

Harassment as a pathological phenomenon

(Mobbing jako zjawisko patologiczne)

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Abstract – Introduction. There are some differences in detail among the researchers of the phenomenon of harassment, but the definition of the fundamental nature of the problem is common. Everyone agrees that harassment is a form of deliberate action which is intended to cause psychological harassment to the victim and, as a result, negative consequences which will be reflected in communication with other people, in relations with society, in life, work and health situations.

The aim of the study. The aim of this work was to provide a brief description of harassment, to draw attention to the different types of this phenomenon and to the risk of this pathology appearing in the professional work of a nurse .

Selection of material. The search was conducted in the Scopus database for the period 2010-2020, using the terms *harassment*, *types*, *nursing staff*. From the literature found in the Google Scholar database, studies were selected which, in the opinion of the authors, would be most useful in preparing this study.

Conclusions. As healthcare workers, nursing staff is one of the occupational groups most vulnerable to harassment. A friendly climate in the workplace seems very desirable here. Where a worker is treated objectively, in a machine-like manner, it blocks his or her development as well as a system of positive relations.

Key words - harassment, types, nursing staff.

Streszczenie – Wstęp. Wśród badaczy zjawiska mobbingu istnieją pewne różnice szczegółowe dotyczące interpretacji zjawiska, jednak określenie podstawowego charakteru problemu jest wspólne. Wszyscy są zgodni, że mobbing jest formą celowego działania, które ma na celu dręczenie psychiczne ofiary a w konsekwencji negatywne skutki, które będą miały odzwierciedlenie w komunikacji z innymi ludźmi, stosunkach ze społeczeństwem, w sytuacji życiowej, zawodowej, jak również zdrowotnej.

Cel pracy. Celem pracy było przedstawienie krótkiej charakterystyki mobbingu, zwrócenie uwagi na różne rodzaje tego zjawiska, a także ryzyka pojawienia się tej patologii w pracy zawodowej pielęgniarki.

Dobór materiału. Poszukiwania przeprowadzono w bazie Scopus za okres 2010-2020, używając pojęć *mobbing*, *rodzaje*, *personel pielęgniarstwa*. Ze znalezionej w bazie Google Scholar piśmiennictwa wyselekcjonowano opracowania, które zdaniem autorów byłyby najbardziej użyteczne w przygotowaniu niniejszego opracowania.

Wnioski. Personel pielęgniarstwa jako pracownicy ochrony zdrowia jest jedną z grup zawodowych najsilniej narażoną na występowanie mobbingu. Przyjazny klimat w miejscu pracy wydaje się tutaj bardzo pożądany. Tam gdzie traktuje się pracownika przedmiotowo, w sposób machinalny, tym samym blokuje się jego rozwój jak również system pozytywnych relacji.

Słowa kluczowe – mobbing, rodzaje, personel pielęgniarstwa.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The term mobbing has existed for many years in various literature items in the field of psychological sciences and various social sciences. It was first used in 1963. Konrad Lorenz, who described the behaviour of aggressive animals. He focused his attention on the situation in which

a group of small animals attacked a single animal, which was bigger, stronger [1].

The precursor of this concept was the German psychiatrist Heinz Leymann in the 1980s. He worked in Sweden at the time and dealt with violence in the workplace. He described harassment as systematic and prolonged psychological harassment at the workplace. The term "mobbing" is derived from the word mob [2].

There are some differences of detail among the researchers of this phenomenon in terms of its interpretation, but the definition of the fundamental nature of the problem is common. All agree that harassment is a form of deliberate action which aims to cause psychological distress to the victim and, consequently, negative consequences which will be reflected in communication with other people, relations with society, in life, work and health situations [3].

In Poland, the official definition of the term "mobbing" appeared in 2003 in the Labour Code. According to Article 94.3 §2, harassment is an act or behaviour which concerns an employee or is directed against an employee. It consists of prolonged and persistent intimidation and harassment. As a result, it creates a feeling of reduced assessment of professional suitability, is intended to ridicule, humiliate or eliminate the employee from the team. An important fact in this provision is the fact that the employee is subjected to such actions [4].

