

Perception of Mobbing in a Mexican Manufacturing Company

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to identify the perception of mobbing in workers of a Mexican manufacturing company. The design was descriptive, cross-sectional and correlational. The sample was non-probabilistic with real participation of 187 employees who individually answered the Questionnaire of Strategies of Harassment in the Workplace of Leymann (1989) modified by Gonzáles de Rivera and Rodríguez-Abuín (2003). The results show that the overall perception of mobbing in all participants is 5%, in employees with permanent contract is 3% and in those with temporary contract of 6%, the difference being significant and, finally in workers with an operator's job position is 6% and in managers it is 5% so it is not a significant difference. The perception of mobbing of the workers of the manufacturing company is in frequent ranges in international investigation and low when comparing it with other Mexican studies.

Key Words: *Mobbing, Workplace Harassment, Workplace Violence, Psychological Harassment, Moral Harassment.*

Introduction

Work is a fundamental activity in life and workers as the organization's human capital are one of the most important factors influencing their success or failure. However, in the organizational environment there may be psychosocial stressors that obstruct the well-being and development of the worker and also the competitiveness of companies. Workplace harassment or Mobbing is one of them.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) in 1998 reports that psychological aggressions are more known by workers and employers as a grave form of violence. These aggressions include group intimidation or mobbing, meaning, intimidation and collective psychological harassment. Mobbing is one of the main psychosocial stressors in a person's work life (Moreno-Jiménez & Rodríguez-Muñoz, 2006), it is a serious problem that can have negative effects in the workplace wellbeing, physical and psychological health of the workers afflicted by it (Piñuel & Zavala, 2003), the organizational environment and in the effectiveness and efficiency of the company (Uluğ & Beydoğan 2009).

In the specialized literature there can be different terms to name workplace harassment or mobbing: adult bullying (González de Rivera & Rodríguez, 2006), psychological terror (Leyman, 1990, 1996), bullying (Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004), etc. In this article workplace harassment and mobbing will be used.

The relevance and negative impact of mobbing in the worker and companies manifests itself in the integration of this construct in international institutions focused in the study of factors that have an impact in the workplace's quality of life. The ILO (1998) establishes that mobbing is the intimidation and psychological harassment that a group of workers exercises onto another worker who is the object of their hostility that manifests in repetitive negative comments about a person, gossip diffusion or false information about the persons there are trying to harm, etc. This organization (ILO) in 2013 defines workplace harassment as "a form of psychological harassment that consists in harassment through vindictive, cruel or malicious actions to humiliate or destabilize an individual or group of employees".

From Leyman's perspective (1990) psychic terror or mobbing in the work life consists of a hostile and unethical communication systematically directed by one or more people mainly to another. These behaviors occur frequently, almost every day and for at least six months so it has mental, psychosomatic and social effects on the person. Psychological harassment in the workplace is "The persistent and intentional maintenance of guidelines for psychological harm, which take place unfairly and unreasonably, without the possibility of space or defense, favored and allowed by the environment in which they occur, and whose ultimate aim is to eliminate the harassed or destroy their health and capabilities" (Gonzalez de Rivera & Rodríguez, 2006). Mobbing in the workplace refers to repeated and long-lasting negative actions directed against an employee by their supervisors or colleagues (Einarsen & Houge, 2006).

In Mexico, prestigious organizations recognize the importance and adverse consequences of mobbing. The National Institute for Women (2007) considers it as a type of gender violence characterized by the exercise of power in a relationship of subordination of the victim to the aggressor in the workplace that is expressed in verbal, physical or both ways. Furthermore, it emphasizes the reference to the academy by citing Leymann's (1998) conception of mobbing: a hostile, unethical and systematized communication by one or a few individuals against a single individual who is isolated in a state of prolonged defenselessness.

The Instituto Aguascalentense de Mujeres in 2011 argues that mobbing (workplace harassment) is a form of psychological violence exercised by employers, subordinates or between workers, in a group or individual and silently "reinforced" by the team of collaborators who happen to be witnesses and who for fear of becoming victims of harassment, do nothing to support the harassed person". It also presents the psychological harassment at work as a moral harassment expressed in abusive verbal and nonverbal conduct that attempts by its frequency and repetition against the psychical or physical integrity of a person. In the document "The harassment in Mexico: a silent form of violence in workplaces" of the Instituto Veracruzano de Mujeres (2008) establishes harassment in the workplace as a social phenomenon called mobbing or bullying in English. The Centro de Estudios para el Adelanto de las Mujeres y Equidad de Género (CEMESAG) in the analytical information about work violence (mobbing) from a gender perspective (2011) and the LXI Legislatura de la Cámara de Diputados, workplace harassment is a synonym of mobbing that implies a form of psychological violence (Marzoan, 2002).

