

VIOLENCE AT WORK

ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS THAT MAY GENERATE PHYSICAL VIOLENCE, AS WELL AS SEXUAL AND MORAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

A Synthesis of a Qualitative and Quantitative Research



Ada Garcia (UCL)
Bernard Hacourt (UCL)
Séverine de Thomaz (UCL)
Hans De Witte (KUL) (KUL)
Elfi Baillien (KUL)
Inge Neyens (KUL)

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**All questions and required complementary
information should be addressed to :**
↳ www.infocap-ucl.be and to garcia@gsw.ucl.ac.be

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Factors that may generate physical violence, as well as sexual and moral harassment in the workplace

A SYNTHESIS OF A QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

A Brief Survey of the Literature: Context and Concepts

Definition

There are a number of definitions on the issue of violence in the workplace, in the scientific literature devoted to the subject. Some of the most prominent ones are the notions of: “mobbing”¹ ; of “bullying”²; “harassment”³; “aggression”⁴; “anomy”⁵. However, the formulation of all these definitions incorporate the importance of analysing the organisational mechanisms which are considered to be key risk factors facilitating the emergence of different forms of violence in the workplace*.

1. Theoretical Identification of Organisational Risk Factors

Many authors have analysed the problematic issue of violence in the workplace. Some have focused their analysis on the victim, while others progressively recognised the existence of important organisational factors that contribute to allow the emergence of violence in the workplace and even to facilitate its perpetuation in different organisations. Therefore, for H. Leyman⁶ the origins of « mobbing » are to be found in the organisation of work, whenever the emergence of stress and frustration cannot find outlets, thus becoming a source of conflict.

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¹ H. Leyman, *Mobbing. La persécution au travail*, Paris, Seuil, 1996.

² A. Adams, *Bullying at Work: How to Confront and Overcome It*, London, Virago, 1997. P. Smith, « Bullying in life span perspective », *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, 1997, n° 7, p. 249-255.

³ M. F. Irigoyen, *Malaise dans le travail. Harcèlement moral : démêler le vrai du faux*, Paris, La Découverte et Syros, 2001. A. Soares, « Quand le travail devient indécent: le Harcèlement psychologique au travail », *Performances*, n° 3, p. 16-26.

⁴ J. Neuman & R. Baron, « Workplace violence and workplace aggression: evidence concerning specific forms, potential causes and preferred targets », *Journal of Management*, 1998, n° 24, p. 391-412.

⁵ J. P. Le Goff, « Que veut dire le harcèlement moral? I. Genèse d'un syndrome. II. Vers un nouvel imaginaire des rapports sociaux », *Le Débat*, 2003, n° 123 - 124.

⁶ H. Leyman, *Mobbing. La persécution au travail*, Paris, 1996.

According to Leyman, the structuring of tasks - as well as the management and animation of those executing the tasks - play a very important role. According to M. F. Irigoyen⁷ there are certain professional contexts within which the process of moral harassment could develop quite easily. For her, there are four key elements associated with new forms of organising work that could generate or facilitate the emergence of different forms of violence.

First, the element of stress plays a prominent role as a source of the emergence of moral harassment. Stress materialises under the influence - among other causes - of the primacy given to achieving specific performance objectives, which result in a very high intensity and pace of the tasks performed by employees. This usually takes place within the context of organisational changes. Moreover, the lack of communication - or frequently, its poor quality - generates interpersonal frictions in the workplace. Again, quoting M. F. Irigoyen, direct conflicts are frequently detected in « repressive » or « traditional » organisations, whereas moral harassment is rather common in organisations implementing a participatory style of management and those requiring a substantial adherence to the values of the organisation. In this last case, the tendency of the organisation's management to maintain a strict adherence of employees to a series of pre-established norms and values creates the conditions favouring the emergence of violence. Another relevant characteristic of organisations prone to facilitate the generation of stress, frustration and violence is the lack of recognition suffered by employees, who think of being perceived - and treated - by management as « mere instruments ».

In the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian scientific literature on the subject, we find the identification of numerous organisational risk factors, which potentially facilitate the emergence of violence in the workplace. Organisational restructuring is frequently identified as one of those key factors. For instance, Cooper (1999)⁸ and Sheehan (1999)⁹ affirm that, in order to respond to higher degrees of competition, organisations are forced to carry out profound restructurings, which are, frequently, quite aggressive. The outcome is characterised by the establishment of an unhealthy atmosphere of uncertainty generating stress. The need to restructure could encourage the implementation of more authoritarian managerial practices, in order to attain the higher levels of productivity through better performance. For instance, the reduction of some positions increases the likelihood of a promotion and, therefore, of higher completion among employees. Consequently, this post-restructuring situation increases the likelihood of interpersonal conflicts among employees. Moreover, there is a stronger focus on the needs of clients and their preferences, with the consequent risk of overlooking employee's rights.

⁷ M. F. Irigoyen, *Malaise dans le travail. Harcèlement moral: démêler le vrai du faux*, Paris, La Découverte et Syros, 2001.

⁸ C. Cooper, « Stress and the changing nature of work », in, *Creating the Productive Workplace*, (eds.) Clements-Croome, D. , Abingdon, Spon Press, 1999.

⁹ M. Sheehan, « Workplace bullying: responding with some emotional intelligence », *International Journal of Manpower*, 1999, n° 20, (1/2), p. 57-69.

The organisation - or structuring - of work could also become a source of organisational violence (Einarsen et al., 1994¹⁰ and Zapf et al., 1996¹¹). This is the case of conflict and the ambiguity of roles, which are both frequently associated with moral harassment. The latter materialises, particularly in a work environment subject to intense pressure and where workers have very little control of their tasks. According to Zapf et al., a large rate of mobbing victims are found in jobs where teamwork and strong coordination of tasks are required, which is a favourable environment for the emergence of interpersonal conflicts.

Other authors, such as Archer¹² brought to light the relevance of culture and organisational environments in the problematic issue of violence in the workplace. In certain cases, moral harassment is not necessarily interpreted as negative behaviour aimed at harming an individual, but rather as a customary conduct determined by tradition. This could also be the case of humiliating pranks and comments - or insults - which are components of the socialisation process and that could become moral harassment if the targeted person cannot successfully defend herself/himself. In this way, organisations which are characterised by an extreme degree of conformity and group pressure would be prone to facilitate moral harassment.

It has been frequently pointed out in the literature that leadership could be considered as an important organisational factor that could potentially generate violence in the workplace. This could be the case of « autocratic leadership » and of similar authoritarian approaches to conflict or problem resolution (O'Moore et al., 1998¹³ ; Vartia, 1996¹⁴). Moreover, the absence of leadership or the presence of lax leadership of the « laissez-faire » type could also allow the presence of violence in the workplace, by sending the implicit message that this kind of behaviour is tolerable.

A number of studies have been conducted, in order to contribute to the understanding of the problem of violence in the workplace. For instance, investigation conducted by the Dublin Foundation on work conditions in Europe¹⁵. According to the authors, it is possible to identify four configurations that are derived from the models of work management implemented in Europe. Each of them unveil different specific risk factors influencing the emergence of violence, as well as those related to the alteration of workers' health.

¹⁰ S. Einarsen et al., « Bullying and harassment at work and its relationship with work environment quality: an exploratory study », *European Journal of Work & Organisational Psychology*, 1994, n° 4, p. 381 - 401.

¹¹ D. Zapf et al., « On the relationship between mobbing factors, job content, social work environment and health outcomes », *European Journal of Work & Organisational Psychology*, 1996, n° 5 (2), P. 215 - 237.

¹² D. Archer, « Exploring bullying culture in the paramilitary organisation », *International Journal of Manpower*, 1999, n° 20 (1/2) 94 - 105.