Harassment is a phenomenon that is difficult to grasp, it is a very complicated and multi-stage process. Each person can experience this phenomenon in a different way, perceive the attacks of a potential perpetrator (mobber) differently, have a different sensitivity and personality. Therefore, each case of mobbing must be considered individually. When attempting to analyse this phenomenon, it is often believed that the subordinate is the victim and the superior is the perpetrator. However, this is not always the case. There are situations where an employee bullies a colleague or the supervisor himself may be the bully. [5]

The following types of harassment can be distinguished [4,6,7]:

- vertical;
- slanting.

Horizontal harassment is when the persecutor is a group of people, i.e. colleagues from the same hierarchy and the victim is a person from that group.

Vertical harassment is referred to when the persecuted person is a superior and the perpetrator is an employee or a group of associates. Such incidents can occur when a colleague is promoted at work and becomes the superior of his colleagues of the same level, education, etc. Co-workers may be jealous, disagree with this fact and may want to humiliate, ridicule their new superior. A favoura-

ble circumstance for vertical harassment may be that the new supervisor does not manage or find himself in a new role and colleagues want to take control over him [4,8].

Sloping harassment is when the perpetrator is a superior and the victim is a subordinate. This type of harassment is most common. This is all the more so because so-called 'good work' has to be sought, sought, and the employee often accepts many inconveniences. In such a situation, the supervisor may demand more and more from the employee. Managers often do not know where the boundary between harassment and proper management, leading a particular team of employees [8].

There is also a division of harassment in terms of the type of behaviour presented. Marciniak stands out [9]:

- active harassment;
- passive harassment.

Active harassment focuses on various stressful situations which place too much strain on the employee. Often, the bully assigns responsibilities to the employee that he or she should perform, or those of those who are sympathetic to him or herself. This limits the bully's ability to perform his or her duties.

The type of passive harassment is the lack of effect in active harassment activities. The inactivity of the bully (mobber) consists in ignoring, disregarding, ignoring the employee, and omitting them when assigning tasks to other colleagues. In the process of various types of mobbing, the victim feels alone. This has a negative impact on their mental and physical functioning. This translates into functioning in the broad context of private and professional life. The more difficult it is that the person subjected to such activities becomes aware of their situation at work [4,8,10].

The Workers' Community of Associations of Social Organizations (WCASO), presenting report data on the phenomenon of mobbing at work, showed that in Poland, the most frequent perpetrators of mobbing are men (60.1%) holding managerial positions of their victims.

Harassment also occurs more frequently between people of the same sex. A person who is bullied is characterised by low self-esteem and awareness of personal shortcomings. Such a person is characterized by fear of competition. He or she uses various forms of harassment behaviour to show an advantage over the other person.

A person who is being bullied may also have the opposite direction - exaggerated self-esteem, close to narcissism. The victims of mobbing, on the other hand, are usually submissive people who provoke their specific behaviour. They are distinguished by their behaviour, many times their abilities. This may cause jealousy, fear and danger in other people.

The personal qualities of a potential victim of mobbing include: a sense of low self-esteem, low domination, low assertiveness, high emotionality, susceptibility to the influence of others.

The personal characteristics of the bully and the person being bullied are not rigid and unambiguous to define and clarify, because the process of harassment is influenced by many different factors, daily work situations, duties to perform, etc. [11]. When analysing the phenomenon of harassment, it is important to be aware that these are activities that take different forms. These activities are characterised by different levels of exposed violence.

Beginning with mere rudeness, continuing to direct verbal, social violence. In the age of easy access to the Internet, cyber-harassment is manifested. Less often, violence of a sexual or physical nature escalates. The manifestations of harassment can be, for example, verbal violence (various types of nicknames, nicknames, shouting), gossip, undermining someone's speech in order to lower their self-esteem [1,3,5,9].

Social violence is usually carried out by people in senior positions. Mockery and diminution of various personal and professional achievements are aimed at endangering a person's social position.

Harassment activities may also be manifested by assigning tasks to be performed below or above the employee's competence.

The lack of assignment of tasks shall also be considered a sign of harassment. The pressure on employees is also a sign of harassment [2,9]. In order for specific actions to be eligible, there must be criteria in the criteria for mobbing activities [5,9,10]:

- first, the duration of certain actions (they must be of a longer duration);
- secondly, harassment activities must include an element of repetition, which must not be a one-off episode or a conflict.

The negative intentions of the perpetrator are an important criterion for the existence of harassment in the workplace. Therefore, harassment is not a single act of anger, aggression or personal frustration. It is a regular activity, taking place over a longer period of time, lasting at least about 6 months, with a weekly frequency [11].

II. HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE OF NURSING STAFF

Harassment is a phenomenon described as the pathological, extreme experience of a negative form of treatment of

a person in their workplace. It is a very complicated, long-term process with negative health consequences. Scientific research on the phenomenon of harassment in the working environment of nursing staff clearly shows that the most frequent form of violence in the workplace which nurses are confronted with is a form of psychological violence. All verbal forms of various forms of harassment, insults [9,12] should be noted in this point.

This is not a new phenomenon that can occur in the workplace. This phenomenon has been analysed in the world for several years now, while in Poland, it is only in recent years that attention has begun to be drawn to this dangerous pathology that may be present in the workplace. The phenomenon of mobbing occurs in many professional groups. Nursing staff also experience this phenomenon. Nursing as a medical profession in health care is characterised by teamwork and acting under conditions of increased stress. This profession is focused on helping other people and has a caring and nursing character. As medical professionals, nursing staff are particularly vulnerable to harassment. This is a sector of the professional group with a variety of extreme views, value systems and attitudes. This is often the cause of various types of conflicts, disputes. The health crisis and the inadequate management system are conducive to the disruption of a sense of security and stability. All these components can cause frustration, aggression and, consequently, real psychological violence against a colleague, supervisor or subordinate [13,14].

The factors determining the existence of workplace harassment include organisational factors such as [1,9,13,14,15]:

- unfavourable organisational culture;
- inadequate management;
- mismanagement;
- inadequate work organization;
- negative changes in the company (e.g. budget cuts to improve its competitiveness)
- hostile climate;
- a stressful working environment.

The culture of an organisation is understood as the existence of certain patterns of thinking, ways of acting and behaviour. In places where superiors, managers with low qualifications and morals are employed, and where the rights and dignity of another person are not respected - the phenomenon of mobbing most often occurs.

An important organisational factor in the existence of mobbing is poor management, which includes its style (autocratic or liberal).

In an autocratic style of management, there is no concern for the employee, there is detailed control, there is no freedom of action, no partnership, no mutual trust. There is

mainly anxiety as a stimulus to act and achieve results in work.

A different style of management that can be the basis for harassment is liberal. It is characterized by lack of or little involvement of the supervisor, passivity, lack of making important decisions and giving employees freedom of action [15,16].

Poor work organisation has a significant impact on the occurrence of harassment in the workplace. Unclear roles and the resulting conflicts and misunderstandings reinforce the development and escalation of harassment. Frustration in the workplace, as well as inability to deal with problems, create aggressive behaviour directed at colleagues [17].

An important organisational factor determining the occurrence of mobbing is change in the company. This is related to economic changes. It forces the reduction of employment, any budget cuts and thus builds a growing sense of threat, life instability among employees [18]. As mentioned earlier, nursing staff as health care workers are, according to global research, the occupational group most at risk of harassment. A friendly climate in the workplace seems very desirable here. Where a worker is treated objectively, in a machine-like manner, it blocks his development as well as the system in which he works. The research carried out in the group of nursing staff in the Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship shows that harassment most often occurs in closed treatment in surgical wards. However, the lowest incidence of harassment was found in open treatment units. The perpetrators of mobbing are most often direct superiors and co-workers. This may be indicative of poor management in this professional group [14,19]. Nurses in the specifics of their profession are constantly in a stressful environment. Nurses are exposed to stress in the workplace every day. Contact with a patient, saving their life, nursing in illness, responsibility for activities and procedures is stressful. This can lead to various types of conflict, burnout and harassment behaviour [1,3,5,9,20].

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