

## RELATIONS BETWEEN EXPOSURE TO AND ACCEPTANCE OF MOBBING – AN EXPLORATIVE STUDY ON A SAMPLE OF POLISH EMPLOYEES

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**Purpose:** The aim of the study was to research how mobbing is experienced and (un)accepted by the employees of Polish organizations, and to check whether there are relations between experiencing and accepting mobbing behaviours.

**Design/methodology/approach:** A quantitative study was conducted at the turn of 2019/2020 on a heterogeneous sample ( $N = 470$ ) of Polish employees. The study was carried out with the implementation of the basic, 64-item version of the SDM Questionnaire, which is a validated (accurate, reliable) and normalized Polish psychometric tool for measuring workplace mobbing. It consists of 2 main scales: an SDM-IDM behavioural scale (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.96$ ), and an SDM-ODC cognitive-emotional scale (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.97$ ). Mobbing un(acceptance) was measured with a 43-item SDM-A scale, which was built upon the behavioural SDM-IDM scale. Due to the skewed scores' distribution, the statistical analyses were conducted with the implementation of non-parametric tests.

**Findings:** The research results indicate that the acceptance of mobbing behaviours is just marginal between Polish employees, however men are more predisposed than women to accept mobbing in the workplace. Moreover, the research shows that the level of mobbing un(acceptance) is related to the level of mobbing exposure, as well as to the employees' sex. The more the employees are exposed to mobbing behaviours the more they are ready to accept them; this trend is more clear in the case of male than female employees.

**Research limitations/implications:** One of the limitations of this research is that the direction of the relations between the exposure to and acceptance of mobbing cannot be determined, as the study did not have experimental nor longitudinal design.

**Practical implications:** The obtained results suggest that employees who work in organizations which turn a blind eye on unethical workplace behaviours or even promote competition and aggression in the workplaces become less sensitive and more tolerant towards negative behaviours and mobbing. Furthermore, the understanding of organizational context and gender differences in mobbing acceptance should help professionals in the process of mobbing assessment and diagnosis, as well as in planning appropriate preventive measures and interventions.

**Originality/value:** The paper address the existing gap in current scientific literature on the relation between mobbing exposure and acceptance across socio-demographic variables.

**Keywords:** mobbing/bullying, mobbing exposure, mobbing acceptance, gender, SDM Questionnaire.

**Category of the paper:** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

Workplace mobbing, which is a kind of psychological aggression involving persistent, repetitive and prolonged exposure of employees to numerous abusive and intimidating behaviours, seriously and negatively affecting mental and physical health of the targets (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, Cooper 2011; Leymann, 1990, 1996), nowadays has become one of the focal points of organizational, ethical and legal concern. Since the pioneering scientific interest in the phenomenon of mobbing (also called *workplace bullying*<sup>1</sup>) initiated by Brodsky (1976), Leymann (1990; 1996) and some other, mostly Scandinavian researchers, it has begun to receive growing scientific attention all over the world to become one of the most often researched topics of the last decades (cf. Einarsen et al., 2011; Escartín et al., 2011; León-Pérez, Escartín, Giorgi, 2019; Power et al., 2013; Salin et al., 2019). The studies on the mobbing prevalence indicate that approximately 10% to 17% of employees are exposed to this form of workplace harassment, though the cited mobbing prevalence rates are varied, depending on the methodology and the measurement tools employed in the research (Nielsen, Matthiesen, Einarsen, 2010; León-Pérez et al., 2019; Zapf, Escartin, Einarsen, Hoel, Vartia, 2011).

In 2001, the European Parliament passed a resolution (European Parliament, file 2001/2339) calling on the EU Member States to counteract sexual harassment and mobbing in the workplace. The first legal anti-mobbing act (Journal of Legal Acts, 2003 No. 213, item. 2081) was introduced into the Polish Labour Code in 2004 (Labour Code, amended version in 2004, article 94). In 2007, the EU commission stated unequivocally that “(workplace) harassment and violence are unacceptable” (Framework Agreement on Harassment And Violence at Work, 2007, p. 1). Accordingly, the researchers and practitioners agree that mobbing, being one of the most severe forms of workplace harassment and an extreme psychosocial stressor (Leymann, 1998; Hoel, Zapf, Cooper, 2002; Høgh, Mikkelsen, Hansen, 2011), should not be accepted in any form and at any workplace. However, the results of some scientific research indicate that the (un)acceptability of mobbing behaviours’ may differ depending on socio-cultural factors as well as on the employees’ gender (Escartín, Salin, Rodríguez-Carballeira, 2011). For example, the results of some studies (Giorgi, Leon-Perez, Arenas, 2015; Escartin et al., 2011; Loh, Restubog, Zagenczyk, 2010; Pauer et al., 2013) suggest that mobbing is more tolerated in countries and organizations with high power distance,

