

## ICOH – 2012 – Cancun - Mexico

### Relation between type of mobbing behavior and triggering event

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## Introduction

- Mobbing, bullying, harassment, etc. are here used as synonyms
- Mobbing is a process
- As such any attempt to categorize the actions involved might hide its dynamic nature
- Categorizing mobbing behaviors could help the design of prevention
- The aim is to discuss the relations between type of mobbing behavior and triggering event.
- **The central question posed is: do mobbing behaviors vary according to the triggering event?**

## Methods

### Qualitative research: 18 cases

assisted in the OHS of Hospital das Clinicas in São Paulo, Brazil

### Data was collected by psychologist/researcher

via individual semi-structured interviews

### A thematic analysis was performed

followed by categorizing all results    creating a frequency distribution

## Socio demographic

61% with children

61,2% below college level

67% São Paulo state natives

50% married,  
33% divorced  
17% single

94% caucasian

67% female

29 to 55 years

## Job characteristics

- **67% from private organizations**
- **# economic activities branches including:**
  - metallurgy (metal casting)
  - computer science
  - health and social services
  - terrestrial transport
  - financial intermediation
  - production of leather
- telecommunications
- public administration
- associative activities
- pharmaceuticals industry
- mining
- plastics and thermal
- clothing industry

## Job characteristics

- **great variability of jobs, including:**
- **blue collar workers:**
  - Nurse auxiliary
  - Terrestrial transport collector
  - Packing auxiliary
  - Chemical analyst
  - Quality controller
  - Laboratory technician
  - Silk screen printer
- **white collar workers:**
  - System analyst
  - Doctor
  - Supervisor
  - Director
  - Management assistant
  - University teacher

## Job characteristics

Time on job varied from 3 to 35 years

89% worked more than 40 hours weekly

80% were urged to do overwork

73% worked more than 10 extra hours per week

94% reported moderate to fast work pace

83% had no control over work rhythm

Type of mobbing behavior	N	%
Concerning job content (attributions, job, function, vacancy)	13	72
Concerning working place	6	33
Concerning work organization	6	33
Work pressure	13	72
Concerning working time	9	50
Concerning wages, benefits, worker's rights	12	66
Concerning law suits	4	22
Ask for urgent work unnecessarily	3	17
Taking out of infrastructure	4	22
Firing menaces	13	72
Humiliations	17	94
Discriminations and lack of equity	11	61
Exclusion	6	33
Isolation	7	39
Others	16	89

## Discovery of fraud – 4 cases

- Following an organizational change which could be a promotion, change of management, etc. a fraud was discovered
- Interviews showed 2 types of employee's behaviors after discovering a fraud, each of them unleashing different consequences:
  - denounce (or threaten to denounce)
  - acknowledge and refuse to participate

## Discovery of fraud: 1) denounces or threatens to denounce a fraud

- Counteroffensive aim appears to be to **neutralize employee** by:
  - Isolation and exclusion;
  - Changes in job content;
  - Discredit employee by humiliating, discriminating
- Threaten employee (life threatens, intentionally expose to dangers, lawsuits, police reports, firing menaces)
- CADS, FMGS and CCAC are examples of this situation

## Discovery of fraud: 2) refusal to participate in the fraud

- Ex.: refusal to pay propine in order to obtain privileges
- aim seems to be to **punish the employee** by:
  - intentionally exposing to danger (for example assigning the driver the most dangerous bus itinerary)
  - interfering with working time (assigning worst working schedules)
  - damaging the employee in his wages, benefits or worker's right
  - discrimination and lack of equity
  - firing menaces if he complains or denounces any of the previous

## Management change: 4 cases

- When a new manager/supervisor/director comes into scene the aim seems to be to **put things and employees into a new frame, changing everything**:
- Ex.: MN (doctor) - new manager:
  - destroyed the previous existing work organization
  - took out her assistants and infrastructure
  - immediately demanded double productivity,
  - discredited her with the receptionists
  - made diminishing comments about her capabilities
  - jokes, sarcasms
  - forbade her to talk to receptionists
  - forged complaints against her for refusing to treat the patients
  - threatened to fire her
  - overtime was reduced and there were mistakes concerning her paycheck