¹³ M. O'Moore et al., « Bullying behaviour in Irish schools in Ireland: a nationwide study », *Irish Journal of Psychology*, 1998, n° 18, p. 141 - 169.

¹⁴ M. Vartia, « The sources of bullying: psychological work environment and organisational climate », *European Journal of Work and Organisational Psychology*, 1996, n° 5(2), P. 203 - 214.

¹⁵ *Troisième enquête européenne sur les conditions de travail*, P. Paoli et D. Merillié, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Dublin, 2001, www.eurofound.eu.int

The first configuration is named « *autonomous work* ». In this context, workers enjoy a substantial autonomy, not only in terms of the execution of task, but also have the option of discussing with the organisation's management on ways to organise work and on working conditions. This model, which is particularly well represented in sectors such as education and finance seems to be less prone to physical violence, but is more conducive to produce stress and fatigue. It seems that those working within the framework of this model are more likely to be submitted to a process of « hyper solicitation » linked to the responsibility of transforming the direct obligation of the performance of a task, into the obligation of producing tangible results.

The study unveils a second configuration, which is called « flexible work ». Here, workers are openly exposed to the flexibility of the time allocated to work. This flexibility is closely associated with the constraints imposed by the rhythm linked to the objectives of the business world. The types of work linked to this form of organising work are found in the healthcare and hotel sectors. Workers in these types of activities working within the « flexible » organisational model are found to be more exposed to risks associated with the impairment of human dignity and more specifically, vulnerable to moral harassment.

The third configuration is called « *automated work* », which is characterised by a very low level of workers' autonomy in performing their tasks. This situation is frequently accompanied - thus counterbalanced - by the possibility of collective bargaining. This type of work is extremely dependent on the technological rhythm of machinery and tools, as well as quantitative and qualitative production norms. To this organisational configuration belong those working in the industrial sector, particularly those working in assembly lines, as well as such sectors as communications and transportation. Women are particularly exposed to physical and health risks. However, they seem to be less likely to be victims of psychological violence (i.e., hyper solicitation and impairment of human dignity) than others working in the context of other organisational structures.

The fourth organisational configuration analysed in this study is « *workers under servitude* ». This one is characterised by the absence of autonomy in the execution of tasks and very limited opportunities to discuss with management about the organisation of work or the content of tasks. This type of organisational configuration is present in sectors such as sales and services. According to the authors of the study, workers are also subject to exploitation. The norms structuring the execution of tasks in this model facilitate the emergence of risks associated to the deterioration of health - linked o hyper solicitation - and those linked to the impairment of the physical integrity and of the dignity of workers.

The authors of this study conclude that the way in which work is organised - as well as the quality of the social interaction therein developed - is extremely important in influencing the presence of risk factors, as well as bring into light their impact on the processes that facilitate the deterioration of health in the workplace.

Different studies have focused their attention on smaller-sized organisations and have uncovered the characteristics that distinguish them from larger ones. For instance, M. F. Irigoyen who defends the idea that the presence of moral harassment is as frequently in small and medium-sized organisations (SMO) as it is in larger ones. This author underscores the danger faced in small organisational structures given the concentration of power in the hands of the manager, who frequently directs alone the organisation. She also identifies the non-profit sector, as prone to this type of risks, since power is also concentrated in one or a very small number of individuals, who might be tempted to increase and/or misuse it.

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2002) published a study about the characteristics of micro and small enterprises within the European Union. The study found that small-sized organisations employ more women than men and that their level of education increased with the size of the firm. It was found that in these small firms there are more workers with part-time contracts and with contracts of limited duration. These last two characteristics are unrelated to the consecutive choice of small-sized organisations. They also register a higher rate of turnover.

Among other characteristics that distinguish of small-sized organisations from larger ones, the study found the central role played by the entrepreneur, who cumulates the roles of manager and owner, since he/she has frequently made a very large investment in the firm. Because of their small number, employees are more visible to the eyes of the entrepreneur.

The consensus reached in the literature on the subject is that small-sized organisations are more vulnerable to (work-related) conflicts, which appeared to be more difficult to channel through traditional means. Therefore, frequently a conflict results in a resignation, since the conflict takes place between the employer and the employee. Usually, those employees who adhere to the norms established by the entrepreneur maintain a closer relation with the him/her, while those that show less adhesion to the entrepreneurial project could find themselves isolated or excluded. Obviously, this situation could be a source of tension in the workplace, since the conflict takes place in a restricted common « work territory ».

Another important trait of SMO is that they register a non-negligible participation of family members, for whom employment relationships frequently have a rather informal character. Several authors opine that, in this context, the social dialogue remains unstructured, informal and lacking balance, which plays in favour of the employer (Lepley...). Social information are described as rarely being placed at the centre of discussions. More frequently than in other organisational contexts, workers find themselves immersed in a dual process and facing working conditions mainly characterised by lower salaries and fringe benefits than those employed in large organisations. Since no collective bargaining is present in these organisations, workers may be more vulnerable to mistreatment by management. In fact, the absence of a labour union and workers' representatives in small organisations could facilitate the emergence - originated by unscrupulous managers - of abuses, which frequently violate labour legislation.

2. The Organisational Configuration as a Framework of Analysis

The perspective of the sociological and psychological approach adopted in this research project focus on the organisation of work and its social relations context, in order to determine if it is possible to establish a link between certain forms of organising work and a the likelihood of exposure to violent acts and harassment in the workplace.

We found element of an answer to this question in several empirical research results providing evidence from different types of organisations operating in several sectors of activity. In Sweden (Leyman, 1993) Norway (Einarsen & Skkogstad, (1996) and in Germany (Zapf, 1999) empirical research studies have been undertaken to identify those sectors showing risk factors favouring the emergence of violence in the workplace called « mobbing ». Moreover, recent studies sponsored by the Dublin Foundation also favour the « organisational approach » to study this issue¹⁶. Also the International Labour Organisation (ILO/BIT) presented in 2003 the results of twenty-two sectoral studies about violence in the workplace in a series of working papers under a serial denomination « Violence and stress at work in service sectors: A threat to productivity and decent work »¹⁷.

The grouping of different organisational dimensions allows the configuration of « risk-prone » situations as the expression of complex system of structural, cultural and managerial variables belonging to different organisations. It also allows to model them in terms of « organisational configurations ». Such an approach shows a number of analogies with the work of H. Mitzberg on the organisational contingency, as well as with the surveys about identities in the workplace conducted by M. Sainsaulieu.

In our research effort, we utilise the theoretical model of « organisational configuration » as the methodological framework. It allowed us to go beyond the structural categories derived from the institutional separations into economic sectors (NACE code) or in professional groups (ISCO code) thus making possible more homogeneous regroupings in terms of the organisation of work.

