

Moral harassment at work model and inability

Izabel C. Martins Campos^{ab*} Lizandra da Silva^a, Rafaela Luiza Trevisan^b and Roberto Moraes Cruz^a

^a*Federal University of Santa Catarina - UFSC, Santa Catarina, Brazil*

^b*State Secretary of Administration's Office, Santa Catarina, Brazil*

Abstract. Moral Harassment at Work (MHW) is considered a recurrent practice of humiliation, mockery, isolation, persecution and psychological torture. Its results go beyond the worker private life: represent financial loss, affects the work, the organization, the productivity and the society. This article aims to develop a model of MHW, which characterizes the main components of the phenomenon and their nexus with the inability to work. For this, the Literature field is consulted, in order to identify systematically, the MHW components and their risky factors. The results showed a multifaceted model which demonstrates: the aggressor/victim and the configuration of the Moral Harassment at Work causes. The management of the degraded work. The characteristic features of the inability to work, caused on the victim. The MHW modalities and as a final product, the integration among these components. It is expected that this model can help the Ergonomist comprehending this phenomenon and contribute on the creation of some strategies of prevention on the workplace. It is concluded that the removal or minimization of this occupational risks requires some changes on the job organization, on the people's behaviour, the leadership styles, on the humanization of the social labor relationship and on the coping this problem.

Keywords: moral harassment at work, degraded work, ergonomics, inability to work, theoretical model.

1. Introduction

Moral Harassment at work consists in a phenomenon as old as the human existence, visible on the family life and social life. However, the scientific studies started between the eighties and nineties. The act of living together on a destructive workplace can cause illness, absenteeism, productivity reduction and compensations.

On this context, the Ergonomist, as a work analyst, needs to respond to its new local demand called Moral Harassment at Work. This phenomenon has brought rebounds on the workers healthy and safety. It is as unresolved conflict, which requires the analyses of different scientific fields for its solution. The dysfunctions on the personal relationships and the lack of ethics on the organizations can generate an occupational accident, when there is a relation between the disease and the workplace. The MHW is characterized as a psychosocial risk, sometimes in-

visible, which brings a deliberate degradation on the work conditions.

The international literature represented by Leymann [35] and Hirigoyen [34] refers to the Moral Harassment at Work as some conflicts at work, expressed with professional aggressions, which cause deterioration on the relations, constraints and damages. In Brazil, this term has gradually been discussed with a silent violence, which destabilizes the victim, affects the work relations, the healthy, affects the workplace, perhaps bringing some harm like: moral, psychological, physical, material and the temporary or definite inability to work. Thus, this theme has a legal, social and psychological importance on the workplace.

According to Hirigoyen [34], the Moral Harassment at Work is every or any improper conduct, especially found on people's behaviour, words, gestures and some writings that can bring damages to ones personality, pride or physical and psychological integrity, endangers his job or degrades his

Corresponding Author. Campus Universitário – Trindade – Fpolis – SC – Brasil. Cx Postal 476. CEP 88040900. Tel. +55 48 37217104; Fax: +55 48 37217032; Email: izacarol@gmail.com.

workplace. On the Ergonomics studies, it is mentioned that the Moral Harassment at Work constitutes a risk to the worker's health and takes to the deterioration on the work relations [14, 45, 52, 9, 40, 20].

On the organizational context, the Moral Harassment at Work brings, from physical to psychological harms to the employees. Moreover, the organization may be affected by the low productivity, benefit reductions, cost elevation with the selection and development of new employees, in order to replace the affected ones, and with the cost brought by the worker's healthy treatment [39].

As a labor analyst, it will depend on the Ergonomist, identifying the possible risks to the worker health and act for eliminating them. However, there is still a gap on this area of knowledge regarding the risky factors and harms caused by the MHW on the organizational context. This is mentioned by Pyñuel Y Zaballa [43] which assigns the need of the observation of the workplace, in order to identify the MHW and the need of finding some institutional measures for controlling the psychological violence on the workplace.

This way, this research aims to develop a model of Moral Harassment at Work, capable to distinguish the main components of this phenomenon and its relation with the inability to work.

