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# Understanding Workplace Violence: The Case of Psychological Harassment

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**Abstract** The aim of this contribution is to understand one of the forms of violence at work: psychological harassment. Widely used, to the point where people can no longer understand or identify it, this concept today risks becoming trivialized. However, it is an important and serious "issue," the effects of which are detrimental to the individual who is its target, the organization that makes it possible, and the society that suffers from it. This contribution proposes to identify this concept and to understand the process in order to better combat it.

**Keywords** Psychological Harassment, Mobbing, Bullying

**Résumé** L'objectif de cette contribution est de comprendre l'une des formes de violence au travail : le harcèlement psychologique. Très largement employé ou point de ne plus le comprendre ni de le cerner, ce concept prend le risque aujourd'hui de se banaliser. Or, il s'agit bien d'une « affaire » importante et sérieuse dont les effets sont néfastes pour l'individu qui en est la cible, l'organisation qui le rend possible et la société qui le subit. Cette contribution propose donc de cerner ce concept et d'en comprendre le processus dans un but de mieux le combattre.

**Mots clés** Harcèlement psychologique au travail, processus de harcèlement psychologique

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With twenty-five suicides at the company in less than twenty months, the France Télécom case became a genuine affair of state in October 2009. An emergency plan to combat stress at work was put forward by Xavier Darcos, the Minister of Labor, with the aim of establishing discussions about stress prevention in large companies before February 1, 2010.

And now the time is here! The state needs to act quickly, regulate the companies at fault, and protect individuals from workplace dangers that put their lives at risk. But what, precisely, are the dangers here? They are of the most insidious, subtle, hard-to-see kind. The new term for them is "psychosocial" risk, because they do not affect the body (at least not directly), but the soul. Such risk disturbs one's thoughts, affects one's feelings, stirs up (exclusively negative) emotions, and casts people into doubt, weakening them day by day—not with physical violence but with words, gestures, self-contradictory instructions repeated over and over, unmeetable goals, constant pressure, continuous control of their actions, decisions imposed without consultation or any consideration of the individual or their limits, their values, or their personal and professional goals…

Psychological harassment at work illustrates this form of violence, which has been given a number of different labels by different authors: bullying, mobbing, psychological harassment, and so on. The concept has attracted considerable and growing interest worldwide, and has become an object of study in Europe, Australia, South Africa, and the United States (Nielsen et al. 2004). France is not the only country to have seen the tip of an iceberg of unhappiness begin to emerge over the past fifteen years; its full size is still unknown, but it worries humanitarians who want businesses to be places of fulfillment and pleasure where kindness is the rule of life (Phillips and Taylor 2009).

We have to understand this form of violence on the basis of the work carried out over the last fifteen years. In France, the most commonly used term to describe it is "harcèlement moral" [a literal translation of which would be "moral harassment"]. As Hirigoyen emphasized in 1998 in her first book, harassment is the result of the behavior of a **perverse and narcissistic individual**[2] toward a designated victim, in total disregard of all moral standards. This concept was **adopted by the Social Modernization Act of January 17 2002** and then incorporated into the Labor Code, the Penal Code, and the Civil Service Statutes, becoming the **legal term** used to describe such behavior: "Employees shall not be subjected to repeated actions constituting moral harassment, the aim or effect of which may result in a

[2] Narcissistic perverts are "psychotics without symptoms, who find balance by discharging the pain they do not feel and the internal contradictions they refuse to see onto others. They do not 'deliberately' cause pain. They do so because they do not know how to exist otherwise. They were damaged in their childhood; this is their method for coping in life. The transfer of pain onto another allows them to value themselves, to the cost of the other" (Hirigoyen, 1998).

deterioration of their working conditions and which are likely to violate their rights and dignity, impair their physical or mental health, or jeopardize their professional future." (Article L.1152-1 of the new Labor Code). But is the term "harcèlement moral" the one best suited for describing the sort of mental aggression we have just described? Because these actions destroy a person psychologically, we prefer to use the concept of **psychological harassment**, leaving it to lawyers to clarify the sometimes murky concept of "harcèlement moral," whose imprecision has led to numerous, sometimes contradictory rulings in the courts (Gosselin 2009).