The organisational variables incorporated in the analysis in this research study are the following:

¹⁶ I. Houtman, F. Andries, R. van den Berg and S. Dhondt (2003) *Sectoral profiles of working conditions*, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Dublin. <http://www.eurofound.eu.int/publications/files/EF0308EN.pdf>

¹⁷ Working Papers, Sectoral Activities Programme - A 100 20499 999, International Labour Office, Geneva, 2003. www.ilo.org/publns

ORGANISATIONAL ENVIRONMENT		THE STRUCTURE OF WORK
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Degree of power - Conflictuality - Interactional behaviour (support and assistance in the performance of tasks) - Working in groups (technical and professional competence) - Social context - Stress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Market - Employment/Unemployment - Socio-political environment - Technical and scientific environment - Clients 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hierarchical Dynamics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Temporal and spatial distance between subordinates and the hierarchical agent they report to - Number of direct subordinates - Total number of subordinates • Centralisation / Decentralisation
THE ORGANISATION OF WORK		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature and Content of Work <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quantity of work - Norms (clarity and effectiveness of rules and procedures concerning work) - Clarity of tasks assigned - Monotonous tasks - Complex tasks - Repetitive tasks - Learning new skills - Relevance of experience - Sensory, physical and psycho-motor constraints - Cognitive constraints - Emotional constraints 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Of schedules - Of working time - Of the work contract - Of the geographical location - Of tasks • Autonomie <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - On the sequencing for executing tasks - On work methods - On the rhythm and pace of work - On pauses (breaks) and leaves of absence - On working time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rhythm and Pace of Work <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intensity of work - Time required to perform tasks - Strenuous pace of work - Rigorous delays
ORGANISATIONAL CHANGES		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Micro-Changes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Of hierarchical supervisors - Of tasks - Of colleagues - Of work schedules - Of the location of work • Macro-Changes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Merger - Restructuring - Collective lay-offs 		
PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Instruments of Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evaluations - Remunerations and rewards - Availability of information about the organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Practice of Personnel Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participatory mode (degree of participation, consultation and involvement in decision-making) - Recruitment, follow-up and development of personnel - Internal communication - Mutation - Management style - Clarity of objectives - Clarity in the specification of roles and responsibilities - Balance between means and resources, with respect to established goals - Resources and functioning 	

– PRESENTATION OF KEY RESULTS –

Here we present the general results of our research study. It incorporates the main observed trends. We divide the presentation in five sections. We start by providing an explanation of the most relevant results of the qualitative analysis conducted in 2004. In the second section, we present the results obtained about the nature and magnitude acts of violence in the workplace. It is followed by a third section in which we explain the main factors capable of generating the risk of violence and harassment in the workplace. In the fourth section we identify the organisational risk factors by utilising the five configurations and according to the specificities of the organisations analysed. Finally, the fifth section is devoted to the gender perspective, which is an indispensable approach for fine tuning the results and to make an effort to develop prevention policies, which will take into consideration the specific situations of men and women in the workplace.

1. Results of the Qualitative Study

The analysis of the results obtained from the qualitative stage of the study allows to present these results within the context of two different perspectives depending on whether one takes into consideration or not organisational specificities. These perspectives take into consideration:

- the principle of transversality, which identifies risk factors by bringing to light the logic behind the generation of violence and harassment in most organisations irrespective of their specificities;
- the principle of differentiation, which the identification of risk factors incorporates the different organisational specificities, in order to understand their influence in the differential generation of risks contributing to the emergence of acts of violence in the workplace.

Moreover, the qualitative analysis has also incorporated the gender approach, as a necessary element for preventing violence and harassment in the workplace. This third perspective has been incorporated through case studies, within which we find different interpretations and hypothesis that could explain the existence of a higher proportion of violence and harassment against women belonging to the workforce.

- **The transversality of organisational risk**

Following a comparative principle, the analysis brings to light five risk factors which appear recurrent irrespective of the organisational context. These are not necessarily, prominent factors; that is, those presenting a high level of risk, but rather factors which are present in all organisations. From this perspective, we find:

- the notion of governance of organisations, with a high degree of relevance given to workers participation and to the management style;
- the approach chosen for managing workers (the adjustment of resources to the functioning of the organisation, the instruments and practices applied to the management of human resources....);
- the communication dynamics and particularly, the approach to internal communications (frequency, nature, procedures....);
- the client system, which has become a predominant element in the logic of organisations;
- the dimension of stress within organisations, which is extremely useful in helping to understand risk factors and to help manage violence and harassment in the workplace.

In the graphical scheme presented in the next page we find the representation of the five factors. This presentation of risk factors allows to observe what has been defined as « *organisational indifference zones* » (Chester Barnard, 1938)¹⁸ where a global prevention to violence should be given a high priority.

- **Configuration and specificities of organisational risk**

At the onset of the empirical research conducted, our first finding is the composite reality of organisations. The organisations included in this study resemble individualised logical organisational sets, more or less linked and articulated among themselves, rather than homogeneous entities functioning according to the same organisational principles. Therefore, we chose to specify the organisational factors according to five « poles » which try to grasp the prevailing behavioural logic. This approach presupposes - as a key characteristic - the diversity rather than similarity, of the different organisational configurations.

- The administrative function pole, which formalises an approach to about violence and harassment around the « bureaucratic formalism » where hierarchical structures, work functions which have been systematised and standardised according to well established procedures, the management of workers according to status, etc., are taken as fundamental organisational elements. In this context, the main organisational risk factors to take into consideration are new work modes (e.g. more autonomy) functioning within frequently opaque and normatively determined by culture (i. e., a certain homogeneity of attitudes and behaviour). The other organisational risk factors are to be placed in an extremely institutionalised hierarchical context, frequently politicised. Other characteristics of this type of organisation include certain managerial options (i.e., instruments and practices) which are dysfunctional to the context of the workplace, as well as the presence of a latent stress among workers.

¹⁸ C. Barnard, *The functions of the executive*, 1938, Harvard University Press.

- the dual pole underscores « conflictuality » as a key organisational element of capable of generating violence and harassment in the workplace. It congregates organisations and workers in a context where tensions emerge between different social groups (i.e., management vs. workers, white-collar vs. blue-collar employees...) and this could degenerate into open confrontations. Here, the risk factors to take into consideration are associated with professional stress, a relationship of domination with respect to those supervisors and managers the workers report to, as well as an organisation of work strongly influenced by productivity and flexibility.
- the community pole, which characterised by a « *specific entrepreneurial discourse* » usually belonging to small and medium-sized organisations (SMO), associations, firms with a very visible close manager/owner, a simple structure, weakly hierarchical, etc. These elements identify the *discourse* and the perception of violence in the workplace. In this context, the identified organisational risk factors are associated with the pressure originating in the intensity of the competition in the market and/or the hierarchical power, which frequently depends on the personality of the manager (s). Should also be taken into consideration the weakness of the human resources management and underdeveloped internal communication mechanisms. There is also the reality that most of the employees perform limited administrative tasks.
- the professional pole underscores the presence of an organisational logic, in which the specificity of the professional tasks guides the development of violence and harassment. This is mainly the case of professions where the work identity is notoriously robust; such as the environments of hospitals, health care in general and education. In this pole, organisational risk factors are associated with the degree of complexity of tasks and other activities belonging to these professions. We should also consider the nature of the power element present in these professional relations, in a context where organisational specificities generate tensions between those belonging to different hierarchical levels (for instance, between overall management and service managers). Finally, the implementation of managerial practices not appropriate to the human interaction context usually generate multiple tensions which facilitate the emergence of practices in which elements of violence are present.
- the pole of open violence identifies organisations and workers having a discourse about internal acts of violence and harassment in which these acts are considered to be influenced by an « external violence ». Here we find organisational risk factors are found in the presence of strong pressures in the work performed (risky tasks and activities) frequently accompanied by a heavy workload (physical and also cognitive). Other identified organisational risk factors materialise out of the hierarchical structure and the potential tensions it can generate (e.g., institutional opacity, a tight hierarchical structure).

- The gender element of organisational risk

The qualitative segment of the analysis brings to light the importance of taking into consideration the « gender approach » in order to better understand the organisational risk factors capable of generating acts of violence and harassment in the workplace.

The gender element is frequently assimilated to only the sex variable and to sexual harassment. This is the first finding identified during the analysis of the logic of violence in the qualitative survey.

The first organisational risk factor observed, in the context of a gender approach, is associated with the relevance of « sociabilities » in the workplace; that is, the type of interpersonal relations that materialise in working groups; that is, relationships between colleagues, but also hierarchical relations) and the behavioural norms that emerge in that context.

