

MORAL HARASSMENT AT WORK OF CARE PROFESSIONALS FOR VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

ASSÉDIO MORAL NO TRABALHO DOS PROFISSIONAIS DE ASSISTÊNCIA À VÍTIMAS DE VIOLÊNCIA CONTRA MULHERES

ACOSO MORAL EN EL TRABAJO DE PROFESIONALES DE LA ATENCIÓN AVÍCTIMAS DE VIOLENCIA CONTRA MUJERES

Karine David Andrade Santos*
psimulti@gmail.com

Joilson Pereira da Silva*
joilsonp@hotmail.com

Leonor María Cantera Espinosa**
leonor.cantera@uab.cat

*Universidade Federal de Sergipe, São Cristóvão, Sergipe, Brasil.

** Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona: Bellaterra-Barcelona, Barcelona, Espanha

Abstract

This research aimed to describe the moral harassment at work experienced by care professionals for victims of violence against women. For this project, this study was structured with a qualitative design, involving 12 care professionals for victims of violence against women in different care centers for these clients in the interior of Sergipe, Brazil, who were submitted to an interview script on moral harassment aspects. These interviews were recorded and transcribed, followed by the application of content analysis according to Bardin. The results found five categories of moral harassment in the following aspects: practices, authors of abusive behaviors, situations of violence in the workplace and consequences for the worker. The professionals surveyed experienced the following moral harassment practices: devaluation, defamation and intimidation that materialized in the execution of the tasks, time of arrival and departure from work, formal and informal meetings, decision making and fundraising for work activities. These abusive behaviors were carried out by the hierarchical superiors and entailed consequences for physical and mental health and, mainly, for the work motivation of the harassed. Thus, in view of the results found, it is fundamental to implement preventive and intervention strategies aimed at moral harassment in these spaces.

KEYWORDS: Moral harassment at work; Care professional for victims of violence; Working conditions.

Resumo

Esta pesquisa teve como objetivo descrever o assédio moral no trabalho vivenciado por profissionais de atendimento a vítimas de violência contra a mulher. Para este projeto, este estudo foi estruturado com delineamento qualitativo, envolvendo 12 profissionais de atendimento a vítimas de violência contra a mulher em diferentes centros de atendimento a essas clientes no interior de Sergipe, Brasil, os quais foram submetidos a um roteiro de entrevista sobre aspectos de assédio moral. Essas entrevistas foram gravadas e transcritas, seguidas da aplicação da análise de conteúdo segundo Bardin. Os resultados encontraram cinco categorias de assédio moral nos seguintes aspectos: práticas, autores de comportamentos abusivos, situações de violência no trabalho e consequências para o trabalhador. Os profissionais pesquisados vivenciaram as seguintes práticas de assédio moral: desvalorização, difamação e intimidação que se materializaram na execução das tarefas, horários de entrada e saída do trabalho,

reuniões formais e informais, tomada de decisão e arrecadação de recursos para as atividades laborais. Esses comportamentos abusivos eram praticados pelos superiores hierárquicos e acarretavam consequências para a saúde física e mental e, principalmente, para a motivação para o trabalho dos assediados. Assim, diante dos resultados encontrados, é fundamental a implantação de estratégias preventivas e de intervenção voltadas ao assédio moral nesses espaços.

PALAVRAS CHAVE: Assédio moral no trabalho; Profissional de atendimento a vítimas de violência; Condições de trabalho.

Resumen

Esta investigación tuvo como objetivo describir el acoso moral en el trabajo que sufren los profesionales de la atención a las víctimas de violencia contra la mujer. Para este proyecto, este estudio se estructuró con un diseño cualitativo, involucrando a 12 profesionales de atención a víctimas de violencia contra la mujer en diferentes centros de atención a estas clientas en el interior de Sergipe, Brasil, quienes fueron sometidos a un guión de entrevista sobre aspectos de acoso moral. Estas entrevistas fueron grabadas y transcritas, seguidas de la aplicación del análisis de contenido según Bardin. Los resultados encontraron cinco categorías de acoso moral en los siguientes aspectos: prácticas, autores de conductas abusivas, situaciones de violencia en el lugar de trabajo y consecuencias para el trabajador. Los profesionales encuestados experimentaron las siguientes prácticas de acoso moral: desvalorización, difamación e intimidación que se materializó en la ejecución de las tareas, hora de llegada y salida del trabajo, reuniones formales e informales, toma de decisiones y captación de fondos para actividades laborales. Estos comportamientos abusivos fueron llevados a cabo por los superiores jerárquicos y conllevaron consecuencias para la salud física y mental y, principalmente, para la motivación laboral del acosado. Así, a la vista de los resultados encontrados, es fundamental implementar estrategias de prevención e intervención dirigidas al acoso moral en estos espacios.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Acoso moral en el trabajo; Atención profesional a víctimas de violencia; Condiciones laborales.

