced job satisfaction. He found that targets experienced higher levels of stress. They also showed clinical anxiety and depression, and were more likely to express a desire to resign. This study included

1,580 health employees, in which 38% of the respondents indicated they had experienced harassment.

In Puerto Rico, results from the Martínez et al. (2002) survey revealed that the effects of harassment reported by the 277 victims interviewed included nervous symptoms (72%), forgetfulness (69%), irritability (69%), muscular pain (68%), sensitivity to injustice (68%), difficult concentrating (64%), depression (64%), loss of sleep (64%), sadness (64%), neck pain (61%), difficulty sleeping (61%), aggressive behavior (58%) and lower self-confidence. p difficulty (22%).

From the Rosa-Vélez (2005) investigation upon the perceptions of Puerto Rican professors related to workplace harassment ( N=132), the symptoms experienced most by the victims were: irritability (86.21%); hypersensitivity towards injustice (75.86%); discouragement (65.52%); and nervousness (58.62%).

According to UK survey data, another effect of workplace harassment is targets resigning from their jobs at a rate of about 25% (e.g. Rayner, 1997; UNISON, 1997; Savva & Alexandrou, 1998). Rayner (1999) articulates “such a figure represents a major cost to any organization, and is useful data for encouraging the pursuit of preventative action” (1999, Profiling a typical target, ¶ 13). She also advises that observers of this behavior also report job change and increased stress levels due to their secondary experiences.

Leymann estimated that some 10 to 15 per cent of all suicides in Sweden could be attributed to workplace harassment (Leymann in Davenport et al. 1999, p. 25).

Davenport et al. (1999) extrapolated from those figures to the U.S. suicide annual statistics, and believes that 10 of the more than 30,000 suicides reported annually are

directly related to workplace issues and/or conflicts. In summary, workplace harassment seems to exist in work settings, and is worthy of more careful definition and attention (p.25).

### *Costs*

This disruptive behavior has many documented costs to the organizational setting. A recent study performed by Rosentien (2010) in hospital workers, found out the correlation between workplace harassment and costly issues to the organization ranging from increased staff sickness to malpractice liability costs. For example, the staff turnover may cost in replacing Registered Nurses from \$60, 000 to \$100,000.

According to the Anti-Discrimination Board of New South Wales (2002) the estimate annual cost of workplace harassment in Australia ranges from \$6 billion to \$13 billion. The estimates are based upon a prevalence rate of 3.5%.

Sheenan (1999) reports that United Kingdom loses 4 billion pounds annually because of lost productivity and legal costs related to manage workplace harassment.

Leymann (1990) believes that the costs of sick leave as a result of the effects experienced by the targets may be estimated at between U.S. \$30,000-100,000 for each person subjected to workplace harassment. These projected costs also comprise those associated with loss of productivity, and the need for intervention by organizational members, such as human resources representatives and health workers. Wilson (1991) also estimated that \$5 billion to \$6 billion dollars are lost every year in the United States economy because of real or perceived workplace harassment.

Davenport et al. (1999) affirm:

When mobbing syndrome strikes an organization the costs measured in productivity, morale, human suffering, and dollars can be high. Teamwork becomes difficult as people turn their focus from the goals and tasks of the organization to internal maneuvering and survival tactics (p.131).

In an interview by the *Orlando Business Journal* (2002), psychologist Michael H. Harrison, Ph.D., of Harrison Psychological Associates, mentions a recent survey of 9,000 federal employees. The results of the study concluded that 42% of females and 15% of male employees indicated being harassed within a two-year period, resulting in a cost of more than \$180 million in lost time and productivity.

On February 20, 2003 the Work Cover Minister, Rob Hulls from Victoria, Australia issued a press release stating that workplace harassment is a growing problem in Victoria, costing businesses more than \$57 million a year. Hulls notes that,

Victorian WorkCover Authority received 1,148 claims for workplace-related incidents ranging from harassment to assault in 2001-02, up from 1,107 claims in 2000-01... The full cost of workplace bullying, in lost productivity and absenteeism, is difficult to quantify, but some Australia-wide estimates have placed it at a staggering \$3 billion a year (2003, ¶ 2).

