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PRODUCTIVITY AT ANY COST? MANAGERIALISM AND HARASSMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY^{1;2}**VANESSA CATHERINA NEUMANN FIGUEIREDO ¹**ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0062-9234>

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ABSTRACT: Considering the importance of aspects of work organization and, primarily, management practices in addressing abusive relationships, this article aims to classify situations of harassment and moral violence reported by university professors, as well as to characterize the work context in which these incidents occurred. The research included 18 university professors from an institution in the Brazilian center-west who reported experiencing moral harassment, as indicated by their responses to item 31 of the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ). To systematize situations of violence and harassment, the frequency of attacks was evaluated, as well as the frequency of responses to the NAQ items, the sociodemographic and occupational questionnaire and the Work Context Assessment Scale. The results point to a work context characterized by unfair practices and an intense work pace, fostering hostile and abusive relationships. For harassed professors, the university demands competitiveness (94%, n=17), and there is a lack of integration (83%, n=15), indicating a solitary experience that leads to individualism. Concerning moral harassment, 9 (50%) teachers were the target of slander and had their position disregarded monthly, weekly, or daily. Regarding situations that happened from time to time (violence), 10 (55,6%) teachers reported being constantly criticized in the service. It is concluded that the occurrences of moral violence are proof of the need to rethink the university environment, whose social ties have been snatched away by quantitative, metric, meritocratic logic, in disregard of the quality and meaning of what is done.

Keywords: Moral harassment, University education, Work conditions, College environment.

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PRODUTIVISMO A QUALQUER CUSTO? GERENCIALISMO E ASSÉDIO MORAL NA UNIVERSIDADE

RESUMO: Considerando a importância dos aspectos da organização do trabalho e, principalmente, das práticas de gestão para a disposição de relações abusivas, este artigo tem como objetivo classificar as situações de assédio e de violência moral assinaladas por professores universitários, assim como caracterizar o contexto laboral onde ocorriam as agressões. Participaram da pesquisa 18 professores universitários de uma instituição no centro-oeste brasileiro que relataram terem vivenciado assédio moral, através da resposta ao item 31 do Questionário de Atos Negativos (QAN). Para a sistematização das situações de violência e do assédio foi avaliada a periodicidade das agressões, assim como a frequência de respostas dos itens do QAN, do questionário sociodemográfico e ocupacional e da Escala de Avaliação do Contexto de Trabalho. Os resultados apontam para um contexto laboral caracterizado por práticas injustas e ritmo de trabalho intenso, propiciando relações hostis e abusivas. Para os docentes assediados, a universidade exige competitividade (94%, n=17) e há falta de integração (83%, n=15), indicando uma vivência solitária que conduz ao individualismo. Em relação ao assédio moral, 9 (50%) docentes foram/eram alvo de maledicências e tiveram/tinham seu posicionamento desprezado mensalmente, semanalmente ou diariamente. Já sobre situações que aconteciam de vez em quando (violência), 10 (55,6%) professores reportaram serem constantemente criticados no serviço. Conclui-se que as ocorrências de violência moral são prova da necessidade de se repensar o ambiente universitário, cujos laços sociais têm sido arrebatados pela lógica quantitativa, métrica, meritocrática, em desprezo à qualidade e ao sentido do fazer.

Palavras-chave: Assédio moral, Ensino superior, Condições de trabalho, Ambiente universitário.

