BALTIC JOURNAL OF LAW & POLITICS
A Journal of Vytautas Magnus University
VOLUME 16, NUMBER 1 (2023)
ISSN 2029-0454

Cit.: *Baltic Journal of Law & Politics* 16:1 (2023): 42-59
https://content.sciendo.com/view/journals/bjlp/bjlp-overview.xml
DOI: 10.2478/bjlp-2023-0003

PSYCHOLOGICAL WORKPLACE VIOLENCE AGAINST OLDER PEOPLE IN LITHUANIA

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Received: February 1, 2023; reviews: 2; accepted: April 26, 2023.

ABSTRACT

Changes in regulation and legislation place an obligation on employers to provide proper and safe working conditions for employees. In this context, it is important to determine if psychological violence prevention efforts are actually effective and whether the more vulnerable employees, older workers, are exercising their rights to defend themselves against the psychological violence they experience without fear of losing their jobs. This article presents theoretical and empirical data which sheds light on the nature of the psychological violence experienced by older people, the positions of people who exercise psychological violence in the employer's organization, and the prevalence of, reasons behind, and forms and consequences of this psychological violence. The study behind this article was conducted by giving questionnaires to employers and employee representatives – i.e. trade unions – with identical questions. The responses of employers and employee representatives on the topic of psychological violence experienced by older workers are fundamentally different, which means that there is not enough social dialogue in this area between employees and employers.

KEYWORDS

Psychological violence, mobbing at work, older workers, occupational safety and health.

INTRODUCTION

Employment relationships play a significant role in a person's life, as every individual (employee) spends a lot of time working or at work. One obvious expectation on behalf of the employee is to spend this time in as much comfort as possible. A study from 2005 has shown that 46% of female and 43% of male respondents experience the use of force, including outbreaks of physical violence.[1] According to Statistics Lithuania, 26.4% of employees aged 15 and above experience occupational risk factors that may impact their mental health.[2] In some sectors, such as healthcare, up to 60% of current employees say they experience psychological violence.[3] Researchers view psychological workplace violence as one of the most dangerous psychosocial risk factors in the workplace.[4] Psychological workplace violence affects not only employee health, but also their performance. Studies conducted by the International Labour Organization show that the labour productivity of employees who experience psychological violence can fall by up to 60% and a company with around 1,000 employees may incur a loss of around EUR 150,000 due to a poor psychosocial environment.[5] The same studies found that occurrences of psychological workplace violence are not necessarily related to the principle of subordination embedded in the employment relationship. Psychological violence may occur in both vertical (employee to manager) and horizontal (employee to employee) organizational relationships. Violence can manifest itself in multiple directions, and its victims can include individual employees, groups of employees, and managers themselves.

This study provides analysis and a legal assessment of whether older workers experience psychological violence in their working environment more frequently due to their age. This can include hostile, unethical, humiliating, aggressive, or insulting actions that constitute an attack on their honour, dignity, or physical and psychological integrity, or an attempt to intimidate, degrade, or put them in a helpless and powerless position. It also analyses what types of workers or colleagues exert psychological violence against older workers, in what actions it manifests itself, and whether older workers objectively have the opportunities necessary to defend their violated rights due to the psychological violence exerted against them. This study aims to determine the prevalence of psychological violence experienced by older workers and whether the phenomenon of psychological violence can be associated with older people exclusively or if it is a global problem instead, which has nothing to do with workers' age.

The subject of this study is psychological violence experienced by older workers. The aging of society calls for greater focus on the rights of the older generation, with

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1 Birutė Pajarskienė, Ieva Vėbraitė, Toma Jasiukevičiūtė, "Rekomendacijos, kaip valdyti psichologinį smurtą darbo vietose" (Guidance on managing psychological violence in the workplace), *Visuomenės sveikata* 52 (2011): 128.

2 Ramunė Guobaitė-Kirslienė, Inga Blažienė, "Psichologinio smurto darbo aplinkoje sampratos teisiniai aspektai Lietuvoje. Darbo teisės iššūkiai besikeičiančiame pasaulyje: liber Amicorum et Collegarum profesorei Genovaitei Dambrauskienei" (Legal aspects of the concept of psychological violence in the workplace in Lithuania. Challenges of Labour Law in a Changing World: liber Amicorum et Collegarum to Professor Genovaite Dambrauskienė), (2020): 113-136.

3 Higienos institutas, "Vilniaus miesto slaugytojų, dirbančių psichiatrijos ligoninėse, bendrojo profilio ligoninių psichiatrijos skyriuose bei psichikos sveikatos centruose, psichosocialinių darbo (taip pat ir smurto darbe) veiksnių įvertinimas" // https://www.hi.lt/uploads/pdf/padaliniai/PSC%20TTVS/Tyrimas_Psichikos%20sveikatos%20slaugotojai.pdf.

4 Jolita Vveinhardt, Wlodzimierz Sroka, "Workplace Mobbing in Polish and Lithuanian Organisations with Regard to Corporate Social Responsibility," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 17(8) (2020): 2944 // https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17082944.

5 Domenico Paparella, Vilma Rinolfi, Fernando Cecchini, "Increasing focus on workplace 'mobbing'," (2004) // https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/article/2004/increasing-focus-on-workplace-mobbing.

an increasing awareness that every human being is valuable and that it is necessary to ensure the rights of everyone. Vulnerable groups ought to be protected, and this also applies to employment and employment-related relationships.

This article presents legal analysis, based upon research conducted by the author, who conducted surveys of employers and employee representatives – i.e. trade unions – to determine whether older employees who experience psychological violence take up the matter with their employer in order to defend their rights, and whether employers properly implement their statutory obligation to provide safe and healthy working conditions. The article concludes with a legal assessment of the situation.