1. Introduction

Moral harassment is materialized in attitudes, behaviors, gestures and words, practiced in a repetitive and prolonged way, which affect the dignity and physical and mental integrity and brings offenses to personality of the target of the aggression. It exposes the person to humiliating situations and can cause the employee to leave and deteriorate the working conditions (NASCIMENTO, 2009). The literature highlights that this practice causes damage to mental health and the occupational functioning of targets, such as depression and anxiety (BOUDRIAS; TREPANIÉR; SALIN, 2020), dismissal and dissatisfaction with work (PURPORA et al., 2019) and suicidal ideation (LEACH; POYSER; BUTTERWORTH, 2017). In view of these consequences, this workplace bullying is a point of attention in the service environment for women who suffer violence from their partners because professionals in this area are in a situation with a high emotional load that requires the practice of constancy, patience and a high degree of tolerance to frustration. It is an activity that causes tiredness, pain and that never seems to be sufficiently well finished (CANTERA; CANTERA, 2014).

This type of contact exposes these workers to experiences of vicarious trauma or secondary traumatic stress, characterized by intrusive symptoms of thoughts about the demands they receive, avoidant attitudes towards situations that refer to the work theme, and physiological activation represented by insomnia, crying, concentration problems, among others (LLANOS; ARÓN, 2004). Different studies aim to understand how professionals who assist people who are victims of traumatic and/or violent situations

experience this type of disorder. Thus, a comparative research involving psychologists in care for child victims of violence and psychologists in the other areas indicated that the former scored higher on intrusive, avoidant and physiological activation symptoms (GUERRA; PEREDA, 2015). Another study carried out with professionals from the Mexican and Central American refugee care centers found that these workers avoided thoughts, feelings and discussions about traumatic events. In addition, they experienced insomnia, concentration problems and intrusive thoughts about the care provided (LUSK; TERRAZAS, 2015). This traumatization or secondary traumatic stress is closely related to the thematic contamination that leads to violent practices in the work relations of the professionals in care for the victims of domestic violence (LLANOS; ARÓN, 2004).

In association with the type of demand and the physical and psychological consequences of the contact with the phenomenon of violence, the care professionals working at the anti-violence centers experience the reproduction of the demand attended in the work relations through harassing behaviors (CANTERA; CANTERA, 2014). These findings are presented in the study by Quiñones, Cantera and Ocampo (2013), conducted with professionals who work in care services for domestic violence. According to the aforementioned study, the experiences of intimidation, devaluation and economic abuse were present in the relations with hierarchical superiors. Moreover, it could be observed that this fact was naturalized, invisible and denied within a context of abandonment and passivity.

2. Moral harassment at work

It is a circular, progressive and insidious phenomenon. It begins in a harmless way when battered people do not show offense and handle the situation in a playful way. The attacks are multiplying until the victim feels trapped and inferior. This sequence of abusive behaviors by the harassing person mobilizes anxiety in the target, which provokes pathological behaviors that serve as justifications for the perpetrator to continue the abuse (HIRIGOYEN, 2011). The following core elements make up the definition of moral harassment at work: negative interpersonal behavior, including the purpose perceived by the target and negative consequences, the purpose of the practice, and the repetition of actions (CLAYBOURN; SPINNER; MALCOM, 2014).

The following moral harassment practices are most common: covert and subtle disapproval of any behavior of the target, repeated and continued criticism of the victim's professional capacity, misreporting and incomplete reporting of services, goals or meetings, resulting in the incomplete or mistaken execution of services, appropriation of the victim's ideas, isolation of the victim from socializing with co-workers and social activities, among others (NASCIMENTO, 2009). In the early stages of moral harassment at work, it is common for the individual to go through a phase called malaise, during which he feels as if he were a nobody. Emotions are characterized by negative thoughts, life loses meaning and the person feels guilt and shame. When the individual's self-confidence becomes fragile, repetitive and recurrent thoughts arise, hitting their professional capacity. The victims' thoughts are oriented towards the harassment in the violent acts experienced and, hence, remain focused on their own pain, causing isolation within the circle of family and friends. This violent practice causes losses in the professional practice and violates fundamental rights, such as health, work, dignity, equality and personal integrity (FREITAS; HELOANI; BARRETO, 2008).