1.1. The moral harassment at work and the inability to work

Moral Harassment at Work is considered an interpersonal aggression or hostile and compelling aggression, which takes place on the workplace that can cause psychological, moral or material harms. It is a complex phenomenon, studied by [35, 33, 43, 8, 6, 22, 51, 31, 48, 29, 5, 41, 19] among other researchers. The humiliation caused by the MHW interferes on the employees' lives affecting their identity, dignity, their social and affective relationships, bringing harms to their health, which can contribute to the inability for the job performance, unemployment or the death, as the last effect.

The different dysfunctions that occur on the workplace can affect the employee's health and are frequently related to the work organization, the job performance, and to the psychosocial risks passed by the employees. This requires an intervention on the interpersonal relations, in order to create the appropriate strategies to prevent them.

Comprehending the workplace, with the goal of transforming it, is an Ergonomist's task, as a labor

analyst, in order to assure the employees' comfort, health, safety and their effective satisfaction. When the work is spoiled, it causes the development of mental and behavioural disorders, musculoskeletal problems, among other diseases and embarrassment: beyond decreased productivity.

The job analysis, made by the Ergonomist can observe all the aspects (juridical, sociological, psychological, and aspects related to the Health, in order to act on the labor health prevention and guarantees the employee's good efficiency. Acting with the right tool, the Ergonomist is able to detect if an organization is being affected by the MHW.

When the Moral Harassment at Work is detected it becomes necessary the disentangling of the issue with the law, for identifying if it really happened any embarrassment, harassment at work, compensations or any other damages. Technical specialist services and occupational health services can identify the existence of the causal connections and diagnose the inability to work. The Ergonomics expertise is also a labor camp, able to investigate the nexus between the harassment at work and the worker's inability to work, on the workplace. However, this issue is not the main goal of this research. As the MHW has being a recurrent phenomenon, it is necessary for the Ergonomist to be ready for dealing with this issue, as to identify risky situations and preventing them with strategies, as to analyze the existing cases with the technical expertise services.

The causal nexus is established in the cases of injuries caused by specific activities, between the employee's job and the harm or injury caused. It can be considered to be the relation between the illness or injury and the prescribed work. Establishing the causal nexus is a specific and complex process, for each employee, which involves his work and life history. In order to establish it, it is essential having the detailed work situation, the relationships established on this context, the work environmental conditions, the institution and the perception of the work influence on the illness, the harm or inability to work caused on the employee [47].

The Doctors standardized specialist medical care guide of Santa Catarina foresees the inability to work as the "inability for developing specific activities, jobs or works, resulted by pathological changes, coming from diseases or accidents". They should always be considered with the evaluation criteria of the inability, the increase of the disease, the life personal risk or related to others, which can be developed with the prosecution of the work. On the labor inability criteria, it is considered the following issues:

morbid changes, professional demanding and legal devices [47].

The permanent disability or disablement cause the employee retirement, for making the worker unable to supply his own living. “The disablement can also be totally or partially considered; if on one hand it is easier identifying the total disability, on the other, the partial one isn’t, when the employee can continue performing his duties, without any life risk or increase of the disease, but involving the loss of quality of work, this way, with less efficiency” [11].

For social security purposes, the “the work inability”, or “inability for work” is defined by the Instituto Nacional de Seguridade Social (INSS) as: “the impossibility for developing specific job functions (or occupation), as a consequence of the morphophysiological changes provoked by a disease or accident. (...)”. For most of the situations, the Social Security Administration works with only one definition, understanding the “disability” concept as the inability for reaching the production average, reached by the employees in normal conditions. On this labor inability evaluation, it is always necessary to have the reference point in mind, and the comparing base must be the conditions of the employee, observed while working and not the average observed on the community of workers [11].

It is found that the labor inability can generate moral damage, when the victim goes on Court and gets the right of being reimbursed, a real existing fact at the Brazilian Court. It is manifest that the employee will spend money with doctors, physiotherapy, and other treatment, as well as other costs, which would be avoided, if he didn’t face this experience at work. For this, the Brazilian judges have taken it as a moral damage, and moreover, have established the payment of financial values and even monthly payments, during a period, as a material compensation.

