

International Journal of Health Science

Acceptance date: 30/01/2025

BURNOUT AND MOBBING IN THE WORKPLACE: PROFOUND CONSEQUENCES FOR WORKERS' MENTAL HEALTH, QUALITY OF LIFE AND WELL-BEING

Nelson Pinto Gomes

MD, MSC, PhD, Specialist in Psychiatry by the Portuguese Medical Association (Ordem dos Médicos) with professional license n°59515, Member of the Scientific Council of the European Medical Association in Brussels as Expert in Psychiatry, Associate Member of the World Medical Association (WMA), Master in Medical Expertise and Body Damage Assessment, Master in Forensic and Legal Medicine, Member of the Portuguese Body Damage Assessment Association (APADAC) no 1017. PhD Medical Science from the Université Catholique de Louvain UCL in Belgium
<https://orcid.org/0009-0000-2549-7402>

All content in this magazine is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution License. Attribution-Non-Commercial-Non-Derivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).



Abstract: The work environment, although essential for professional development, can be a breeding ground for psychosocial conditions that are harmful to mental health, such as mobbing and burnout. Mobbing, characterized by bullying and hostile behaviour, can result in serious emotional damage, such as anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as affecting productivity and quality of life. Burnout, a syndrome associated with chronic stress, is manifested by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and low personal accomplishment, impacting on workers' physical health and motivation. Both conditions often interrelate, creating a vicious cycle of emotional exhaustion. The research showed that 75% of the studies reviewed pointed to burnout as a consequence of long working hours and lack of organizational support, while 68% indicated that mobbing is a determining factor in the development of burnout. In addition, authoritarian leadership and a lack of organizational support were identified as factors that perpetuate mobbing and burnout. Prevention strategies, such as leadership training programs and psychological support, were effective in mitigating these problems, as was the implementation of public policies that combat mobbing. The conclusion reinforces the importance of organizational interventions and public policies to prevent these conditions, ensuring healthier, more collaborative and productive work environments, with a focus on worker well-being and organizational sustainability.

Keywords: Burnout, Organizational management, Mobbing, Occupational quality of life, Mental health at work.

INTRODUCTION

Although the workplace is a fundamental space for professional fulfillment and individual growth, it can also become fertile ground for the development of psychosocial conditions that are harmful to workers' mental health. Among the most prevalent conditions in this context are mobbing and burnout, which have become increasingly common in contemporary organizations. Mobbing, or bullying at work, involves repetitive and systematic behaviours of hostility, humiliation and intimidation, carried out by colleagues or hierarchical superiors with the aim of excluding, destabilizing and emotionally damaging the affected individual (Nascimento *et al.*, 2022). This type of practice can have a devastating impact on the worker's mental health, compromising not only their professional performance, but also their quality of life outside the workplace. On the other hand, burnout is a complex syndrome that results from prolonged exposure to occupational stress and is characterized by three main dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and low personal accomplishment (Aquino *et al.*, 2023). Both conditions have been recognized as risk factors for the development of serious mental disorders, highlighting the importance of their prevention and treatment.

The consequences of mobbing are profound and affect various spheres of the worker's life. Studies indicate that those who face this type of harassment in the workplace are significantly more likely to develop mental disorders such as anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (García *et al.*, 2024). In addition, individuals who are victims of mobbing also often report physical symptoms such as muscle pain, chronic fatigue and sleep disorders, which can worsen over time, permanently compromising their physical health. Simões *et al.* (2020) point out that mobbing results in a process of social and emotional

disintegration of the worker, which often leads to isolation and loss of self-esteem. These consequences not only affect the worker's personal life, but also impair their professional performance, generating a vicious cycle of suffering that is difficult to break without effective interventions. In this sense, it is essential that organizations adopt clear policies to combat mobbing, as well as offering psychological support and reporting channels to ensure a safe and healthy working environment.

With regard to burnout, the effects of this syndrome go beyond the emotional sphere and have significant implications for productivity and work performance. Oliveira *et al.*, (2021) point out that workers suffering from burnout have high levels of disengagement, which translates into lower than expected performance, greater likelihood of errors and lower quality in customer service. In the long term, the emotional exhaustion associated with burnout can lead to more serious health conditions, such as cardiovascular disease, hypertension and other physical disorders, putting not only individual well-being at risk, but also affecting the efficiency of organizations. Burnout is also directly related to a decrease in job satisfaction and an increase in absenteeism rates, which results in financial losses for companies. Early identification of symptoms and the implementation of prevention strategies are essential to mitigate the impacts of this syndrome and improve workers' quality of life (Gómez *et al.*, 2024).

The relationship between mobbing and burnout is complex and interdependent, and both conditions can aggravate each other. Grotto *et al.* (2023) state that prolonged exposure to hostile behavior in the workplace can be one of the main triggers of burnout, creating a vicious cycle of emotional exhaustion. When a worker is constantly the target of bullying, their ability to cope with stress decreases, making them more vulnerable to

the emotional exhaustion characteristic of burnout. The lack of social and professional support in environments where mobbing is tolerated can further aggravate the situation, leading to serious mental health problems. This cycle of victimization, stress and emotional exhaustion highlights the importance of addressing these two conditions in an integrated way, offering ongoing psychological support and creating more inclusive and collaborative work environments (Souza *et al.*, 2020).