¿PRODUCTIVIDAD A CUALQUIER COSTO? GERENCIALISMO Y ACOSO EN LA UNIVERSIDAD

RESUMEN: Considerando la importancia de aspectos de la organización laboral y, principalmente, de las prácticas de gestión para la eliminación de relaciones abusivas, este artículo tiene como objetivo clasificar situaciones de acoso y violencia moral denunciadas por profesores universitarios, así como caracterizar el contexto de trabajo donde ocurrieron las agresiones. La investigación incluyó a 18 profesores universitarios de una institución del centro-oeste brasileño que habían experimentado acoso moral, a través de su respuesta al ítem 31 del Cuestionario de Actos Negativos (CAN). Para sistematizar situaciones de violencia y acoso se evaluó la frecuencia de agresiones, la frecuencia de respuestas a los ítems QAN, el cuestionario sociodemográfico y ocupacional y la Escala de Evaluación del Contexto Laboral. Los resultados apuntan a un contexto laboral caracterizado por prácticas injustas y ritmo de trabajo intenso, fomentando relaciones hostiles y abusivas. Para los profesores acosados, la universidad exige competitividad (94%, n=17) y hay falta de integración (83%, n=15), indicando una experiencia solitaria que conduce al individualismo. En relación al acoso moral, 9 (50%) docentes fueron objeto de calumnias y ignorados en su cargo en el mes, semana o diariamente. Respecto a situaciones que ocurrían de vez en cuando (violencia), 10 (55,6%) docentes relataron haber sido criticados constantemente en el servicio. Se concluye que los hechos de violencia moral son prueba de la necesidad de repensar el ambiente universitario, cuyos vínculos sociales han sido arrebatados por lógicas cuantitativas, métricas, meritocráticas, sin tener en cuenta la calidad y el significado de lo que se hace.

Palabras clave: Acoso moral, Enseñanza superior, Condiciones de trabajo, Ambiente universitario.

INTRODUCTION

Although not new, the phenomenon of bullying has become notorious and recurrent in higher education institutions, both private and public. According to Hirigoyen (2014), bullying includes repeated offensive behaviors, speech, and mannerisms that undermine the work environment and affect the honor and health of the victim(s). Frequent attacks can be devastating, depressing, and humiliating, resulting in intellectual, moral, and psychological harm.

According to Hirigoyen (2011), subtle and perverse forms of violence, such as veiled threats, intimidation, and blackmail, constitute behavior whose goal is to exterminate the victim. This incivility affects not only the target of the aggression but the entire collective, as it interferes with and intimidates the workplace to the point of causing colleagues to become complicit in this psychological violence through symbolic domination. For Bourdieu (1983), symbolic violence is a game of interests and positions among those who hold social power; as an invisible restriction, it manifests in social interactions involving submission and subjugation, not being perceived as violence, given the naturalization of the torment experienced in that social space. However, like other forms of violence, it has the purpose of being harmful (Carrieri; Aguiar; Diniz, 2013).

In universities, the encroachment of neoliberal ideals, rooted in anti-democratic and exclusionary logic, has a significant impact on professional relationships. The emphasis on evaluating faculty based on results and achieved goals undermines social bonds, as recognition linked to productivity distorts the intrinsic value of intellectual and scientific pursuits.

The rise of managerialism has prompted leaders and employees within public institutions to adopt a more individualistic and often adversarial approach in response to increasing demands for pace and efficiency (Figueiredo; Silva; Santana, 2020). The abusive behaviors that emerge from the organization of work mirror the pathogenic suffering prevalent in public service. This new managerial framework introduces values and mindsets typically associated with private enterprises, normalizing pressure, heightened expectations, work overload, constant assessments, and fostering relationships that are often authoritarian, unfair, and disrespectful.

Managerialism, as a system for organizing power, emphasizes evaluating human activity through a lens of costs and benefits. Concerning the concept of conduct, it centers on the worker's demeanor, being effective, agile, respectful of established management standards, helpful, industrious, and compliant with the rules and ideals set forth by management (Gaulejac, 2007).

In academia, the value of teachers and the acknowledgment of their intangible contributions are increasingly undermined by managerialism. This trend fosters a self-managerial mindset, compelling educators to leverage their creativity, passion, inventiveness, and intellect to achieve ever-higher levels of performance. Aligned with neoliberal principles, the burden of seeking recognition falls solely on teachers, who also bear the blame for any personal struggles, including illness, amid the gradual erosion

of social and labor rights. This intricate dynamic of recognition and blame ensnares teachers' sense of identity, placing them in subservience to a rationality that mandates a continuous quest for high performance. This struggle is often necessary for securing grants and research funding while attempting to uphold their authority, all in the hope of finding fulfillment and meaning in their work (Moreira, 2009).

Productivism has increasingly taken hold in universities, influencing the rigorous evaluation of work. This assessment comes not only from management, aimed at recognizing an individual's contribution to the organization, but also from colleagues, who evaluate the creativity and innovation embodied in that work. However, it is recognized that the emphasis on validating the utility and outcomes of labor has overshadowed aesthetic appreciation, the beauty of creation. This shift impacts personal identity and hinders the fulfillment that comes from contemplating one's ideals.