The study analyses the employer's obligations under the law and the employers' attitudes towards the implementation of the obligations, which differ from the actual situation in enterprises and the alleged implementation, through the prism of legal regulation. The author of the article received questionnaire answers from employers and trade unions and carried out a legal assessment of the answers received in the context of the current legal regulation. Trade unions at the national level, which bring together sectoral and territorial trade union organisations in different sectors, were contacted for the study. The employer's duty to ensure safe and healthy working conditions is not sector-specific but is a common duty for all employers. Accordingly, employers were selected at random by contacting regional employers' organisations.

The study consists of a clarification of the concept of the persons covered by the study, presenting the concept of an older worker, as well as an overview of the legal regulation of the prevention of psychological violence in Lithuania and the identification of the obligations for employers. The data obtained during the study from employers, selected randomly by submitting questionnaires to regional employers' organisations, and national trade union organisations, after submitting completed questionnaires to them (the questions are identical for both groups), are compared and legal conclusions are drawn in relation to each question.

The study uses and combines logical and systematic analysis, comparative analysis, document analysis, as well as teleological, descriptive, historical, linguistic, empirical and other methods.

As of 1 November 2022, the legal framework for the prevention of psychological violence has changed, and legal practice has not yet developed to provide insights for improving the legal framework.

1. The concept of older workers

The subject of this study is psychological violence experienced by older workers, and it is therefore important to determine the age at which employees count as such. Different sources specify different ages, and there is no consensus on how this concept is to be defined, with different institutions or organizations using a wide age range. Usually, however, this threshold is defined as 55 years and above.[6] Based on Erik Erikson's eight stages of development theory (1963; 1968), the last stage begins when older adults are learning to make peace with themselves and accept and appreciate their past. This is the stage of wisdom. Multiple authors suggest that older age begins after reaching 55

[6] Agnė Gaurylienė, Renata Korsakienė „Vyresnio amžiaus darbuotojų įsitraukimas į darbą (Work engagement of older workers),“ *Science Future of Lithuania* 9(2) (2017): 143-153 // https://journals.vilniustech.lt/index.php/MLA/article/download/544/394.

or 60 years.[7] This view is also held by researchers who studied the relationship between workers' age and labour productivity.[8] In its analyses, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (*OECD*) holds that "employment prospects of older workers are bleak in much of the OECD. People above age 50 are often the first to be fired and the last to be hired. Their skills can be out-dated because employers do not consider them for training and many older workers see little benefit to investing their time in training."[9] However, this position is not entirely consistent, as the critical age in the employment relationship is considered to be 55 years and above:

> Many countries have already undertaken a number of reforms and consequently employment rates of older people have increased over the past decade in many countries, particularly for those aged 50-59. Despite these encouraging developments, there remains considerable scope for further improvement. On the one hand, there are large differences across countries in the opportunities to work at an older age, even if older workers are considered as more youthful ("65 being the new 55").[10]

A similar position is held by the European Commission, which says that workers over 50 face a greater risk of long-term unemployment, but the age interval it sets for older workers when discussing labour statistics starts at 55. When assessing the employment rate among older workers in its Green Paper on aging, "fostering solidarity and responsibility between generations"[11], the European Commission refers to older workers as those aged 55 to 64.

The Republic of Lithuania Law on Employment lays down additional employment support measures for the unemployed older than 45 years of age, but this study concerns the issues of older workers who are employed. In the light of the definitions of older workers by international organizations and various studies mentioned above, the present study will consider older workers to be those aged 55 and above.

The 2014 Report of the Study on Opportunities for (Self-)Integration of Older People into the Labour Market (Social Inclusion)[12] identifies psychological violence as a genuine problem, and this phenomenon is therefore considered below, when discussing the results of the survey conducted.

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7 Silva Lengvinienė, Aušra Rutkienė, Ilona Tandzegolskienė, "Vyresnio amžiaus asmenų išlikimo darbo rinkoje teoriniai aspektai" (Theoretical aspects of older people's labour market survival), *Profesinis rengimas: tyrimai ir realijos* 25 (2014): 128-137.

8 Thomas Zwick, "Training older employees: what is effective?" *International Journal of Manpower* 36-2 (2015): 136-150 // https://doi.org/10.1108/IJM-09-2012-0138; Hesham_Magd, "Management attitudes and perceptions of older employees in hospitality management", *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 15-7 (2003): 393-401 // https://doi.org/10.1108/09596110310496033.

9 OECD Social, "Employment and Migration working paper 28," (2005) // https://www.oecd.org/social/family/35961390.pdf.

10 "Council Recommendation on Ageing and Employment," (2006) // https://www.oecd.org/els/emp/Flyer_AE_Council%20Recommendation.pdf.

11 "European Commission, Green paper on Ageing," (2021) // https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/com_2021_50_f1_green_paper_lt.pdf.

12 Rūta Brazienė, Inga Mikutavičienė, Agnė Dorelaitienė, Ugnė Žalkauskaitė, Jurga Jurkevičienė, *Vyresnio amžiaus žmonių (socialinės įtraukties) į(si)traukimo į darbo rinką galimybių tyrimo ataskaita* (Report on a study on the (social inclusion) employability of older people) (Vilnius: Lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus tarnyba, 2014) // https://www.lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2016/02/vyresnio-amziaus-zmoniu-tyrimas_ataskaita.pdf.