We begin by presenting psychological harassment as a multifaceted form of violence whose characteristics can be difficult to pin down. We then propose a model that highlights four stages of what we label psychological harassment in the workplace. Finally, by analyzing the determinants and consequences of such harassment, our model emphasizes the need to prevent psychological harassment. It increases stress, reduces well-being at work, harms performance, pushes people to leave their jobs, and is, consequently, an extremely costly phenomenon that not only has a negative impact on people's health but harms the organization's competitiveness and society's well-being.

## 1. **Psychological Harassment: A Multifaceted Form of Violence**

The considerable number of publications on psychological harassment show that it is a multifaceted concept, one with many forms and definitions, but whose process has now been identified.

### 1.1. ***Multiple Definitions***

Defining psychological harassment is a delicate undertaking. Many proposals have been made, many debates undertaken, and many experiments carried out to describe it properly. It is often associated in the media with psychological distress, and is ultimately used by those who do not just undergo it but speak out about it. The scientific community is more demanding, trying to clarify the concept in order to understand and diagnose it. But these attempts do not give a single accepted outcome, because aspects of the proposed definitions do not agree (Faulx 2009). There are two types of definitions.

**"Causal" definitions** focus on the causes of unhappiness in the workplace in general, and psychological harassment in particular. Work organization and context become the central determinants of harassment, sites of social injustice where bad conduct becomes banalized and entrenched (Dejours 2006, 2008). In an article that appeared in *Le Monde* on February 29, 2000, Dejours defined it as **a clinical form of social alienation in the workplace resulting from external psychic constraints exerted on a subject by the work organization, by management and evaluation techniques, and by the leaders of the company**.

**"Factual" definitions**, which concentrate on the particular acts, are more common. Leymann (1996) was one of the first to define psychological harassment at work. Using the term "mobbing," he defined it as an **attitude aimed at depriving a designated victim of all professional and social opportunities**. It is the accumulation of hostile remarks and actions over a long period, expressed or manifested by one or more persons toward another, their target. Poilpot-Rocaboy (1998) defines psychological harassment as **any lasting and repeated attitude on the part of one or more members of the organization which intimidates, devalues, or isolates another of its members in order to destabilize them**. Chappell and Di Martino (1998) broaden the definition, speaking in terms of **psychological violence** and including any abusive and tyrannical behavior toward a subordinate or peer, or any psychological harassment exercised by a group against an individual. These authors describe any **abusive conduct**, including actions and spoken or written words, that affect a person's personality, dignity, or physical, psychological, or social integrity by, for instance, jeopardizing their employment, or damaging their working conditions. These are often minor acts in themselves, but when repeated can constitute a serious form of violence. Finally, various researchers in northern Europe define harassment as **repeated and persistent negative acts** directed at one or more individuals that generate a **perceived imbalance of power** between victim and perpetrator, creating a hostile work environment. Harassment is a form of **hostile interpersonal aggression**, a form of antisocial behavior in the workplace.

These definitions, joined to the legal definition of "harcèlement moral" in France, give us various criteria for identifying psychological harassment: the **repetition** of **hostile behavior**, its negative impact on **working conditions and psychological damage to the person**, the **absence of an intentional element** or **relationship of authority** as necessary conditions, but the necessary presence of an **imbalance of power**.

### 1.2. *A Form of Violence with Many Faces*

Various studies have highlighted the multiplicity of forms that psychological harassment takes in the workplace depending on the number and motivations of the actors and their position in the hierarchy of the firm.

Recognizing the number of actors and their hierarchical positions leads to a distinction between **downward vertical harassment**, directed from a superior toward a subordinate; **upward vertical harassment**, from one or more employees to their hierarchical superior; **simple horizontal harassment**, from one colleague to another; and **collective horizontal harassment**, from a group of colleagues to another colleague.