In order to understand the mobilizing aspects of this practice in the workplace, the elements that cross the dynamics of the current labor market need further clarification. Thus, globalization and the competitive climate driven by the market and the rise of financial capital entail implications that also directly affect workers, such as: demand for higher productivity with lower expenses; outsourcing associated with low wages and long hours, loss of autonomy and task burden, favoring attrition as a consequence of the work process, as well as the trend to the development of a scenario of work intolerance that leads to the appearance of workplace harassment (BARRETO; HELOANI, 2015). The

precariousness of work also emerges as a favorable factor for the occurrence of this violence in this environment. This finding is reinforced in a study carried out with workers from the Family Health Strategy (FHS), in which an association was observed between a work environment with excessive pressure for productivity and without institutional protection and the occurrence of harassment (PIONER, 2012). Furthermore, it is known the population most affected by harassment in this environment consists of black and homosexual people, people with special needs, workers over 40 years of age, people with repetitive strain injuries and women (HIRIGOYEN, 2011).

What the female working population is concerned, in a study by Campos-Serna et al. (2012), in Spain, women are more likely to work without contract or under worse contractual relations, greater exposure to psychosocial risks and situations of high effort/low reward, subject to sexual harassment and discrimination at work. Such risks become more pronounced in the industrial sector. Gender also becomes a point for analysis in relation to harassment at work when a study by Escartín, Salin, & Rodríguez-Carballeira (2013) on this subject with men and women indicates that women perceive harassment actions as isolation and emotional abuse as more serious than men.

These abusive situations at work usually entail losses in the self-confidence and self-esteem of the victim (ANTUNES; CARLOTTO; STREY, 2012) and lead to the occurrence of mental disorders in the target of the aggressions (INVITTI, 2012; POOLI; MONTEIRO, 2018). There exists a positive and significant relationship between job demands and physical exhaustion within high levels of harassment at work, with a boosting effect of this violent practice on the job demands, physical exhaustion and the occurrence of depression (DEVONISH, 2013). The same is true between the experience of moral harassment in this environment and the occurrence of depression and anxiety (LAC et al. 2012; PRESTI; PAPPONI; LANDOLFI, 2019; YING-YING et al., 2020).

This practice leads to lack of concentration, insomnia, nightmares, irritation, melancholy, apathy, sadness, depression and suicidal ideas (ANTUNES; CARLOTTO; STREY, 2012). Regarding the occurrence of the latter, in research by Nielsen et al. (2015) with about 1,000 workers in Norway, it was revealed that harassment at work is positively related to later suicidal ideas. This is due to the fact that this phenomenon is a form of social exclusion at work that makes up a form of isolation within a social group, thus constituting a predictor for suicidal ideas. These findings are reinforced in other studies that point to a significant impact on the wellbeing of the people harassed, who experience anxiety, depression, irritation and psychosomatic symptoms (VERKUIL; ATASAYI; MOLENDIJK, 2015; NIEDL, 1996).

The targets of moral harassment at work, based on a study carried out in Spain, may also present greater emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, lack of personal fulfillment, higher levels of somatic complaints and behaviors characteristic of trauma victims (GONZÁLEZ-TRUJIQUE; GÓMEZ, 2013). These pressures entail exhaustion for the resistance of the organism, which leads to functional and organic disorders. This state of chronic stress can also be translated into anxiety disorders and a state of constant and permanent hypervigilance (QUIÑONES; CANTERA; OCAMPO, 2013). Given the physical and emotional consequences and the nature and risks to mental health of professionals assisting people in situations of violence, this research was aimed at describing the moral harassment at work experienced by care professionals for victims of violence against women.

3. Method

3.1. Sample

The sample consisted of 12 professionals active in direct care to victims of violence against women. These participants have an average age of 35 years and provide this kind of services at different care

centers in the interior of the State of Sergipe, Brazil. The professional characterization of the researched population was as follows: two social educators, five social workers, three psychologists and two lawyers allocated between 1 CREAS (Reference Center Specialized in Assistance Social), 2 CRAMs (Reference Centers for Assistance to Women) from the interior of Sergipe and DEAM (Specialized Police Services for Women), located in DAGV (Police Station for Assistance to Vulnerable Groups) in the city of Aracaju. Participants had undergraduate degrees, two of whom had broad graduate degrees sensu in their respective areas of activity and found themselves in this type of rendering of services. Convenience sampling was used, based on the professionals' personal availability to participate in the research.

The instrument applied was the interview script and the contact with the participants of this project was intermediated by representatives of four care centers that attend to demands related to violence against women, aiming to map the number of professionals specialized in providing this kind of services who would be willing to participate in this study. After this stage, date and location were scheduled with the professionals who attend to victims of violence against women to conduct the interviews. The study was carried out after the participants had signed the Free and Informed Consent Form, which contained a brief description of the purposes of this research.

The results were interpreted through Bardin's content analysis (2009). In line with this author, the categorial method proposed by Bardin was applied, so that the core of the message written in the interviews was determined in stages, as indicated below: pre-analysis, exploration of the material and treatment of results.