The second organisational risk factor belongs to the « organisational culture ». It is important to point out the presence of a degree of homogeneity of attitudes and behaviours that, in certain organisational situations, translate the internalisation of discriminatory behavioural norms toward women.

The qualitative analysis allowed to identify the different organisational factors considered to be at the origin of the generation of risks of violent behaviour in the workplace of SMO. Those organisational risk factors are associated the management of men and women (i.e., workers and employees) the internal and external environment, to organisational changes, as well as to the culture of the organisation.

The management of women and men appears in this qualitative segment of the study for the totality of the organisations which participated in the study. More specifically, the absence of accurate definitions of functions is identified as an important risk factor capable of generating interpersonal conflicts.

Evaluation procedures, are also signalled as a risk factor, whether they are non-existent, or whether they are based on openly subjective criteria.

Factors linked to resources and to the functioning of the organisation are equally important in the issues analysed by this study. This is the case in which there is an insufficiency of personnel to perform the required tasks, thus generating a heavy workload and the possibility that workers be assigned tasks for the performance of which they do not have adequate competence.

The management style appears in the content analysis as also being associated to the presence of violence in the workplace. This happens when management is perceived as too authoritarian and controlling too many subordinates, as well as the case of a management structure perceived as not competent to manage to deal with human interaction.

Finally, a faulty communication, as well as weak mechanisms to disseminate information are also judged as important organisational risk factors contributing to generate acts of violence in the workplace.

The internal environment is another element considered a risk factor in all participant organisations. For instance the presence of stress is an element which frequently appeared in numerous interviews. This one could be closely associated with the content of the work itself, thus implying a strong emotional meaning. It could also be present, as a result of the implementation of practices aiming at introducing competition among colleagues, in order to increase productivity and the return derived from personnel, or the interaction with extremely demanding clients, as well as the constraints imposed by very tight deadlines to finish a task.

The rational behaviour of colleagues is also identified as a factor capable of generating conflicts, which could become a source of acts of violence, mainly those in the category of moral harassment.

Concerning the external environment, the analysis brings to light the fact that the very demanding clients are the source of stress for workers. Competition is also signalled as a way to legitimise the recourse to violent practices by management or colleagues. In fact, a high degrees of competition could generate the obligation to increase productivity. Frequently, the introduction of this type of practice modify the original organisational values, since - now - in order to survive and maintain market share, it has to focus on other priorities.

Organisational changes registers a prominent place in the set of organisational risk factors associated with the presence of violence in the workplace. The « micro » organisational change appears to be more important in the SMO. Here, changes operated in higher hierarchical levels, in colleagues, in work schedules, or the location of work are presented ubiquitous in SMO. At the same time, the « macro » organisational changes - which do not materialise frequently in SMO - are also considered very harmful, in terms of the presence of violence in the workplace. This is particularly the case of mergers, restructurings, collective lay-offs, which have a non-negligible impact on the working environment.

The last organisational risk factor identified by interviewees is the organisational culture. The introduction of the element of profitability in the organisational culture is signalled as being baneful. In fact, the need to increase profitability frequently shatters the original values which were - until then - advocated by the organisation.

It is important to notice the presence of similarities between the qualitative results obtained from organisations employing more than 100 workers and those obtained from SMO.

2. The Acts of Violence and Harassment in the Workplace

The approach followed for evaluating the magnitude of violence in the workplace is that of the victimisation survey in which the worker interviewed - woman or man - declares having been the subject of violence and harassment in the workplace. The results obtained are the following:

<u>Moral harassment</u>	<u>Sexual harassment</u>	<u>Violence at work</u>
14,7	3,1%	9,2%

« • Moral harassment

Within the 2003 sample of the 297 interviewed persons, we found that 14,7% openly declared having been harassed. This is a relatively high rate, when compared to the 11,5% national average (2002) and to the 9,0% registered in the European Union in 2000. But it is necessary to add a nuance to this result.

First, the survey has been conducted in the regions of Brussels and Wallonia, while the nation-wide survey - conducted in 2002 - registered for those two regions, 18,3% and 16,3%, respectively, against 7,6% for Flanders.

Moreover, if we take into consideration the criteria advanced by Leymann (1993) - who specifies that we should consider the presence of « mobbing » whenever such an act takes place at least once a week during a six-month period - the resulting rate in our research is not higher than 2,1% (major frequency).

Another interesting information - this time a qualitative one - was revealed during the restitution sessions. According to this one, the major frequency (2,3%) rate is associated with the number of complaints filed in organisations; also called « reporting rate », which identifies the date at which the worker contacts a person in the organisation to report an act of moral harassment. One hypothesis put forward - but not confirmed in our study - is that the deviation or gap between two types of measured frequencies should reflect the existence of a « shadow effect ». The presence of this effect seems to be confirmed whenever one takes into consideration the distinction between « the recognition of being the subject of harassment » and « being aware of an act of harassment against somebody else ». In this case, the rate rises substantially, from 12,6% to 23,1%.

Results also show that the perpetrators are identified as being - in most of the cases registered - members of management/supervisors (42,0%) and also colleagues (40,0).

- **Sexual harassment**

To the question of «being sexually harassed at work during the last six months», 3,1% of workers interviewed answered affirmatively. This rate is significantly higher than the average (2,0%) registered in Europe, but markedly lower than the rate registered in the nation-wide Belgian (2002) survey (8,5%). Here again the «major frequency» is much lower (close to 1,0%). Moreover, the proportion of affirmative answers to the question «being aware of an act of harassment against somebody else» reaches 7,4%, which represents a level much higher than those cases in which the interviewees have been the victims. In this case, the proportion doubles and is accompanied by a simultaneous cancellation of «major frequencies» (0,0%). In this case, the identified perpetrators are colleagues (65,0%) and managers/supervisors (30,0%).

- **Violence at work**

When dealing with violence, in the broad sense of the term, that is, persecutions, threats, as well as physical or psychological aggressions, 9,2% of workers declared having been the victims of such acts of violence, with 1,5% placed in the «major frequency». The first of these two percentages is higher than the nation-wide rate, which was 7,6% in 2002. When looking at the «lowest frequency» the 14,4% those in the observed facts category is higher than those in the experienced facts category. This could be interpreted as the fact that higher collective attention is paid to these types of acts, even though most persons interviewed were not the victims. In this category, the acts of violence in the workplace are attributed to colleagues (40,0%) and to management/supervisors (25,4%) and a new type of perpetrator; clients (33,5%).

SMO

After having defined moral harassment - on question 32 of the questionnaire - the respondent was asked if he/she «had been the victim of moral harassment, in the organisation which employed her/him, during the last six months». The choices offered to the respondent were: a) no; b) yes; c) yes, but rarely; d) yes, but sporadically (the last two were gathered in the category of «minor frequencies»; e) yes, many times a week; f) yes, almost every day (the last two, gathered under the category of «major frequencies».

We obtained the following results. 86,3% (that is, 253 individuals) provided negative answers. A share of 10,3% (30 respondents) declared having been morally harassed at the workplace and falling in the category of minor frequencies, while 1,7% (only 5 individuals) that they were harassed according to major frequencies. Almost always, colleagues and managers/supervisors were identified as the perpetrators, with 51,4% (18 individuals) being signalled as colleagues and 31,4% (11 individuals) as members of the managers/supervisors group. Subordinates were identified as the culprits by 8,6% of the respondents (3 individuals) while clients were identified as representing 5,8% (2 individuals).

In the category of those respondents «having information about acts of moral harassment perpetrated on others» we observe that: 80,2% of respondents (235 individuals) answered negatively; 14,0% (41 individuals) answered positively, according to minor frequencies, while 4,4% (13 individuals) according to major frequencies. Here also, colleagues and managers/supervisors were denoted as the culprits, with 48,1% (26 individuals) incriminating colleagues and 31,5% incriminating managers/supervisors. Subordinates have been identified as perpetrators by 9,3% (5 individuals) while clients by only 1,9% (one person) of respondents.