As in other institutions, when the dedication and cognitive, emotional, and social investment of peers in the performance of their work are not legitimized, all possibility of professional identity and fulfillment is undermined. This is especially true of the importance of work organization and, especially, management practices in preventing abusive relationships.

In universities, ongoing and egregious psychological violence, intended to harm others, can be perpetuated by a range of individuals, including managers, directors, coordinators, professors, advisors, technicians, other staff members, fellow faculty, and even students. This aggression manifests through behaviors, gestures, expressions, and language that foster an invasive, insulting, and threatening environment, undermining professional and academic performance and instilling feelings of humiliation and worthlessness. Harassment also encompasses threats and a disregard for established rights, such as vacation time, working hours, leaves of absence, and regulated workloads, along with excessive scrutiny of others' work. These actions contribute to insecurity, disorganization within families, and discomfort in the workplace.

The university work environment, with these characteristics, remains intolerant of failure and suffering, marked by inhumanity and frayed social connections, and is conducive to the development of abusive relationships and, consequently, illness. According to Ferreira (2007, p. 83), "the social pathology of violence manifests when subjective work relationships deteriorate and work becomes meaningless. Relationships of solidarity are diluted, and suffering becomes more intense."

Faced with the suffering that arises from resistance and persistence against unfair, hostile, or excessive workplace practices, social pathologies germinate, and disrespect becomes commonplace (Ferreira; Pilatti, 2012). Due to repeated frustrations in changing the work organization where bullying reigns, defensive strategies gradually lose their ability to maintain mental stability.

According to Soboll (2011), bullying is an act of psychological violence whose aggressive manifestation in the workplace humiliates, embarrasses, and shames. This phenomenon occurs through speech, writing, behavior, or gestures, occurs repeatedly, and many of them impact workers. It can

manifest subtly and demonstrate the deterioration of professional conditions and relationships, potentially compromising mental and physical health, manifesting in psychopathological conditions such as post-traumatic stress, anxiety, and depression.

According to Glina and Soboll (2012), rude behavior, abusive conduct, repetitive and prolonged negative acts are its main expressions, whose psychological damage involves decreased energy and vitality, muscle tension, difficulty resting, palpitations and dizziness, psychosomatic problems and physical illnesses, increased levels of stress, anxiety and depression, hetero-aggressive and self-aggressive behavior, which can trigger post-traumatic stress disorder, inability to work and suicidal behavior.

Harassment, as a manifestation of capitalist domination, serves to demobilize and depoliticize the working class. This form of violence, often perpetrated with the complicity of colleagues, is experienced in isolation, perpetuated, and silenced. In the process of normalizing degradation, the social pathology of harassment is characterized by ongoing and persistent hostility, threats, and humiliation. This leads to psychological and socio-professional harm, with the aim of controlling, coercing, or excluding individuals or groups (Barreto, 2003). As an expression of the social pathology of violence, it contributes to the emergence of illness by normalizing work-related suffering and infiltrating the individual's psychological well-being.

Ferreira (2013) indicates that social pathologies derive from “situations arising from the transformation of defensive strategies that fail to silence or disguise the suffering resulting from the constant adversities of work” (p. 82). In this trajectory, the social pathology of violence is manifested when work becomes meaningless, with the trivialization of hostile, outrageous, and disrespectful acts, such as moral harassment (Figueiredo; Silva; Santana, 2020).

The new public service management model is based on a managerialist and economic approach, whose use of technological innovations and Toyotist management techniques establishes a new profile for the worker, as well as “innovative” forms of evaluation and usefulness of work in higher education. Beginning in the 1990s, the 1995 State Reform Master Plan, based on privatization values and market competition, redirected education funds to private institutions, considered more efficient. At the same time, it brought to public universities the idea of efficiency and speed, in keeping with the privatization ideology (Lima, 2007). This process altered the organization of university work, incorporating duties, tasks, responsibilities, working hours, salaries, and different modes of social relations within the university.

Under the guise of enhancing educational indicators, the federal government invested in increasing the number of higher education institutions and programs, along with the establishment of new federal universities. The implementation of the Federal University Restructuring and Expansion Program (REUNI) and the promotion of private universities and colleges led to a broader access to higher education, allowing more working-class students to enroll and remain in their studies. However,

this expansion, which followed a trend of reducing public education spending, was only partial, characterized by inadequate materials, limited financial resources, and a shortage of staff to fulfill all necessary tasks, a situation that deteriorated further after 2017.