4. Results and discussion

To organize the study findings, the denomination of the categories revealed in this analytical process is linked to the constituent elements of this violence, identified in the research environment, such as practices, authorship, situations of abusive conduct, reasons for the harassing circumstances and the consequences of moral harassment for the worker.

The data presented below were subject to more in-depth reading through inference and interpretation (BARDIN, 2009), whose results are presented in the following categories below.

4.1. Moral Harassment Practices

This category of analysis aims to present and discuss the practices of moral harassment reported by the participants of this research.

Moral harassment is materialized by the manifestation of abusive conduct, expressed through gestures, words and behaviors, in a systematic and repeated way, whose main support for this practice is the abuse of power (HIRIGOYEN, 2011). In this work environment, this category was revealed through the exercise of words and behaviors within the labor relations that jeopardized the quality of work, work capacity, personal dignity and self-esteem of the professionals surveyed.

As a way of attacking dignity, in the research environment, devaluation was practiced through artifice or expressions by the aggressor who raised doubts on the quality of the work the targets performed, as described next. In addition to hitting the target's work capacity, the moral harassment also impacted the dignity of the harassed person, as exemplified in the following statements:

"... And let's just say, the other professional who was from the area of psychology also, he did not value what I was going to do How do you say Wanting to do more and you showing your work and the other does not value it ... "(Participant 8).

"... He always crossed out, crossed out my notes, tugged at the little ones and left impolite messages" (Participant 4).

"... They liked to say that I did not know how to do anything, because it is something very simple there ..." (Participant 6).

Another motivation for conducts of devaluation is the gender issue, as detected in a research environment with a mostly male staff. The following discourse show how women are one of the most affected populations by moral harassment at work (HIRIGOYEN, 2011; LÓPEZ-CABARCOS; VÁZQUEZ-RODRÍGUEZ; GIEURE, 2017) and exposed to situations of discrimination in this environment (CAMPOS-SERNA et al., 2012). It also points out how intolerance of women's presence, within a typically masculine environment, authorizes the practice of this form of violence (BARRETO; HELOANI, 2015):

"... It withdraws our entire professional merit for being a woman... So she's a woman, she's not competent, so she doesn't know, she doesn't do, she is unable to..." (Participant 5).

Another assault against dignity found was libel, undertaken by discrediting the personal dignity, according to the following interview excerpt:

"The previous coordinator, when this approach team arrived, she went to talk to them: Take care with these three, do not get involved with these three, because they're no good" (Participant 1).

Furthermore, in this subcategory, it was verified that the abuse of power was present, expressively and clearly, through coercive and intimidating expressions in which the targets were put in a paralyzing situation and cornered, revealing one of the processes occurred in moral harassment, characterized by the impediment of the target of action (ARENAS et al., 2015; HIRIGOYEN, 2011). The following statement exemplifies this question:

"You are defending your coordinator, but next month, if you do not do the production, they will be queuing at GBarbosa I witnessed this a lot" (Participant 2).

One of the forms of intimidation, which involved risks to physical integrity, was experienced by the participant within a predominantly male environment, which reinforces the predominant exposure to moral harassment in women (CAMPOS-SERNA et al., 2012; MISAWA; ANDREWS; JENKINS, 2019; ROUSE et al., 2016), as pointed out next:

"... I waited for the right time to go up and talk to the boss to report, to forward and make arrangement and he started working in the same sector as I and he worked armed. I, of course, wore the gun, but it was inside the car, in that case, and he would put it on the table. Then, when he put the gun like that, I already saw that it was like something he wanted to intimidate me, I was afraid"(Participant 5).

Another expression of abusive conduct found in labor relations was the humiliation, which is the degradation of the individual's self-esteem linked to shame, embarrassment and the experience of being treated with contempt. And this also concerns the sense of injustice for being offended and diminished by the other (REKNES; GLAMBEK; EINARSEN, 2020; TROMBETTA; ZANELLI, 2010), as exemplified in the following excerpt:

"Sometimes you hear certain things, which you do not deserve right ?! Even the secretary herself, you know, here comes the humiliation, here comes what you need, so you have to do everything I say"(Participant 3).

Less frequently, isolation and refusal to communicate at informal moments were also found within the interview reports, as discussed in the statement below:

"So social isolation, as I said. The small groups isolate themselves here, who are chitchatting ... in the cafe" (Participant 4).

As another method of harassment found in this research environment, the purposive degradation of working conditions took the form of the intentional and constant attribution of functions that required higher qualification from the target (FIGUEREDO, 2012) as exposed in the following case:

"The person would put, I do not know, like, the demands I was not adapted to, which I did not have much affinity with 'That's all, will you do it or not ??'. Then he always put that" (Participant 6).