Another result from the study is that we find more men (22 respondents) than women (11 respondents) acknowledging as being the victims of moral harassment in the workplace. We detect that almost the same proportion of men and women identify their colleagues as the perpetrators of harassment, while only men signal managers/supervisors as the culprits.

We also obtained very weak rates concerning sexual harassment. For instance, after having defined sexual harassment in the questionnaire (question 33) a question is asked to each participant if she/he could affirm «having been the victim of sexual harassment in the workplace, during the last six months». We provided the respondent the same types of options to answer the question, as previously provided for answering the question on moral harassment; that is, equally distributed in minor and major frequencies. Those responding negatively reached 95.9% of respondents (281 individuals). Only one person indicated having been the victim of sexual harassment (a 0,3% rate of victimisation) and considered in the minor frequency. We also have to point out that the no-answer option registered 3,8% corresponding to 11 individuals. The respondent who indicated having been the victim identified colleagues as the culprits, without specifying whether the person executing the act of harassment was a man or a woman.

On the issue of «being aware of acts of sexual harassment on somebody else», 94,2% of respondents (276 individuals) answered negatively, whereas 1,4% (4 individuals) affirmed being aware according to minor frequencies. As in the case of moral harassment, colleagues and managers/supervisors were signalled as the perpetrators of such acts. Here 50,0% (3 individuals) incriminated their colleagues and 16,7% (1 individual) signalled managers/supervisors. Two of the respondents did not specify the function of the person responsible for committing an act of sexual harassment on another person.

The results on the issue of violence at work are the following. After having defined this type of situation (question 34) we ask the respondent «if she/he acknowledges having been the victim of violence at work during the last six months» while providing options to answer it equal to those provided in the question on moral and sexual harassment. Here, 93,9% of respondents (275 individuals) provided a negative answer, 4,1% (12 individuals) answered positively according to minor frequencies, while 0,7% (2 individual) according to major frequencies. Again, mostly colleagues have been signalled as the perpetrators, with a rate of 40,0% of respondents (6 individuals). Managers/supervisors registered 26,7% and clients received the same rate, within the category of authors of such acts of violence.

On the fact of «being aware of acts of violence on somebody else», 90,1% of those answering the questionnaire (264 individuals) answered negatively. Moreover, 6,8% (20 individuals) provided an affirmative answer according to minor frequencies, while 1,4% (4 individuals) according to major frequencies. As usual, the frequency of identified actors fall within three categories, the first being - in this case - colleagues with 23,1% (6 individuals) second, managers/supervisors registering 30,8% (8 individuals) and finally, 26,9% of respondents (7 individuals) identified clients as those responsible for such acts of violence. Only one individual (3,8% of the sample) denoted a subordinate as the perpetrator.

The conducts considered as more representative, in terms of major frequencies were associated with the victim's work, rather than with the person in particular. Among the variations of this type of conduct we find the following: « negligence with respect to your point of view » (7,2%); « demeaning or mocking pleasantries » (6,4%); « disseminating malicious gossip about you » (6,1%); « you have been ordered to perform tasks which are well below your level of competence » (5,5%) ; « a systematic undervaluation of your work and efforts » (5,5%).

We should also point out that acts of physical and sexual violence registered low scores relative to the majority of negative or dysfunctional behaviours. Specifically, for acts of sexual violence, the proposition «you have been bothered sexually by unwelcomed gestures or words» registered a 2,5% rate (7 individuals, 2 men and 5 women) according to minor frequencies and 1,3% (4 individuals, of which one man and one woman) according to major frequencies.

Another proposition concerning « unwelcomed initiatives of a sexual nature » was chosen, in the context of minor frequencies, by 1,4% of respondents (4 individuals, two men and a woman) and by 0,7% (2 individuals, of which one woman) in major frequencies.

Concerning physical violence the first proposition «physical attacks or physical abuse» was chosen - within the category of minor frequencies - by 4,5% of respondents (13 individuals, 11 men and 2 women) and by 1,0% (3 individuals, one man and two women) in major frequencies. The second proposition about physical violence, the statement «you have been physically threatened» 7,5% of respondents (22 individuals, 14 men and 8 women) chose it in minor frequencies and by 1,0% (3 individuals, one man and one woman) in major frequencies.

3. Prominent Organisational Risk Factors

We were able to identify the existing mutual interdependencies among a number of statistical indicators, with the aim of forming coherent and logic approaches with respect to organisational risks able to generate violence and harassment in the workplace. Due to their explanatory value, we have identified three factors:

- (1) the degree of conflict (« conflictuality ») within organisations including the different approaches to manage those conflicts;
- (2) work within a team;
- (3) a hierarchical-functional principle, which puts together a number of variables.

These organisational factors have been designated as prominent in terms of risk. They have an explanatory value in about one third of cases (31,6%) and intervene in the process which could generate violence, as well as moral and sexual harassment in the workplace.

- **Conflictuality and the management of conflicts**

The survey reveals the existence of frequent conflictual situations (a relatively high rate of conflicts, since only 15,0% of workers not having any sort of conflict in the organisation they work for) with 62,0% declaring a minor frequency (i.e., from a few instances per year to several times per month) and 23,0% in the major frequency (from a few times a week to almost everyday).

Conflictuality and its management are based on rational dynamics prevailing within the organisation (everyone for her or himself vs. altruism) and on different approaches to resolve conflicts (engaging to find a solution vs. avoidance and retreat). These alternatives allow to identify high-risk situations, where the interaction among segments of the organisation's population are determined by individualism and where efforts to regulate are frequently absent. Here, we are confronted with such themes as opposition, tension and adversity. Variables utilised brought to light two forms of opposition:

- (1) a situation of domination, where the asymmetry of power relationships play a key role. Here, a small group of workers placed in a certain hierarchical level (e.g., human resources services implementing evaluation methods) maintain a hegemonic position in the workplace;
- (2) an antagonistic situation, which manifests itself through confrontations between groups of workers, defending differentiated values and principles (duality).

- Working in teams

The majority of organisations which participated in this study show the presence of working in teams, as an organisational risk factor. It mainly manifests itself through the poor quality of relations - in terms of capabilities and behaviours - with colleagues, but also with direct supervisors.

First, the issue of relations between colleagues has to take into consideration a number of variables concerning the level of relations (individual work or work requiring interactions within a group and the size of the group) also the nature of those relations (affectif, cognitive or instrumental) as well as the existing group dynamics and experience (avoidance, conformism). Moreover, these relations inside the team are also observed through the existence of hierarchical relations (descending, ascending or of reciprocal exchange) and more specifically, relations with a proximity leadership (altruism, communicator,...).

Factorial analysis unveiled two dimensions that discriminate variables among themselves, and also the workers. The intensity of the social link forms the first axis. A social linkage could be weak or strong within those working in a team (weak sociabilities vs. strong ones).

The second axis is based on variables associated with the mental representations that workers have about authority and, more specifically, about its leadership (through rules vs. through relations at work).

At this stage, we could establish a «risky» organisational situation, where workers seek to limit their relations with colleagues (reducing them to, for instance, only compulsory exchanges) and avoid interaction within the group. Therefore, relations with the direct supervisor are then placed in the context of a social distance, where he/she is perceived as the guardian of rules, or worse, by defining such relations as non-existent or to be avoided. This situation translates a second-best one where the supervisor does not play the role of a facilitator of professional exchanges or of animator of the work environment; which are qualities very much appreciated by workers.

We will see that those organisational factors play a determining role in matters concerning sexual harassment, thus highlighting the crucial role played by the intermediate hierarchy.