Guided by a new type of management, the prescribed organization of university work stipulates behaviors and conduct, indicates the division of personnel and labor, as well as the type of content and the specific tasks for which each individual is responsible (Dejours, 1992). This organization also involves controlling and monitoring compliance with regulations, statutes, and processes that workers must adhere to achieve the objectives, purposes, and amount and excellence of production, according to their previously determined working hours, recesses, and breaks (Ferreira et al., 2011).

According to Antloga et al. (2020), the transformation of suffering into creativity occurs when individuals possess the capability, respect, and autonomy to reframe the flawed judgments that lead to suffering, thus fostering their growth and contribution within the organization. However, when the subjective negotiation between desires and projects, along with the perceived absences stemming from actual work, is obstructed, it hampers cooperation, trust-building among peers, and the recognition of beauty. Demetrio (2019) identifies competitiveness and envy as barriers to strengthening connections, ultimately impeding the formation of a cohesive professional collective.

According to the Psychodynamics of Work, when work becomes a source of displeasure, it generates an increase in psychological stress; without psychic relief, this tension gives rise to pathogenic suffering. In the workplace, this manifests in loneliness and individualism, overload and violence, collective strategies, malaise, and illness.

Before illness occurs, defense strategies are constructed and shared within the collective to support the work environment (Dejours, 2008). They allow for the distorted assimilation of work-related excesses through unconscious behaviors assimilated by the collective, seeking adaptation, compensation, or even denying organizational abuses, such as subjection to aggressive situations and excessive responsibilities. The sharing of unconscious strategies allows work to be carried out, even under adverse conditions, as the dismay inflicted on professional relationships is trivialized. Although they serve the purpose of momentarily maintaining fragile mental health when work is arduous, in cases where defenses are overused by the collective, defensive ideology dominates and establishes behaviors considered commonplace within the institutional space, trivializing the discomfort caused by moral violence and its acceptance.

However, when such strategies are no longer capable of containing and supporting the organizational failures and shortcomings associated with the context characterized by bullying, workers become more vulnerable to developing health problems such as depression, suicidal ideation, fatigue, alcohol abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder, and anxiety (Henning et al., 2017; Freire, 2008; Leach; Poyser; Butterworth, 2018). Given the importance of bullying for mental health, this article aims to

classify the situations of bullying and bullying reported by university professors, as well as to characterize the work context in which the attacks occurred.

METHODOLOGY

An exploratory and quantitative study was conducted with university professors at a public institution located in the Brazilian Midwest, entitled “Analysis of the occurrence of pathogenic suffering in the university context,” approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee under CAAE number 82923818.3.0000.0021³. Eighteen professors were studied who reported having experienced or were, at the time of the research, being the target of moral harassment. This was noticed through the affirmative answer to question 31 of the Negative Acts Questionnaire, which defines moral harassment and asks the respondent to indicate whether they had experienced this phenomenon in the last six months, the duration, and characteristics of the event (Jacoby; Monteiro, 2016). After identifying the victims, data from the Sociodemographic Questionnaire, the Negative Acts Questionnaire, and the Work Context Assessment Scale were explored.

Instruments

Sociodemographic and occupational questionnaire (Figueiredo; Silva; Santana, 2020): questions about education, marital status, performance in the role of course coordinator, workload dedicated to undergraduate and postgraduate studies, research, teaching, extension, supervision of internships and students in various projects, and guidance.

Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ): This NAQ-R was created by Norwegian researchers Stale Einarsen and Bjørn Inge Raknes (first version in 1994), translated, adapted, and validated in Portuguese for Brazil by Christ (2011). The NAQ currently consists of 34 items and measures how often the respondent was subjected to various negative acts and potentially offensive behaviors during the last six months, such as direct (intimidation and verbal aggression) and indirect (defamation, social isolation) behaviors, as well as open-ended questions. Response options on a Likert scale assess the frequency of exposure to harassment situations, ranging from 1 to 5 (never, occasionally, monthly, weekly, and daily).

Work Context Assessment Scale (EACT-*Escala de Avaliação do Contexto de Trabalho*): formed by three factors (work organization, working conditions and professional relationships). It is part of the Inventory on Work and Illness Risks (ITRA), a questionnaire composed of four scales and developed by Ferreira and Mendes in 2003, seeking to understand the relationship between work and subjectivation,

³ The initial version of this article was published in the book of works of the VII International Colloquium of Clinical Sociology and Psychosociology entitled “Crises, fractures and resistance: actions and reflections in clinical sociology” (“*Crises, fraturas e resistências: ações e reflexões em sociologia clínica*”), organized by Pedro Henrique Isaac Silva, Maria Aparecida Penso and Paulo Bareicha.

to outline the work situation, the experiences, and the health consequences of that work (Ferreira; Mendes, 2003).

Participants

Eight men (two coordinators and six professors) and 10 women (three coordinators and seven professors) participated, all of whom reported experiencing bullying. They have between five and twenty-six years of teaching experience, and their tenure at the institution ranges from one to 32 years. Their ages range from 29 to 69. According to their educational level, three had postgraduate degrees (specialization), three have master's degrees, eleven have doctorates, and only one has a postdoctoral degree. Eleven live in the city only for work, nine have children, and ten are married. Regarding the relationship with the aggressors, the most common type of bullying was horizontal, among professors. Those in coordination, leadership, or management positions were those who most frequently attacked their dignity, with eight incidents identified against women and five against men (Figueiredo; Silva; Santana, 2020).

Data analysis

For the NAQ analysis, the definition provided by Soboll (2008) was utilized. In this context, moral violence is defined by isolated acts of aggression and infrequent impulsive behaviors that are not intended to harm the victim, such as shouting during arguments or in hostile situations that may arise between colleagues with otherwise good relationships. In contrast, moral harassment is characterized by frequent violations over extended periods, marked by ongoing aggression, humiliation, contempt, elevated tones of voice, all aimed at causing harm to the victim.

Thus, to analyze violent and harassing situations at work, the frequency of each NAQ item was calculated (Pooli; Monteiro, 2018): “Never (1)” was considered indicative of the absence of violence; for the option “once in a while (2)” the meaning of specific experiences of psychological violence/aggression was attributed, and the occurrence of situations of moral harassment was mapped by the expressions “Monthly (3), Weekly (4) and Daily (5)” (Figueiredo; Silva; Santana, 2020).

The frequencies of the elements of social relations, organization, and working conditions were calculated. In the EACT (Likert), the answers “never (1)” and “rarely (2)” were considered negative, and those marked as “sometimes (3)”, “frequently (4)”, and “always (5)” were considered positive. The data were analyzed with Excel, through which the percentage of professors who reported having been/are being the target of moral harassment was calculated, based on the statement in question 31 of the NAQ. To calculate the frequency, the statement “sometimes” (3) was considered a sign of moral violence, and the answers “frequently” (4) and “always” (5) indicated situations of moral harassment; those marked as “never” (1) and “rarely” (2) were considered negative.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The institutional valorization of characteristics such as being combative, competitive, and assimilating varied and unlimited demands, even when there is precariousness, indicates the propagation of privatizing objectives and goals, which can encourage and normalize inappropriate and disrespectful treatment (Figueiredo; Silva. Santana, 2020).

Regarding bullying, among the 18 professors who reported experiencing this type of violence, 9 (50%) reported having been the target of gossip and having their opinions disregarded monthly, weekly, or daily. Regarding situations that occurred occasionally (violence), 10 (55.6%) professors reported having been criticized at work.

The attack on the dignity of harassment victims appeared mainly in disrespectful insinuations (50%, n=9), in the depreciation of their beliefs, positions and their private life (44.4% or n=8), in the refusal of contact and isolation of the victim (33.3% or n=6) and in the dismissal of their opinions and points of view about the tasks (50% or n=9). There was a deliberate degradation of working conditions, demonstrated in the systematic attempts to find fault (38.9% or n=7), in the lack of necessary information to complete the tasks (38.9%), in the systematic assignment of unreasonable tasks or within an impossible deadline (33.3%), below their competencies (33.3% or n=6), subjected to an excessive workload (33.3%) and pressured not to demand their rights (11%, n=2). Verbal, physical or sexual violence appeared in shouting communication (33.3% or n=6), in undue sexual attention, such as inappropriate behaviors, speech, gestures and attitudes without the person's consent in a sexual context that cause discomfort, (11.1%, n=2), in the threat of physical abuse (5.6%, n=1), in intimidating behavior (5.6%, n=1) and in sexual harassment committed through inappropriate gestures or offers (11.1% or n=2).