The causes of mobbing are diverse. Davenport, Schwartz and Elliot (1999) propose five possible sources: the psychological state and conditions of the abusers, organizational culture, the personal characteristics of the victim, the psychological state and conditions of the victim and the non-organizational factors like values and social rules. Another widely accepted casual factor related to organizational climate is a poor working environment that creates the conditions for generating it (Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004). Moreno-Jiménez, Rodríguez, Garrosa, and Morante (2005) argue that organizational variables like organizational politics and the type of contract influence mobbing.

For Piñuel and Oñate (2006) workplace harassment is and indicator of an inadequate functioning in the organization in the way of organizing work, assignment, selection and promotion of workers, culture, administration style, etc. Psychological harassment is conceptualized by González de Rivera (2002) as a complex psychosocial syndrome resulting from an interaction of dynamics generated by the harasser, the victim and the psychosocial group they belong to. For the occurrence of mobbing is indispensable the presence of these three elements, only one of them is not enough.

The Instituto Aguascalentense de Mujeres (2011) points out that the main causes of mobbing are discrimination, the worker's challenge to the "rule of the predominant group" that imposes rules, competition to the challenge of the most capable and frustrated sexual harassment. Workplace harassment comes from the internal relationships between workers and the abusive exercise of management power that translates first into work related stress.

Different characteristics of the harassment situation have been proposed for reliable mobbing identification. One of them is a destructive conflict based in a behavior of frequent and long-lasting abuse (Zapf, 1999); that cannot be understood as harassment if it is a single incident or if the parties involved have "similar strength" (Einarsen Hoel, Azpf & Cooper, 2003). The behavior of harassment tends to be carried out by one person, but often the other coworkers allow it by being silent observers of these behaviors. Mobbing, has a group character, generally it does not imply physical threats and is a phenomenon that occurs in all cultures.

Mobbing is characterized mainly by behaviors focused at the attack on aspects of a person such as their dignity, professional capability, private life or physical and moral qualities (Artazcoz, 2003), is deliberate and over time can increase. It always has a goal that is usually the psychological destruction of the victim, it's repeated systematically; it causes in the person an inadequate defensive reaction with psychological, physical and social negative effects (Fernández et al., 2009). Under this scenario, not all harassment victims suffer mobbing.

Leymann (1996) described 45 behaviors that grouped into 5 basic groups of harassment activities: a) to reduce the victim's ability to communicate properly with others, including the harasser himself, b) to prevent the victim from having the possibility of maintaining social contacts, c) aimed at discrediting or preventing the victim from maintaining his personal work reputation, d) aimed at reducing the victim's occupation and employability through professional discrediting, e) that affect the physical and psychic health of the victim. This categorization from Leymann (1996) is the basis for Leymann's Inventory of Psychological Terrorization one of the most used instruments for the detection of mobbing. Leyman (1996) argues that harassment has a detrimental effect on the harassed because it tends to be constant for a long period of time with the intention of causing damage and manifests itself by manipulating: a) the victim's reputation with rumors, defamation and ridicule, b) communication since the victim is not allowed to express himself, no one speaks to him, receives criticism aloud and significant looks, c) the social circumstances where the victim is isolated, d) the nature of the possibility of fulfilling in his work does not take work, assigning humiliating tasks without meaning and the violence and threats of it.

Reports on the incidence of mobbing show differences in the proportion of victims of harassment. These variations may be product of criteria, culture and different workplace environment (Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004) and of the particular characteristics of the person, the job position, gender, knowledge of the phenomenon and methodological of the investigations, among other.

The ILO in 1998 reported that in the United Kingdom 53% of the workers had been subjected to intimidation and workplace harassment, that 78% had witnessed these kinds of behaviors and that in Germany, Australia, Austria, Denmark, United States and Sweden was expanding more and more and, in 2000 informed that 9% of European workers had been victims of mobbing. Hoel, Sparks and Cooper (2001) in a report from 2001 if this same organization indicate that at least 10% of the workers were exposed to psychological harassment or intimidation.

