

PSYCHOLOGICAL TERROR AS TODAY'S TSUNAMI OF THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE FEMALE NURSE, MALE NURSE AND MIDWIFE'S PROFESSIONS – RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE

TERROR PSYCHICZNY JAKO WSPÓŁCZESNE TSUNAMI ŚRODOWISKA PRACY NA PRZYKŁADZIE ZAWODU PIELEŃNIARKI, PIELEŃNIARZA I POŁOŻNEJ – PERSPEKTYWA BADAWCZA

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ABSTRACT

Aim. The purpose of this publication is an attempt to show the scale and scope, as well as forms, manifestations and consequences of mobbing in the group of female nurses, male nurses and midwives working in open and closed treatment in Poznan hospitals.

Material and methods. The test results were collected by the diagnostic survey using a questionnaire survey and a narrative and free interview in the group of 42 randomly selected employees.

Results. The ¾ (i.e. 66.7%) of the total researched persons experienced mobbing in the workplace. In turn, based on H. Leymann's criterion, 12% of respondents out of the total surveyed were considered as psychological abuse cases. In the opinion of respondents it is vertical mobbing, i.e. mobbers are superiors (83.3%). Victims of mobbing have usually experienced harassment and abuse, personal intimidation and physical violence at work. The most common 'tools' of psychological violence are: excessive workload, ignoring, excluding or boycotting.

Conclusions. People experiencing psychological abuse frequently meet vertical mobbing, which may show dysfunctions in the process of human resources management and the necessary need for remodelling the organization culture in the workplaces. This remodelling will be the form of implementing anti-mobbing prevention in the researched environment.

KEYWORDS: mobbing, psychological terror, female nurses, male nurses, midwives.

STRESZCZENIE

Cel. Celem niniejszej publikacji jest próba ukazania skali i zasięgu oraz form, przejawów, jak również konsekwencji zjawiska mobbingu w grupie zawodowej pielęgniarek, pielęgniarzy i położnych, zatrudnionych w lecznictwie otwartym i zamkniętym w szpitalach na terenie miasta Poznania.

Materiał i metody. Wyniki badań zebrano metodą sondażu diagnostycznego z użyciem kwestionariusza ankiety i wywiadu narracyjnego oraz swobodnego w grupie 42 losowo wybranych pracowników.

Wyniki. W opinii ¾ (tj. 66,7% wskazań) ogółu badanych osób doświadczyli oni w swoim miejscu pracy zjawiska mobbingu. Z kolei bazując na kryterium H. Leymanna, za przypadki dręczenia psychicznego spośród ogółu badanych uznano 12 procent respondentów. W opinii respondentów występuje mobbing wertykalny, tzn. mobberami są przełożeni (83,3% wskazań). Ofiary mobbingu najczęściej doświadczyły nękania i dręczenia poprzez pracę, osobistego zastraszania oraz przemocy fizycznej. Najczęściej stosowanymi „narzędziami” przemocy psychicznej są: obciążanie nadmierną ilością pracy, ignorowanie, wykluczanie lub bojkotowanie.

Wnioski. Osoby doświadczające dręczenia psychicznego najczęściej spotykają się z mobbingiem wertykalnym, co może świadczyć o dysfunkcjach występujących w procesie zarządzania zasobami ludzkimi oraz niezbędnej potrzebie przemodelowania kultury organizacji w środowiskach, w których pracują badane osoby. Przemodelowanie to będzie formą wprowadzenia profilaktyki antymobbingowej w badanym środowisku.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: mobbing, terror psychiczny, pielęgniarki, pielęgniarze, położne.

Introduction

The reason for writing this article was the following thought: People in the era of formality and computer-

ization cease 'to be' – to be honest, fair, affectionate, sensitive to truth, beauty, and social values [1]. In the socio-axiological dimension people, unfortunately, de-

viate from the 2500 years old rule of social coexistence and head for excitement with evil *'...on an unimaginable scale crossing endless barriers of severe, precise, complex crimes directed against another person, preparing the other people an inhuman fate in the antropospheric universe'* [2]. The above reflection became simultaneously the voice in the discussion about modern pathologies in the workplace on the example of psychological mobbing aimed at nurses and midwives. This manuscript is a compilation. Theoretical issues concerning definitions, forms, causes, magnitude, course and consequences of the analysed phenomenon were compared with the results of empirical data, collected in one of Poznań hospitals.

The problem of abnormal and deviant behaviours including the ones in the working environment is not a new phenomenon. On the maps of human history numerous examples of such behaviours have been preserved, ranging from family and peer groups to employees. The 21st century man bears the imprint of subsequent new dramaturgy of experiences that have their source in psychological terror arising within several decades in the world and more than ten years in Poland in the working environment. In this context, theorists handling the present issue began to take a closer look at this phenomenon, analyze its sources, as well as psychological, organizational and social consequences.