## Management change: 4 cases

- New managers normally seemed to distrust employees “inherited” from the previous one, and **wanted to get rid of them and replace them**. Ex.: A.A.S's (supervisor) – new manager:
- many employees were dismissed and substituted
- mandatory vacations
- job change
- few tasks assigned (after begging)
- humiliating or below her capabilities tasks (ex.: dust furniture, sweep the floor)
- put her in a room with glass partition to expose her situation to everybody.
- excluded from courses, trainings and meetings
- was isolated

## Employee's promotion leading to more contact with supervisor – 1 case

- Supervisor is a bully, a very well related bully.
- His aim is to **humiliate** his subordinate, and he acts this way because he has a privileged position in the organization, which guarantees his impunity. Ex.: CAJ
- supervisor called him a donkey, bad mouthed, chided and humiliated him sometimes in front of other employees, sometimes in private
- Threatens to fire if he reports the bullying
- After reporting to HR was fired

## 3 other triggering events

1. **Accusation of beginning rumors on the administrator of the company** - 1
  - In this case the aim is to **discredit the employee** and the strategy is to humiliate and firing menaces.
2. **To be transformed in a permanent worker (and the supervisor not)** – 1
  - Here the aim seems to be to **punish the employee** and the strategy includes: humiliations, ask for urgent work unnecessarily, oblige the employee to work in such a fashion or sequence that could cause his dismissal or critics to his performance.
3. **Dispute over a job** - 1
  - Two colleagues (university teachers) wanted to exclude KRDM in order to take over her classes. In this case, their aim was to **discredit her** (with students, colleagues and superiors) and the strategy was to defame, humiliate, exclude and open lawsuits against her.

## Aggravating circumstances

- Some circumstances could aggravate mobbing in terms of number, intensity or frequency of mobbing behaviors:
- **Worker's characteristic (sex, race, socio economic level, leadership)**
- Ex.: EC
- The main problem here was a **cognitive dissonance about being an African American and an overachiever at the same time**
- the triggering event was being approved in the exam to become a public servant, hospital's employee
- Mobbing behaviors were aimed at excluding her from the job.

## Aggravating circumstances

- **Worker's performance (speed, experience, quality)**
- Employees who favor quality over quantity, the slow workers, face difficult times, especially when there is a management change
- **The new manager/supervisor's aim is to obtain results or get rid of him/her**
- The main strategies are:
  - work pressure
  - firing menaces
  - concerning wages, benefits and worker's rights
  - humiliations: diminishing comments about worker's capabilities
- The same happens to employees who are learning the job, for instance a new system, or overachievers (envy)

## Aggravating circumstances

- **Worker's stability – 4 cases**
- 1. In accordance to Brazilian legislation **civil servants** especially those who passed a very hard examination, after apprenticeship are considered stable unless a very serious offence is committed.
  - Ex.: VFP - Being a stable worker in apprenticeship, her supervisor's aim was to dismiss her, and the strategy included:
    - bad evaluations in performance appraisal
    - exclusion from training, courses and meetings
    - opening law suits against her
    - work pressure
    - asking her to carry equipments from one place to another and other tasks which were not part of her job description
    - humiliations,
    - discrimination, etc.

## Aggravating circumstances

- **Worker's stability – 4 cases**
- 2. Another situation of stability which appeared was **being a member of the Internal Commission for the Prevention of Work Accidents**, which is a commission of in-house workers with the responsibility to prevent workplace accidents, in accordance with Brazilian legislation. In this case the worker has one year stability.
  - Ex.: AAS
- 3. **Following a sick leave due to work-related disease or injury** recognized by the National Institute of Social Insurance, the worker has one year stability.
  - Ex.: FGS – after RTW she was not working anymore in the same place and even worse, there was no work (vacancy) for her.

## Conclusions

- This research pointed to the complex nature of bullying behaviors and processes.
- According to Einarsen (2000) by and large, the cross-sectional designs of most studies in this field and the extensive use of survey methods, constitutes a static approach to the study of bullying at work.
- Qualitative research can help to treat mobbing in a more dynamic way, emphasizing its nature as an escalating process.
- **More than just a sum of mobbing behaviors, bullies and organizations create strategies to deal with employees in order to attain certain aims**
- these strategies have rationality, although not flexibility, and are in accordance with the triggering event
- According to the triggering event victims characteristics can act as aggravating factors.

## Obrigada!



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