The repetitive humiliation of a long period interferes on the victim life in a direct way, affecting his identity, dignity and affective and social relationships, causing serious damages to his physical and mental health, which can bring a labor disability, unemployment, or the death as a last consequence, constituting an invisible, but real risk on the labor conditions and relations. The aggression tends to bring anxiety to the victim, which holds in a defensive position (hypervigilance), for having the threatening sensation, that cause the feeling of failure, impotence, low self-esteem and humiliation [46].

1.2. The MHW and the ergonomics

The Literature field and several international researches have contributed to the Moral Harassment at Work studies [25, 26, 29, 48, 36, 31, 1, 10, 32, 6, 7, 8, 15, 22, 34, 33, 35, 44, 43, 51], sometimes focusing their studies on the Ergonomics, once the phenomenon has become a risk to the worker’s life and has taken to the deterioration on the work relations at the Institutions. [28, 14, 45, 52, 9, 40].

In accordance to Cassito et al [15] the health damages can bring the following symptoms: psychopathological, psychosomatically and behavioural. However, it is still necessary the performance of researches about the Moral Harassment at Work recognition at the workplace and how the Ergonomist should identify it and interfere on this issue, thus, emphasizing the importance of the current research.

The Moral Harassment at Work risky factors on the Organizations, in accordance to [43] are grouped in: inequality on the duties distribution; work load; excessive competition; lack of respect among people; unsolved or bad solved conflicts; jealousy; envy, or rivalry; lack of communication among the employees and the employers, among other facts.

The categories proposed by Hirigoyen [34] for recognizing the Moral Harassment at Work are classified in four hostile behaviours’ to be analyzed: work deteriorated conditions, made on purpose; isolation and refusal to communicate; offences against the dignity and verbal, physical or sexual violence.

When studying the human interaction at work, the Ergonomist needs to understand the hierarchical relations, the human variability, beyond the broad context on the work environment. The labor analyses on the subjective aspects found on the social relations and the degrees of hazard of these relations are identified gaps encountered on the Ergonomics Field.

2. Method

The present study was based on a national and international literature review, which allows the identification of the MHW facets. It is necessary identifying the exploratory nature of this study, once it has the purpose of getting information of the MHW components and their relation with the inability to work. By the data qualitative analysis, it was possible developing a model, which allows the Ergonomist to recognize this problem at the workstation and its relationship with functional inability on victims, and to

verify evidences or effective violence at work, performed by the heads, their co-workers, subordinates, or the organizations' customers.

For the Moral Harassment at Work model and the inability, the Literature reviewed on this paper has provided and identification the facets and respective components and its visual representation. This research is of a descriptive nature, because it identifies characteristics of phenomena MHW, functional disability, and their relationships, through literature.

This survey was developed through theoretical source. This source consisted in the search for scientific articles obtained in databases (Medline, BIREME, BVPS-PSI, Scielo), using the following keywords combined: moral harassment at work, in public service, labor relations; psychological harassment; psychological terror; psychological harassment at work; psychological and moral damage; incapacity; case law; profile of stalker.

International researches were also surveyed on the database: *acoso moral*, *bullying*, *mobbing*, *harassment in the workplace*, *murahachibu*, *molestie psicologiche*, *agresion in the workplace*, *workplace violence*, *whistleblowers*, *employee abuse*, *bossing*, *coacção moral*, *hostigamiento psicológico en el trabajo*.

The terms MHW and inability to work related publications were searched in the areas of knowledge:

Health Sciences: Annual Reviews, Dentistry and Oral Sciences Source (EBSCO), Highwire Press, JAMA, Journals@Ovid Full Text (Ovid), Mary Ann Liebert (Atypon), Nature (NPG), Oxford Journals (Oxford University Press), Science (AAAS), SpringerLink (MetaPress).

Engineering: ACM Digital Library, ACS Journals Search, Emerald Fulltext, IEEE Xplore, IOPscience

(Institute of Physics - IOP), Nature (NPG), Royal Society of Chemistry, Science (AAAS), ScienceDirect, SpringerLink (MetaPress), Wiley Online Library, Applied Ergonomics.

Human Sciences: Academic Search Premier - ASP (EBSCO), Cambridge Journals Online, Education Full Text (Wilson), JSTOR Arts & Sciences I Collection, Oxford Journals (Oxford University Press), Project Muse, PsycArticles (APA), SAGE Journals Online, SocINDEX with Full Text (EBSCO), SpringerLink (MetaPress), Wiley Online Library.