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<sup>1</sup> Nowadays these two terms are used interchangeably in scientific and popular discourse, despite their different, original meaning.

as well as in more masculine cultures. There are also studies (Durniat, Mañas, 2017; Escartín et al., 2009, 2011; Giorgi et al., 2015) showing that a behaviour which is perceived harmful and unaccepted in one organization or country may be perceived as neutral and legible in another national or organizational setting. Moreover, some researchers (Bloisi, Hoel 2008; Durniat, 2015b; Parzefall, Salin, 2010) claim that in the organizations where mobbing is widespread, employees “get used” to the exposure to unethical, mobbing behaviours, start to tolerate them or even consider them as a “norm” or part of the organizational culture; which is very dangerous. Furthermore, there is some scientific evidence (Salin, 2003, 2011) showing that men have higher acceptance of and resistance to negative mobbing behaviours, along with a lower tendency to label their negative conduct in the workplace as mobbing. Salin’s research (2011) also revealed that the interaction between the gender of the observer, the victim, and the perpetrator indicated whether a case was labelled as mobbing or not. Moreover, women expected more negative organizational consequences of mobbing, thus they perceived it as a more severe and unacceptable workplace behaviour. Further empirical findings (Escartín et al., 2011) support the conclusion that female employees are more sensitive to mobbing behaviours than their male counterparts. Some scholars claim that unequal levels of social power in organization, and discrimination of women makes female employees more preoccupied with and more sensitive to workplace mobbing (Escartín et al., 2011). Other research (Crothers, Lipinski, Minutolo, 2009; Escartín et al., 2011) proved that men feel less threatened by mobbing behaviours and perceive them as more acceptable than women do. This kind of results may be explained in the light of the social rules theory and gender role socialization (Ely, Padavic, 2007), which indicate that societal expectations induce different roles and norms of accepted behaviour for men and women. Therefore, male employees who are socially trained to be more dominant and aggressive may feel less threatened by the exposition to workplace mobbing and may perceive such conduct as more acceptable than female employees (Crothers et al., 2009; León-Pérez et al., 2019).

A review of the scientific research results on the acceptance of mobbing behaviours suggests that we already have some conclusive findings in this field, though there are still some unanswered questions and gaps that need to be filled. Thus, the aim of this paper is to address the gap which exists in current scientific literature on the relation between the level of mobbing exposure and acceptance across socio-demographic variables, such as sex, age, position, and seniority of employees, sector and branch of employment.

## 2. Research questions

This study, which is mostly an exploratory research, aims to answer a number of questions connected with the exposure to and acceptance of workplace mobbing. Among the most important questions discussed in this paper are the following:

1. What is the intensity of exposure to workplace mobbing among the investigated employees?
2. What is the level of mobbing (un)acceptance among the investigated employees?
3. Is there a relation between the level of exposure to mobbing and accepting mobbing behaviours in the workplace?
4. Are there any relations between the level of mobbing exposure, mobbing (un)acceptance and socio-demographic variables (sex, age, sector and branch of employment, position held and seniority)?

## 3. Socio-demographic sample characteristics

The research was conducted in Poland at the turn of 2019 and 2020 on a sample of 500 participants selected from a population of adult employees working in a variety of companies located in Wrocław and its surroundings. As 6% of the data was incomplete, it was discarded and the analyses were carried out on a data coming from 470 respondents (218 men and 241 women). The detailed sociodemographic data of the researched sample is provided below in Table 1. The participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous. The respondents were tested individually or in small groups, outside the potentially threatening workplace. The respondents were informed that the study was carried out only for academic purposes, and that they can withdraw from the participation at any time.