Basic concepts

A starting point for considerations on mobbing in the working environment is the etymological origin of the word *'mob'* (used as a noun). In English it means *'crowd, rabble, riffraff'*, i.e. a larger group of people who, acting together, harass their victim. The English verb *'to mob'* means *'to jerk, attack, harass, besiege, gather (around someone)'* [3]. Mobbing in the normative sense *'... means the actions or behaviour related to an employee or directed against an employee, consisting in persistent and prolonged harassment or intimidation of an employee, causing his/her underestimation and aiming at his/her humiliation, isolation or elimination from the team of colleagues'* [4]. This definition shows that the idea of mobber's actions is the use of psychological abuse. In turn, Swedish psychiatrist and psycho-sociologist, an expert in the field of mobbing, H. Leymann defines this phenomenon as: *' (...) psychological terror in the workplace that engages the hostile and unethical communication (using insults, invectives, slanders, shouting, etc. in daily contacts at work) systematically sustained by one or more people against another, which in turn pushes the victim to the position which makes him/her impossible to defense. These activities happen frequently (at least once a week) and they last for an*

extended period of time (at least half a year). Due to the duration and frequency of abuse, this results in abnormalities in the realm of the psyche, physical health and social functioning of the victim, causing inability to defend the existing job and find a new one' [5]. H. Leymann as a precursor of research on mobbing in his original definition points to the three basic criteria that characterize mobbing. They are: the duration of terror, the repeatability of mobbing actions and the existence of mobber's negative intentions (that is the person who carries out mobbing actions).

The process of mobbing is also divided into nine stages, which were distinguished by F. Glasl as follows:

- phase I – the attempt of cooperation and the formation of incidental stresses;
- phase II – polarization of positions and the style of discussion;
- phase III – interaction through deeds, not words;
- phase IV – fear for reputation and coalition;
- phase V – a loss of face (status) and moral outrage;
- phase VI – dominance and accumulation strategies based on fear;
- phase VII – systematic destructive campaigns against the opposite party;
- phase VIII – attacks against the emotional balance of the enemy;
- phase IX – total destruction and suicide [6].

Moreover, as follows from literature analysis, the phenomenon of mobbing occurs in working environments with strong subordination. These are, in particular, hotel and catering industry, military, police or education institutions. The group also includes employees of hospitals and other institutions of medical care. Therefore, the research focuses on signs, forms, extent and consequences of mobbing in the professional group of female and male nurses. The scientific literature shows that health care workers are also a significant group exposed to various forms of mobbing behaviours. The above reflections are confirmed, in particular, by research conducted in 2005 by Buchan et al. They imply that female nurses are victims of violence three times more often than other professionals in the field of healthcare [7].

Aim

Healthcare, including nurses and midwives is one of the professional groups in Poland more exposed to mobbing despite the fact that the employer's duty is to prevent mobbing (art. 94, paragraph 1, Labour Code). The aim of the manuscript was an attempt to show the scale, scope, forms, signs, and consequences of mobbing in the group of professional female nurses, male nurses and midwives working in open and closed treatment in Poznań hospitals.

Material and methods

Based on the words of American sociologist, H. Blumer, '... the nature of researched reality determines the measures used – methods and techniques for obtaining data, and not vice versa' (see Hałas 1994:49). In view of the above, the perceptive key of adopted theoretical methodology will be a diagnostic survey method with the use of a questionnaire survey and a narrative interview as well as a free interview in the group of 42 randomly selected nurses and midwives working in open and closed treatment in Poznan hospitals. The respondents met the established criteria for the sample selection. Applied methodological triangulation in the authors' intention is to contribute to the far-reaching objectivity of the issue discussed.

Results

Results presented in this part of the publication are based on previously accepted theoretical methodology. Respondents were 42 people working in positions of midwives, female and male nurses in open and closed treatment in Poznan hospitals. Among respondents there were 37 women and 5 men.

The research was based on the so-called rigorous criterion of H. Leymann, according to which victims of such abuse were considered only those people who were exposed to at least two out of a list of twenty-two negative actions, repeated at least once a week and lasting at least six months [8]. In accordance with the above criterion, 12% of respondents out of the total number of respondents were considered psychological abuse cases. The rest of the people experienced harassment at work or another form of aggression besides mobbing.