Within the classification of harassment methods, according to Hirigoyen (2011), the exercise of devaluation, defamation, humiliation and coercion are located within the category of attack against dignity. The insulation conducts are located on the axis of isolation and refusal to communicate and the attribution of tasks superior to the professional's competence to the level of intentional degradation of working conditions. These results of the harassment methods found are in line with the research carried out by Quiñones, Cantera and Ocampo (2013) involving care professionals for victims of violence against women.

Thus, through the reality presented in this category, the professionals surveyed were subject to violent work practices that affected their personal dignity, the conditions of this environment and the labor relations, through practices of devaluation, coercion, intimidation, humiliation and tasks beyond their competences. Such violent expressions were embedded in the categories of attacks against dignity, isolation and refusal to communicate and deliberate deterioration of working conditions (CHIRILÁ; CONSTANTIN, 2013; HIRIGOYEN, 2011). Despite the theoretical considerations by Arón and Llanos (2004) that indicate thematic contamination as the vehicle to produce violence in the relationships between health care professionals and the violence caused by the experience of negative emotions in the contact with the care demand, it is verified that this form of understanding cannot be fully applied to the results in this category of research. The disputes and abuse of power in public services (BOBROFF; MARTINS, 2013; HURLEY et al., 2016; NGUYEN, et al., 2017) and the tagging of the target as an inferior subject (BARRETO; HELOANI, 2015), whether due to gender or hierarchical position, implicit or explicitly, are the main drivers of harassment practices found in this field.

To proceed with the broader understanding of this practice in the workplace in this study, the next category presents the agents of these abusive behaviors in the work environment.

4.2. The Authors of Moral Harassment in the Workplace

The present category of objective, identify the authors of the practices of moral harassment reported by the participants of this research.

The authors of moral harassment in the workplace correspond to the identification of the origin and direction of abusive practice at the place of study. These abusive behaviors predominantly came from hierarchical superiors, characterizing descending harassment. This is the most frequent type of harassment and exhibited in highly hierarchical structures (FREITAS; HELOANI; BARRETO, 2008; PILCH; TURSKA, 2015), also being the most found type in a care environment for victims of violence (QUIÑONES; CANTERA; OCAMPO, 2013).

Horizontal harassment was also present, which is a form of violence practiced by colleagues and tends to emerge in groups that tend to level the individuals and have difficulty to live with difference, motivated by feelings of envy or personal rivalries (HIRIGOYEN, 2011). Less frequently, mixed harassment was found when the superior exerted manipulation together with colleagues in this work environment (QUIÑONES; CANTERA; OCAMPO, 2013). Thus, within descending harassment, these forms of abuse of the hierarchical superiors' power and respect are more recurrent in the statements, as follows:

"It's, no, it's hierarchy, right? As I said, that was the Secretary's posture, she was the head of office, then she became our coordinator, so she followed the same posture she learned there at the Secretary, being the secretary's head of office" (Participant 2).

"One case in which I cried, I really cried was that of a boy who was appointed to a high position in the Safety Secretariat ... " (Participant 5).

"She's my boss, right?!" (Participant 3).

In other reports, harassing interactions from colleagues were found, which is called horizontal harassment. The following statements describe the situation mainly involving the entry of commissioned employees:

"They are colleagues who are appointed, these people are not part of the staff, they are passing by" (Participant 5).

"Co-workers" (Participant 7).

Finally, abusive conduct in professional relations was detected which came from work colleagues and superiors, representing mixed harassment:

"It was her and the trainees ... we were the victim of their persecution" (Participant 1).

Thus, as outlined in this item of the discussion, downward harassment predominates within the relationship of the care providers with the victims of violence against women, so that the hierarchy itself provides unequal power between superior and subordinate (ALSHAWUSH; HALLETT; BRADBURY-JONES, 2020; FIGUEREDO, 2012), thus permitting the former's abuse of his prerogatives within that higher position. Next, horizontal harassment figures as the origin and direction of this abusive practice. As the least constant authorship, there is mixed harassment, resulting from the superior's manipulation of colleagues (QUIÑONES; CANTERA; OCAMPO, 2013). After exposing the main authors of this violence in the research environment, the spaces within the work dynamics can be appointed where these agents practiced this abusive conduct, whose circumstances are reported in the next point of this debate.

4.3. Moral Harassment Events at Work

This section of analysis aims to present the situations of occurrence of moral harassment practices in the workplace pointed out by the respondents. Events of moral harassment in the workplace took place during professional practice, in control and administrative management practices and in organizational changes.

