

**Research Article****THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT AS A GENDER-BASED FORM OF MOBBING*****Emir Begović**

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Abstract

Mobbing represents systemic, moderate, and planned psychological violence aimed at the degradation of the worker, while sexual harassment refers to an act of gender-shaped violence that shows inequalities in the workplace due to the division of power. Feminist theories, led by the theory of Catharine MacKinnon, represent a symbol of the struggle against this form of behavior. Although there is a large number of researches on mobbing and sexual harassment, awareness of the mentioned phenomena is still not sufficiently developed in society. For this reason, it is necessary to continue research in order to better understand the problem. The paper aims to connect existing theoretical knowledge about mobbing and sexual harassment, as well as to present their causes and consequences. The role of organizational culture is important in order to potentially recognize and prevent violence in time. A review of the relevant literature has shown numerous consequences of sexual harassment. Apart from the victim, the consequences are borne by the organization and society as a whole. The normalization of this phenomenon within society represents a huge obstacle and makes its reporting to competent authorities difficult, which results in systemic neglect. The results of the reviewed literature indicate a large number of omissions when it comes to protecting workers from sexual harassment as a gendered form of mobbing. With adequate prevention, it is possible to react in a timely manner if violence occurs. The basis for creating a safe working environment is to view mobbing as a social, rather than an individual problem.

Keywords: Mobbing, Sexual harassment, Workplace, Feminist theories, Organizational culture.

INTRODUCTION

Workplace harassment is a deeply rooted and persistent social phenomenon that has only recently begun to be the subject of systematic and critical discussion within the public sphere and organizational contexts. Although it has been established that the impact of such negative behavior causes anxiety, adverse effects, and symptoms of depression in individuals (Bowling & Beehr 2006), we find ourselves in a situation of global marginalization of harassment, without providing adequate institutional or normative attention. Harassment also contributes to decreased productivity and increased absenteeism in organizations (Deery *et al.*, 2011). According to its etymological meaning, mobbing is derived from the Latin phrase *mobile vulgus*, which denotes something that is constantly in motion and fickle. The term mobbing reflects the dynamic and collective dimension of power in which an individual becomes the object of pressure and control within a broader organizational mass. Its semantic field expanded in the Anglo-Saxon context. The noun "mobb" in this context refers to a mass, a mob, or a crowd. When it comes to extreme interpretations, the noun "mobb" also denotes organized forms of domination such as a mafia organization. It is interesting that mobbing only became the subject of theoretical and empirical study in the 1980s, which is paradoxical because its presence in human civilization has been continuous. Since the dawn of civilization, human interactions have been marked by numerous forms of conflict and power strategies. Individuals and groups have used these to develop mechanisms of control. Historical constants related to structural inequalities and power dynamics within social communities and organizations, in the context of the emergence of human civilization and the phenomenon of mobbing, can be divided into three types: harassment, scheming, and manipulation.

Following historical constants, mobbing can be viewed as a modern expression of processes that have long existed in society. In this way, micro-interactions and macro-structural factors coexist and are articulated through the constant production of social control. This paper analyzes existing scientific and professional literature on the phenomenon of mobbing in the workplace. The aim of the paper is to connect existing theoretical insights on mobbing and sexual harassment as its gendered form and to analyze their causes and consequences.

LEYMANN'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE STUDY OF MOBBING

German psychologist Heinz Leymann was the first author to take a more serious scientific interest in the phenomenon of mobbing, which he described as a specific pattern of behavior among people in the workplace. He founded a clinic for victims of workplace harassment. His definition of mobbing is as follows:

Mobbing, or psychological terror in the workplace, refers to hostile and unethical communication that is systematically directed by one or more individuals toward, primarily, a single individual, who, because of the mobbing, finds himself in a position where he is helpless and unable to defend himself, and is kept there by means of ongoing mobbing activities. Due to the high frequency and long duration of the hostile behavior, this mistreatment leads to significant mental, psychosomatic, and social suffering (Leymann 1990).

According to Leymann's definition, we can conclude that mobbing represents a systemically directed, planned, and continuous form of communication. The mobber (the person who carries out the mobbing) very carefully selects a target on whom to vent their abuse, and then proceeds to put their ideas

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into action. The goal of mobbing is very clear, and the mobber is fully aware of it. It will lead to the destruction of the targeted victim, who will then bear numerous consequences. The French Social Modernization Act clearly defined this phenomenon:

Mobbing is psychological harassment that is repeated through repeated actions whose purpose or effect is the degradation of the worker's working conditions, which can cause an attack on and harm human rights and human dignity, damage physical or mental health, or compromise the victim's professional future (Loi n° 2002-73, 2002). The definition of mobbing in French legislation allows for a precise normative delineation of mobbing as workplace harassment. The specificity of mobbing is determined by the elements of repeated actions and their focus on degrading the employee's working conditions, where it is sufficient for there to be either the intent or the objective consequence of this form of action.