2. The regulatory framework of the prevention of psychological violence in Lithuania

The concept of mobbing to describe relationships at the workplace was first applied by Prof. Heinz Leymann, one of the most famous researchers of mobbing. He sees mobbing as equal to psychological violence or psychological terror, suggesting that psychological terror – or mobbing – in the workplace means hostile and unethical communication or behaviour by one or a few individuals mainly towards one individual. Mobbing is a type of psychological violence in the workplace. Leymann has defined 45 mobbing actions towards a victim, which include unfounded criticism of their work, person, or beliefs, spreading rumours, giving tasks that are above their level of ability, forcing them to do harmful work, not providing them the information needed to work, ignoring or bullying them, making degrading comments at them, etc. In other words, a very wide range of humiliating and hurtful actions are used to attack them.[13] Without going into detail about the various forms of psychological violence in the workplace, this study assumes that any occurrence of psychological violence in the workplace can fundamentally affect their economic and social status and self-esteem. In Lithuania, the legal criteria for psychological workplace violence were considered in some detail by Ramunė Guobaitė-Kirslienė and Inga Blažienė.[14] Due to its purposefulness, frequency, and continuity, psychological workplace violence causes significant mental, psychosomatic and social suffering. Leymann's conception mentioned above excludes temporary conflicts in the workplace.[15] In the literature, psychological violence is frequently associated with unwelcome emotional aggression, along with significant long-term consequences to the victim – emotional and otherwise. According to Vittorio Di Martino, hostile behaviour of this kind can remain relatively unnoticed and subtle in the beginning and thus difficult to recognise, but it may evolve into a highly aggressive form of violence over time.[16] It is usually accepted that aggressors may taunt their colleagues from more or less the same organisational level (horizontal psychological violence) or occupying different positions on the company hierarchy (vertical psychological violence). With respect to bullying in the workplace, it is also very important to remember that one of the components of the employment relationship is the subordination of workers to their employers. This legal subordination gives the employer the right to use managerial prerogatives to direct, control, and discipline workers either directly or through managers. Given that employers, top management, and mid-level managers are effectively allowed to use managerial prerogatives, the use of bullying as a tool of managerial control[17] causes serious difficulty and is one of the symptoms of psychological violence. Moreover, according to some authors, "vertical bullying" is also a reality (M. S. Hershcovis, 2011, p. 501; S. Branch, J. Murray, 2015, p. 289). This happens when people bully

[13] "Aiškinamasis raštas dėl Darbo kodekso 30 ir 58 straipsnių pakeitimo įstatymo projekto" (Explanatory note on the draft law amending Articles 30 and 58 of the Labour Code), (January 2021) // https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAP/2cc906f0567011eba1f8b445a2cb2bc7.

[14] Ramunė Guobaitė-Kirslienė, Inga Blažienė, *supra* note 2, 113-136.

[15] Heinz Leymann, "Mobbing and Psychological Terror at Workplaces", *Violence and Victims* 5(2) (1990): 120 // http://www.mobbingportal.com/LeymannV&V1990(3).pdf.

[16] Vitorio Di Martino, Helge Hoel, Cary L. Cooper, Preventing violence and harassment in the workplace (report), *Eurofound. Ireland*, (2003) // https://policycommons.net/artifacts/1837517/preventing-violence-and-harassment-in-the-workplace-report/2580740/; Ramunė Guobaitė-Kirslienė, Inga Blažienė, supra note 2, 113-136.

[17] Valerio De Stefano, Ilda Durri, Charalampos Stylogiannis, Mathias Wouters, "System needs update": Upgrading protection against cyberbullying and ICT-enabled violence and harassment in the world of work: ILO Working Paper 1 (Geneva, ILO)," (2020) // https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/263068/1/ilo-wp01.pdf.

their managers – i.e. individuals who, at least formally, are given more power, because they occupy a higher position in the company hierarchy.[18]

Its rather abstract definition notwithstanding, psychological workplace violence may cause certain negative consequences to the worker. A number of studies found that psychological violence may cause health problems to its victims, and that such working conditions may lead to "voluntary" quitting, but different types of behaviour make it difficult to distinguish between the effect on health, absenteeism, motivation to work, the quality of occupational safety, and labour mobility.[19] The Health and Safety Authority of Ireland reports that stress and discomfort can become part of the daily reality of those experiencing bullying. Bullying in the workplace very frequently causes mental health disorders, and physical health issues are also common. Moreover, these health disorders not only impact the victim's performance at work, but also reduce their desire and ability to interact with other people.[20] The Swedish National Board of Occupational Safety and Health observed that the consequences of bullying in the workplace are felt not only by the worker being bullied, but also by the whole group. Group-level consequences may be, for example, decreased performance and productivity, disregard for existing rules, lack of trust, general insecurity, withdrawal from the group or from the position, high absenteeism due to illness, and rapid staff turnover.[21] Other studies also determined the extent of financial consequences to companies: Leymann, for example, was one of the first to estimate that financial losses incurred may be up to USD 100,000. Other studies in Europe have shown that companies can lose up to EUR 50,000 a year due to mobbing, while harassment costs up to GBP 13.75bn to the UK economy.[22] Mobbing in the workplace is very expensive for businesses, with a company of around 1,000 employees incurring a loss of approximately EUR 150,000 per year due to psychological harassment-related costs. One should also underscore the 60% reduction in performance of mobbing victims themselves.[23]

The International Labour Organization Convention concerning the elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work (No. 190) states that

> the term 'violence and harassment' in the world of work refers to a range of unacceptable behaviours and practices, or threats thereof, whether a single occurrence or repeated, that aim at, result in, or are likely to result in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm, and includes gender-based violence and harassment; the term 'gender-based violence and harassment' means violence and harassment directed at persons because of their sex or gender, or affecting persons of a particular sex or gender disproportionately, and includes sexual harassment.[24]

Council Directive 89/391/EEC of 12 June 1989 on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health of workers at work[25] obliges em-

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18 *Ibid*.

19 Mona Berthelsen, Anders Skogstad, Bjorn Lau, Stalve Valvatne Einarsen, S., "Do they stay or do they go? A longitudinal study of intentions to leave and exclusion from working life among targets of workplace bullying," *International Journal of Manpower* 32 (2011): 178-193.