The V European Survey of Working Conditions (2012) published by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) noted that 4% of workers claim to have been exposed to harassment or during the previous year. On the First Results of the VI European Survey on the workplace conditions of Eurofound in 2015 related to verbal abuse, unwanted sexual attention, threats and humiliating behavior in the month prior to the survey and with the occurrence of physical violence, sexual harassment and harassment in the previous 12 months revealed that 17% of women and 15% of men claimed to have been exposed to such behavior.

Nielsen, Matthiesen and Einarsen, (2010) in meta-analysis of 20 studies where the 45 item Questionnaire (Leymann, 1990, 1996) or a similar questionnaire, such as the Negative Actions Questionnaire (NAQ) (Einarsen, Hoel & Notelares, 2009, Einarsen & Raknes, 1997) to 8270 participants found that the prevalence of workplace harassment was 7.7%. These authors point out that in 15 studies with a total of 44878 participants combining the auto identification method with the criterion of the behavioral experience of bullying at least once a week, bullying had a weighted prevalence rate of 3.7%.

In Spain, a sample of 149 workers of both sexes from different sectors of work activities was detected that 8.7% had suffered harassment behavior with a weekly or daily frequency during the last 6 months (González & Graña, 2007). In the Cisneros VI barometer, the prevalence ranges from 9% to 16% and in the active population it is 9.2% (Piñuel & Oñate, 2006). Fernández and collaborators (2009) found that more of the 15% in the population suffers mobbing. In Turkey, Uluğ and Beydoğan (2009) in a study of 95 civil servants registered as postgraduate students found that 61% (28 employees) were subjected to at least one mobbing behavior of at least six months duration. Product of the analysis of several investigations Einarsen and Houge (2006) argue that between 1 and 10% of the workers are subject to mobbing behavior.

In Mexico, Bustos (2015) from the Universidad de Guadalajara said that data from the Instituto de Salud Ocupacional of that University show that 80% of Mexicans have suffered workplace harassment. In addition, Bustos reports that in the National Survey on the Dynamics of Relationships in Households of INEGI, of 785,377 women employed, 83 thousand 671 suffer some type of labor violence. The Instituto Aguascalentense de Mujeres (2011) in a sample of 76 female employees and 19 male employees of a clothing factory in the garment industry of Aguascalientes found that 98% of the workers had no knowledge about the areas and types of violence and therefore could not recognize whether they lived it or not. The types of violence identified were economic and psychological; 20.37% reported being harassed psychologically.

In Michoacán, Méndez, Trejo and Rodríguez (2011) from the Universidad Autónoma de Guerrero in 2010 detected that teachers perceive mobbing in the communication and social contact at work, in personal discredit before their coworkers, the discrediting of their work and professional capacity, risk in physical health at work in exposed subjects and other moral harassment strategies and behavior. The highest levels in a descending way occur in the risk in the physical health at work in the exposed subjects and in the discredit of the work capacity.

From another angle of analysis, it has been revealed that the type of contract is a predictor of workplace harassment. Moreno-Jiménez et al. (2005) found that the temporary contract favors more situations of psychological harassment than the indefinite contract and infer that the labor instability of the temporary contract increases the defenselessness and vulnerability to psychological, verbal and physical labor abuses and that is related to a lower level of incorporation to the organizational functioning that tends to isolate the worker.

However, in a study by Piñuel and Oñate (2002) the results were reversed since the incidence of mobbing was much higher (almost double) in fixed contract employees (permanent) than in workers with temporary contracts. Another variable that has been little studied in the prevalence of mobbing is the job position. Administrative employees (12.7%) and intermediate managers (10%) present above average workplace harassment and workers and specialists 16.9% below average, these being significant differences (Piñuel and Oñate, 2006).

The consequences of mobbing on the person who suffers it may manifest themselves in: work stress, low productivity, absenteeism, lack of motivation and professional abandonment (Piñuel & Zavala, 2003). Prolonged workplace harassment can manifest difficulty concentrating, memory loss, isolation, fear and exaggerated worry, irritability and near-continuous violence can lead to difficulties for the victim with the family and their environment (Fernández et al., 2009). Mobbing is the main source of social stress at work (Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003) and is associated with low worker satisfaction with leadership, control over work, social climate, role ambiguity, challenging tasks, and overwork (Einarsen, Raknes & Matthiesen, 1994).