The submission to any work condition and the competitive and individualistic nuances and lack of recognition of the other were evident in the situations of moral harassment that, within this research, were located in the execution of the tasks, fundraising for the work activities, entry and exit times, formal and informal meetings and decision making. Hence, according to the following reports, the harassment found space during the execution of tasks which, as indicated at another moment in the discussion, refers to the degradation of the working conditions, through the attribution of tasks superior to or different from their professional practice:

"... The person would put, I do not know, like, the demands I was not adapted to, which I did not have much affinity with. As the area of law is a very wide area and then I believe that the person did so because he knew that I did not adapt well to that area and then ... "That's all, will you do it or not??"... Then he always put that ..." (Participant 6).

"... So, I would stand back, stand back because it was the coordination. So that frustrated me there. And he had other assignments that were not in psychology ... " (Participant 8).

To understand these events, it should be pointed out that entering the context in which the situations of moral harassment occur means facing one of the sides of the labor relations that are totally marked by competitive, individualistic, disrespectful characteristics and lack of acknowledgement of the other (ATTICK, 2017; BRADFORD; SHIELDS, 2017). It means assessing the level of insecurity workers

experience in view of the fact that the precariousness of work (VAN DEN BRANDE et al., 2016), in all its aspects, causes them to submit to any employment condition as they are privileged, that is, being in the condition of employee is a reason to be blackmailed as a threat of unemployment (BARRETO; HELOANI, 2015).

Furthermore, as moments of acceptance of any circumstance in the practice of the profession, it could also be observed that fundraising was hampered by the avoidance of exposing oneself to a situation of harassment by one of the participants, according to the statement below, which refers to one of these times:

"When I came in, I was campaigning. So, today I avoid campaigning ... because there is no material, right?! I avoid it because what you hear in the city hall is not worth it" (Participant 3).

In turn, during the meetings, there was space for the practice of attacking professional dignity, as confirmed in the following account:

"But then, she was not relieving, like, giving some opinion at some meeting, and she was not paying attention to what I was talking about, not feeling respected as a professional" (Participant 2).

As an additional element for a more violent management model, the new management models require high performance levels from their employees, as well as the renouncement or detachment from personal and family life (FIGUEREDO, 2012), as indicated by Participant 1, who was submitted to a strict control of entry and departure times from work due to the possible delays the family obligations caused:

"When we clock in, it's all about the time lady. It's all about the time here. It's not about the execution of the work, because the team performs the work here very well. So, in that sense we've never had any problem. Now the clock, my dear".

In addition, one of the situations, as pointed out by Freitas, Heloani and Barreto (2008) and Salin and Hoel (2011), which leads to harassment, is the entry of new members into the organization, as indicated in the following statements:

"... So they started making small groups to talk about the effective employees. So, for example, we could not come today, but the coordinator was not there. My dear, the trainees immediately took the mobile phone, sent a message to the coordinator, when we arrived the next day, she would say: "You did not come yesterday, I already know, why didn't you tell? "So they kept on creating intrigues"(Participant 1).

"... ah, it was another person, another boy, another employee who was responsible for this and had good contact with the policeHe started to complain, saying that it was a man thing, "I would not know why a woman, because women will not learn, because women do not pursue things ... (Participant 5).

In the same field of the conflict among employees, harassment is present in decision making, as attested by the participant's response when questions were asked about the situations in which these abusive behaviors took place:

"It is, at the moment when I was mastering the situation, when I was managing a situation ..." (Participant 5).

The triggering situations were detected during professional practice, in control and administrative management practices and in the organizational changes. The organizations are scenarios for individual and group interpretations and actions in view of the work structures and interpersonal and intergroup relations, and can thus constitute conditions and situations that contribute to the occurrence of the moral harassment phenomenon at work (FREITAS; HELOANI; BARRETO, 2008; PHEKO; MONTEIRO, SEGOPOLLO, 2017). In order to substantiate these harassment practices in the labor context, the research participants provided explanations detailed in the next category to be presented below and the repercussions of this abusive conduct for the worker, considering aspects related to his work life, physical health and mental health, will be pointed out in the following item at the last.

4.4. Reasons for the Occurrence of Moral Harassment

In this study, the reasons for the occurrence of moral harassment refer to the justifications the participants reported for locating the abusive conduct they were exposed to in this environment. The reasons for the practices of bullying were framed in two aspects: organizational factors and personal factors. The organizational factors consisted of the abuse of power and the rejection of women in positions of command.