20 European Parliament, "Bullyng at work. Working paper," (2001) // https://www.europarl.europa.eu/workingpapers/soci/pdf/108_en.pdf.

21 *Ibid*.

22 Jolita Vveinhardt, "Mobingo nuostolių mažinimas koreguojant organizacijų etikos kodeksus," *Management theory and studies for rural business and infrastructure development* 2(31) (2012).

23 European Parliament, *supra* note 20.

24 *International Labour Organisation Convention (2019, no. 190)*, art. 1.

25 Council Directive 89/391/EEC of 12 June 1989 on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health of workers at work // https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/LT/ALL/?uri=CELEX:31989L0391.

ployers to improve worker health and safety procedures, but does not specifically use the term "psychological violence". Therefore, with the understanding that psychological violence is one of the occupational risk factors (a psychosocial risk factor), said directive lays down the measures for improving the health and safety of workers in the workplace, including their psychological comfort.

Until 1 November 2022, the Labour Code of the Republic of Lithuania obliged employers to create a working environment where workers or worker groups do not experience hostile, unethical, humiliating, aggressive, or insulting actions. The content of those actions was also defined: these are actions that attack the honour and dignity, physical or psychological integrity of an individual employee or a group, or that aim to intimidate, humiliate or put an employee or group in a helpless and powerless position. It also provided that employers shall take all necessary measures to prevent psychological workplace violence, publish information about it in the usual ways of the workplace, and take active measures to provide assistance to individuals who have experienced psychological violence in the work environment. Back in 2005, the Lithuanian Free Market Institute conducted a study titled "Worker Attitudes to Various Issues Related to Employment Relationship Regulations" (Okunevičiūtė, Neverauskienė, 2007) and in 2006, J. Eičinas and G. Vilkevičius carried out a study of workplace violence and harassment prevention in Lithuanian organizations, both of which found that despite Lithuanian laws obliging employers to take measures to prevent hostile actions of employees, these provisions are not sufficiently implemented in Lithuania.[26]

As of 1 November 2022, the provision in Article 30 of the Labour Code of the Republic of Lithuania was extended by incorporating the definition of psychological violence detailed in the International Labour Organization Convention concerning the elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work (No. 190) into the national regulatory framework, providing that (1) violence and harassment, including psychological violence and gender-based violence and harassment (violence and harassment against individuals due to their gender or disproportionally affecting individuals of a certain gender, including sexual harassment), (2) includes any unacceptable conduct or threat thereof, (3) regardless of whether the unacceptable conduct is intended to have a physical, psychological, sexual or economic impact, either on a single occasion or on a repeated basis, (4) whether the unacceptable conduct causes or is likely to cause such an effect, whether such conduct is offensive to the dignity of a person or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment, and/or (5) whether it causes or is likely to cause physical, financial and/or non-financial harm. It is forbidden to engage in acts of violence and harassment at the workplace, including public and private areas and places, when the employee is at the employer's disposal and performing the duties under their employment contract; during rest or lunch breaks [27] or when using the domestic, sanitary and hygiene facilities; during work-related trips, travels, trainings, events or social activities; in work-related communications, including those carried out by information technology applications and online services; in employer-provided housing; and while commuting to and from work.[28]

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[26] Pranas Žukauskas, Jolita Vveinhardt, "Lyginamoji mobingo diagnozavimo instrumentų analizė" (Comparative analysis of tools for diagnosing mobbing), *Organizacijų vadyba: sisteminiai tyrimai,* (2011): 133-146.

[27] Importantly, the legislation creates obligations for the employer, even though in some cases the employee is not even at the employer's disposal, e.g. on his/her way to and from work, during breaks, and partly at social events, which means that it creates the possibility of the occurrence and assessment of psychological violence at work in the context of the employment relationship, not just in the direct context of the employment relationship, but also in situations relating to the relationship.

[28] *Labour Code of the Republic of Lithuania,* Register of Legal Acts (2016, no. 23709), art 30.

The definition of psychological violence provided in the Labour Code of the Republic of Lithuania leaves a lot of room for discussion regarding its application. For instance, based on the new legal regulation (as of 1 November 2022), the threat of unacceptable behaviour on a single occasion (not even the behaviour itself), which can have a negative impact even without causing harm, can be treated as psychological violence. This uncertainty fails to meet the expectations of parties to a legal employment relationship. Hypothetical cases may be treated as psychological workplace violence: whenever there is an opportunity for certain action and a chance that certain harm would be caused, such a situation would qualify as psychological workplace violence. From a legal standpoint, such a situation can be seen as an obligation to take preventive action, i.e. to identify possible occurrences before they take place or foresee possible harm before it is caused, but this raises serious issues in terms of practical implementation. Without a concrete situation that can be assessed using the legal criteria for occurrences of psychological violence – that is, without the fact of psychological workplace violence – the employer is still under a legal obligation to 'predict' a possible issue and take action to prevent that possible issue from occurring. However, from the standpoint of the regulatory framework for occupational safety and health, the employer is always under an obligation to act preventively, and, in a sense, the presumption of guilt is always applied.[29] As of 1 November 2022, the wording of Article 30 of the Labour Code of the Republic of Lithuania obliges employers to take preventive measures by adopting a psychological violence prevention policy as part of its local regulatory framework when the employer has 50 or more employees. It does not follow, however, that employers with fewer than 50 employees need not take action with respect to the prevention of psychological violence, because the law also lays down general obligations for the employer, including taking measures to eliminate and control violence and harassment based on the possible risk of violence and harassment, setting the procedure for handling such cases and informing employees about it, organizing employee training on the risk of psychological workplace violence, preventive measures, etc.