Table 1. Situations of harassment and violence reported by university teachers⁴⁵

NAQ Questions	Situations of Moral Harassment %(n)	Situations of Moral Violence %(n)	Total (n=18)
They spread rumors about you.	50% (9)	33.3% (6)	83.3% (15)
Your opinions/views have been ignored.	50% (9)	33.3% (6)	83.3% (15)
You were the target of insults about your person, attitudes, or private life.	44.4% (8)	27.8% (5)	72.2% (13)
They tried to find errors in their tasks.	38.9% (7)	38.9 (7)	77.8% (14)
Someone withheld information that affected your performance (...)	38.9% (7)	33.3% (6)	72.2% (13)
They shouted/You were the target of gratuitous aggression.	33.3% (6)	27.8% (5)	61.1% (11)
(...) performed unreasonable tasks or within an impossible timeframe.	33.3% (6)	27.8% (5)	61.1% (11)

⁴ Note 1: In the table, the NAQ questions are abbreviated, the full model of which can be found at this address <https://central3.to.gov.br/arquivo/276627/>

⁵ Note 2: Situations of Moral Harassment lead to responses that occurred daily, weekly, or monthly in the six months before the application of the NAQ; those of moral violence are those that occur sometimes, also in the last six months (as detailed in the methodology).

You were ignored, deleted, or “put on ice”.	33.3% (6)	22.2% (4)	55.6% (10)
You were exposed to excessive workload.	33.3% (6)	22.2% (4)	55.6% (10)
You were forced to perform work below your level of competence.	33.3% (6)	16.7% (3)	50% (9)
Allegations have been made against you.	27.8% (5)	44.4% (8)	72.2% (13)
You were constantly reminded of your mistakes.	27.8% (5)	27.8% (5)	55.6% (10)
You were ignored, harassed (,,)	27.8% (5)	27.8% (5)	55.6% (10)
They removed or replaced areas/tasks under your responsibility (...).	27.8% (5)	11.1% (2)	38.9% (7)
You were subject to excessive supervision of your work.	22.2% (4)	22.2% (4)	44.4% (8)
You were humiliated or ridiculed.	16.7% (3)	33.3% (6)	50% (9)
You have received signs or hints that you should resign or quit your job.	16.7% (3)	16.7% (3)	33.3% (6)
Threatened with having your life made more difficult.	16.7% (3)	5.6% (1)	22.2% (4)
You were transferred against your will.	16.7% (3)	5.6% (1)	22.2% (4)
Persistent criticism of your work or efforts.	11.1% (2)	55.6% (10)	66.7% (12)
Pressured not to claim your right.	11.1% (2)	33.3% (6)	44.4% (8)
You were subjected to excessive sarcasm or teasing.	11.1% (2)	33.3% (6)	44.4% (8)
People who were not close to you played “pranks” on you.	11.1% (2)	22.2% (4)	33.3% (6)
You received unwanted sexual attention.	11.1% (2)	11.1% (2)	22.2% (4)
(...) systematically performed tasks that are not part of your job (...)	11.1% (2)	11.1% (2)	22.2% (4)
You have received messages, phone calls, or emails containing insults.	5.6% (1)	38.9% (7)	44.4% (8)
You were the target of intimidating behavior (...) “pointing the finger”, (...) pushing (...).	5.6% (1)	33.3% (6)	38.9% (7)
Threats of violence or physical abuse.	5.6% (1)	11.1% (2)	16.7% (3)
You were the target of offensive behavior/comments about your race/ethnicity.	0% (0)	16.7% (3)	16.7% (3)

Source: Created by the authors.

The practice of moral harassment and violence in the workplace is linked to unsustainable material conditions and an unfair work organization. According to Hirigoyen (2011), harassing professional relationships are characterized by verbal, physical, and sexual violence, including offenses against dignity, intentional deterioration of working conditions, and segregation, with the rejection of communication with the victim.