In Mexico, mobbing is considered a psychosocial problem with serious adverse effects on physical and psychological health, that is, on the well-being of the people being harassed and in the workplace due to absenteeism, decreased productivity, loss of motivation and rotation (Fernández et al., 2009). The knowledge of its characteristics and incidence in the organizations is still in its beginnings so there are few studies about it (Moreno-Jiménez et al, 2006; Trujillo-Flores, Lámbarry-Vilchis, & Valderrábano-Almegua, 2015). More investigations are needed. The objectives of the study were to identify the perception of mobbing in the workers of a company in the manufacturing sector and in the categories of permanent and temporary contract as well as in the positions of administrative and operatives.

Method

Participants

The sample was non-probabilistic of 191 employees of a manufacturing organization. The female gender participants were 47 (24.6%) and male gender were 144 (75.4%). Four workers responded inadequately to the instrument so the actual sample was 187 people. The permanent contract employees were 143 (75.6%) and temporary contract employees 44 (23.5%). The workers with an operator's position were 160 (86%), employees with administrative position 26 (14%) and one employee omitted this data. The working age of the workers was 1 month to 15 years.

Instruments

Questionnaire on Workplace Harassment Strategies (LIPT-60 Leymann Inventory of Psychological Terrorization Modified by González de Rivera and Rodríguez-Abuín (2003).

The adaptation consisted of a modification with two axes: add 15 items to the original 45 items and change the initially dichotomous response alternative to a Likert scale to measure the intensity with which each

harassment behavior has affected the worker with four options ranging from zero (the behavior has not occurred) to four (maximum intensity behavior).

This instrument provides global information-frequency and intensity perceived by the person from the set of harassment strategies suffered. It has six subscales: 1. Job discredit (JD) that are the strategies of harassment in which a discredit in work is given by calumnies, rumors, distortions, with concealment or minimization of achievements and exaggeration or invention of failures, 2. Disruption of progress (DP), refers to blocking work activities, assigning to the worker inappropriate tasks below their competencies, 3.

Blocking of communication (BC), is aimed at blocking the communication of the worker, inside and outside the organization, 4. Covert intimidation (CI) consists of threats and damages towards the worker, an important feature is that no such actions are noticed, no one can be held accountable, 5. Manifested Intimidation (MI) are direct aggressions, direct threats, verbal threats and obvious restrictions such as ridicule, shouting, grievances and scorns exercised in a public manner and without dissimulation and 6.

Personal discrediting (DP) focuses on discrediting the worker in his personal life manifesting with mockery, criticism and denunciation of his origins or his way of being or living or thinking. The questionnaire also has 10 items that are not grouped into any of the six dimensions. González de Rivera (2005) Reported adequate results on the reliability index obtained by a correlation of the two halves and Cronbach's alpha. In the subscale DL the α is .94, the EP has an α of .88, in the BC the α is .92, in the IE the α is .83, the IM the α is .84 and in the DP it is α .84.

Procedure

This investigation was a descriptive, cross-sectional and correlational study carried out in a company in the Northeast of Mexico. Prior to the study itself, two working meetings were held with the company's trusted personnel explaining the subject of mobbing emphasizing negative consequences on the physical and psychological well-being of the worker and on the productivity of the company. Once the proposal was accepted, the application logistics were negotiated.

Conditions of application Each department head asked an employee during his work shift to participate in the investigation and to go to a room in the company where the person in charge of the study welcomed him, gave thanks for accepting to participate, explained the instrument and communicated the confidentiality, anonymity and absence of labor or personal consequences for the information that would be provided. The application was individual from Monday to Friday for two weeks. Sporadically two employees from the line of production would simultaneously come to the study.

Data Analysis

With the answers to the instrument a database was created to develop a statistical analysis that consisted mainly in obtaining the internal consistency, percentages and correlations to observe the significance in difference between categories.

Results

It is important to note that four cases were excluded by the statistical program due to lack of response to various items, so all the data presented are 187 subjects. Internal consistency was acceptable (Table 1).

Table 1. Internal Consistency

Workplace Harassment Strategies Questionnaire	Cronbach's Alpha
Complete instrument	.96
<i>Subscales</i>	
Job discredit	.81
Disruption of progress	.76
Blocking of communication	.91
Covert intimidation	.75
Manifested intimidation	.77
Personal discredit	.83

The perception of mobbing in workers at a global level and in their factors is reduced. (Table 2)

Table 2. Perception of mobbing

	Percentage
Global	5
<i>Factors</i>	
Job discredit	9
Disruption of progress	5
Blocking of communication	4
Covert intimidation	2
Manifested intimidation	10
Personal discredit	3

Temporary contract workers perceive much more mobbing than permanent contract workers, although the percentages are low (Table 3).