- [The hierarchical-functional principle](#)

There is a third factor encompassing variables concerning the professional competencies of the hierarchical structure (particularly, in terms of decision-making), the manner in which the organisational control is exercised and the norms (rules and work procedures).

The first axis of the factorial analysis defines as risky the degree of centralisation of decisions in organisations (centralisation vs. decentralisation). Here, decisions are frequently concentrated at the top of the top of the organisation and do not have a collegiate dimension, not even at the level of head of services or departments.

A second axis determined by factorial analysis allows to define more accurately the notion of the formalisation of the organisation (formalised organisation vs. non-formalised organisation) according to the approaches utilised for controlling work (hierarchical control of subordinates, their results, through procedures or not, ...) and of the codification of procedures (weak or strong codification).

We could also specify another risky organisational situation, which is associated with a lasting centralised functioning. This one characterises the hierarchical-functional principle found in certain organisations. To this one we could add a totally different logic based on the absence of formalisation.

Therefore, the distribution of decisions, the control system and the importance of norms will influence the likelihood of the emergence of violence and harassment in the workplace.

SMO

A regression analysis allowed to determine the existing statistical links between organisational violences and the organisational and socio-demographic characteristics. Different variables were tested (introduced in the model as explanatory variables). We now proceed to present the results obtained for every type of organisational violence.

Three organisational and socio-demographic characteristics were derived from the results, as playing a role in the emergence of moral harassment in the workplace.

First, the frequency of conflicts within the team or the department. The majority of those individuals, who declared having been the victims of moral harassment in the workplace, also specified that they had to face conflicts quite frequently. Of all respondents, 68,6% who were victims (24 individuals, with all modalities of answers included) affirmed having faced «several times a week» and «several times per month» conflicts. 14,3% of the victims (5 individuals) said that they had to face conflicts «almost every day» while 5,7% (2 individuals) «several times per year».

The second significant organisational characteristic found was seniority. Most of the victims belong to a group with a significant seniority. Thus, 24,2% of the victims (8 individuals) had a seniority falling within a 5 to 10 years bracket. Similar rates were found for those in seniority brackets «between 1 to 5 years», «10 to 20 years» and «more than 20 years»; that is, 21,2% (7 individuals and all modalities of answer included). Individuals with less than one year of seniority are less numerous in identifying themselves as victims, barely representing 12,2% (4 individuals).

The third organisational characteristic identified as significant was organisational changes. Among the individuals who identified themselves as victims of moral harassment (all modalities of answer included) 84,8% (28 individuals) declared that they lived through organisational changes during the last two years. The types of organisational changes these victims went through were: one or several restructurings for 32,9% of victims (23 individuals); a change in the managerial leadership for 24,3% (17 individuals); procedures of organisational transformation for 22,9% of the victims (16 individuals). Mergers and collective lay-offs registered significantly lower percentages, with 12,9% (9 individuals) and 7,1% (5 individuals) respectively.

As stated previously, since only one individual declared having been the victim of sexual harassment in the workplace, it was not meaningful to proceed to a statistical analysis of this category.

Two organisational characteristics were identified as significant in cases of violence in the workplace.

The first one was organisational change. Here, 85,7% of victims (12 individuals) declared having gone through organisational changes during the last two years. Restructuring was a factor registering the highest percentage with 32,4% (6 individuals). Procedures for organisational transformation reached the same level - 22,2% (4 individuals) - of victims than those who went through changes at the top of the management structure. They were followed by cases of mergers and collective lay-offs (each with a rate of 5,5%).

The second organisational characteristic found as significant was seniority. Concerning this characteristic, of all individuals declaring themselves as victims of acts of violence in the workplace - all modalities of answer included - 42,9% of them (6 individuals) had a seniority falling in the «10 to 20 years» bracket. Individuals with a seniority of «less than one year» or «between 5 and 10 years» registered a 21,4% rate (3 individuals). Finally, 14,3% of victims (2 individuals) had a seniority falling in the «1 to 5 years» bracket.

With the purpose of determining the organisational factors representing risks of violence in the workplace, we calculated linear regressions for each type of violence. Organisational factors have been classified according to groupings of variables. Those groupings were established after calculating their internal coherence (i.e., Alpha de Cronbach). The linear regressions were conducted by incorporating as an independent variable moral harassment and afterwards, the violences at work. Since there was only one affirmative respondent about sexual harassment, we were not able to use this method on this subject.

The explanatory variables introduced in the model refer to: a) the organisation of work (nature, content, pace and autonomy); b) the organisational environment (work in teams, conflictuality, job insecurity and relations with clients); c) human resources management practices (decision-making, management style and hierarchical positions); d) instruments applied in the management of human resources (norms applied, follow-up and personnel development, workers' performance, quality of work environment and internal communications); e) organisational change. After having introduced these variables as explanatory variables for every type of violence, we got the following results (step-by-step method).

Concerning moral harassment, we obtained three significant factors.

First, the «socio-emotional» management style. This factor - gathering five variables - qualifies the attitude of a hierarchical superior concerned about the well-being of his/her workers. Among the victims of moral harassment (all modalities of answer included), 38,2% (13 individuals) affirmed that they have sometimes faced this style of management, 17,6% (6 individuals) said of having rarely faced this style, while 26,5% (9 individuals) declared having faced this style frequently.

Second, another factor being identified as significantly associated with moral harassment is the «focusing on conflict». This factor gathers four variables and describes a very individualised attitude, where everyone defends his/her interests, in case of a conflict. Individuals declaring themselves victims of acts of moral harassment in the workplace have also frequently faced this conflict focused approach. Not a single victim has declared never having been faced this kind of situation. In fact, 88,6% (31 individuals) declared of having faced this factor «frequently» or «always».

The third, significant factor associated with moral harassment is the clarity in the definition of the task. This one gathers eight variables. The majority of individuals who declared themselves victims of moral harassment signal the presence of uncertainty with respect to the task they had to execute. Thus, 69,0% of them (24 individuals) declared they faced tasks that were clearly defined and 31,0% (11 individuals) said they rarely faced well-defined tasks. No respondent declared being «frequently» confronted with a clearly defined task.

There are three factors which have been signalled as significant with respect to violence at work.

First, the pace of work, which gathers four variables allowing to identify whether the worker is confronted with a time constraint in the performance of tasks. Here 92,9% of individuals (13 respondents) declared themselves victims of violence at work all modalities of answer included since they were forced to perform tasks at a sustained pace.

The second organisational factor linked to violence at work is the internal communication. This factor encompasses four variables of our questionnaire. We found that 57,1% of the victims (8 individuals) consider that internal communication is considered - «sometimes» or «never» - as adequate, while 42,9% of respondents (6 individuals) answered just the opposite.

The third and last organisational factor found as significant for influencing violence at work is the degree of autonomy at the disposal of the worker, while exercising his/her functions. With respect to this factor, 64,3% of the victims of violence in the workplace (9 individuals) affirmed that they have exercised autonomy in the executing their functions and 21,4% (3 individuals) affirmed having always performed their tasks autonomously. Also, 14,3% (2 individuals) declared that they have been autonomous at work only «occasionally». It seems, therefore, that too much autonomy could be a source of violence in the workplace, in as much as workers could have a real need for being adequately «framed» in the execution of their tasks.

4. Organisational Specificities of Risk Factors

Does the frequency of violence in the workplace vary significantly among organisations? Are there organisational differences (i.e., organisation of work, management of human resources, organisational changes, etc.) that may increase the likelihood of the emergence of violence in the workplace? And, if yes, which groups of organisational risk factors are more susceptible of favouring certain acts of violence and harassment in the workplace?