Multidisciplinary: Academic Search Premier - ASP (EBSCO), Cambridge Journals Online, Highwire Press, Nature (NPG), Oxford Journals (Oxford University Press), Science (AAAS), ScienceDirect (Elsevier), SpringerLink (MetaPress) e Wiley Online Library.

In the portal of journals, theses and dissertations database of CAPES scientific productions have been identified on the basis of key words: environmental degradation and the working environment, socio-professional relations, labor actions, laws, doctrine, case law, evidence, damage and psychological, health, stalker profile and harassed, confrontation of the MHW, with the terms workplace and inability. First, We examined the titles of articles and theses, submitted by base periodicals, theses and dissertations of CAPES, eliminating those that dealt with aspects that are not aligned to this paper. We also made sure to read summaries of articles, resulting in the selection of those who have grip with the goals of this study.

3. Results and discussion

Through the literature review it was possible to identify the facets encountered on the MHW, as demonstrated on the Table 1. The identified facets were: 1. Work; 2. People Involved and 3. Nexus and Inability to Work.

The Facet of Work refers to violence at work, aspects of work organization and working conditions. Violence at work is characterized by abusive conduct in relation to one or more persons, arising from work situations and involving the exposure of workers to be humiliating and embarrassing situations, repetitive and lasting throughout the day, and can generate physical or psychological health consequences, in order to denigrate the personality and dignity of the individual. The Organization of work implies offices on technical and social division of labor standards, time and control required for the performance of tasks, task content, tiered system, power relations. The conditions of work for the infrastructure, physical space, equipment, material and professional development, ergonomic characteristics of the employment, conditions of hygiene and safety.

The Facet on the People involved include interpersonal relationships and social relations at work, victim characteristics, of the offender and of the witness. Interpersonal relations/social relations: Representations about communication, sociability, professional interaction with colleagues, managers and users of services and products. The victim is the person (s) who suffers damage (m) constraints on work with damages) physical, psychological, moral or material. The aggressor is the subject (s) who practices (m) psychological violence at work and the witness is the person (s) involved (m) of the job.

The Facet Nexus and Incapacity cover the causal relationship that is established in cases of injuries that occurred by the performance of specific activities, between the activity exercised by the employee and the damage or injury submitted. Can be understood as the ratio of the illness or injury and the work

required. In addition, this Facet covers the incapacity for work, i.e. the "impossibility of performance of the functions specific to an activity (or occupation), as a result of morfo-psico-fisiológicas changes caused by illness or accident.

Table 1
Specification of facets of MHW

FACETS	COMPONENTS	AUTHORS
WORK	<p>Violence at work: Individual or organizational Globalization and neoliberalism generated insecurity of work; charges embodied by increasing pressure and quantitative targets; depersonalization of the worker; Repetition with subtle attacks systematized; harassment, embarrassment, rumors, mocks, humiliation/psychological violence; held over time (six months or more); Types of Harassment: Horizontal, Vertical, (ascending and descending)</p> <p>Organization of work (OT) Excessive charges of work flows without information or authoritarian leadership; inadequate styles management of conflicts on the part of superiors; poorly defined work task; disorganized allows colleagues and superiors to take advantage of the situation; excessive hierarchies; insufficiency or ambiguity instructions and the lack of information represent another risk factor, for the efficient performance</p> <p>Conditions of work (CT) Accumulation or new tasks; the same employee, of whom were expected a versatility; Low quality of production or services rendered; Inadequate equipment. Aggressive behaviours of groups aimed at the exclusion of one of its members. Reduced productivity; Tarnished image of the Organization</p>	[4, 3, 5, 6, 10, 12, 13, 15, 17, 18, 19, 23, 24, 26, 21, 22, 25, 29, 30, 31, 32, 34, 33, 35, 36, 37, 39, 41, 48, 51, 50]
PEOPLE	<p>Interpersonal Relations: labor (RST) Empirical investigations on the causes of MHW are focused on: the victim's personality/profile/stalker and psychosocial factors; fear of losing their jobs or the workplace for co-workers more capable and experienced</p> <p>Victim Absenteeism/health licenses; Constraint of work capable of causing damage to the personality, dignity or physical integrity or mental; Purpose to destroy the victim, its reputation, its network of communication and make it abandon work</p> <p>Aggressor Neurotic, narcissistic, personality, psychological behaviour hostile; 4 categories: purposeful Deterioration of working conditions; Isolation and refusal of communication; Attack on the dignity; Physical violence, verbal or sexual; Attacks; harassment, embarrassment, mocks</p> <p>Witness/spectator Silence-Passivity of the witness; Align to the aggressor or the victim</p>	[1, 2, 5, 8, 7, 6, 10, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 24, 27, 29, 32, 33, 34, 35, 38, 42, 44, 43, 46, 49, 48, 52, 51, 31, 41.]
NEXUS CAUSAL E INABILITY	<p>Nexus Diseases, accidents at work; Physical damage, moral, psychological, material</p> <p>Incapacity for work Unemployment and death (ideation or suicide); Inability to work temporarily or permanently. Illness, health licenses and/or invalidity pensions</p>	[9, 14, 26, 28, 11, 47, 40, 45, 52]