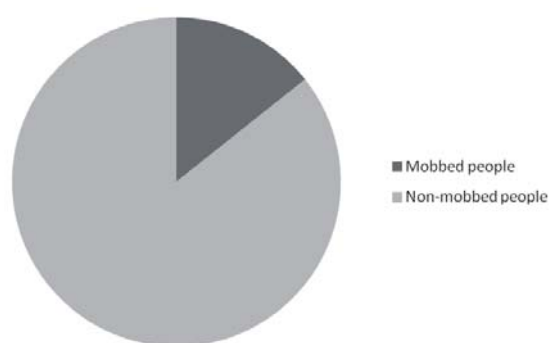


Figure 1. The percentage of mobbed and non-mobbed people according to the criterion of H. Leymann

Source: authors' own research

Results of analyses concerning the mobbers' position show that in the vast majority there is vertical mobbing, i.e. mobbers are superiors (83.3% of indications), and only one person considered a victim of psycholo-

gical violence pointed to a colleague. This behaviour is defined as horizontal mobbing (**Table 1**). Obtained estimations clearly indicate pathologies in the organization cultures and, above all, dysfunctions arising in the process of human resource management.

Table 1. The position of the mobber

Mobber's position	Mobbed persons	
	Frequency	%
Superior	5	83,3
Employee	1	16,7
Total	6	100,0

Source: author's own research

Significant findings are supplied by analyses of respondents' answers regarding general feelings of being psychological abuse victims (**Table 2**). Respondents were asked to answer the question: Did you experience mobbing at work in the last six months? Respondents had at their disposal the same five-step scale of responses from 'I was not mobbed' to 'nearly every day'. More than ¾ of the total number of respondents have the feeling of being mobbed in the workplace (66.7% of indications) several times a week or every day (30.9% and 35.8% of votes, respectively).

It should be emphasized that while among people from the first group, 83.3% of the respondents have a feeling that they experience mobbing at work every day or several times a week, among respondents not considered victims of psychological harassment 66.7% of indications were reported.

Table 2. The feeling of being a victim of mobbing

Frequency	Mobbed		Non-mobbed		Total	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Not	0	0	4	11,1	4	9,5
Yes, but rarely	0	0	3	8,3	3	7,1
Yes, from time to time	1	16,7	6	16,7	7	16,7
Yes, several times a week	1	16,7	12	33,3	13	30,9
Yes, almost every day	4	66,6	11	30,6	15	35,8
Total	6	100,0	36	100,0	42	100,0

Source: authors' own research

It should be noted that, according to the adopted criterion of H. Lehmann, 12% of respondents were considered victims of mobbing. Overrepresentation of persons having the feeling of being mobbed in relation to the facts may result from deficit of respondents' knowledge of mobbing, which means inappropriate or incorrect understanding and interpretation of the analysed

phenomenon or subjective feelings of respondents as well the ambiguity of the term 'mobbing'.

Another important issue was the identification of mobbing behaviours in respect of persons recognized as victims of mobbing and the evaluation of the degree of these people's impact on mobbing actions in their workplace. For this purpose the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ) of S. Einarsena and B.I. Raknes was used. The questionnaire contains a description of negative actions which the respondents might encounter at work (with no reference to mobbing). Each of the respondents was asked to choose out of 22 points (on a five-step scale: '*never*', '*once a month or less than several times a month*', '*once a week or more often*' and '*every day*') these actions and behaviors that the mobber used in relation to them.

For the purposes of this analysis, the two most common positions were summed up, which, in the opinion of this questionnaire (NAQ) authors, were important for identifying victims of mobbing. These were indications: '*once a week or more often*' and '*every day*'. The distribution of these responses is presented in **Table 3**.

Table 3. Forms of mobbing impacts among the victims of mobbing

No	Negative action (behaviour)	Never		Once a month or less		A few times a month		Once a week or less		Every day	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1.	Concealing information affecting the results of work	0	0.0	1	16.7	1	16.7	2	33.3	2	33.3
2.	Humiliating and ridiculing in connection with work	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	16.7	2	33.3	3	50.0
3.	Delegating tasks below competences	1	16.7	1	16.7	1	16.7	1	16.7	2	33.3
4.	Taking away responsibility	0	0.0	1	16.7	0.0	0.0	2	33.3	3	50.0
5.	Spreading gossip and rumours about the employee	0	0.0	1	16.7	1	16.7	2	33.3	3	50.0
6.	Ignoring, excluding or boycotting the employee	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	33.3	4	66.6
7.	Uttering abusive or offensive comments relating to the employee	1	16.7	0	0.0	1	16.7	2	33.3	2	33.3
8.	Crying, showing anger, rage	0	0.0	1	16.7	1	16.7	2	33.3	2	33.3
9.	Intimidating in the form: violating the private space, pushing, blocking	1	16.7	1	16.7	1	16.7	2	33.3	1	16.7