Continuity and Prevalence of Mobbing in Contemporary Society

Mobbing is a phenomenon that is ubiquitous in contemporary society. However, mobbing has not been sufficiently openly problematized in public. This results in a lack of institutional attention. Poredoš and Kovač (2005) divided mobbing activities into several types of attacks, such as attacks on the ability to communicate properly (limiting opportunities for expression, refusing nonverbal contact with the victim), attacks on the ability to maintain social relationships (isolating the victim), attacks on personal reputation (making up stories about the victim and their private life, gossiping, mocking), attacks on the quality of the professional situation (constant criticism and complaints, low job evaluations, assigning tasks that are not suited to her professional qualifications, swamping her with tasks and imposing short deadlines, constantly changing job duties) and attacks on health (the victim is forced to perform tasks that harm her health).

Einarsen (1999) divided mobbing into two types of activities: work-related violent activities and person-related activities. Work-related structural violent activities make it difficult for the victim to perform their job or completely or partially deprive them of responsibilities. He identifies two types of violent behavior. The first is caused by conflict, while the second is "predatory" behavior. This form of behavior includes, among other things, social exclusion, spreading rumors, unwanted sexual advances, and the like. When it comes to "predatory" aggressive behavior, the victim is a subject who has unintentionally found themselves in a situation where the abuser wants to demonstrate power.

Mobbing in an organizational context manifests itself through two universal forms: horizontal and vertical mobbing. Horizontal mobbing is a form in which the abuser(s) and the victim are colleagues, i.e., on the same hierarchical level. It most often occurs due to jealousy, to prevent advancement, and also out of fear of competition. Vertical mobbing refers to workplace harassment in situations where the abuser is in a higher position in the organization than the victim (a supervisor), and there is also a reverse version (when an employee mobs a supervisor). Strategic mobbing is a form of vertical mobbing in which organizational actors with different interests join forces to degrade and drive the victim out of the organization.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT AS A STRUCTURAL FORM OF VIOLENCE

At the beginning of this chapter, it is necessary to differentiate between sexual violence and sexual harassment. According to Mamula and Bonacci Skenderović (2006), sexual harassment is considered to be any attempt to engage in a sexual act, an unwanted sexual comment, or a proposition that a person may make toward a victim. The key characteristics of sexual harassment are considered to be the use of force, threats, or blackmail aimed at endangering the victim or the victim's loved ones.

In 1973, Mary Row used the term sexual harassment in the book *Saturn's Rings*, which addressed various issues of gender and sexual harassment of women in the workplace. The term sexual harassment became known to the general public in the 1990s, when reports of it in the US and Canada were increasing daily (Bowers & Hook 2002). Sexual harassment is a form of gender-based violence rooted in unequal gender relations. Babović (2015) emphasizes that anyone, regardless of gender, can become a victim of sexual harassment, but points out that women are the most common targets of this form of mobbing.

Sexual harassment that manifests in the workplace reveals the inequalities inherent in the distribution of power and within the gendered organizational hierarchy. Contemporary society needs to focus its attention on the phenomenon of sexual harassment. In doing so, awareness would be raised among societal actors, and the phenomenon of sexual harassment, particularly in the workplace, would be recognized. There is a strong possibility that such reflection would also lead to better normative regulation of this phenomenon. Examples of sexual harassment are detailed in the OSCE's 2019 research. Sexual harassment includes unwanted touching, hugging, sexually suggestive comments, intrusive questions about one's private life intended to offend the victim, insults based on appearance, the sending and displaying of explicit photos and gifts, and indecent exposure of intimate body parts, coercing someone to view pornographic content, as well as unsolicited emails or text messages containing explicit content. Interestingly, inappropriate attempts to get close on social media are also considered sexual harassment.