Table 3. Perception of mobbing by type of contract

	Permanent	Temporary
	Percentage	
Global	3	6
<i>Factors</i>		
Job discredit	6	10
Disruption of progress	3	6
Blocking of communication	3	5
Covert intimidation	1	2
Manifested intimidation	7	11
Personal discredit	2	4

The differences in percentages in the perception of mobbing between permanent and temporary contract workers were significant at a global level and in the factors of job stigma and lack of progress. However, they were not significant in blocking communication, covert intimidation, overt intimidation and job stigma. (Table 4).

Table 4. Differences in the significance of the perception of mobbing by type of contract

	Significance
Global	.02
<i>Factors</i>	
Job discredit	.02
Disruption of progress	.01
Blocking of communication	.05
Covert intimidation	.34
Manifested intimidation	.60
Personal discredit	.11

* p< .05

The perception of mobbing by job positions shows that the overall percentage is slightly higher in operators than in managers and differences in categories of mobbing (Table 5).

Table 5. Perception of mobbing by job post

Global	Operatos	Administrative
	Percentage	
Global	6	5
<i>Factors</i>		
Job discredit	9	8
Disruption of progress	6	5
Blocking of communication	4	4
Covert intimidation	2	1
Manifested intimidation	10	12
Personal discredit	4	1

However, the significance of the differences in the percentages previously indicated is only significant in the one corresponding to the personal discredit (Table 6).

Table 6. Differences in the perception of mobbing by work position

	Significance
Global	.70
<i>Factors</i>	
Job discredit	.93
Disruption of progress	.75
Blocking of communication	.73
Covert intimidation	.54
Manifested intimidation	.20
Personal discredit	.03

* p< 05

Discussion

The perception of mobbing of the Mexican manufacturing company's employees is lower than the figures reported by the International Labor Organization in 1998 and 2001, in the VI European Survey of Working Conditions of 2015 and the meta-analysis by Nielsen, et al. (2010). It is also smaller than data from Spain found by González and Graña (2007), by Piñuel and Oñate (2006) and Fernández et al. (2009) and by Uluğ and Beydoğan (2009) in Turkey. However, it is slightly higher than the results of the V European Survey of

Working Conditions (2012) and the meta-analysis by Nielsen, et al. (2010) when he combines the self-identification method with the criterion of the behavioral experience of bullying "at least once a week". In this study mobbing is in the range posed by Einarsen and Houge (2006).

The contrast of our data with other reports from Mexico shows that they are markedly smaller Bustos, 2015, Instituto de Aguascalentense de Mujeres (2011) and similar to those of Méndez, et al. (2011). The differences in percentages of perception of mobbing are probably influenced by the methodology of the studies (Nielsen, et al., 2010), cultural factors (Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004), the scarce knowledge of this phenomenon (Instituto Aguascalentense de Mujeres, 2011; Piñuel & Oñate, 2002), criteria for considering that mobbing exists (Piñuel & Oñate, 2006), victimization time, severity, consequences of mobbing, employee safety in the anonymity and confidentiality of the information provided and their beliefs about consequences for their permanence in employment.

In this study, temporary contract employees perceived significantly more mobbing than permanent contracts, a result that coincides with that of Moreno-Jiménez, et al (2006). An explanation is the labor instability of the temporary contract (Moreno-Jiménez, et al., 2006) because employees with this type of contract have no guarantee of permanence in the organization so they can be "target" of mobbing; In addition, in general the supply of work is scarce so these personnel have to resist sometimes adverse situations to maintain the position even for a certain time and cover personal needs. Our results are opposite to the report by Piñuel and Oñate (2002) of higher incidence of mobbing in employees by fixed contract. These inconsistent data indicate the need for more research to clarify other variables related to the type of employment contract, such as age, sex, job position, type of company, etc..

We find that the overall perception is slightly higher in operating employees than in managers and a finer analysis indicates that the significant differences are only in the category of personal discredit. Piñuel and Oñate (2006) found that administrative employees perceived significantly more mobbing than operators. These discordances are a continuation indicator of research that includes the variable of job position, type of organization and that they provide information about if the phenomenon is ascending, descending or lateral

Conclusions

The perception of mobbing of the workers of the manufacturing company of the Northeast of Mexico, is in ranges frequently reported in international research and low when comparing it with other Mexican studies. From our perspective, a single case of mobbing in an organization is a call for prevention programs in this area to try to counteract its dispersion and generate conditions for adequate physical, psychological, social, economic and labor well-being of workers and an organizational culture aimed to success.

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