Work Harassment: Psychological Bullying in the Workplace of ICU

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WH: Work Harassment

Harassment at work is an issue that - if we think about it seriously, knowing the consequences it can have on its recipient - will certainly not leave us indifferent, if not shocking. But it is not just a personal problem that one may face in the workplace. It is a social phenomenon, not only because it concerns the social isolation of one, because more than one person is involved, but also because it occurs in too many workplaces, in all countries of the world and also has socio-economic components, both in terms of etiology and its consequences.

The Harassment at work is not a new phenomenon. It simply began to be discussed and studied as a social problem for the first time in the 1960s. For several years now, the phenomenon of psychological violence, mainly in the workplace and in schools, seems to have grown. avalanche, often having very serious consequences and, several times, even for the rest of the life of its recipients. Anxiety, depression, various physical and mental problems (abdominal pain, headaches, insomnia, hypertension, various phobias, etc.) as well as post-traumatic stress disorder are just some of the possible consequences of a workplace harassment.

But what are the reasons that so many people around the world, minors and adults, individually or in groups, become so sadistically cruel and painless towards other people with whom they coexist daily and who have never harmed them in the slightest? What does this kind of behavior represent? Why does it continue to exist and what can we do to, if not eliminate, at least reduce its incidence? [1-6].

What is considered work harassment?

Workplace harassment or bullying is considered to exist when a person is harassed, threatened or exposed, systematically and for a long time, to various forms of psychological, mainly violence, by another person or a group of people [7,8].

The Harassment at work can be done:

a) verbally, e.g. through ridicule, threats, dissemination of false information in order to reduce the person's reputation, imitation, etc.

b) of course, e.g. through pushing, hitting, destroying personal items, etc., and

c) tacitly, through a complete ignorance of the person, exclusion from common activities, grimaces, sighs, ironic smiles, etc.

The W.H should not be confused with isolated or accidental misunderstandings between two people. Workplace harassment presupposes a very clear power
difference between those involved [9-12]. The person being harassed is almost always powerless against him or her or those who are harassing him or her, unable or unwilling to defend himself or herself. To talk about W.H., there should be, as mentioned above, a timelessness in the negative actions against the harassed person that have serious consequences, such as: lack of ability to communicate with others and create social contacts, the collapse of the image and external harassment as well as various negative effects on the workplace, life as well as his physical and mental health. Shame is a key word in cases of work harassment. The harassers aim to make the victim feel ashamed of the point that he or she becomes even more vulnerable and vulnerable to the violence [13-16].

The Role of Group Processes

Studies on how different groups work have shown that in each type of group there are latent processes that largely determine its function and behavior. Two interesting theoretical approaches to understanding group processes are:

The theory of rejection

According to her, the members of each new group that is created need a common idea / perception for that group. During this process, there is always someone or someone who does not share the common idea / perception of the group or who wants to leave it. Such a person is experienced by the "team" as a threat to its common effort. Initially, efforts are made to "deviate from the instructions" of the deviant person. When this is not possible, then the "non-compliant" is either rejected or will have to cancel or leave the group or change the group itself, which is very rare [17,18]. The same thing happens every time a new member joins the team. The old members, consciously or subconsciously, take the responsibility of initiating the newcomer in the common values and the rules of operation of the group. The initiation effort can take many forms and intensities, depending on the degree of response of the new member who will either comply or be canceled or, if necessary, expelled. Such efforts aim only at the "survival" of the group, that is, at maintaining its cohesion, as perceived by its own members [19-21].

The Theory of the Scapegoat

The idea of this theory is borrowed from the Bible and wants to describe the rejection of an individual by a group. Targeting someone as a scapegoat - who is ultimately expelled from the group - involves transferring a common guilt to someone else, which relieves the group of the burden of that guilt. The "teamwork" displayed in this case, as well as in that of work harassment, absolves the team members from any kind of individual responsibility. Group action enables each participant to do things they would not even think of doing on their own. In this way, we can understand, on a social level, the various prejudices that exist and that from time to time - especially during difficult socio-economic crises - are reinforced. The aggression then accumulated is, to a large extent, the answer to the fear that prevails and which is transferred to an innocent and, as a rule, harmless target or victim.

At the level of small groups, what usually happens initially is the appearance of various latent behaviors or actions such as: "We do not greet the victim", "We do not inform him of important information", etc. In some cases, things get more serious by hiding important instructions or joint decisions that will seriously expose the victim but possibly the patients also. The common denominator of a group operating in such a destructive way is that this destructiveness is determined by various paranoid latent fantasies that distort reality and create in the group a sense of threat, even of its very existence. Therefore, it begins, in essence, to defend itself against more or less non-existent enemies, such as e.g. a scapegoat.

Who is being harassed?

Harassment at work can occur in any workplace, affect anyone - regardless of age, gender, professional competence or position in the hierarchy - and anyone can be found, either in the position of the perpetrator or in that of the victim. However, there is always some explanation as to why some are affected and others are not. A general complaint is that anyone who differs, in one way or another, from the rest of the group is at greater risk of being harassed at work. Personal characteristics and behaviors, which are blamed and often observed in victims of work harassment, fall into two categories:

I. In passive, low-key and submissive individuals with personality traits such as: wariness, insecurity, physical weakness, low self-esteem and poor self-image, and

II. To victims who cause and have personality traits such as: hyperactivity, irritability, explosiveness and provocation. Such characteristics are considered as easy to irritate and provoke the environment, which facilitates the targeting of these individuals [22-24].