The modern society we live in brings with it numerous negative trends. One of them is truly disheartening: the conditions of sexual orientation that, in most cases, become a prerequisite for employment or advancement within an organization. Unfortunately, victims of this form of violence are unaware of the legal and social frameworks that define what is considered mobbing and sexual harassment. The victims' ignorance and unfamiliarity with legal frameworks are a key factor in reproducing structural inequality and gender-based power dynamics within an organization. The aforementioned acts are largely considered "normal" and "harmless," a perception largely reinforced by their environment. In the context of contemporary social transformations, where the normative sense of shame is gradually eroding, perpetrators of harassment gain additional social permissiveness and freedom to engage in this immoral act. A large number of victims ultimately believe it's all their fault, not the abuser's. Victims of mobbing experience multiple consequences, and in the most common situations they are

forced, of their own accord, to leave their workplace or receive a termination notice. When they resign, it's more a result of "burnout" or simply the last "straw" for their sanity. In the second case, if the employer notices that the victim of harassment frequently misses work, is unproductive, fails to complete work tasks on time for an extended period, and so on, they terminate the person's employment. It can be observed that in both cases we have numerous problems that, among other things, persist throughout society as a whole. We are becoming a society in which we have worn-out and mentally exhausted individuals who, in most cases, become dysfunctional in everyday social interactions.

Harassment and violence in the form of sexual misconduct fall under the broader category of gender-based violence. Mamula emphasizes violence against the female sex in the definition of gender-based violence, pointing out that "any act that leads to, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering of women, including threats to such persons, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether it occurs in private or public life. This includes physical, sexual, or psychological violence such as domestic physical violence against women, acid burning and mutilation, sexual abuse, including rape and incest by family members, female genital mutilation, the killing of female newborns, and emotional abuse such as coercion and the use of violent and insulting language. Gender-based violence does not only occur within the family and the community at large, but is sometimes permitted or even encouraged by the state through various policies and actions. Put simply, gender-based violence refers to a phenomenon in which men are perpetrators in the majority of cases, regardless of whether the violence is between men or between men and women, and women are victims in the majority of cases" (Mamula *et al.*, 2004). Mamula drew attention to the fact that women are most often victims of gender-based violence, but she also pointed out that men can be victims as well. It is necessary to begin viewing this form of violence in the public sphere. One of the reasons why women are mostly victims is the link between violence and social norms. Contemporary social norms in most cases "justify" male dominance, in which violence is articulated and treated as a broader social problem, thereby reflecting gender inequality within social and institutional structures.

Structural power relations in sexual harassment: Perpetrators and victims

In a study conducted in 2012. in Iran (Horvat & Perasović Cigrovski 2014), it was concluded that perpetrators come from all social strata, but that women are more afraid of perpetrators of lower socioeconomic status because they are more likely to be followed and touched by them.

Horvat and Perasović Cigrovski (2014) presented two theoretical approaches in their research that identified the causes of sexual harassment. According to the first traditional theoretical approach, the focus is on the victim, specifically her appearance and behavior. Women are advised on how to behave to avoid unwanted actions by men, but that approach does not include advice on how men should behave. In the second theoretical approach, namely the theory of rational choice, it is assumed that those who commit violent acts are rational individuals. Such individuals base their behavior on an assessment of the risks and benefits that choosing a particular behavior would have for them. If there are no

sanctions for violent behavior but the opportunity exists, the perpetrator will carry out an act of harassment. Anyone can become a victim of sexual violence, regardless of gender, age, race, or similar factors. It is important to emphasize that the victim should not be blamed for what they experienced, but that the full focus of responsibility should be on the abuser. It is disheartening that in contemporary thinking the responsibility is placed on potential victims of sexual harassment by giving them examples of what to avoid so they don't become targets of violence. In contrast, potential abusers, or those with a history of such acts, receive almost no social or institutional intervention, nor are they even warned or sanctioned. Such passivity unconsciously provides them with additional social permissiveness and a "green light" to further perpetrate harassment.

SOCIOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE ORGANIZATION

Sexual harassment is considered a huge problem in modern society. Author Catherine MacKinnon, in her book *Sexual Harassment of Working Women*, defined sexual harassment as the unwanted imposition of sexual demands in the context of an unequal power relationship. This author's definition of sexual harassment is one of the few presented in academic papers, as her research focused on this form of workplace violence. This is because MacKinnon was the first to delve deeply into the concept of this type of harassment. Economic power is to sexual harassment what physical force is to rape, argues MacKinnon. This line of reasoning brings about a shift in the perception of workplace sexual harassment from something inherently physical and direct, moving the focus to the primary cause of this type of violence: power relations.