According to The Workplace Bullying & Trauma Institute USA & Canada (2002), employers pay for workplace harassment through tangible costs, such as turnover costs; downtime (lost efficiency); recruitment; hiring bonuses; time to proficiency of replacement (reduced efficiency); litigation costs; attorney fees; settlement costs; jury awards; appeal costs; stress-related payments for Workers' Comp awards and Disability Benefits; accident increases as staff become more fatigued; talent flight of the best and

brightest as they seek non-hostile workplaces, dummies and political operatives are often all that remain; and lost capacity to innovate. They affirm that there are also some intangible costs as: company reputation; bad public relations from high-profile litigation, naming employers as supporting offensive harassers; sabotage by fearful employees who know no alternatives when management fails to purge or punish the tyrant; and staff resistance to initiatives launched by management who can not be trusted to look after employees' interest (2000, How employers pay for bullying, ¶ 1). Figures from The Workplace Bullying & Trauma Institute USA & Canada “estimate that employers and insurers pay an estimated \$250 billion yearly for: direct employee health care costs; turnover from employee flight and re-training costs; accidents related to stress-induced fatigue; and litigation and resistance to top-down change initiatives” (2000, Employers Practices Liability, ¶ 7).

An article published in *USA Today* on February, 1998 revealed that employers are acquiring insurances to protect their organizations against workplace harassment claims, for which companies pay \$5,000 to \$100,000 annual premiums with deductibles of \$10,000 to \$25,000, and the median compensatory award in wrongful termination cases topped \$200,000 in 1995, up 45% from the year before.

### **Workplace Harassment Compared to Sexual Harassment**

In 2008 Hershovis and Barling analyzed 110 studies that compared workplace general harassment and sexual harassment. They concluded that workplace harassment is more damaging to its victims because organizations have less mechanisms to protect them.

In a study about interpersonal workplace stressors Richman et al. (1999) concluded that workplace harassment was four times more prevalent than sexual harassment, they stated:

Men and women across occupational groups perceive substantial degrees of exposure to both sexual harassment and generalized workplace abuse. While sexual harassment, but not generalized workplace abuse, is illegal in the United States, the data demonstrate that generalized abuse is experienced far more frequently and is associated with deleterious outcomes in victims. Since sexual harassment and generalized workplace abuse are inter-correlated, it is possible that generalized workplace abuse may include more subtle forms of sexual harassment (1999, Discussion, ¶ 1).

An exploratory study of workplace harassment in further education and higher educational institutions in Wales compared perceptions and experiences across six areas: workplace harassment presented as bullying, sexual harassment, racial harassment, sex discrimination, unfair promotional opportunities, and reduced promotional opportunities. Frequency results for workplace harassment revealed that workplace harassment was ranked higher than sex discrimination, sexual and racial harassment incidences (Lewis, 1999).

Rospenda (2002) also performed a study examining the relationship between sexual harassment and generalized workplace harassment and help-seeking behavior in a sample of 2,038 university employees. This study pretended to explore whether those who reported harassment as well as utilization of services had less deleterious drinking outcomes compared with those who were harassed and did not utilize services. It was



hypothesized that services utilization would moderate the harassment-drinking relationship, such that those who were harassed and sought services at Time 1 (T1) would have lower drinking outcomes at Time 2 (T2), compared with those who were harassed and did not seek services. Her findings were the following:

Employees who experienced sexual harassment or general workplace harassment were more likely to report having sought mental health or health services to deal with workplace issues, compared with those who did not experience sexual harassment or general workplace harassment, controlling for job stress and prior services use. Women experiencing general workplace harassment were more likely to use their services than men, but the same was not true for sexual harassment. Men experiencing sexual harassment who sought services exhibited higher levels of some alcohol outcomes, contrary to expectations (2002, ¶ 1).

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working (EFIW) Conditions also carried out a survey in 1996 that was based on 15,800 interviews with workers throughout the European Union. Their findings suggested that 4% of workers (6 million) were subjected to physical violence, 2% (3 million workers) to sexual harassment, and 8% (12 million workers) to workplace harassment identified as intimidation and bullying (EFIW, 1997).

Brodsky (1976) sees sexual harassment as only one out of five types of work harassment. Name calling, scape-goating, physical abuse and work pressures were claimed to be as frequent and as severe as the former.

### **Conclusion**

Global studies on workplace harassment show that this offensive behavior is real and pernicious to the organizational settings. Through the past two decades, researchers

have demonstrated the prevalence of this problem, that causes many physical and emotional effects to it's targets as well as high economical costs to the organizations.

Is a matter of fact that workplace harassment is among the workers experiences and the outcomes of this situation can damage the integrity of the targets as well as the institution.

While extensive research has been done about the subject it seems, as related to the figures on the impact of this behavior, that little has been done by the decision makers within government and organizations to reduce the consequences of this pervasive conduct.

The literature also demonstrates that the culture and organizational climate influence how individuals interact. Employers most strive to create an appropriate workplace environment that includes creating an organizational culture that does not allow workplace harassment. Organizations must implement clear policies against this demeanor, along with procedural systems to follow up the complaints.

Education and awareness on this topic is very important. This information is crucial to identify this problem and to lead its targets to the adequate organizational procedure.

Further investigation must be done to understand more about the scope of this problem and to look for options that could help to mitigate the situation.

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