10.	Allusions or signals from others that the employee needs to leave	0	0.0	1	16.7	0	0.0	1	16.7	4	66.6
11.	Recalling mistakes repeatedly	1	16.7	1	16.7	1	16.7	1	16.7	2	33.3
12.	Ignoring or receiving the employee with hostility	1	16.7	1	16.7	1	16.7	2	33.3	1	16.7
13.	Criticizing work and efforts constantly	0	0.0	1	16.7	1	16.7	2	33.3	2	33.3
14.	Ignoring views and opinions	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	33.3	2	33.3	2	33.3
15.	Playing jokes	0	0.0	4	66.6	0	0.0	1	16.7	1	16.7
16.	Delegating tasks with aims impossible to reach or deadlines impossible to meet	1	16.7	1	16.7	2	33.3	1	16.7	1	16.7
17.	Putting unfounded accusations	1	16.7	1	16.7	1	16.7	1	16.7	2	33.3
18.	Excessive monitoring of work	1	16.7	0	0.0	1	16.7	1	16.7	3	50.0
19.	The pressure not to demand anything the employee is empowered to	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	16.7	1	16.7	4	66.6
20.	Frequent teasing and sarcastic comments	0	0.0	1	16.7	1	16.7	2	33.3	2	33.3
21.	Excessive workload	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	33.3	4	66.6
22.	Threatening with physical violence or actual physical abuse	0	0.0	1	16.7	3	50.0	1	16.7	1	16.7

Source: authors' own research

The results of the research show that the most frequent forms of mobbing given by respondents are: negligence, exclusion or boycott of the employee, allusions or signals from others that the employee needs to leave, pressure suggesting that the employee should not demand anything he/she is empowered to and an excessive workload. Four of these mobbing activities were indicated by 66.6% of the persons considered victims of psycho-terror. In turn, 50.0% of indications concerned humiliation and ridiculing in connection with work, and then taking away responsibility and spreading gossips and rumours about the employee. It should be noted that, in the opinion of the respondents, the above forms of mobbing were experienced every day. However, the lowest number of indications, i.e. 16.7%, arising every

day, concerned, in particular, intimidation in the form of pointing the finger, violation of private space, pushing, blocking the way, ignoring or hostile reception of the employee, delegating tasks with aims impossible to reach or deadlines impossible to meet and threatening with physical violence or actual physical abuse.

Summing up, it must be concluded that mobbers' behaviours can be classified into three categories. These are: 1) harassment and abuse through work – according to respondents, behaviours belonging to this group are the most common; 2) intimidation – with fewer respondents' indications; 3) physical abuse – according to respondents, recognized as victims of psychological violence, these actions were the least frequent.

Conclusions

1. Obtained estimations show that the phenomenon of psychological terror in the environment of female nurses, male nurses and midwives is quite common, as more than ¾ of the total surveyed respondents have the feeling of being mobbed (66.7%) several times a week or every week.
2. Based on the criterion of H. Leymann, 12 percent of respondents were recognized as cases of psychological abuse.
3. Research studies show that victims of psychological terror most often encounter those mobbing activities which include harassment and abuse through work. Then they indicate personal intimidation as another manifestation of analyzed behaviours. The lowest number of mobbing victims are exposed to activities related to physical violence.
4. In the opinion of respondents, most commonly used 'tools' of psychological violence are: ignoring, excluding, or boycotting the employee, allusions or signals from the others that the employee should leave, pressure suggesting that the employee should not demand anything he/she is empowered to and an excessive workload.
5. The scale of the analyzed phenomenon and its type (vertical mobbing) may show dysfunctions in the process of human resources management and the necessary need for remodelling the organization culture in the workplaces.
6. Psychological terror at work regardless of its intensity and form is one of the underlying stressors of modern professional environment and can evoke consequences in mental, physical, social and vocational functioning, including motivation to work and its efficiency.
7. Let the following directive thoughts be the conclusion of the authors' analyses: 'Psychological

tsunami' due to its toxicity, favours primarily individual disorders because as E. Kuraciński notices, mobbing '*...causes paralysis of activity, reinforces splitting of the personality and regression of the individual identity*' [9]. The whirlwind of this tsunami reaches the organization sphere as well, particularly management, which is the duty one should fulfil and the gift that should be shared – skilfully and to good use, and this requires developing full and real humanity in one-self [10]. The last sphere destroyed by this tsunami is the social one, which in the researched environment is based on social Darwinism, and hence becomes an arena of mobbing actions.

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