The man's position of power, Simmel (2011) observes, in addition to establishing his relative superiority over women, also dictates that his standards become universal, human standards that apply to every individual. All discussions about women are conducted only in relation to their being in relation to the man, in real, ideal, or value frameworks, and no one asks what women are in and of themselves.

McLaughlin, Uggen, and Blackstone (2017) examined the economic and career consequences of sexual harassment of women in the workplace in the United States. The results showed that women who experienced sexual harassment, in addition to health problems, were forced to face financial issues. The most common category of victims was women in leadership positions within the organization. The goal of feminist theories is precisely to raise awareness about the sexual harassment of women, with the caveat that the consequences are not only on an individual level but also for society as a whole. Women working in a predominantly male environment are highly likely to experience sexual harassment, especially if they hold a job that contemporary society stereotypically considers "male." The measures women decide to take may partially depend on the gender of the supervisor. If the supervisor is a man, women are more likely to believe that there is tolerance for sexual harassment within the organization than if the supervisor were a woman.

According to MacKinnon (1979), sexual harassment in the workplace reduces women to sexual objects and reinforces sexual stereotypes. As a result, there is also a decline in

women's authority in their positions within the organization. The author also drew attention to the structural patterns of power within the work environment. Men abuse their high position in the hierarchy to harass their female colleagues. MacKinnon lists several forms in which sexual harassment can appear: suggestive and unwanted comments and jokes, unwanted stares, "accidental" touches on the way by, pinching, kissing, making ultimatums or conditions of a sexual nature in exchange for a job or promotion, and finally, sexual intercourse under duress. Raewyn Connell, in her theory of hegemonic masculinity, emphasizes how society privileges a one-dimensional, normative ideal of male behavior. Men who deviate from this normative ideal are perceived by society as feminine, making them vulnerable to sexual harassment. Women, on the other hand, are targeted if they challenge their subordinate position in the workplace as part of a system that favors a particular pattern of masculinity. Sexual harassment in this context is a tool for maintaining the status quo within the organization.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Organizational culture has a significant impact on the detection of sexual harassment in the workplace. It is crucial to establish interaction with everyone within an organization, from the developed social level all the way to the emotional, so that the organizational climate acquires a new value system. Such values can be viewed as rules about what is right and what is wrong in the interpersonal relationships among employees. It is important not to forget the crucial function of organizational culture, as within the framework of social determinants, it designs the social system in which employees are aware of their work environment. In such an organizational context, employees control or direct their behavior, but also understand and evaluate their own and others' work-related behavior. There are organizations that are more likely to produce a culture with greater tolerance for sexual harassment. If employees feel that the organizational climate is intolerant of sexual harassment, this is favorably associated with psychological well-being, job satisfaction, and employee organizational engagement (Clark 2020:19). Clear policies and guidelines are essential for a healthy work environment that seeks to prevent and address the phenomenon of sexual harassment. Inevitably, there are cases in which organizations provide selective attention only to the most severe forms of sexual harassment, and unfortunately the consequence is that the less problematic incidents of this type of behavior are completely overlooked. Offerman and Malamut pointed this out.

"In order to try to avoid an organizational climate that tolerates sexual harassment, organizations need clear policies and guidelines against the phenomenon that will clarify the actual actions in the event of reports of sexual harassment" (Offermann & Malamut 2002:887).

Such (un)intentional passivity leads to the generation of serious problems within the organization. As a result of this passivity, inappropriate behaviors such as suggestive comments and negative gestures are increasingly being normalized. In this way, psychosocial pressure on victims is intensified, and the abuser is empowered to continue reproducing their inappropriate behavior without fear of consequences.

CONSEQUENCES CAUSED BY HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

People who are victims of harassment go through anger, helplessness, confusion, and a sense of guilt after the act itself. The symptoms themselves vary from victim to victim. In addition, they vary depending on the duration of the harassment as well as the level of support. Heinz Leymann divided the consequences of mobbing into five categories: social, psychosocial, psychosomatic, psychiatric, and economic. Social consequences include social isolation, stigmatization, voluntary unemployment, and social maladjustment (Leymann 1990). In this case, the victim experiences condemnation from coworkers, family, and members of society. Their support is lacking, which ultimately further deteriorates the victim's condition. In most cases, due to a lack of and inadequate help from close people, the individual gives up the fight. This ultimately results in resigning from the organization. When it comes to the psychosocial consequences, Leymann also points to the loss of coping resources. According to his observation, many coping resources are tied to social situations, and as these change in a negative direction, the coping system falls apart. The very ability to cope with challenges often depends on the support we discussed earlier. The existence of a support network of family members, friends, and society as a whole can be a very important resource for coping with this problem. Psychological consequences include: feelings of despair and utter helplessness, intense anger due to the lack of legal remedies, severe anxiety, and despair (Leymann 1990). Despair is a state in which an individual may feel that there are no sustainable solutions to their problem. When a person is completely helpless, they lose control and sink into a darkness that represents captivity in a difficult situation.