These are the kinds of questions which have guided this research study and which have influenced the choice of adopting the principle of **organisational differentiation**¹⁹ as a methodological instrument. This approach allows to uncover the following:

- (1) that not all organisational factors uniformly generate the risks of the emergence of violence and harassment within organisations;
- (2) that the established organisational configurations allow to present a differential diagnosis about the risk factors favouring the emergence of violence and harassment within organisations.

To approach this issue, five groupings have been established.

¹⁹ This definition was borrowed from P.R. Lawrence et J.W. Lorsh (1996) *Adapter les structures de l'entreprise*, Editions de l'Organisation, Paris, (première édition, 1969).

- [Configuration of the administrative function](#)

This configuration essentially gathers those workers in organisations which are characterised by the **existence of a specific bureaucratic basis**; that is, based on the presence of an administrative set of rules and procedures aiming at regulating the mode of production and the interaction among workers. Here, obviously, we find the public administration and more broadly, the public sector. But also, some administrative services operating in the private sector. Workers located in this organisational configuration show a number of very specific characteristics. For instance, a mix of men and women in the workplace, a rather high level of education (higher education and high school levels) as well as the significant presence of higher staff among them.

In this context, the rate of moral harassment (17,0%) and of violence at work (11,0%) are slightly higher than the average obtained through the survey. However, concerning sexual harassment, the observed rate (1,4%) falls short of the survey's average.

Conflictuality and the management of conflicts are identified as risk factors capable of generating moral harassment and acts violence in the workplace. This conflictual climate could be interpreted as being linked to a withdrawn positioning with respect to the consensual bureaucratic model and those forms of collective regulation anchored in agreements and pacts.

The introduction of the «professional dynamics» of public service displeases a number of workers who feel that they are becoming the victims of violence and moral harassment.

The victims of violence, within the context of this configuration, perceive practices such as follow-up and personnel development as insufficient. The appropriateness of the description of the function (i.e., description of tasks) and the profile of the position (i.e., profile of the person executing the function) is frequently faulty and consequently, prone to promote the maladjustment of the relationship position/person. Certain definitions of objectives and evaluation criteria are also signalled as bad management practices or, at least, of not being adequate with respect to the «administrative function».

It was also brought to light the absence of a type of leadership close to workers, which is exercised by persons having appropriate inter-relational competencies and offering workers support in the performance of tasks. These inadequacies could be interpreted in terms of distance/proximity to higher staff. They keep the door open for the possibility of moral harassment.

On the issue of sexual harassment, it is identified in this context with working in teams and more specifically, with the relational behaviour of colleagues.

We also found that members of management are identified as the main perpetrators of moral harassment and violence at work, reaching a rate of 57,0% for moral harassment and 51,0% for violence at work. About sexual harassment, colleagues are identified as the main culprits by 67,0% of workers belonging to the configuration of the «administrative function».

- Dual configuration

In this configuration we find organisations characterised by a strong social division of work showing a duality (populations of different qualifications, new managing initiatives, etc...) which frequently generates confrontations and a higher level of risk of violence and harassment in the workplace. These organisations and their workers belong, mainly, to the private sector producing goods, but we could also find them in the public sector. This «duality» is present around the emergence of the professional dynamics present in public services. The socio-demographic and socio-professional characteristics of this configuration are: a) an essentially masculine (88,0%) and blue collar (42,0%) as well as an initial level of secondary education for those entering the sector (72,0%).

The rate of moral harassment is particularly high within this configuration, since about one fourth of workers (26,0%) declared having been victims of such acts. The proportion of violence at work (15,0%) is slightly above the overall average. As far as sexual harassment is concerned (2,5%) it is lower than the average.

The practice of moral harassment finds in this context, quite a fertile ground. For their development, they are directly associated with the notion of conflictuality, but other organisational factors also contribute; particularly, a feeling of insecurity with respect to employment and the concomitant professional incompetence of the hierarchy. This is the reason why management (76,0%) is clearly identified as the main perpetrator of such acts. The low level of education of victims is also another significant element playing a role in the victimisation process.

Violence at work is also present in this configuration. We could also associate to it risk factors similar to those mentioned before, such as: conflictuality, insecurity, employment and certain weaknesses in the degree of competence of the management hierarchy. Here, we need to add the «*laisser-faire*» type of « permissive » leadership as a supplementary organisational element, capable of becoming an additional source of violence in the workplace.

In this configuration, sexual harassment appears particularly weak. Sex and the family situation are two variables identifying victimisation. From the organisational point of view, the hierarchic-functional principle is identified as a risk factor. One must also underscore the importance of professional competencies of the hierarchy and the presence of a «non-vacated» leadership with deficiencies favouring the emergence of acts of sexual harassment. Again, the presence of an atmosphere of conflict contributes to reinforce such a situation.

- [The configuration of the «community»](#)

This configuration mainly encompasses private sector organisations, most of them characterised by their small size, which are structured but not formalised. But this is not necessarily the realm of the informal, but rather that of the simple structure, of the flexible organisation and of the emblematic figure of a boss, or a restricted management. Within this configuration we could find organisations that could be quite old and those that are considered newcomers. They develop in activities that could be considered not very capitalistic, such as commerce, the agro-food sector, small mechanics, in which the competitive advantage is to be found in the capacity to adjust to market changes, product quality or to the adaptation to the evolving preferences of clients, rather than on economies of scale.

The socio-demographic and socio-professional characteristics of workers shows a mixed composition of men (55,0%) and women (45,0%) as well as a level of education between the secondary (51,0%) and higher education (43,0%). Another trait is that there is a balance between employees (48,0%) [blue-collar] and workers (37,0%) [white-collar]. Another characteristic is that working in teams is relatively important and it encompasses 33,0% of workers within this configuration.

In contrast with other organisational configurations, here the rate of moral harassment is quite weak (12,0%) as well as that detected in violence at work (5,0%). However, it is rather the rate of sexual harassment (4,0%) which represents a level higher than that of the survey's average.

Within the group of organisations included in this configuration, acts of violence and harassment in the workplace are considered of little significance, according to the responses obtained within such organisations. Their identified perpetrators are mostly colleagues and managers/supervisors, except for violence at work. On the latter, clients are signalled as the main culprits. The following three predicting elements have been unveiled: working in teams, the type of contract and working during week-ends. Moreover, workers believe that the level of conflictuality could eventually contribute to develop acts of violence at work, as well as moral harassment.

In this configuration, sexual harassment finds a privileged context. Management is clearly identified as the category of main perpetrators (77,0%) while the main elements playing the role of predictors are: the sex variable, the type of contract, the socio-professional category and the family situation. They could all represent significant risk factors. Again, working in teams and the relational or interactive behaviour of colleagues are the main organisational risk factors detected. Finally, prevailing norms and the level of autonomy of workers are also considered risk factors.

- Professional configuration

All the organisations included in this configuration present a particularly prominent professional identity. This is mainly the case of hospitals with the medical profession, education with school teachers or university professors, etc. These specificities require a careful understanding of particular organisational risk factors.

The socio-demographic and socio-professional characteristics of workers in these organisations are very specific (for instance the importance of groups of managers representing 72,0%, as well as a particularly high initial level of education, with 86,0% of them having a higher education level). Moreover, workers belonging to this configuration reveal a marked interest for the activities in which they participate.

Moral harassment and sexual harassment do not score very high in this configuration. Their respective rates are relatively low, with a 10,0% score for moral harassment and only 0,6% for sexual harassment. However, the score for violence at work is substantial, with 19,0% of respondents declaring having been the victims of these acts.

Here, the identified perpetrators are clearly identified as the clients, patients and students for 72,0% of workers. Nevertheless, 22,0% of respondents signalled members of management as the culprits, while 6,0% signalled their colleagues.