**Table 1.**

*Socio-demographic data of the sample (N = 470; 2019/2020)*

Demographic category		Count	%	Demographic category		Count	%
<b>Sex</b>	woman	241	51,3%	<b>Sector</b>	public	100	21,3%
	man	218	46,4%		private	343	73%
	missing data	11	2,3%		missing data	27	5,7%
<b>Age</b>	up to 25 years	100	21,3%	<b>Position</b>	director	17	3,6%
	26-35 years	137	29,1%		supervisor	60	12,8%
	36-45 years	118	25,1%		specialist	126	26,8%
	above 45 years	112	23,8%		subordinate	241	51,3%
	missing data	3	0,6%		missing data	26	5,5%

Cont. table 1.

Branch			Seniority		
	industry	135		28,7%	up to 1 year
commerce	78	16,6%	above 1 to 3 years	85	18,7%
services	86	18,3%	above 3 to 6 years	61	13,4%
administration	41	8,7%	above 6 to 10 years	65	13,8%
education	27	5,7%	above 10 years	207	44%
health service	13	2,8%	missing data	15	3,2%
others	79	16,8%			
missing data	11	2,3%			

Source: Own research, Katarzyna Durniat.

#### 4. Psychometric instruments

Mobbing experience was measured with a basic version of the SDM Questionnaire, a validated, original Polish psychometric tool which has been developed and tested in Polish socio-organizational circumstances since 2005 (Durniat, Kulczycka, 2006). The tool was rooted in international mobbing literature and empirical evidence coming from Polish exploratory, qualitative research (dozens of interviews with the mobbing victims) followed by quantitative exploratory research, focusing on assessment of the items' theoretical validity, tests of scales' structure (EFA) and reliability analysis (Durniat, 2020a, 2020b; Durniat, Kulczycka, 2006). The basic version of the SDM test consists of 64 items constituting two main scales: (i) the SDM-IDM scale (behavioural indicators; 43 items;  $\alpha$  Cronbach 0.956; e.g.: 'I am avoided and ostracized by others at work', 'I am the object of humiliating gestures and glances') used for measuring exposure to mobbing behaviours and the SDM-ODC scale (emotional, psychosomatic and cognitive indicators; 21 items;  $\alpha$  Cronbach 0,97; e.g.: 'The atmosphere at work makes me feel exhausted', 'I have the feeling that some people at work want to get rid of me') which completes the psychological picture of mobbing interaction. The SDM-IDM scale is divided into three, more specific subscales ( $\alpha$  Cronbach: 0.927; 0.932; 0.803). All the tests' scales are highly and positively correlated. The Polish tool is equipped with a five-point, ordinal answer scale, reflecting the frequency of the exposition to particular mobbing behaviours or feelings (from 1 - never to 5 - very often). Mobbing is diagnosed on the basis of the cumulative SDM-IDM scale results, while the SDM-ODC is treated as an auxiliary scale. The SDM questionnaire was empirically tested in numerous mobbing studies providing consistent results of the test's structure, scales' reliability and construct validity (Durniat, 2020a). The SDM Questionnaire was normalized on a sample of Polish employees (N = 1852), what makes the tool suitable for both group and individual research. Due to non-parametric scores' distribution the norms for all test's scales and subscales were determined based on scores' density distribution and percentiles (Durniat, 2020b, p. 42).

Furthermore, the 43-item SDM-A scale was used to measure the level of mobbing behaviours' (un)acceptance. The content and construction of this scale is built upon the SDM-IDM scale, whose items were grammatically transformed and adapted to measuring the level of mobbing behaviours' acceptance (c.f. Durniat, Mañas, 2017). In this study each of items constituting the SDM-A was assessed on a three-point ordinary scale (from 1 - acceptable, through 2 - sometimes acceptable to 3 - completely unacceptable). The cumulative result of the SDM-A is the indicator of mobbing (un)acceptance.

## 5. Distribution of results and statistical solution

In the first step, the descriptive statistics were calculated for both scales used in the study (SDM-IDM and SDM-A). As can be seen in Table 2, both scales are characterised by skewed data distribution. In the case of the SDM-IDM scale there is a clear dominance of low scores (positive skewness), while in the case of the SDM-A scale there is a clear dominance of high scores (negative skewness).