As shown in Table 2, excessive demands (94%, n=17) and submission to an excessively intense work pace (94%, n=17) are reprehensible and indicate a harassing interpersonal relationship between the work organization and the individual. Such actions are close to what Soboll (2008) calls organizational harassment, when repeated behaviors aimed at increasing production are established.

Table 2. Experiences in the work context reported by harassed university professors⁶

Factor 1: Work organization	% (n)
The standards for task execution are rigid	100% (18)
The pace of work is excessive	94% (17)
Performance monitoring is carried out	94% (17)
Tasks are completed under pressure to meet deadlines	88% (16)
There is a strong demand for results	88% (16)
There are not enough people to complete the tasks	88% (16)
There is a division between those who plan and those who execute	83% (15)
Tasks are repetitive	83% (15)
Factor 2: Working conditions	% (n)
The furniture in the workplace is inadequate.	72% (13)
The work tools are insufficient to perform the tasks.	72% (13)
The working conditions are poor.	61% (11)
The physical environment is uncomfortable.	61% (11)
Consumables are insufficient.	61% (11)
The equipment needed to perform the tasks is precarious.	55% (10)
The workstation is inadequate to perform the tasks.	50% (09)
Factor 3: Socio-professional relationships	% (n)
There are professional disputes in the workplace	94% (17)
There is a lack of integration in the workplace	83% (15)
Communication among employees is unsatisfactory	83% (15)
Employees are excluded from decision-making	77% (14)
There are difficulties in communication between managers and subordinates	77% (14)
Autonomy is non-existent	61% (11)
The distribution of tasks is unfair	61% (11)

Source: Created by the authors.

Submission to an inadequate work process is overburdening, resulting in greater physical and mental costs, damaging professional ties and the mental health of the university community, and undermining the teaching-research-learning relationship. However, being proactive and flexible in “quantophrenia” is part of the repertoire of those who want to be employed and respected for their work (Gaulejac, 2007).

Mobilizing mentally in pursuit of the institutional objective, even when salaries are incongruent with the required dedication, conditions are insufficient, and there is a lack of supplies and human resources, which is evident in the real work of public university professors. The influence of privatization ideology led to the exacerbated state dismantling observed between 2017 and 2023, when the federal government advocates for staff cuts, discredits all public servants, and withdraws or withholds investment in public education policies. At the university studied, the difficulty of replenishing positions for retired and displaced professors becomes concrete, leaving the remaining professors with more tasks, classes, students, and responsibilities, without the necessary staff to meet existing demands. Thus, although during Dilma's administration, the state prioritized increasing the number of institutions and

⁶ The table refers to the affirmative situations marked by 50% or more of the harassed teachers, through the application of the EACT.

the supply of positions, working conditions became even more scarce during the Temer and Bolsonaro administrations, demonstrating a lack of commitment to higher education policies. Other difficulties that resonate to this day refer to budget cuts and contingencies, the devaluation of science, culture and education, and even administrative reforms that threaten the achievements of public servants (Lusa et al, 2019).

During the pandemic, the worsening of working conditions was observed, with widespread layoffs of professors at private universities, due to the expansion of distance learning, an educational model for the interests of capital. Driven by a neoliberal privatization project, the situation at public universities was bleak. However, the blatant precariousness seen during the pandemic had already been gradually taking hold, causing overload and pressure, intolerance, rivalry among colleagues, illness, and resignation from the profession, as shown in factor 2 (Table 2).

For the harassed professors, the university demands competitiveness (94%, n=17) and lacks integration (83%, n=15), indicating a solitary experience that leads to individualism, in contrast to the social construction of a teaching collective. For Lima (2013), the collective refers to the experience of jointly developing new operational standards and professional and ethical regulations to be incorporated into the occupational activity, guided by the visibility of original work, by the ethical trust that rests on the word and judgment of others, and by free debate for collective deliberation, an action necessary for modifying aspects of the work organization.

Along this path, new demands, knowledge, emotional and cognitive investment, as well as material resources were required to be supplied by professors, who had to quickly appropriate the use of digital resources, meeting the demand for teaching remotely, taking on various online tasks, without having a time to stop, without having material or ergonomic support from higher education institutions (Alencar; Barros, 2021).