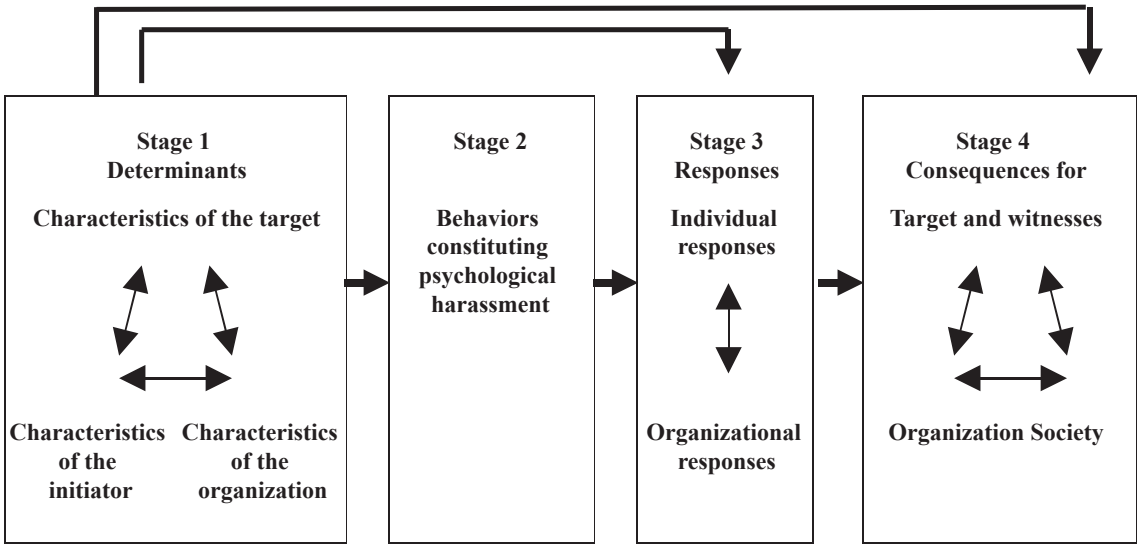
The actors' motivations allow us to distinguish between "**strategic" harassment**, justified by a desire to distance oneself "without financial cost" from a given employee; "**competitive" harassment**, motivated by fear of the

other—by their skills, for instance; "**post-sexual" harassment**, resulting from the other's refusal to start an intimate relationship and driven by desire for revenge; "**behavioral" harassment**, linked to a lack of relational abilities—the inability to listen, to cooperate, to relate to others, and so on; or "**physiological" harassment**, related to a lack of emotional control, to shifts in mood, to a need for domination, and so on (Poilpot-Rocaboy 1998).

### 1.3. *Identifying the Process*

These multiple definitions and forms of psychological harassment make the concept extremely complex. We need a model to understand it better, which can be presented as a dynamic, linear process with four stages (Figure 1). Interactions between three types of preexisting situations (Stage 1) lead to harassment (Stage 2), generating individual and organizational responses (Stage 3) and producing three types of consequences (Stage 4). The process is also nonlinear, because the determinants (Stage 1) can directly influence responses by individuals and the organization (Stage 3), as well as the consequences of the harassment (Stage 4).

*Figure 1 - The process of psychological harassment in the workplace*




## 2. **The Stages of the Process of Psychological Harassment in the Workplace**

We will now look at each of the four stages of the process of psychological harassment.

2.1. ***Encounters between Individuals in the Workplace.***

Psychological harassment is a complex phenomenon arising from individuals encountering each other in a given work context, one of them being the initiator of the act and the other the target (Stage 1).

Many authors tend to emphasize one or other of the determinants in this stage—the characteristics of the "initiator," of the "target," or of the workplace context—and so emphasize a psychological, psychoanalytic, "victimological," legal, or managerial representation of the phenomenon.

2.1.1. ***Characteristics of the Target***

As Zapf and Einarsen (2003) note, the causes of harassment at work have sparked debate in the media and the scientific community. Is there a standard profile for victims of harassment? Some respond that an individual characteristic—a neurotic personality, for instance—accounts for the victim's situation (Coyne et al. 2000). Corneau (2004) remarks that, even though workplaces favor dominant-dominated relationships, not everyone in such situations is the victim of harassment. In many cases, the victims condemn themselves: they unconsciously show their own inner conflicts to the outside world. The victim's own behavior and attitude encourage harassment, and are responsible for it. Beyond this **neurotic personality**, various studies attempt to pick out "standard" personality traits among victims of harassment. For some (see Zapf and Einarsen 2003), victims are identified by characteristics such as low self-esteem, high anxiety, introversion, integrity, and so on. Other authors differ from this approach. Di Martino et al. (2003) argue that these personality traits are consequences rather than causes of harassment. Leymann (1996) treats phenomena like anxiety and low self-esteem as normal responses to an abnormal situation.

Many authors move away, then, from seeing the victims as responsible for harassment (Leymann 1996, Hirigoyen 1998, Poilpot-Rocaboy 2000), arguing instead that anyone can become the target of psychological harassment at any time in their professional life. It is the encounter between individuals—initiator and target—in a given work context that creates the situation in which harassment can arise (Poilpot-Rocaboy 2000). The power relation between actors nonetheless seems to be a major explanatory criterion for this situation (see Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf and Cooper 2003). An **imbalance of power** can reflect the organization's hierarchical structure, but can also be informal, connected with knowledge, experience, the length of time the person has been in the company, support by influential people, and so on. Vulnerabilities arising from a person's social situation (being a single parent, for instance), their physical characteristics (a disability, for instance), or their economic situation (being the sole earner in their household, for instance) can disrupt the balance of power, increasing the likelihood of harassment.

### 2.1.2. *Characteristics of the Initiator*

Is there a typical profile for offenders? While some authors see the perpetrator as a **psychopath and a pervert** (Hirigoyen 1998), others argue that harassers are not always mentally ill, but that **working contexts can lead them to harassment**. Even in a "harassment-friendly" context, however, some will resist: the way they have been shaped by their education, experience, values, and personality—their sensitivity, altruism, and empathy—offer alternative behavioral choices, like leaving the company or acting as a mediating force between the hierarchy and a member of their team.

Zapf and Einarsen (2003) distinguish three forms of harassment, based on the characteristics of the harasser. The first relates to the harasser's desire to protect their own **self-esteem**. On this account, protecting and developing one's self-esteem, understood as a way of judging oneself, is a basic motivation influencing and controlling human behavior in many social situations. A high level of self-esteem seems to increase the likelihood of aggressive behavior compared to low self-esteem. In addition, Baumeister et al. (1996) suggest that negative emotions like frustration, anger, and anxiety play an intermediate role between self-esteem and aggression. Similarly, envy is seen as a major reason for harassing another person (Zapf and Einarsen 2003, Vidaillet 2007). According to Neuman and Baron (2003), perceptions of unfair treatment, frustration, and stress are often preconditions for aggression and violence at work. Finally, Le Goff (2008) points out that individuals have now internalized a model of flawless performance: "the model of the young dynamic manager, perpetually at the top of their game, solving every problem and directing his subordinates with a disconcerting smile" (249). This model creates constant stress for individuals and a fear that they are not up to the task. Individuals who internalize this unattainable model tend to lose value in their own eyes when they cannot achieve it, instead accepting others' judgments of them. They consequently refuse responsibility for failing to achieve this imaginary power over their situation and the other. "The aggressiveness that they show toward the other is equal to the self-contempt and resentment they feel" (251).

The second form of harassment is linked to the harasser's **lack of social and relational skills** (Zapf and Einarsen 2003). Lack of emotional control, of self-criticism, and of hindsight can lead to harassment. A superior may, for instance, let out his or her anger and negative emotions by shouting at others in the workplace, not realizing the effects this behavior has on them.

Finally, harassment can be the result of **political behavior** (Zapf and Einarsen 2003) and **political games** within the organization. This behavior may be aimed at protecting the harasser's position or interests within the organization. Some researchers have argued that this phenomenon, which primarily occurs at the intermediate and higher levels of the hierarchy, explains why it is often superiors and managers who commit harassment. Furthermore,

O'Leary-Kelly, Griffin, and Glew (1996) have used a "social learning perspective" to analyze harassment as a behavior learned through observation, experience, and imitation from various sources: family, school, military service, television, business, and so on. This means that behaviors observed within the organization are reproduced. Brodsky (1976), however, argues that harassment cannot develop without a work organization and corporate culture that tolerates these behaviors.

2.1.3. ***Characteristics of the Organization***

Many studies emphasize the organization's responsibility for harassment. Some authors see harassment as the result of deliberate organizational strategy or as a result of organizational failure. Dejours confirms this idea of an organization functioning in a perverse, pathogenic way in the new editions of his work (2006, 2008). Similarly, Pezé (2008) emphasizes the role of work situations that have extremely negative results on the body and the psyche.

Faulx (2009) examines the reasons for the growth in harassment, offering two explanatory hypotheses in light of the growing literature on harassment. The first claims that harassment has always existed and that its apparent growth is linked to a **new way of conceiving social relations**. On this view, harassment is the result of a **social construction** that arises particularly from new modes of thought and action within professional circles. The tendency to personalize social problems explains the development of the concept of harassment. Whereas the struggles between classes or within hierarchies were used to offer explanations before the 1990s (Haroche 2005, cited by Faulx 2009), the language of hostile work situations or harassment is now used. The Marxist concept of exploitation, dominant for a century, has faded, and been replaced by a **psychologization of labor relations** that disempowers the company, as harassment becomes the result of "toxic" interindividual relationships rather than a social and organizational problem. This "psychologized" vision, which Askenazy attacks (2004), stops us from taking the whole organizational system into account for understanding harassment situations. The second hypothesis suggests instead that harassment has developed from **new realities in the workplace** (Faulx 2009). On this view, working conditions have evolved over the last fifteen to thirty years, permitting harassment situations to develop. Changes in power mechanisms, increased mechanisms of control, greater work pressures, and competition between solitary individuals are the changes that explain the phenomenon of harassment. Faulx (2009) concludes that the two hypotheses are complementary. He considers the appearance of the concept of harassment and its success to reveal a change in the way the social world is understood and the way the working world functions. Numerous studies reinforce the second hypothesis, presenting the company's character as major determinants of psychological harassment. Hoel and Salin (2003) propose a list of four components: (1) broad social changes and changes in the nature

of work; (2) work organization; (3) corporate culture and social context; and (4) management styles.

**Organizational change** is strongly connected to harassment. In order to maintain their competitiveness in the context of globalization, organizations make changes, restructure, and often increase pressure on their employees and intensify work demands. Such an environment affects their relationship with employees, which frequently deteriorates. Due to decreased job security, employees may become less resistant to managerial pressure, and less able to defend themselves against unfair and aggressive treatment by managers. The flattening of hierarchical structures creates fewer opportunities for advancement, which increases competition between managers, personal conflicts, and the likelihood of harassment (Hoel and Salin 2003).

**Work organization** (Dejours 2006, 2008), a negative and stressful working environment (Leymann 1996), the intensification of work, pressure, unclarity about where one is to work (De Gaulejac and Léonetti 1994), teams put together without consultation, poorly defined roles, imprecise rules in the workplace, and difficult working conditions like noise, heat, or cold are determinants of psychological harassment at work (Hoel and Salin 2003). Le Goff (2008) notes that the organization of traditional work has been challenged and has given way to "more flexible forms of organization that reduce hierarchical structures, compartmentalize services, and value versatility, the enrichment of tasks, and autonomy" (240). This change calls for greater responsibility and involvement on the part of individuals in a new, unstable, insecure environment. Indeed, "versatility and the removal of hierarchies… have destabilized the occupational categories and collectives that employees could subscribe to, identifying themselves as members of an ordered, hierarchical whole" (242). The marks of collective belonging become less clear, reinforcing uncertainty and creating "conditions that favor disorder and psychological imbalance, while modes of collective regulation and protection have been eroded and undermined" (Le Goff 2008, 243). Each individual is required to be more autonomous and responsible for their own work, their own performance, and that of the company. The weakest struggle and face a landscape of contradictory demands where nothing is put in place to help them, improve their skills, or offer training. The weight of this responsibility can seem unbearable and can lead to conflict.

**Corporate culture** also plays a significant role in the development of harassment. Culture is characterized by values, rituals, routines, symbols, norms, and rules that guide the behavior of a group of individuals. According to Hoel and Salin (2003, 211), "When newcomers enter the organization, they must gradually adapt to the standards of the company and the group through a process of socialization." Humiliating jokes and insults can be part of the process of socialization by which new arrivals are tested. This form of "humor" can rapidly degenerate into harassment if, for various reasons, the

victims cannot defend themselves or do not treat such behavior as a game or a joke (Hoel and Salin 2003). Moreover, harassment dominates in organizations where employees and managers feel they are supported and their abusive behavior is accepted by their superiors. Brodsky (1976, 83) writes that "for harassment to occur, the culture of the organization must allow and reward it." A culture based on the absence of collective solidarity, competition between solitary individuals, and the intensification of conflicts between different ranks in the hierarchy (De Gaulejac and Léonetti 1994) further reinforce the risks of harassment, because such competitive individualism is accompanied by a dissolution of collective defense mechanisms, including the weakening of trade unions.

Finally, the influence of **management styles** has been studied. Two such styles appear particularly associated with harassment: the authoritarian and the laissez-faire. The traditional authoritarian style creates "dominant-dominated relationships" within a business, which legitimize a power imbalance that can easily be abused. The laissez-faire style and inaction by leaders when faced with harassment are interpreted as signals of acceptance, and so contribute to the development of harassment. Furthermore, individual dissatisfaction with management style, instructions, and employee feedback encourages psychological harassment (Hoel and Salin 2003). Faulx (2009) notes that changes in power mechanisms may help to explain harassment. New managerial practices are marked by a rejection of the hierarchy and the dominant-dominated mechanisms that lead the organization to develop flexible means of constraining and punishing individual decisions deemed inconsistent with its needs. The new practices instead use 'soft' domination (Courpasson 2005, cited by Faulx 2009), where influence replaces power, leaders replace bosses, managers replace executives, and team leaders replace supervisors. Within these semantic changes, the requirement to obey one's leaders is maintained or even increased, demands on work become more intense, and constraints on productivity increase. The shape taken by abusive behavior changes correspondingly. "Previously, the boss gave the orders and, when things went wrong, abused his/her power; now, the manager or co-worker exert influence over and perhaps manipulate their colleagues and, when things go wrong, harass them" (Faulx 2009, 12).

### 2.2. ***Hostile Behavior***

When encounters between individuals in a work context lead to negative emotions and distress, the question becomes: Does such behavior constitute psychological harassment (Stage 2)?

Beyond the distinctive criteria presented above—repetition, the degradation of working conditions, consequences for the individual—various authors have offered classifications for different forms of hostile behavior. For example, Leymann (1996) divides the actions he describes

as "mobbing" into five groups, according to their effects on the victim: (1) actions that prevent victims from expressing themselves; (2) actions that isolate the victim; (3) actions that lower the victim's status in the eyes of their colleagues; (4) actions that discredit the victim's work; and (5) actions that damage the victim's health. Leymann associates forty-five behaviors with these five groups. Quine (1999) attempts to evaluate "bullying" by constructing a questionnaire with twenty items divided across five categories: (1) threats to the victim's professional status; (2) threats to the victim's person and reputation; (3) isolation; (4) actions connected to work, like exerting permanent pressure or setting impossible goals; and (5) destabilization. In Ireland, the 2001 report by the Taskforce on the Prevention of Workplace Bullying broke psychological harassment down into ten actions: (1) the infringement of the individual's right to dignity at work; (2) humiliation; (3) intimidation; (4) abusive language; (5) persecution; (6) exclusion and isolation; (7) tormenting, spying on, or deceiving the victim in order to intrude on their lives; (8) repeatedly assigning irrational tasks that are obviously against the individual's interests; (9) repeatedly setting unrealistic deadlines or impossible tasks; and (10) implicit threats (quoted by Di Martino, Hoel and Cooper 2003, 7). In each of these classifications, the behaviors are undesirable to the target and clearly hostile to them.

### 2.3. ***Observed Responses***

In the next stage, psychological harassment elicits a response from the individual and the organization (Stage 3).

#### 2.3.1. ***Individual Responses***

Individuals can respond to psychological harassment in a passive or active manner. In an Icelandic study, Olafsson and Jóhannsdottir (2004) classify individuals' responses into four groups: (1) authoritarian responses, (2) seeking help, (3) avoidance, and (4) inaction. These four groups describe a range of responses from action to inaction. The passive strategy amounts essentially to doing nothing. The victim's lack of reaction is explained by the fact that: (1) they do not understand what is happening; (2) they do not dare to discuss the situation, because they do not know how to explain the reasons for their unhappiness; (3) they think the harassment will stop, and live in hope of a better future; and (4) they are afraid to discuss it for fear of retaliation or losing their job. The passive strategy leads to loss of confidence and self-esteem in the victim. They feel isolated and will gradually withdraw. The second strategy is active. The aim is to oppose the aggressor openly, informing management and seeking help from colleagues, managers, and others. If victims feel they will not receive help, they may leave the company in order to protect themselves or may turn to the law. In France, the introduction of harassment into the Labor Code has prompted victims of harassment to take positive action.