**Table 2.**

*Descriptive statistics of the SDM-IDM scale and SDM-A scale (N = 470; 2019/2020)*

Scale	M	CI -95%	CI 95%	Md	Min	Max	Q1	Q3	IQR	SD	Sk	Ku
SDM-IDM	62.39	60.06	64.71	51	43	188	45	69	24	25,64	2.019	4.07
SDM-A	120.59	119.36	121.82	126	43	129	120	128	8	13,56	-2.89	9.49

Note. SDM-IDM = scale of exposure to mobbing behaviours; SDM-A = scale of mobbing behaviours' (un)acceptance; N = total sample size; M = mean; CI = confidence interval; Md = median; Min = minimum; Max = maximum; Q1 = first quartile; Q3 = third quartile; IQR = interquartile range; SD = standard deviation; Sk = skewness; Ku = kurtosis.

Source: Own research, Katarzyna Durniat.

Due to the skewed distribution of the measured variables only non-parametric tests were used in the study. The statistical analyses were done with a significance alpha level of at least 0.05 with the implementation of the IBM SPSS Statistics, 24 version program.

## 6. Exposure to mobbing behaviours across socio-demographic variables

The level of the exposition to mobbing was calculated on the basis of overall SDM-IDM scale results with reference to the SDM-IDM scale norms indicated in the literature (Durniat, 2020b). Following that, the sample was divided into three groups: respondents not being exposed to mobbing (low scores, up to 61 points); respondents falling into a mobbing risk group (with average scores, between 62 to 81 points); and respondents exposed to mobbing in the

workplace (with high scores, above 81 points). Table 3 presents the SDM-IDM scale results, in reference to the whole sample and broken down by sex of the respondents.

**Table 3.**

*Exposition to mobbing behaviours - result for the whole sample (N = 470) and broken down by respondents' sex*

Categorisation of the SDM-IDM scale results (exposure to mobbing behaviours)		Respondents' sex			
		women	men	total	
Categories of the SDM-IDM overall scale results	Low scores (no mobbing exposure)	Count	171	137	308
		% mobbing category	55,5%	44,5%	100,0%
		% sex	71,0%	62,8%	67,1%
		% total	37,3%	29,8%	67,1%
	Average scores (risk of mobbing)	Count	36	39	75
		% mobbing category	48,0%	52,0%	100,0%
		% sex	14,9%	17,9%	16,3%
		% total	7,8%	8,5%	16,3%
	High scores (expose to mobbing)	Count	34	42	76
		% mobbing category	44,7%	55,3%	100,0%
		% sex	14,1%	19,3%	16,6%
		% total	7,4%	9,2%	16,6%
Total		Count	34	42	76
		% mobbing category	44,7%	55,3%	100,0%
		% sex	14,1%	19,3%	16,6%
		% total	7,4%	9,2%	16,6%

Source: Own research, Katarzyna Durniat.

The results obtained in this study (c.f. Table 3) proved that 16,6% of the researched Polish employees were exposed to workplace mobbing (high scores in the SDM-IDM scale). No statistically significant differences were discovered in exposure to mobbing with respect to: sex ( $\chi^2(2) = 3.572$ ;  $p > 0.5$ ), position ( $\chi^2(6) = 10.959$ ;  $p > 0.5$ ), seniority ( $\chi^2(8) = 8.674$ ;  $p > 0.5$ ), sector ( $\chi^2(2) = 3.572$ ;  $p > 0.5$ ), and branch of employment ( $\chi^2(12) = 10.010$ ;  $p > 0.5$ ). However, significantly more respondents from the age bracket between 26-35 years than those from other age groups were highly exposed to workplace mobbing ( $\chi^2(6) = 14.801$ ;  $p = 0.022$ ).

## 7. Mobbing (un)acceptance across socio-demographic variables

Negative skewness and clear dominance of high scores in the SDM-A scale (c.f. Table 2) suggests that the acceptance of mobbing behaviours is just marginal. Based on the SDM-A scores' distribution and percentiles, it was possible to distinguish two groups of respondents in relation to the level of mobbing behaviours (un)acceptance: group 1 (up to 10-th percentile: 104 points): respondents with borderline acceptance of mobbing and group 2 (above 10-th percentile): respondents firmly unaccepting mobbing. Further statistical analyses were carried out on nominal data: 2 categories of mobbing (un)acceptance across socio-demographic variables and 3 categories of mobbing exposure broken by the participants' sex.