As the present study was being conducted, the State Labour Inspectorate published its Methodological Recommendations on the Prevention of Psychological Violence, which specify that psychological violence usually manifests as:

> direct or indirect threats or accusations aimed at causing emotional or physical pain or loss (e.g., threats of possible dismissal, worsening working conditions when preparing schedules, etc.); denigration of achievements (e.g., unfounded criticism of the employee regarding the tasks completed by them, aimed at humiliating or insulting them, etc.); defamation (e.g., dissemination of untrue information that may degrade their honour and dignity, etc.); repeated negative remarks (e.g., unpleasant comments with varying content); ignoring (e.g., isolation, separation from the team and collaborative activities, not disclosing information, continuous disregard for or denial of the employee's requests and needs, etc.); manipulation (e.g., inadequate workload, wage manipulation, unrealistic requirements, etc.); sarcasm (e.g., mockery, scathing irony, etc.); the desire to ridicule (e.g., the behaviour of an employee or group of employees when the personal and professional characteristics of another person are presented for ridicule, making mocking remarks or associative jokes about the employee, creating a hostile and unethical environment in which the employee feels abused, humiliated, etc.);

[29] Supreme Court of Lithuania, 11 December 2019, judgement no. 2K-272-458/2019 (Lithuanian case).

yelling (e.g., communication in a raised tone, uncontrolled temper, etc.); public humiliation (e.g., making degrading comments at the employee's expense or remarks aimed at humiliating or demeaning them, contempt, etc.); insults aimed at destroying one's self-confidence, including public humiliation; actions, remarks or gestures attacking an employee's self-esteem and self-worth with the aim of humiliating them.[30]

It should be noted that the characteristics of psychological violence manifestations listed by the State Labour Inspectorate for the most part correspond to the characteristics of psychological violence defined by the researchers discussed above. Therefore, this study has been conducted to determine if older people experience psychological workplace violence as defined by the State Labour Inspectorate and whether psychological violence may be said to constitute a problem for older people.

3. Legal assessment of manifestations of psychological violence against older workers in Lithuania

The volume of research on psychological workplace violence is limited, but the study of this phenomenon is becoming increasingly relevant. The studies conducted so far show that, for example, in Norway, psychological violence is experienced by 8.6% of workers, with 4% indicating to have experienced it once or twice, 3.3% indicating they are experiencing it currently or have experienced it earlier, and 1.2% indicating they are experiencing it every week.[31] According to Leymann, 3.5% of Swedish workers experience psychological workplace violence.[32] A study by B. Vėbraitė, I. Andruškienė, and J. Jurgutis showed that 25.4% of participants in Vilnius and Klaipėda experienced constant scolding or harassment at work over a period of 12 months.[33] However, it should be noted that there are no studies on psychological violence against older people in particular. Other researchers who conducted studies on the integration of older people into the labour market focused on their participation therein. For example, a study by Navaitis, Burneikienė, and Trinkūnienė (2008) shows that older people experience age-based discrimination more often than younger people. Moreover, the discrimination experienced by older workers is often related to employment relationships: they are not hired because of their age, receive unfair wages for their work, or are fired without reason. Older people experience difficulties in the labour market in terms of both competing against other specialists and completing the tasks properly.

This article presents the data of a survey titled "Psychological violence experienced by older people", which was conducted in September 2022 with the aim of analysing the actual manifestations of psychological violence against older people. For this purpose, the present author surveyed employers (from both the public and the private sectors, and from medium-sized and large enterprises) and employee representatives (trade

[30] "Metodinės rekomendacijos psichologinio smurto darbe prevencijai užtikrinti" (Methodological guidelines to prevent psychological violence at work), (March 2022) // https://www.vdi.lt/AtmUploads/PREVENCIJA.pdf.

[31] Ståle Einarsen, Anders Skogstad, "Bullying at work: Epidemiological findings in public and private organizations," *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* 5 (1996): 185-201 // DOI: 10.1080/13594329608414854.

[32] Heinz Leymann, "The content and development of mobbing at work," *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* 5-2 (1996): 165-184.

[33] Birutė Pajarskienė, Ieva Vėbraitė, Jurgita Andruškienė, Arnoldas Jurgutis, "Ujimo / priekabiavimo dažnis Vilniaus ir Klaipėdos darbo vietose pagal ekonomines veiklas ir profesijas" (Incidence of harassment at workplaces in Vilnius and Klaipėda by economic activity and occupation), *Visuomenės sveikata* 57 (2012): 57-69.

unions). The survey presented similar questions to both the employers and the trade unions in order to obtain a comparison of the extent of psychological violence against older people in the workplaces. A total of 14 employers (7 of whom have more than 250 employees, 6 have from 50 to 250 employees, and 1 has up to 50 employees) and 69 trade unions (with 42 of them representing up to 50 employees each, 22 representing up to 250 employees each, and 5 representing more than 250 employees each) agreed to participate in the survey. Out of these employers, 64.3% are active in the private sector, and 35.7% in the public sector. With respect to the participating trade unions, 92.8% represent employees from the public sector and 7.2% represent employees from the private sector. Looking at the involvement of employee representatives in the survey and the answers they gave, one may presume that trade unions from the public sector are more actively involved than those in the private sector in addressing the problems faced by employees, including the issue of psychological workplace violence. The organization type (private vs. public) is a significant factor in terms of the prevalence of psychological workplace violence. Some studies suggest that the prevalence of bullying is comparatively lower in the private sector. Other studies, conversely, observe that bullying is more common in the private sector.[34] For example, according to some studies, the prevalence of bullying differs based on the organization: the prevalence of bullying among municipal workers in Finland (10.1%) is higher than other studies on bullying in Finland indicate (Piirainen et al. 2000); research into the Norwegian public sector found that bullying was 8.2% more widespread there than in the private sector (Einarsen and Skogstad 1996).[35]

Analysis of survey responses shows that one-third of those who told their employers they were experiencing psychological violence were older than 55. The trade unions, for their part, indicated that in 34.8% of cases, the issue of psychological workplace violence was raised by up to 5 workers in the last calendar year; in 8.7% of cases, from 6 to 10 workers; and in 4.3% of cases, by 10 or more workers.