2.3.2. ***Organizational Responses***

Similarly, organizations respond to harassment through active and passive strategies. Inaction is a passive style. The organization's representatives are unaware of the victim's complaint or attach no importance to it. The company does not intervene and punishment is nonexistent. These strategies can be explained by the fact that: (1) the organization considers harassment acceptable or even normal; (2) the complaint appears unfounded—»it's not serious," "it's just a game," "it's just for fun," "it's just someone else complaining," and so on; (3) the situation is viewed as a personal matter—»it's their problem" or part of "their private life»; or (4) managers do not know how to respond to or manage the complaint. Action is an active response to harassment. Individuals including the director of human resources, managers, the leadership, trade union representatives, or company doctor may intervene, seeking information, improving communications, training others, setting punishments, and addressing organizational causes like working conditions, work organization, management style, and corporate culture. These individual and organizational responses determine the consequences of psychological harassment at work.

2.4. ***Effects observed***

Different studies show that psychological harassment has negative consequences for the individual, the organization, and society in general (Stage 4).

2.4.1. ***Individual consequences***

There are three types of negative consequences for individuals. The first is a deterioration in physical and mental health (McCarthy et al. 2001, Leymann 1996, Ayoko et al. 2003, Di Martino et al. 2003, Einarsen and Mikkelsen 2003, Djurkovic et al. 2004, Matthiesen and Einarsen 2004, Nielsen et al. 2004). This deterioration is marked by an increase in stress and a decrease in psychological and physical well-being, with symptoms including fear, increased anxiety, depression, the development of psychosomatic and cognitive symptoms like hypersensitivity, memory loss, feelings of persecution, and the inability to concentrate, clarify ideas, or solve problems, isolation, loneliness, the breakdown of social relationships, chronic fatigue, and sleep problems. In the worst cases of harassment, victims often suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Leymann and Gustafsson 1996, Matthiesen and Einarsen 2004, Nielsen et al., 2004, Tehrani 2004). Finally, some have presented harassment as a cause of suicide (Leymann 1996, Hirigoyen 2001).

The second effect of psychological harassment is the economic consequences for the victim. Increased costs and loss of income often occur due to illness and associated absences, inability to work, disability, a drop in performance, the decision to leave work, dismissal, and so on. The loss of confidence brought on by harassment may leave some unable to cope with job

interviews. The psychological damage is such that victims are afraid to present themselves to new employers and cannot argue or present their experiences and skills in a way that appeals to hirers.

The third consequence relates to the victim's family and social life. Exposure to harassment has a high probability of affecting the victim's private life, including relationships with family and friends, their free time, their family obligations, and their sex life (Einarsen and Mikkelsen 2003).

#### 2.4.2. ***Organizational consequences***

Psychological harassment entails considerable costs for the organization. There are direct costs related to employee absence, sickness or disability leave, turnover, including recruitment costs for the replacement of those who leave and for training new arrivals (Djurkovic et al. 2004), the cost of lower performance and productivity, and collective work stoppages, particularly strikes within part or all of the company (Ayoko, Callan and Hartel 2003, Hoel, Einarsen and Cooper 2003). Indirect costs arise from litigation, including defense costs and time spent preparing cases and attending court, and the judgment itself, including damages, costs associated with reclassifying a voluntary departure as a dismissal, a justified dismissal as a wrongful one, a suicide as an industrial accident, or a work stoppage as an occupational illness or accident. Finally, there are costs related to the deterioration of the organization's image and reputation. These organizational consequences suggest that beyond simple respect for the individual and the desire to ensure their well-being, combating harassment is a sensible commercial decision.

#### 2.4.3. ***Societal consequences***

The direct and indirect costs of psychological harassment for society relate to its ability to function well and to structures for financing social protection systems. In France, many of the costs generated by harassment are borne by the public. Costs related to absence due to sickness, disability, or death, to the premature termination of productive labor, and to early retirement are covered by the respective insurance programs. The decline in productivity and service quality (Arnetz and Arnetz 2001) affects the country's image and limits its attractiveness to potential investors. The effects on the victims' private lives and the break-up of families means that there are more single-parent families who, because of their isolation or their limited earnings, now have to be supported by social security, whether through single-parent benefits or welfare.

## Conclusion

Highlighting the complexity of psychological harassment in the workplace is essential for developing practices that can combat the phenomenon. Identifying its determinants helps managers understand and control its causes.

Understanding its consequences demonstrates that the decision by a company's leadership to combat such violence helps to guarantee the firm's sustainability.

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