Psychosomatic and psychiatric consequences of workplace harassment include depression, hyperactivity, compulsion, suicides, and psychosomatic illnesses. According to Leyman (1990), there are doubts that the experiences arising from this social situation mobbing affect the immune system. When mobbing is continuous, it in most cases leads to the development of depression. At the outset of these phenomena, we encounter stress that is the product of unfavorable social circumstances and relationships. In cases of constant stress, there is a high likelihood of developing depressive symptoms, which, in addition to being an individual issue, also become a social problem. In situations where adequate institutional and social support is lacking, there is a possibility of severe consequences for the individual.

Economic consequences are also a significant aspect of workplace harassment. They do not pertain solely to the individual or society, but also to the functioning of the organization itself as a system. Long periods of sick leave, a catastrophic drop in the entire group's output combined with the loss of productive work, can be estimated at between \$30,000 and \$100,000 per year for an employee subjected to mobbing, as cases in the U.S. show. In Great Britain, Australia, Canada, West Germany, and Scandinavia, where these situations last ten or more years (Leymann 1990). A poor work atmosphere and serious consequences undermine the organization's reputation. Also, one of the consequences for the organization is a drop in employee motivation, which leads to decreased productivity and business performance. In such a

situation, the quality of work declines and additional problems accumulate. Because of the large number of sick leaves taken by the victim or victims, additional staff must be hired and all financial obligations to those on sick leave must be met.

MECHANISMS OF SILENCE IN CASES OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Mamula (2011) in her research found results that showed 4.5% of women reported sexual violence in the workplace. Accordingly, the percentages of reported sexual harassment are even lower. The key reason most women do not dare to report sexual harassment to the proper authorities is that they believe there was not enough continuity, meaning the harassment did not occur or did not last long enough to be reported. The organization Stop Street Harassment cites fear that the authorities will not respond adequately or will not believe the victims as reasons for not reporting sexual harassment. They fear that the authorities will blame the victim for their choice of clothing or believe that the harassment did not contain enough elements to be reported. The trivialization and normalization of sexual harassment contribute to the large number of unreported cases (Anđelić 2022). One of the reasons victims do not dare to report sexual harassment is the fear of retaliation from the perpetrator. After reporting the abuser, the victim fears the possibility that they could be harmed again. There is a possibility that in their revenge for being reported, the abuser will find accomplices, thereby indirectly continuing to harm the victim. There are also situations in which the victim downplays the nature of the harassment they experienced, thereby unconsciously enabling the harasser to evade the consequences and sanctions they should face. As a result, we have the normalization of harassment in society.

CONCLUSION

Mobbing is a phenomenon that, despite its constant presence throughout the history of human labor, has only in modern society become the subject of scientific research. A major contribution to the study of mobbing was made by German psychologist Heinz Leymann, who in his research presented it as a long-term, systemic problem within organizations. An analysis of the reviewed literature reveals the enormous consequences that sexual harassment, as a form of workplace mobbing, has for the victim as well as for society as a whole. It is important to note that the consequences are not limited to psychological effects, but also include professional and economic ones, confirming that this is a phenomenon with a wide range of repercussions. Using Catherine MacKinnon's (1979) feminist theory, Simmel's contributions, and Raewyn Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity, this paper argues that sexual harassment within an organization should be viewed as a structural phenomenon. Sexual harassment is a gendered form of mobbing that occurs during an unequal distribution of power. An adequate organizational culture is therefore crucial in recognizing and preventing the occurrence of sexual harassment in the workplace. If an inadequate organizational culture prevails, it creates a "fertile ground" for violence. The most common reasons why most women do not report violence are the fear that no one will believe them, the belief that there was not enough continuity for a report to the proper authorities, and the fear of direct or indirect retaliation from the abuser. The results of the literature review pointed to shortcomings in protecting workers from sexual harassment. It

is very important to establish confidential and simple reporting mechanisms, educate workers about the consequences of harassment, and ensure ethically oriented leadership within the organization. Hiring trained human resources personnel, bringing in mediators, and introducing rigorous penalties for harassers can allow for timely intervention if violence occurs.

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