Based on this table, it was developed a explaining model for the Moral Harassment at Work and the Inability, Figure 1, which aims to help the ergonomist on the identification and the phenomenon investigations. This model presents: 1) The psychosocial factors as existing conditions at work, related to the organization, the work content and the task performance, with capacity for affecting the employee 's physical, psychological or social health and the work development [23] 2) The consequent components of

the aggressor/victim/witness and the set of the MHW causes; 3) The components of the degraded work management, which influences on the relation between the stalker and the victim; 4) The characteristic components of the inability to work, caused on the victim; 5) The MHW modalities (ascendants, descendants and horizontals) and the product as an integration product among the components.



Figure•1: Moral Harassment at Work (MHW)

By the presented model, it can be concluded that the MHW is characterized by repetitive and lasting embarrassing behaviours and humiliations on the degraded work. It is a risky factor to the employee's health, brings deterioration on the socio professional relations, illness, inability to work and high expenses. The labor demands autonomy and the information provided may help the Ergonomist facing and preventing the labor's constraints.

The created model on this research is a theoretical guide of the aspects which clarify the existence of the MHW and inability to work, with the goal of helping the labor analysts on the identification of this phenomenon and provide the comprehension of the psychological violence strategies, on the caused effects and prevent them.

This model doesn't have the intention of exhausting the subject, but facilitating the MHW understanding, when stimulating the analysis of existing coercions on the workplace. As the MHW is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, the Ergonomist can contribute for the causal nexus search, or evaluate the conditions, the organization and the labor social relations for finding the existence or evidence of the MHW, besides, the psychosocial risks and the consequences on the employee's health conditions.

The Ergonomist needs to identify the MHW risky factors for the discussion and on the coping of this current theme on the professional relations. Identifying the main components of this phenomenon

can be the starting point for its coping and for the finding of the right strategies for extinguishing the violence at work, which many times, is responsible for the employee's health and safety.

4. Conclusions

The Moral Harassment at Work can provoke psychological, moral, physical and material harms to its victim. The Ergonomist needs to recognize the effects and impacts on the employee's healthy, in their personality, image, dignity and identity. It is a complex phenomenon, which occurs at the workplace and is directly associated to the organizational culture, the conditions and to the organization of work, besides the social professional relations. The elimination or the minimization of the Moral Harassment at Work requires changes on the organization and the management of the work, of the behaviour, of the leadership styles, on the coping of the humiliations that happen on the work social relations.

On this context, it must be observed the psychosocial factors which cause the Moral Harassment at Work and its link to the inability. On the workplaces, there are psychosocial risks inequality on the tasks distribution; work load; excessive competition; lack of respect among people; bad or even

not solved conflicts, among others), which generate illnesses and accidents, revealing the deterioration and the degraded work.

On this social context, it is necessary to study the role and the Ergonomics contribution, and for that, it becomes important to establish the work analysis, as the main focus on the psychological or subjective aspects on the social relations, made on the workplace and the degrees of insalubrity found on these relations. The harassment at work is a social representation of the work degradation and the Ergonomist can detect the caused damage, including the check of the causal nexus. The presented model, with the highlighted facets and respective components can be used as theoretical subsidy for professionals on the Ergonomics field, Health and Security of Work.

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