The reasons for the occurrence of harassment are situated predominantly within an individual perspective in which the personality of the target / aggressor or the professional moment of the target of violence are the aspects associated with the causes for this practice (ANTUNES; CARLOTTO; STREY, 2012). Thus, as an organizational factor, the abuse of power exercised by representatives of municipal entities was recorded as one of the reported reasons for the practice of moral harassment, according to the following statements, which also reveal the points of instability and tension that lead to a degraded and insecure work environment (BARRETO; HELOANI, 2015; VAN DER BRANDE et al., 2016):

"According to her, in the case of that person, she said it was due to management pressure, like, how could she be a CC if she did not do it, she was going to get fired, you see? So, because of the pressure, according to her" (Participant 1).

Another organizational factor one of the participants raised was the rejection of the presence of women in positions of command as reasons for the occurrence of harassment in their work environment. This picture of gender as the main point of discussion for this practice was strongly present in the discourse of participant 5 and this reality, once again, reinforces how women are discriminated against at work (CAMPOS-SERNA et al., 2012; LÓPEZ-CABARCOS; VÁZQUEZ-RODRÍGUEZ, GIEURE, 2017), and one of the main targets of this violent practice in this environment (HIRIGOYEN, 2011):

"Right, when I was in control of the situation, when I was managing a situation. " "That had to be a woman"

The emergence of this type of individualizing understanding described in the following reports refers us to the research by Garbin and Fischer (2012), which mentions how the media exposes the phenomenon as a relationship problem between two people: one who attacks and the other who is attacked. This is clear in the following excerpts:

"...as the person is silent, the person does not cause trouble. Then there are people who take advantage to discharge the problems on one person, a poor guy there, you see?! (Participant 7).

"Because she does not do the work, she did not want me to do it so as, let's say, not to stand out. So she used to make a fuss" (Participant 8).

It should also be clarified that this individualizing analysis of moral harassment also puts forward the individuals as the main responsables for their living and health conditions, thus shifting the focus from the collective to the individual and neglecting issues regarding work organization and abuse of power (ANTUNES; CARLOTTO; STREY, 2012; ARENAS et al., 2015). Thus, based on this individual premise, the interviewees outline the following statements, which either refer to the personality of the perpetrator of the aggression, as shown below:

"I think that the management is insecure, you see? "(Participant 4).

"No, I think it's the posture of the person himself" (Participant 2).

Or link the harassment to the inexperience in the target's work:

"... because it was, I think, because of my fear of starting really, of being a beginner, of thinking that I would not be able to solve that problem" (Participant 6).

In view of the statements exposed, the organizational factors are linked to issues of power and gender, expressed by the abuse of prerogatives by superiors and by the rejection of women in command situations. Nevertheless, the individualizing understanding of this practice is considerably clearer in the reported statements, which sometimes attribute the motives to the personality of the perpetrator of violence, and sometimes to the personality of the target of the violence.

4.5. Consequences of Moral Harassment for the Worker

This category of analysis aims to describe the consequences on physical and mental health of the bullying practices that the participants were exposed. The consequences of moral harassment for the worker point to the results of the participants' exposure to violence in their work environment. Among the losses found, motivation and professional climate were the most affected elements in the work environment. These negative effects will influence the working conditions, causing insecurity and the consequent attempt to leave work; and the participants' health, who will report experiences of negative emotions such as sadness and anger and psychosomatic symptoms such as migraine, hair loss and back pain.

Among the negative effects for the work activities the participants highlighted, motivation was the main element affected, causing a decrease in the quality of the service provided and implications for the execution of the tasks that are linked to the researches carried out by Carter et al. (2013) and Chan-Mok, Caponecchia and Winder (2014) in which being exposed to harassment in the workplace entails significant consequences for the respondents' motivation and performance. The following excerpts show this aspect:

"It affected the motivation, like, sometimes, I wanted to come and when I thought: Damn I'm going to have to meet that woman the other day, my God! It's just that, like, I was annoyed, I did not do the work well, I hardly did the groups, I know users were not to blame for that" (Participant 1).

"So I would write reports, sometimes I was unable to, I would block ..." (Participant 8).

It was verified that the workplace climate also suffered losses in view of the degree of tension and mistrust experienced in the workplace, as signaled in the expression below:

"... Work climate is because everyone used to work apprehensive and you also end up losing the motivation to work, right? That was it, motivation and the climate like ..." (Participant 2).

This drop in the quality of the work climate fits into the weakening of working conditions (FREITAS; HELOANI; BARRETO, 2008). In addition to discussing this type of injury, the following excerpt reminds us of the target's intention to leave, which confirms findings from the others researches (GLAMBEK et al, 2014; SRIVASTAVA; AGARWAL, 2020). It is worth noting that, despite the losses in her work, the interviewee acts in a labor market context in which she undergoes different working conditions to be employed.

"So, the professional climate gets pretty bad, right? If the coordinator who is the head of the team, woman, causes that much intrigue among the employees I just did not ask to leave because I could not do this, you know how difficult it is to get a job" (Participant 1).