Who is Harassing?

As mentioned above, everything that applies to a victim also applies to the perpetrators. We all felt at some point the need - or maybe we did - to "put in our place" someone

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we thought "deserved", and we probably all gossiped, consciously ignored or spread a rumor that existed or did not exist for someone. This is by no means synonymous with harassment at work, but it could potentially be a prelude to it. Those who harass are considered to have a more positive attitude towards the use of violence, they want to dominate and impose themselves on others, their point of view should always prevail and there should not be the slightest doubt about their face. They are also experienced by those around them as dynamic people who, however, rarely show feelings of sympathy for others, do not experience guilt, need the admiration of others, lack empathy, easily envy and exploit others and, finally, find it difficult to take initiatives and decisions. In other words, they have personality traits that exist in people with antisocial or psychopathic personality. From the moment, that the W.H it is, mainly, a group phenomenon, it presupposes the existence of companions who are influenced by someone who has a leading role and whom, in some way, they admire or fear. Acceptance of the leader-perpetrator behavior by those around him reinforces, legitimizes and perpetuates work harassment.

How is Work Harassment Expressed?
As mentioned above, the W.H can occur in any workplace, but is more likely to occur in cases where major changes occur in the workplace of ICU, where there are harsh working conditions, stress and dissatisfaction or where there is a lack of organization, ambiguity of roles or insufficient management. It can also arise on the occasion of the conflict between different work cultures, where everyone wants to maintain the routines and the way of working that they know well. It can also occur due to the recruitment of a person who comes from another country, etc. Under such conditions, it is much easier for one or more people to be used as scapegoats or boxing bags. The W.H focuses and concerns, usually in the following two areas:

A. In the object of work of the individual, ie in the burden of his working conditions, e.g. by depriving him of responsibilities for no reason, hiding information about patients, assigning him difficult or unpleasant obligations, etc.

B. To acquire personal character through personal attacks, humiliation, dissemination, sexual harassment or implication, etc.

The Consequences of Work Harassment
Any consequences of a work-related harassment are affected by the victim's personality, personal relationships, workplace relationships, and similar past experiences. The consequences on the victim's self-esteem and self-confidence are serious, usually accompanied by elements of anxiety, depression, despair, difficulty concentrating, intense mood swings, insomnia, fear, various psychosomatic symptoms (abdominal pain, headaches, headaches), shortness of breath, dizziness, hypertension, heart problems, allergies, kidney dysfunction, fatigue, etc.), and even the onset of post-traumatic stress disorder. Some come out of this kind of hell with difficulties that they can manage, while others may have many and serious problems that need the help of specialists and that, in some cases, may even last for the rest of their lives.

It is really "sick" for someone to claim that the exercise of psychological violence is something inevitable in human relationships and that a major cause is some characteristics of the victim. Every adult should be able to manage similar situations in a different and more mature way and, if he cannot, then it is not the fault of the recipient of his personal shortcomings and repulsions. Such arguments have no research support. The personality of the victim does not play a special role in his choice as a recipient of psychological violence. What is happening is the exact opposite, that is, the personality of the victim is disturbed, due to the psychological violence against him.

Some argue that victims of work harassment are often people who are strongly opposed to certain choices of the workplace management, to its authoritarianism and who, in general, do not easily submit to its authority. If the management of a workplace first makes an employee a scapegoat or openly targets him, then this is primarily the reason why this employee is subjected to psychological violence by the rest of the staff, and not his attitude towards the management.

Other causes include the following

Reorganize the team or hire a new manager.

Someone who can be favored or appreciated by the management.

i. Someone who refuses to do something that is asked of him and that he considers to be -or / or that may be- immorally correct.

ii. Someone trying to protect a co-worker from being harassed at work.

iii. Someone who has pointed out the existence of injustices, bad conditions, unacceptable behaviors or abuse of power in the workplace.
The Silence and Tolerance of Colleagues

People say that "Fear guards the ballast", and fear, in the case of work harassment, often leads to "Silence of the lambs", that is, of colleagues. In this way, the victim remains usually helpless, which often creates feelings of guilt and shame in the non-participating colleagues. One way to get rid of these torturous feelings is to blame the victim as solely responsible for the ordeal he or she is experiencing, which further strengthens his or her isolation and exposure to the perpetrators. The situation becomes even more tragic for the victim, when the passivity of his colleagues turns into an active applause of the psychological violence that takes place. We could say that the colleagues, in this case, become the audience of a Roman arena that with its applause determines the limits of the victim’s punishment.

Conclusion

The truth is that the W.H It has much larger dimensions - I would say scary - than many of us believe and it will not, of course, be eliminated by itself. The issue needs to come to a wide public debate in order to sufficiently highlight its serious consequences both on a personal and socio-economic level, but also to make appropriate proposals for the best possible response. All researchers on the subject agree that the responsibility lies not with the victim but with the way a workplace is structured and operates. When people feel insecure, anxious, stressed and afraid, they easily look for a scapegoat to shoulder what is unbearable for them and, thus, maintain an illusion of internal and external balance. It is necessary to have an effective legal framework that protects the recipient of psychological violence, but also each employer to ensure a framework of employment relations that prevents as much as possible the occurrence of such phenomena. The responsibility of each administration is great. Because knowledge is always a prerequisite for any optimization and change, discussions and open dialogue in the workplace before and / or when there is an W.H. It is especially important that they are done, if possible, even with the assistance of an external expert.

References

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