Notably, the answers to the question of how many workers who take up the matter up with them were older than 55 years of age were nearly identical to the total numbers. This suggests that workers taking the matter up with the trade unions were, in almost all cases, older than 55 years of age. Compared with the employers' responses, which said that such workers comprised about one-third of all cases, one can see a clear difference emerge. In this way, the responses given by the employers may create the impression that workers, including those older than 55 years of age, do not take up the matter of the psychological violence they experience with their employees at all. This allows one to presume that either (a) the chances of psychological violence occurring are low or insignificant, or (b) the workers experiencing psychological violence have very little trust that their employer will resolve the issue.

The extremely low number of workers taking up the matter with their employer is attributable to their distrust that the employer will resolve the issue of psychological workplace violence. This is made evident by the fact that the subject of psychological violence experienced by workers is raised with the trade unions significantly more often. With respect to the regulatory framework, it is also important to note that legis-

[34] Milda Astrauskaitė, Roy M. Kern, "Patyčios darbe: sampratos, paplitimo, pasekmių ir priežasčių analizė" (Workplace bullying: an analysis of concepts, prevalence, consequences and causes), Kauno technologijos universitetas, Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas // https://www.hi.lt/uploads/pdf/visuomenes%20sveikata/2013.4(63)/VS%202013%204(63)%20LIT%20A%20Patycios%20darbe.pdf.

[35] Maarit Vartia, *Workplace bullying: A study on the work environment, well-being and health*, (2003).

lation lays down certain obligations to the employers regarding the prevention of psychological violence, namely to adopt internal procedures (policies) for the prevention of psychological violence and harassment, to make their workers familiar with them, to set up investigation procedures for assessing cases of psychological violence, to appoint responsible persons, and to organize employee training. The fact that workers, as the employers suggest, make little use of the redress procedures set out in internal legislation may be due to the fact that either (a) employers do not fulfil the obligations mentioned above, or (b) workers are simply not integrated into the psychological violence prevention system and know nothing about it. In what follows, the associated legal questions are further explored.

Further grounds for presuming that workers distrust their employers may be the fact that when asked whether workers (older than 55 years of age) experienced psychological violence in their working environment due to their age in the last calendar year, 21.4% of employers said that they did not know. When asked whether the internal atmosphere among the workers older than 55 years of age was business-like, orderly and safe, 14.3% of employers also said they did not know, with 7.1% going so far as to suggest that the atmosphere there is not business-like, orderly or safe. 35.7% of employers said they did not know how their workers feel, despite the fact that the employer is under an obligation to ensure safe and healthy working conditions for their workers and to create a working environment where employees and groups of employees do not experience hostile, unethical, humiliating, aggressive, or insulting actions that constitute an attack on their honour and dignity, physical and psychological integrity, or an attempt to intimidate, degrade, or put them in a helpless and powerless position. Therefore, the employer cannot be uninformed about the psychological violence experienced by their employee, irrespective of whether or not the employee has taken up the matter with them. Looking at this situation from a legal standpoint, one would have to conclude that either (a) the employers fail to properly fulfil the obligations laid down in Article 30 of the Labour Code of the Republic of Lithuania – that is, to adopt internal procedures (policies) for the prevention of psychological violence and harassment, to make their workers familiar with them, to set up investigation procedures for assessing the cases of psychological violence, to appoint responsible persons, and to organize employee training – or (b) the employers only formally fulfil these obligations and possibly only formally make their workers familiar with the adopted procedures, without getting the workers involved into the proper and effective functioning of the psychological violence prevention system.

Some proportion of workers may be able to take active steps themselves to defend against the psychological violence they experience, but, given the higher social vulnerability of those older than 55 years of age, these older employees do not tend to involve themselves in these actions for fear of losing their jobs. This situation, where workers consciously choose not exercise the rights accorded to them by law, is called the 'implicit threat' mechanism in some studies.[36] In view of the presumption above, namely, that older workers are socially more vulnerable and may find it more difficult to find a new job in the labour market, it would seem that they do not want to become a 'nuisance' to the employer and therefore do not report the psychological violence they experience to their employer, but instead seek help from employee representatives.

[36] Valerio De Stefano, *Smugling-in flexibility: temporary work contracts ant the „implicite threat" mechanism* (Geneva: International Labour Organization, 2009), 14-23.

When asked who may be a potential aggressor using psychological violence, 71.7% of employers say there is no psychological violence or they have no knowledge about it. From a critical standpoint, it seems more likely that the employers have no knowledge about it. Interestingly, one-fifth of employers said that psychological workplace violence occurs between workers who are not party to the relationship of subordination (i.e. horizontally), with only less than one-tenth saying that the source of psychological violence is the manager.

In strong contrast, the trade unions said that psychological violence against workers who are older than 55 years of age is exerted by managers in as much as 71% of cases, with 30.4% of respondents indicating that it is exerted by people who are not party to the relationship of subordination and 5.8% saying that psychological violence is exerted by those who are subordinate to the victims. This allows one to presume that the high number of cases of psychological violence exerted by managers indicated above is the exact reason why workers do not take up the matter with the employers, but instead turn to employee representatives, because taking up the matter with the employers may potentially result in job loss or a deterioration of working conditions.