Only violence at work - taken into consideration as a global notion - is identified by workers belonging to this configuration, as a prominent organisational risk factor. This is being identified, mainly, at the levels of leadership and the definitional clarity of the tasks.

For the leadership factor, workers highlight the poor quality of superior/worker relations. This problem could originate in the lack of group meetings, the limited availability of supervisors and managers, etc. Others interpret the situation as being generated by the lack of participation of workers in organisational decisions. For instance, at least meetings to disseminate information (top down) or sporadic consultations, etc. In this context, the organisation functions in a reactive fashion. For instance, workers do not have the opportunity to express opinions unless they present a complaint. Finally, some bring to light the limited competence of «professional» who are in charge of managing human resources. Within this context, it is notorious the lack of managerial resources made available by the organisation for supporting the work of cadres and management.

A second factor coming to the surface is the lack of clarity in the definition of tasks. Those respondents declaring themselves as victims specifically denounce having to perform their tasks in a fashion contrary to their preference, as well as receiving contradictory orders, or receiving contestable evaluations of their tasks. In fact, the description of tasks in organisations is broad and global.

Therefore, the detailed specifications on mandates and responsibilities of each worker fall within the purview of the functions of each direction/cadres of services. This way of doing things leave a broad margin for interpretation and creates a real danger of promoting conflicts of roles among workers. In fact, organisations count on inadequate means to ensure that workloads maintain a certain coherence with respect to the capacity of workers and the resources available to them. Moreover, these organisations have gone through substantial restructurings during the last few years, which resulted in a surplus of work and constraints associated with the time available to workers to execute tasks.

- *The configuration of «open violence»*

Within this configuration, we find that workers and organisations have been confronted - in one way or another - with violent situations denominated as open; that is, visible, which is basically an external violence. Within this category we find workers and organisations in specialised public agencies such as the army, police, jails,.etc. Also, some entities of the private sector like security agencies, as well as branches of particular activities, such as hospitals and schools. We also find here certain socio-demographic and socio-professional specificities, such as: the presence of a mostly masculine population made out of workers with an initial level of secondary education. Other key characteristics are: workers with an indeterminable-duration contracts (99,0%) working full-time (91,0%). We also find the prominence of work in teams (40,0%) and the importance of the managerial function (22,0%).

The 15,0% rate of moral harassment is slightly above the average. This tendency is more prominent for violence at work (15,0%) which is rather high. The rate observed for sexual harassment is only 4,0%.

In this context, working in teams (particularly the interactional behaviour of colleagues) represents the first source of organisational risk. In fact, colleagues are identified as the main perpetrators of moral harassment with a rate of 73,0% and of sexual harassment with 72,0%. The type of contract, the level of education and the family situation are considered socio-organisational elements that could influence the emergence of violence within the team. The role of subordinates should also be taken into consideration.

Hierarchy is a second factor explaining violence and harassment in the workplace. More specifically, professional and interactional competencies are seriously questioned in this context.

There are other factors contributing to better identify organisational risks. These are: relations with «clients» (particularly those determined as delinquent, etc.) the participation in decision-making, which is considered deficient and the relevance given to the role of norms in the functioning of organisations belonging to this configuration.

In this configuration, sexual harassment is particularly worrisome. Variables such as «sex» and the «family situation» are particularly significant. One relevant explanatory organisational factor should be directly linked to the nature and content of work. This is very specific due to the presence - real or potential - of open violence (the person wears a uniform and sometimes a weapon, etc.) and of a masculine culture (sometimes a pronounced macho culture): «crying translates weakness»; «women do not belong here». Other factors considered relevant are: relations with clients; being involved in organisational changes; job insecurity, which are frequently accompanied by the practice of organisational control and personnel follow-up policies.

5. The Gender Component in Acts of Violence in the Workplace

To improve the understanding of acts of violence and harassment in the workplace, it is important to introduce a gender perspective, in order to bring to light areas of differentiation between male and female workers. We proceed to explain them.

- **A sexuated sexual harassment**

Here, the «sex» variable is quite significant. It allows to establish the higher risk of sexual harassment faced by women. In fact, the difference is 7,6% for women and 1,3% for men. In the national survey (2002) the difference was 10,8% for women, against 1,3% for men.

- **A gender based moral harassment**

Certain moral harassment practices evoke a gender-based harassment. For example, women could be more inclined than men to complain about being insulted (11,0% of women workers against 6,0% for men) or about mocking or demeaning pleasantries (44,0% for women and 38,0% for men). Moreover, the survey has also unveiled the same reality for cases of «double harassment» (i.e., cases where an initial sexual harassment transforms itself into a practice of moral harassment, as a result of the failure of the approach or of a refusal about a proposal of sexual relations, etc.). Thus, 4,9% of women declared themselves victims of this situation, while for men the rate is only 0,7%. In fact, this situation aggravates itself when the victim finds herself in a precarious situation. Thus, 8,4% of women who find themselves in a precarious situation declared having been the victims of «double harassment», while the rate is only 0,1% for men.

Taking into consideration the inequalities that prevail in social interactions based on gender in general and in the workplace in particular (in terms of access to jobs, salary, securing promotions, etc.) it is important to elaborate a very specific approach geared at preventing harassment and integrating therein the three important elements already discussed: sex, the issue of «double harassment» and the situation of being in a precarious situation.

Relevance and Limitations of the Primary Prevention Studies

As a result of what has been already explained we are compelled to acknowledge the importance of disseminating information and of implementing specific initiatives to develop awareness within organisations, which are concerned about the well-being of workers (firms, administrations, labour unions and associations) about the risks of the emergence of violence at work. Also it is important to implement initiatives with different agents and practitioners involved in the management of psycho-social risks and workers' health. Obviously, it is also important to get workers involved in these activities of public awareness, since they are at the center of the issue of violence in the workplace.

On average, 42,0% of workers declare that the organisations they work at show no interest in fighting against the presence of moral harassment and violence at work. To this they add the absence of measures, either against harassment (43,0%) or against violence exercised against a worker by a third person (42,0%). Moreover, when these measures exist, 39,0% of respondents denounce them as being inadequate and inefficient. Finally, 40,0% of respondents do not know who to address themselves to in the organisation, in case of harassment or violence at work.

Table 5.1: Organisations on the Issue of Violence at Work

	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>DOES NOT KNOW</u>
Willingness of the organisation To fight against :			
▪ Moral harassment	32%	42%	26%
▪ Sexual harassment	25%	39%	36%
▪ Violence at work	23%	46%	31%
Knows the person you should address yourself, in case of an act of violence at work	28%	40%	32%
Measure taken within the organisation against :			
▪ Acts of moral and sexual harassment	26%	43%	31%
▪ Acts of violence perpetrated by a third person	25%	42%	33%
Estimated effectiveness of measures implemented	33%	39%	28%

The establishment of avenues to implement primary intervention measures represents the second contribution of this research study. It is an instrument through which theoretical knowledge and empirical results could serve as a base for developing a practical dimension approach for elaborating instruments to identify, diagnose and prevent organisational risks of violence and harassment in the workplace.

These instruments should be accessible to organisations and be used by them, that they could become a participant in this fight. In this context, a special attention should be devoted to the situation prevailing in small and medium-sized organisations.

The diffusion of the results obtained by this research study could also contribute to document and improve - as well as the joining of forces with different agents in the area of labour - initiatives geared at elaborating prevention campaigns, which are needed in order to improve the workings of organisations and enhance the well-being of workers.

In concluding, it is important to emphasise that the Dublin Foundation suggested that anybody wishing to act effectively in the prevention of acts of violence and harassment in the workplace, interventions must concentrate on the workers, the organisations and their interaction. Moreover, it was also stressed that initiatives should be simultaneously implemented at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels.