Al. I. Cuza University of Iaşi

Faculty of Philosophy and Social and Political
Sciences

Violence angst women in the workplace

-Thesis Summary-

Scientific Coordinator,

Prf. Univ. Dr. Nicu Gavriluţă

<div align="right">

PhD Student,

Oana Zigman

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Summary

In the present summary we will be presenting some essential information regarding the PhD thesis [1] that studies the phenomenon of workplace violence directed towards women.

The interest for this area of research was first manifested during the years spent in the university studying for a Master's Degree, studies that were finalized with the presentation of a study on sexual harassment of women in the workplace.

Another reason behind the motivation for this area of research lies in the discrepancies between the interest for the victimization of women in the family environment and he one for the victimization of women in the professional environment, at a national level specifically.

It is important to underline the fact that today's women are not just mothers and wifes. They can have a rich and complicated profesional life just like any other man. An important mention is that even if the title of the thesis refers to the victimization of women, the goal of this thesis is not

to argue that women comprise the largest category of victims of workplace violence or that they encounter the highest risks. The focus of this study is directed towards women because the selected universe of the research, where the activities took place, meaning the social care services` human resources, the employees are mostly women. This led to the curiosity regarding the specifics of women's victimization during working hours.

Consequently the objectives of this paper were: the identification of the employees' perception regarding the risks that they are exposed to during work hours, the identification of employees' perceptions in regard to acts of workplace violence and also the identification of risk factors tied to the appearance of the phenomenon, again as they are perceived by the employees.

Of course another important reason for choosing this area of study is the high levels of prevalence of it and the extremely high number of individuals exposed to this type of violence at their workplace, as victims or as witnesses (Johnston et. al. 2009; Carll, 1999; Harrison, 1996;). Of great concern is also the fact that the specialists in this field have noticed a risin trend wich indicates that domestic disputes tend to spill over in the workplace (Mantell, 1994; Hesket, 1996). Before

we talk about the actual research done for this thesis and in order to facilitate a better understanding of the subject of study the present paper brought into discussion a few theoretical approaches of the phenomenon. As it can be well observed by taking a look at the content the first subject discussed concerned the conceptualization of the key terms and also supplying correct and complete definitions for terms like workplace violence, bullying, mobbing and so on.

Among the other subjects of this section there were a few issues that came into light during the theoretical documentation. Among these we can mention the issue of defining the term workplace violence (the specialists in this field have yet to reach an agreement on what is and what acts the term encompasses) and the factors that contributed to this issue, the discussions among them regarding the nature of the terms bullying and mobbing (are they or are they not synonyms), etc.

Regarding the definition and the different meanings that specialists have given the term and phenomenon of workplace violence, we have mentioned in the body of the paper various approaches of the matter and of curse various definitions. As we can well see following the theoretical documentation, different specialists use different terms to refer to acts of workplace

violence: mobbing (Leymann, 1996; Zapf et. al. 1996), harassment (Bjorkqvist et. al. 1994), bullying (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Rayner & Cooper, 1997, Vartia, 1996), victimization (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997), psychological terror (Leymann, 1990).

Starting with a statement made by Fein and Vossekuil (1995) regarding the fact that violence in general is both a process and an act, we have mentioned definitions from various consecrated authors in the field (Mayhew &Chappell, 2002; Neuman & Baron, 1998) and also from international organizations, (International Labor Organization, Occupational Safety and Health Administration, World Healt Organization, etc.).

The next section of the paper was a discussion regarding the different types of workplace violence and the different classifications encountered while reading the literature, and also explanatory theories in the field. Looking for valid explanations for workplace violence leads to problems concerning aspects of conceptualization, methodology, but also problems arising from the specifics of a certain approach of the subject. For instance psychologists approach the subject of the degree in which violence is the result of a set of unique features of one's character and the degree in which these are affected by genetic or

neurophysiologic aspects, while sociologists study the degree culture and the economical situation of an environment mold and individual's tendencies towards violence, and also the degree in which violent acts can be counted as effects of social interactions on the person's perceptions of reality (Baxter & Margavio, 1996).

Trying to merge the contribution of the two, in order to provide a better understanding of the phenomenon, the literature in this field takes under consideration the exploration of a few social factors like downsizing and also individual factors like past violent incidents (O'Neil et. al. 2003). Although the study, this phenomenon does not have theory of its own, there are certain general theories regarding violence in general that can be quite efficient in this specific field. Among these we have mentioned and offered details for the following: the Theory of Routine Activities and Lifestyle, The General Theory of Crime, The Effect/Danger Ratio Theory, The General Strain Theory, and so on.

The next part of the paper talks about the evolution of the phenomenon, highlighting the issue of risk factors and cause and effect relationships. Special care was given to the organizational factors, starting with the idea that in many cases the certain conditions of an organizational environment can lead to a greater risk of exposure to violent acts for

the employees. Taking under consideration the universe of the research, the next part of the paper we presented some particularities of the process of exposure to violence in the case of the employees of organizations/institutions that provide social care services. Here we have mentioned and analyzed a variety of relevant international studies. According to reports like BCS (The British Crime Survey) and RIDDOR (Reporting of Injuries, disease and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations) for the years 2002 – 2003, the employees with the highest degree of exposure to violence during work hours were those employed in fields like protection and security, closely followed by those in the field of social care services. We have also made mentions regarding the most frequent types of violence that the employees are exposed to in the field of social care (Harris & Leather, 2012; Macdonald & Sirotich, 2005) and regarding the types of employees with the highest levels of exposure in this workfield (Winstanley & Hales, 2008; Breakwell & Rowett, 1989; Weinger, 2001; Spencer & Munch, 2003).

Naturally, taking under consideration the objectives of this paper, the next section of the paper focused on the identification and details of specific characteristics of women's victimization at work. In this section we provided information

regarding typical characteristics to the female gender, characteristics that make a difference when it comes to experiencing workplace violence. We provide information regarding the image that women have as easy targets because of their stature and physical strength and not only that, but also regarding the alleged differences between the two sexes when it comes to reactions to possible situations that involve conflicts.

Different articles and papers that we have referred to have provided contradictory data with concern to which category of employees have the largest number of victims of workplace violence (females or males). Studies like those of Guterman et al. (1996), Jayaratne et. al. (2004) or Newhill (2003) argued that men represent the employees that fall victims most frequent while authors like Baines (2005), Flannery, Fisher & Walker (2000) described females as the employees with the largest number of victims of this phenomenon.

Also we have mentioned different studies and published articles that have compared the level of exposure or victimization for both sexes to different and specific types of violence in the workplace, like mobbing, bullying, sexual harassment, stalking, etc. (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000; Warchol, 1998; Fisher & Gunnison, 2001).

Because one of the ideas we mentioned in the body of the paper was that there is a lack of interest and information regarding this subject, at a national level, in the following pages we mentioned and offered details regarding the results to the most important studies developed in Romania, fact which was considered extremely important in identifying the plus value added by our study and also the novelty aspects of the proposed paper.

Once this discussion was finalized, we went on to describe the different steps of the research we conducted and the results we came to after the data analysis.

The first step was to describe the two institutions and the centers that we accessed in order to gather the data from their employees.

The instruments used were a questionnaire built to evaluate the first perception of employees regarding the risk they encounter during work hours and a semi structured, thematic interview guide. These were described in detail beginning with the construction phase and up to the objectives that were reached by using them. This discussion was completed with data on the characteristics of the participants from every different step of the research.

In it's turn this was followed by the analysis of the data we obtained, in order to illustrate, with a greater clarity, what are the objectives were reached and to what degree, and of curse what were the results of these activities. The interpretation of the data in the case of the first instrument used was made according to the group that the employee belonged too, groups divided based on the jobs the participants had in the organization. In the case of this analysis the researcher tried to highlight the distinctions between the answers of female versus male employees.

Regarding the interpretation of the data obtained by means of the interviews, the analysis took under consideration the themes previously established in the building stages of the instrument, also highlighting the existent distinctions between the two sexes.

In the last chapter of the paper we present the final conclusions and results of the study conducted, the limits of the research activities, the elements of novelty and also the difficulties that the researcher had ti face during the activities.

The employees from organizations that provide social care services, by the nature of their responsibilities and also of the activities that they conduct, try to help the people that are in situations

of necessity, situations generally called social risk situations, and do not want to work under constant tension and fear for one's self.

Additionally, because of the specific of the work field, but also of the relationship built between employees and beneficiaries, often just the simple mention of violence from the beneficiaries and other clients can seem, for some of them, like a violation or a betrayal of the spirit of partnership that they try to establish

Specialist on the subject consider that there is a certain orientation regarding the values and ideology that come with having a job in this field, orientation that can lead to an indisposition to acknowledge the cases of violence from clients or beneficiaries.

Leadbetter (1993) agrees with this argument as he suggests in his papers that the majority of social care professionals consider that this type of discussions, especially in the cases in which the patients of beneficiaries come from situations of extreme risk, illness or disease, counter sau break the ethics o a profession centered on the needs of the client/beneficiary.

As final observations, we mention the fact that the analysis of the gathered data lead to conclusions that confirmed the results of other

international studies, results that have been mentioned and detailed in the other chapters of the paper.

The answers offered by the participants regarding the frequency of exposure to violent acts during work hours and regarding the personal perceptions of factors that affect the degree of risk for some people also confirmed previous cited results from international studies.

The other mentioned results concerned discussions on the existence of differences between the sexes when it comes to the interpretation and analysis of violent acts, the differences in ways of experiencing the phenomenon, differences in the most frequent types of violent acts that they are exposed to as a victim and/or as a witness, etc.

The results of the research have suggested a few recommendations meat to help in preventing and managing cases of workplace violence from both perspectives, the employee's and the management's.

One of these recommendation refers to the birth of a collaborative relationship between the management and the front line employees, those who come face to face, in direct contact to outside individuals, especially to help the process of development and evaluation of politics, intervention

strategies and employee training programs on the issue of workplace violence and effectively handling risk situations.est limitation of

One of the greatest difficulties and implicitly greatest limitation of this research was the fact that terms such as mobbing and bullying do not have Romanian equivalents, which is why they had to be explained using lengthy phrases and comparisons during the activities planed in the research.

We also want to mention the fact that this study is not quantitative one but a qualitative one, and so the results cannot and are not meant to be generalized to the entire population of people employed in this work field. The conclusions refer only to the participants and in the best case scenario to the population of employees from that region.

Because of the relatively small number of participants in this study we did not use the term sample but the term participants, in order to avoid any sort of confusion that might be created regarding the nature and purpose of the research conducted.

One of the main merits of this paper is considered to be the highlighting of aspects such as the lack of information about the phenomenon, at a national level but also in the organizational environment, among members of the staff,

employees on different jobs, a lack of information that can lead to a higher degree of risk and exposure for all the members of the organization.

Also the present paper brings added value to the research field through the approach of the subject and also the objectives established and reached, through the organization and clarifications of certain terms and through the results of the research activities conducted.

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