Discussing the consequences for the interviewees' mental health, in turn, is linked to the understanding that the vilification of the working conditions exposes the professionals' lack of control over their own work, affecting their emotions and entailing negative repercussions for their physical and mental health (FREITAS; HELOANI; BARRETO, 2008). Its means deepening the discussion on one of the phases of harassment at work called malaise, when the harassed person experiences sad thoughts, negative self-assessment and exhaustion (LIANG, 2021; PENG et al., 2016), as evidenced in the following statements:

"... I was sad at first, very sad, I spent up to, really, a very sad five months, you know ?!" (Participant 7).

"So it's bad, you get super down" (Participant 3).

"... we get a little worn, come home like that, tired, you want to take a shower and sleep, you know?" (Participant 2).

"... sometimes I'd lose sleep, woman, because of that. I had a lot of migraine and I could not do the job well" (Participant 1).

"... Oh dear ... the spine hurts ... a lot of hair loss ..." (Participant 3).

"I lost a lot of weight, I got lean ..." (Participant 6).

This aspect of mental health problems also leads to reports of losses for the targets' physical health, such as the occurrence of migraine, insomnia, hair loss and weight loss, which refers to the damage to mental and physical health as reported by other studies (HURLEY et al., 2016; NAUMAN; MALIK; JALIL, 2019). The exposure to moral harassment follows a trajectory that can entail harmful effects for the targets' physical health. Moreover, as outlined in this category, these symptoms refer to the set of losses these participants experienced in their working conditions, represented by the decline in motivation and professional climate, and the experience of negative emotions and mental exhaustion.

5. Conclusion

This experience was evidenced by the results listed in this study, which portrayed the practices, factors, situations, authors and consequences of moral harassment for these workers. Thus, the findings showed that this professional group is exposed to abusive conduct in their work environment (QUÍÑONES; CANTERA; OCAMPO, 2013). The presence of moral harassment in the work relations of care professionals for victims of violence against women exposes a reality permeated by practices of devaluation and the violation of personal and professional dignity, engendered by the abuse of power and the definition of targets as inferior people. Hence, for the sake of this study, thematic contamination does not fully explain the phenomenon observed.

These violent practices in the workplace, mostly coming from hierarchical superiors, entailed negative consequences for physical and mental health and, more clearly, it is verified that motivation and professional climate are the two elements the moral harassment at work affects most. These losses entail repercussions for the execution of tasks and safety at work. In short, these visible and invisible risks lead to the worker's illness (FREITAS; HELOANI; BARRETO, 2008), as evidenced in this study by the characteristics of the experience of the malaise phase in response to the harassment at work and by the manifestation of psychosomatic symptoms.

Thus, this research revealed a work environment in which the experience of abusive conduct in professional relations is little discussed as, in accordance with Castellón (2011), research in this area has been focused on investigating harassment in the work relations of workers in organizations such as banks, hospitals, schools and different companies. In view of the invisibility of the subject, this study gave voice to professionals immersed in harassing labor relations, whose harmful consequences were present in the working conditions and in the workers' mental and physical health. In addition, most participants' individualizing understanding of moral harassment in the workplaces investigated demonstrates the need to construct and disseminate studies of this nature, as it is essential to clarify how abuse of power and organizational issues promote the increase of violence at work.

In view of the forms of violence observed in this work environment and the consequences for the workers' health, public policies or programs need to be constructed that are aimed at preventing harassment in these spaces and/or implementing intervention strategies for the places where this violence

at work is present. In addition, the institutional promotion of meetings to discuss the demands met and the labor relations are other aspects to promote these professionals' well-being. As a guideline for the actions suggested, self-care figures as a tool to prevent harassment in work relations and a strategy for health promotion and care (CANTERA; CANTERA, 2014). This finding is reinforced in a study among psychologists, whose results identified that professionals with a higher frequency of self-care behaviors present higher levels of quality of life and personal accomplishment, as well as lower levels of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, anxious symptoms and secondary traumatic stress (VIO et al., 2011).

Finally, this study presents limitations that can be overcome in future studies. The first one is related to the lack of an instrument to indicate the presence of symptoms related to secondary traumatic stress in the participants, so as to relate the results collected to the presence of harassment practices reported during the interview. The second restriction of this scientific resource is the inexistence of questions that explore this professional group's experience of attending to victims of violence against women. The third point is linked to the absence of questions in the survey to understand how ways of dealing with conflicts in this environment can strengthen the occurrence of harassment in these labor relations. The fourth limitation relates to the lack of knowledge on the prevention and health promotion practices the participants and the research institutions undertake.

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Endereço para correspondência:

Nome Karine David Andrade Santos

email psimulti@gmail.com



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