Generally, the vast majority of the respondents (90%) definitely do not accept mobbing behaviours in the workplace, while a small proportion of them (10%) are on the verge of mobbing behaviours' acceptance. The results of the Chi-square test indicate that there are no statistically significant relations between mobbing (un)acceptance and respondents' age ( $\chi^2(3) = 3.712$ ;  $p > 0.5$ ) position held in organization ( $\chi^2(3) = 0.881$ ;  $p > 0.5$ ), seniority ( $\chi^2(4) = 4.636$ ;  $p > 0.5$ ), sector ( $\chi^2(1) = 0.41$ ;  $p > 0.5$ ), and branch of employment ( $\chi^2(6) = 4.342$ ;  $p > 0.5$ ). However, there exists a relation between mobbing acceptance and respondents sex ( $\chi^2(1) = 6.439$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). Significantly more men (30; 13,8%) than women (16; 6.6%) are ready to accept (sometimes) mobbing behaviours.

## 8. Mobbing behaviours' un(acceptance) in relation to mobbing exposure

The distribution of the frequency of the respondents' responses (divided into 3 groups, according to norms of the SDM-IDM scale; generally and broken down by sex) across 2 levels of mobbing (un)acceptance (on the bases of the SDM-A scale results) are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4.**

*Exposition to mobbing behaviours (3 levels) across 2 levels of mobbing (un)acceptance (SDM-A) broken by respondent's sex (N = 470; 2019/2020)*

Exposure to mobbing behaviours (SDM-IDM) across sex		Mobbing behaviours (un)acceptance (SDM-A)			
		borderline acceptance	unacceptance	total	
<b>WOMEN:</b>  <b>Categories of the SDM-IDM overall scale result</b>	low scores (no mobbing exposure)	Count	4	167	171
		Count expected	11,4	159,6	171,0
		% mobbing exposure	2,3%	97,7%	100,0%
		% mobbing (un)acceptance	25,0%	74,2%	71,0%
		% generally	1,7%	69,3%	71,0%
		Standardised residual	-2,2	.6	
	average scores (risk of mobbing)	Count	4	32	36
		Count expected	2,4	33,6	36,0
		% mobbing exposure	11,1%	88,9%	100,0%
		% mobbing (un)acceptance	25,0%	14,2%	14,9k%
		% generally	1,7%	13,3%	14,9%
		Standardised residual	1,0	-.3	
	high scores (exposure to mobbing)	Count	8	26	34
		Count expected	2,3	31,7	34,0
		% mobbing exposure	23,5%	76,5%	100,0%
		% mobbing (un)acceptance	50,0%	11,6%	14,1%
		% generally	3,3%	10,8%	14,1%
		Standardised residual	3,8	-1,0	



Cont. table 4.

	generally	Count	16	225	241
		Count expected	16,0	225,0	241,0
		% mobbing exposure	6,6%	93,4%	100,0%
		% mobbing (un)acceptance	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%
		% generally	6,6%	93,4%	100,0%
<b>MEN</b>  <b>Categories of the SDM-IDM overall scale results</b>	low scores (no mobbing exposure)	Count	4	133	137
		Count expected	18,9	118,1	137,0
		% mobbing exposure	2,9%	97,1%	100,0%
		% mobbing (un)acceptance	13,3%	70,7%	62,8%
		% generally	1,8%	61,0%	62,8%
		Standardised residual	-3,4	1,4	
	average scores (risk of mobbing)	Count	9	30	39
		Count expected	5,4	33,6	39,0
		% mobbing exposure	23,1%	76,9%	100,0%
		% mobbing (un)acceptance	30,0%	16,0%	17,9%
		% generally	4,1%	13,8%	17,9%
		Standardised residual	1,6	-,6	
	high scores (exposure to mobbing)	Count	17	25	42
		Count expected	5,8	36,2	42,0
		% mobbing exposure	40,5%	59,5%	100,0%
		% mobbing (un)acceptance	56,7%	13,3%	19,3%
		% generally	7,8%	11,5%	19,3%
		Standardised residual	4,7	-1,9	
	generally	Count	30	188	218
		Count expected	30,0	188,0	218,0
% mobbing exposure		13,8%	86,2%	100,0%	
% mobbing (un)acceptance		100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	
% generally		13,8%	86,2%	100,0%	
Standardised residual					
<b>BOTH SEXES (overall)</b>  <b>Categories of the SDM-IDM overall scale results</b>	low scores (no mobbing exposure)	Count	8	300	308
		Count expected	30,9	277,1	308,0
		% mobbing exposure	2,6%	97,4%	100,0%
		% mobbing (un)acceptance	17,4%	72,6%	67,1%
		% generally	1,7%	65,4%	67,1%
		Standardised residual	-4,1	1,4	
	average scores (risk of mobbing)	Count	13	62	75
		Count expected	7,5	67,5	75,0
		% mobbing exposure	17,3%	82,7%	100,0%
		% mobbing (un)acceptance	28,3%	15,0%	16,3%
		% generally	2,8%	13,5%	16,3%
		Standardised residual	2,0	-,7	
	high scores (exposure to mobbing)	Count	25	51	76
		Count expected	7,6	68,4	76,0
		% mobbing exposure	32,9%	67,1%	100,0%
		% mobbing (un)acceptance	54,3%	12,3%	16,6%
		% generally	5,4%	11,1%	16,6%
		Standardised residual	6,3	-2,1	