By internalizing “quantophrenic” reasoning, workers lose their sense of what and how much they do, as they operate within a logic governed by metrics, in which all their actions are dimensioned and measured. This way of working is considered a pathology translated into the mathematical language of social and human phenomena (Tonon; Grisci, 2015). This pathology is related to symbolic retribution, the expectation of zealous and hyperactive work in search of meaning. However, the loss of the affective dimension of human social phenomena fails to transform afflictions into pleasure, since, in this case, there is necessarily a dependence on the Other to confirm the authority of their work experience. In this sense, the dynamics of recognition are dammed, and the relationship with the social becomes lonely, alienating, and meaningless (Dejours, 2008).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study highlights the growing visibility of bullying cases to professors, demonstrating the consequences this type of violence has on mental health, learning, and the institution. The psychological and social devastation of bullying in public service has gradually become apparent, and its normalization must be linked to the impact on the subjectivity of New Public Management. Based on the neoliberal ideology of the pursuit of fulfillment and happiness at any cost, managerialism makes pressure for high performance through productivism commonplace. This pressure can be triggered by a toxic environment, resulting in aggression, hostility, and unease in professional relationships, impacting identification and the collective.

Faced with this situation, feelings of abandonment and ignorance about how to report such violence remain. It is urgent to implement strong and effective institutional policies to combat a violent and career-threatening workplace environment, such as reporting channels, support, and investigation, as well as a regular preventive agenda. Many harassment cases are forgotten or not pursued by victims due to the lack of support, corporatism, fear, or known irregularities. In this context, Law number 14,612/2023, which includes moral harassment as an ethical-disciplinary violation in the Statute of the Brazilian Bar Association (OAB-*Ordem dos Advogados do Brasil*), gains relevance; Law number 14,540/2023, which creates the program to Prevent and Combat Sexual Harassment, Sexual Violence, and other crimes against sexual dignity, covering public agencies, schools, and private companies; and Law number 14,457/2022, which establishes measures that aim to protect women in the workplace against harassment.

Considering that moral harassment creates an unfavorable climate in the workplace, making it tense, frightening, and competitive (Valente; Sequeira, 2015) for the professors who are harassed, the preventive measure must begin with knowledge of the phenomenon and institutional encouragement to prevent and report it. This requires the involvement of management and the university community to create a humanized approach to ethical issues at work, the implementation of continuing education on the topic, and the welcoming and strengthening of the collective.

Even though it does not constitute a form of management, the harassment investigated is useful for success and achieving rankings through intimidation. If not contained, it ends up validating the dynamics of suffering at work, expressed in the use of defensive strategies for the continuity of service or adaptive normosis (Souza, 2019) to values, demands, and daily violence.

Although this study's data point to a small number of harassed faculty members, it's important to consider its various facets and the difficulty in reporting and making the harassment public, whether due to fear of retaliation or even being labeled as a complainant or weak worker, which leads many victims to remain anonymous. Incidents of moral violence demonstrate the need to rethink the university environment, where social bonds have been undermined by quantitative, metric, and

meritocratic logic, disregarding quality and the meaning of action. Reviving the democratic vocation within higher education, through cooperation, trust, and deference among colleagues, students, researchers, and management, can help build a renewed rationality that is more ethical and sensitive, respecting creative work and life.

This discussion does not end with this article. From the perspective of political economy theory, bullying in the university environment can be seen as a complex phenomenon embedded in the structural contradictions of contemporary capitalism, especially its neoliberal form. Labor relations in higher education, permeated by the logic of productivity and managerialist rationality, express power struggles, institutional interests, and dynamics of domination that require continuous analysis (Marx, 2013). Thus, bullying is understood as a collective and systemic problem, which reinforces the need for studies that articulate and delve deeper into the economic, political, and social dimensions of the organization of teaching work, paving the way for new forms of resistance, confrontation, and institutional transformation.

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DATA AVAILABILITY DECLARATION

The content underlying the research text is contained in the manuscript

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1 – Outlined and coordinated the project, actively participated in the initial and final draft of the manuscript, analysis, interpretation, and discussion of the data, the decision to submit the article for publication, and its formatting.

Author 2 – Participated in the final draft of the manuscript, analysis, interpretation, and discussion of the data, the decision to submit the article for publication, and its formatting.

Author 3 – Participated in the development of the research project, the initial draft of the manuscript, and the analysis, interpretation, and discussion of the data.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in this article.