The victim of violence at work is vulnerable professionally (through public humiliation, belittling their opinions, accusations of lack of effort, assigning them to meaningless tasks that do not meet their level of competence or taking away some of their former areas of responsibility), in terms of personal reputation (hurtful remarks, profanity, verbal abuse, threats, belittling, age-based remarks, gossip), and through isolation (psychosocial exclusion, limiting of opportunities, disregarding of their opinion, hostile answers to questions, not providing them the information needed to work).[37] To uncover the different forms in which psychological violence against older employees occurs, the employers and the trade unions participating in the survey were asked in what ways psychological violence manifests itself, providing them with a list of possible manifestations of psychological violence specified by the State Labour Inspectorate under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania. These include: physical and/or sexual abuse; unethical behaviour (either systemic or on a single occasion); disrespectful behaviour towards others; threats (e.g., of possible dismissal, worsening working conditions in various ways, etc.); denigration of achievements (e.g., criticism of the employee regarding the tasks completed by them, aimed at humiliating or insulting them, etc.); and defamation (e.g., dissemination of untrue information that may degrade their honour and dignity. Defamation is often intended to spread false accusations about a person, etc.); repeated negative remarks (e.g., unpleasant comments with varying content, etc.); ignoring (e.g., isolation, separation from the team and collaborative activities, not disclosing information, etc.); manipulation (e.g., inadequate workload, wage manipulation, unrealistic requirements, etc.); unfounded criticism (e.g., destructive criticism of the employee regarding the tasks completed by them, aimed at humiliating or insulting them, etc.); sarcasm (e.g., mockery, scathing irony, etc.); the desire to ridicule (e.g., the behaviour of an employee or group of employees when the personal and professional characteristics of another person are presented for ridicule, making mocking remarks or associative jokes about the employee, creating a hostile and unethical environment in which the employee feels abused, humiliated, etc.); yelling (e.g., communication in a raised tone, uncontrolled temper, etc.); public humiliation (e.g., making degrading comments, jokes or pranks at the em-

[37] Birutė Pajarskienė, Ieva Vėbraitė, Jurgita Andruškienė, Arnoldas Jurgutis, *supra* note 1, 57-69.

ployee's expense, belittling them, showing contempt, using hate speech etc.); physical violence (i.e. intentional and unwanted acts such as punching, hitting, kicking, biting, burning, etc. that result in trauma or injury); imprisonment, isolation, separation from social activities; verbal, written or physical conduct of a sexual nature that is unacceptable, unwanted or abusive and that aims to create, or creates, an intimidating, hostile, unpleasant, humiliating or offensive environment for the person being thus treated; unwanted physical contact (e.g., slapping, petting, caressing, groping, attempting to kiss, kissing, etc.) or demanding such contact; displaying offensive images, notes, or other materials, offensive gestures; displaying or sending pornographic or sexist photos, images, or texts; persistent attempts at communicating, stalking or collecting information about a person, when this is not related to the job functions being performed; threats or other intimidating behaviour aimed at restricting the person's freedom of self-determination; pressuring the employee in order to solicit certain behaviour, services or sexual services not related to the job functions they perform; unjustified worsening of working conditions, compared to other employees; any other unacceptable conduct or threat thereof, regardless of whether the unacceptable conduct is intended to have a physical, psychological, sexual or economic impact, either on a single occasion or on a repeated basis, whether the unacceptable conduct causes or is likely to cause such an effect, whether such conduct is offensive to the dignity of a person or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment, and/or whether it has caused or is likely to cause physical, financial and/or non-financial harm.[38]

A significant proportion of surveyed employers said that psychological violence manifests itself in unethical behaviour (either systemic or on a single occasion) (7.1% of cases), disrespectful behaviour towards others (14.3% of cases), repeated negative remarks (e.g., unpleasant comments with different content, etc.) (7.1% of cases), sarcasm (e.g., mockery, scathing irony, etc.) (7.1% of cases), and unjustified worsening of working conditions, compared with other people (7.1% of cases), with 71.4% indicating "other" but failing to specify their answers. Notably, the employers did not include other cases related to violations of the employee's personal space (e.g. suggestions of a sexual nature, unwanted physical contact, etc.). This suggests that psychological violence manifests itself more through the organization of work itself, rather than via the potential aggressor's attempts to violate the personal space of an employee. In light of the fact that workers identify the manager as a potential aggressor, and the manager is the one responsible for the organization of work, the data under analysis suggests that the organization of work and aspects related to it are the exact instrument most commonly used to create a psychologically unsafe work environment for the employee. It appears this is done for certain personal gain, e.g. to create the conditions such that the employ quits the job. And it appears that managers at various levels generally misuse their discretionary right to organize work and likely take advantage of the social vulnerability of older workers by applying certain kinds of pressure to force workers to "limit their own labour rights".

This presumption is confirmed by the employee representatives, who indicated the following manifestations of psychological violence against older workers as the most prevalent: unethical behaviour (either systemic or on a single occasion) (46.4%); disrespectful behaviour towards others (46.4%); denigration of achievements (e.g., criticism of the employee regarding the tasks completed by them, aimed at humili-

[38] *Supra* note 30.

ating or insulting them, etc.) (46.4%); yelling (e.g., communication in a raised tone, uncontrolled temper, etc.) (23.2%); unfounded criticism (e.g., destructive criticism of the employee regarding the tasks completed by them, aimed at humiliating or insulting them, etc.) (21.7%); sarcasm (e.g., mockery, scathing irony, etc.) (24.6%); repeated negative remarks (e.g., unpleasant comments with different content, etc.) (30.4%); ignoring (e.g., isolation, separation from the team and collaborative activities, not disclosing information, etc.) (20.3%); threats (e.g., of possible dismissal, worsening working conditions in various ways, etc.) (26.1%); manipulation (e.g., inadequate workload, wage manipulation, unrealistic requirements, etc.) (21.7%); and unjustified worsening of working conditions, compared to other employees (18.8%).