Cont. table 4.

<b>Generally</b>	Count	48	422	470
	Count expected	48,0	422,0	470,0
	% mobbing exposure	10,2%	89,8%	100,0%
	% mobbing (un)acceptance	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%
	% generally	10,2%	89,8%	100,0%

Source: Own research, Katarzyna Durniat.

Generally, the Chi-square test results ( $\chi^2(2) = 67.367$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) demonstrate that there is a relation between the exposure to and acceptance of mobbing behaviours in the workplace. For men and women (together), in a subgroup of respondents not being exposed to mobbing we observe a statistically significant, clear lack of mobbing behaviours' acceptance ( $\chi^2(2) = 67.367$ ;  $p < 0.001$ , borderline mobbing acceptance:  $O = 8$ ,  $E = 30.9$ ,  $sdresid. = -4.1$ ; unacceptance:  $O = 300$ ,  $E = 277.1$ ,  $sdresid. = 1.4$ ). With respect to a subgroup with average mobbing exposure, we observe significantly more respondents who are borderline accepting mobbing than we would if the two variables were not related (borderline mobbing acceptance:  $O = 13$ ,  $E = 7.5$ ,  $sdresid. = 2$ ). In a subgroup highly exposed to mobbing, there are definitely more people who are ready to accept mobbing behaviours and less people unaccepting mobbing behaviours than one would expect if the two variables were not dependent to each other (borderline mobbing acceptance:  $O = 25$ ,  $E = 7.9$ ,  $sdresid. = 6.1$ ; unacceptance:  $O = 200$ ,  $E = 180$ ,  $sdresid. = -2.1$ ). Thus, we can observe a general trend indicating a direction of the relationship between the exposure to and acceptance of mobbing behaviours: the stronger the exposure, the greater the tendency to accept mobbing behaviours. The same trend is observable in both gender subgroups, although it is stronger in a subgroup of men than in the case of women. In a subgroup of women who are not exposed to mobbing, we observe a statistically significant, strong lack of acceptance for mobbing behaviours (borderline mobbing acceptance:  $O = 4$ ,  $E = 11.4$ ,  $sdresid. = -2.2$ ; unacceptance:  $O = 167$ ,  $E = 159.6$ ,  $sdresid. = 0.6$ ). In a subgroup with an average mobbing exposure, there are no statistically significant differences in the acceptance and non-acceptance of mobbing behaviours (borderline mobbing acceptance:  $O = 8$ ,  $E = 2.3$ ,  $sdresid. = 1.3$ ; unacceptance:  $O = 32$ ,  $E = 33.6$ ,  $sdresid. = 0.3$ ). Among women exposed to mobbing, there is a statistically significant increase of respondents borderline accepting mobbing behaviours, however, in this subgroup the number of women not accepting mobbing is consistent with the expected values ( $\chi^2(2) = 21.911$ ;  $p < 0.001$ , borderline mobbing acceptance:  $O = 8$ ,  $E = 2.3$ ,  $sdresid. = 3.8$ ; unacceptance:  $O = 26$ ,  $E = 31.7$ ,  $sdresid. = -1.0$ ). In the case of men, among those who are not exposed to mobbing, there is a statistically significant, clear lack of acceptance for mobbing behaviours, similarly as it was in women's group. In the mobbing risk subgroup of men, there are no statistically significant difference between borderline acceptance and non-acceptance of mobbing behaviours (borderline mobbing acceptance:  $O = 9$ ,  $E = 5.4$ ,  $sdresid. = 1.6$ ; unacceptance:  $O = 30$ ,  $E = 33.6$ ,  $sdresid. = -0.6$ ). Nevertheless, in the subgroup of men exposed to mobbing, there is statistically significantly more respondents ready to accept mobbing behaviours and significantly fewer

respondents who do not accept mobbing behaviours than expected ( $\chi^2(2) = 41,678$ ;  $p < 0.001$ , borderline mobbing acceptance:  $O = 17$ ,  $E = 5.8$ ,  $sdresid. = 4.7$ ; unacceptance:  $O = 25$ ,  $E = 36.2$ ,  $sdresid. = -1.9$ ).

## 9. Summary

The results of the study conducted on Polish employees indicate that workplace mobbing behaviours, as expected, are generally unaccepted, no matter the respondents' age, seniority or position in the organization, branch, and sector of employment. Nonetheless, the results also indicate that men are more predisposed than women to accept mobbing behaviours in the workplace, which is in line with the findings of previous, gender-oriented mobbing research (e.g. Escartín et al., 2011; Salin, 2003, 2011) and in vain of the theory of gender role socialization (Ely, Padavic, 2007). Moreover, this research reveals that there is a relation between the exposition to and the acceptance of mobbing in the workplace. This relation exists in both sex groups. The findings demonstrate the overall trend showing that the more the employees are exposed to mobbing behaviours the more they are ready to accept this kind of negative workplace conduct. Nevertheless, this trend is more clear in the case of male than female employees. Thus, the research also demonstrates that men are more prone than women to accept negative workplace behaviours, especially if they themselves are exposed to workplace mobbing. Thus, the overall study results not only support the relevance of gender in the process of mobbing behaviours' perception and acceptance but they also confirm the hypothesis of the role of the casual interpretation and the influence of organizational context for the acceptance of mobbing behaviours (Durniat, 2015, Giorgi, Leon-Perez, Arenas, 2015; Parzefall, Salin 2010). Thus, it seems that mobbing victims try to determine the severity and (un)acceptability of unethical workplace behaviours to in light of their own experience of the exposition to mobbing and the prevailing organizational patterns of behaviours. Nevertheless, women seem to be less susceptible to be influenced by this social mechanisms and contextual justification of workplace mobbing acceptability. However, the results obtained in this study could also be interpreted the other way round: that the employees who are less assertive and more accepting the unwanted behaviours more often become the mobbing targets. Actually, the direction of relation revealed in the study cannot be determined, as the research did not have experimental nor longitudinal design; what clearly is a limitation.

## 10. Practical implications

The findings of this study have a number of practical implications, meaningful both for mobbing prevention and intervention. First of all, the managers and HR specialists should understand their responsibility of and prior role in creating ethical workplace environment. As it was pointed out by Victor and Cullen (1988) “organizations shape the ethical or unethical behaviour of their employees” (after: Giorgi et al., 2015, p. 5). The results of this study imply that employees perceive and assess mobbing behaviours’ acceptability in the context of their exposure to mobbing in the workplace. Unfortunately, the higher the exposure to mobbing, the more accepting they become towards unethical behaviour. Thus, it is very dangerous when organizations turn a blind eye on the presence of workplace mobbing or even promote competition and aggression, what makes the employees kind of “immune” and less sensitive towards unethical workplace behaviours. Furthermore, the practitioners should be aware that gender differences in mobbing behaviours acceptance may refrain the male managers or HR specialists from intervention when receiving mobbing complaints from female employees, as they may underestimate the meaning of these behaviours for women. Finally, the understanding of organizational context and gender differences in mobbing behaviours’ acceptance should help professionals in the complex process of mobbing assessment and diagnosis, as well as in planning appropriate preventive measures, anti-mobbing workshops and interventions.

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