In employment relationships, the above actions may occur in the context of work organization. In a legal employment relationship, the function of work organization is assigned to the persons authorized by the employer: managers at various levels. Therefore, considering the position of the employee representatives, which shall be deemed the more objective of the two (given the aforementioned legal assessment of the employers' position), one may conclude that the largest impact on the older workers is exerted via the instruments of work organization. This also supports the earlier conclusion, namely that workers are hesitant to defend their violated rights.

As mentioned above, Article 30 of the Labour Code of the Republic of Lithuania obliges employers to take active measures to prevent psychological violence, to adopt internal legislation, and to prevent possible manifestations of psychological violence from occurring. This study also sought to determine if employers fulfil their statutory obligation to take all possible measures to prevent psychological violence. Nearly 60% of employers stated that a responsible person has been appointed who can be contacted if one experiences psychological violence, but only one-third said their company's employees are aware of this person, with almost a third admitting that they are unsure if their employees had been informed about the person they can contact upon experiencing psychological violence.

The responses of the employee representatives, in effect, only confirmed this situation, with nearly 35% confirming that a responsible person who can be contacted if one experiences psychological violence has been appointed, 36% saying that no such person exists, and 25% stating they are unaware of such a person. When asked if workers are aware of a person who can help them if they experience psychological violence, only 27.5% of respondents answered in the positive, 30.4% of respondents answered in the negative, and 36.2% said they were unsure.

From a legal standpoint, this situation confirms an earlier presumption, namely that the statutory obligations are fulfilled only formally: even if a company has adopted internal procedures for the prevention of psychological violence and harassment, or has appointed the people responsible for its implementation, its workers are not made familiar with the procedures and are not aware about such a person having been appointed. All of this suggests that the psychological violence prevention system in companies is absolutely formal in nature. It remains possible that local documents have been prepared, but they have no effect.

Interestingly, the employers indicate that they have appointed a person responsible for the prevention of psychological violence, who can be contacted by those experiencing it (57%); organize employee training on the topic of psychological violence (57%); conduct anonymous employee surveys (around 30%); have prepared internal procedures for the prevention of violence and harassment (50%); conduct annual in-

terviews with their employees on the topic of psychological violence (around 30%); are still in the process of preparing internal legislation on the prevention of psychological violence (15%); and conduct individual interviews with their employees (around 10%). The employee representatives, however, state that the responsible person has been appointed only in less than one-sixth of cases (15.9%), employee trainings are organized in less than one-fourth of cases (23.2%), anonymous employee surveys are also conducted in less than one-fourth of cases (23.2%), and only in 14.5% of cases are they aware of readily available internal procedures for the prevention of violence and harassment, with about one-third of respondents indicating that employers are not doing anything at all.

In view of all the responses obtained, it can be concluded that only less than a third of the organizations have taken psychological violence prevention measures, and that these measures are insufficient given the fact that the majority of workers turn not to their employer, but rather to the trade unions to defend their violated rights. As mentioned above, this is likely the case because they distrust their employers and do not believe that issues related to psychological violence will be resolved. A further reason why the instances of turning to one's employer in such cases are known to be so few is that the psychological violence is, for the most part, exerted by managers, who can directly influence the continuity of the employment relationship, and workers are likely afraid to lose their jobs at an older age. It may also be presumed that internal procedures for the prevention of violence and harassment are only formal documents that fail to actually address the problem, because as many as 50% of employers indicated they have such procedures in place, but only 14.5% of employee representatives said they were aware of them. From a legal point of view, this means that employers, who are under an obligation to prepare internal legislation on the prevention of psychological violence and familiarising their employees, against signature, with the labour law provisions establishing workplace procedures (Paragraph 4 of Article 42 of the Labour Code of the Republic of Lithuania), likely fail to fulfil this obligation on the topic under discussion.

As discussed above, the definition of psychological violence also encompasses the cases where hypothetical actions may cause hypothetical harm, but in most cases, as mentioned above, the harm is real. This view is also supported by the employee representatives, who said that older workers usually develop physical health problems (69.6%) and mental health problems (62.3%) due to the psychological violence they experience; that 43.5% of workers faced with psychological violence quit their jobs; and a significant number of workers become less productive (42%). The data under analysis supports the legal conclusion that psychological workplace violence should be assessed in terms of real actions (illegal activity) and in the context of real consequences (financial or non-financial harm).

CONCLUSIONS

Psychological violence in the employment relationships of older people is related to their status as older workers because, given their higher vulnerability and fear of losing their job or of other negative consequences from attempting to resolve the problem, they often do not seek help (turning to employee representatives in critical cases only). This finding is supported by empirical results which confirm that workers do not contact employers at all, and very rarely contact workers' representatives.

Employees distrust their employers' ability to resolve the issue of psychological workplace violence were they to turn to them, and instead turn to employee representatives. The source of distrust is the fact that psychological violence is usually exerted by managers. The survey data show that, paradoxically, managers are the most frequent perpetrators of psychological violence, while employers themselves are either unaware of it or claim that there is no such thing, according to the survey findings.

Employers fail to ensure the prevention of psychological violence and are often unaware of workers' mental well-being and the psychological violence they experience. The existing violence prevention rules are in most cases merely formal documents, and even if workers are familiarised with them, said procedures are ineffective, because workers fail to take the matter up with their employees. This is evident from the survey, which found that only about 1/3 of the cases are aware of the company's internal procedures in place to help workers defend their violated rights.

As of 1 November 2022, the legal framework for the prevention of psychological violence has changed, so the situation should improve substantially, but it is premature to draw any conclusions on the improvement of the legal framework in the absence of established practice.

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