In addition to the individual impacts, the repercussions of mobbing and burnout also affect organizational dynamics as a whole. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2019) recognizes burnout as an occupational phenomenon, emphasizing the need for public and corporate policies to promote healthy work environments and prevent chronic stress. Organizations that do not tackle these problems effectively face not only an increase in occupational health costs, but also a significant drop in the motivation and commitment of their employees (Von Randow *et al.*, 2021). It is therefore essential that companies adopt practices that prioritize the mental health and well-being of their workers, creating an organizational culture that values emotional health, mutual respect and collaboration. By proactively dealing with mobbing and burnout, it is possible to promote a more balanced work environment, where individuals feel valued, respected and capable of reaching their full potential.

The aim of this study is to carry out an in-depth analysis of the consequences of burnout and mobbing in the workplace, emphasizing their impact on mental health, quality of life, the physical and emotional well-being of workers and organizational dynamics. It seeks to understand how these conditions affect both individuals, leading to the development of psychological disorders such as anxiety and

depression, and the productivity and performance of companies, highlighting the economic and social cost associated with these practices. In addition, the study aims to explore the main preventive and interventional strategies, ranging from the implementation of organizational policies to the provision of psychological support and awareness-raising actions, with a view to creating healthier, more respectful and balanced working environments, where respect for human dignity and occupational health are priorities.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted using a qualitative approach, seeking to understand the impacts of burnout and mobbing in the workplace and to identify effective strategies for their prevention and mitigation. Qualitative research was chosen because of its ability to explore and interpret complex phenomena, considering the perceptions, experiences and meanings attributed by workers and organizations. This approach allowed for an in-depth analysis of the emotional, social and organizational effects associated with these conditions.

To carry out this work, a systematic literature review was conducted using recognized databases such as Scopus, PubMed, Web of Science and SciELO. Articles published between 2019 and 2024 were selected in order to ensure the inclusion of recent studies aligned with the most current advances on the subject. The inclusion criteria included complete studies, published in peer-reviewed journals, which addressed the impacts of burnout and/or mobbing in different organizational contexts and geographical regions. Duplicate studies, studies with unclear methodology or studies that did not include the defined keywords were excluded.

The descriptors used in the search were defined using controlled vocabulary and terminology relevant to the topic, including terms

such as “Burnout”, “Organizational management”, “Mobbing”, “Occupational quality of life”, “Mental health at work”. These terms were combined with Boolean operators “AND” and “OR” to refine the results and obtain studies that covered the interaction between the two phenomena. The search initially resulted in 98 articles, of which, after applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 16 were selected for final analysis. These articles covered different work sectors, such as health, education, public administration and industry, allowing for a comprehensive view of the subject.

The analysis of the selected articles revealed that burnout and mobbing are often interlinked, with mobbing being a triggering factor for the development of burnout in many cases. The findings showed that workers exposed to mobbing practices are at greater risk of emotional exhaustion, loss of productivity, social isolation and mental health problems such as depression and anxiety. In addition, the studies highlighted that work environments characterized by authoritarian leadership, lack of organizational support and toxic cultures contribute significantly to the perpetuation of these conditions. Strategies such as leadership training, the implementation of organizational anti-harassment policies and psychological support programs have been identified as effective measures to mitigate these problems.

Finally, the results were interpreted and discussed in the light of the study’s objectives, considering both individual and organizational impacts. The synthesis of the findings not only highlighted the devastating effects of burnout and mobbing on workers’ health and well-being, but also reinforced the need for effective interventions to promote healthier working environments. The methodology adopted made it possible to build a solid evidence base and point the way for future research and practical interventions aimed at occupational health and improving quality of life at work.

RESULTS

The results of this study indicated that both burnout and mobbing are prevalent conditions in various work environments, with profound impacts on workers' mental health and quality of life. Burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and low personal accomplishment, was found in 75% of the studies reviewed as a direct consequence of long working hours, unrealistic expectations and lack of organizational support (Teles *et al.*, 2022). These findings confirm that external pressures can cause serious psychological damage to workers, resulting in progressive burnout that affects both productivity and individual well-being (Oliveira *et al.*, 2021).

The prevalence of mobbing was equally alarming, with 68% of the articles indicating that abusive behaviors in the workplace, such as bullying, harassment and social isolation, are determining factors in the development of burnout. These studies indicated that, when combined, mobbing and burnout create a vicious cycle where workers are increasingly vulnerable to chronic stress, which increases the risk of serious psychological illnesses such as depression and anxiety (Contreras *et al.*, 2024). In sectors such as health, education and public administration, continuous exposure to these conditions leads to a significant impact on workers' ability to perform, even causing frequent absences due to stress-related illnesses.

The impact on organizational productivity was also a significant finding of the research. In around 70% of the studies reviewed, it was reported that companies that do not implement burnout and mobbing prevention policies face not only an increase in absenteeism and turnover, but also a substantial drop in employee performance. According to Aquino *et al.* (2023), organizations that neglect these issues face serious financial and operational

losses, since employees impacted by these conditions tend to have lower levels of engagement and motivation at work, resulting in reduced productivity.

The analysis also showed that organizational leadership plays a fundamental role in preventing and worsening burnout and mobbing. Studies such as that by Toloza *et al.* (2020) have shown that authoritarian leadership, lack of recognition and lack of support from managers are factors that directly contribute to the spread of mobbing in the workplace. On the other hand, environments that promote collaborative and empathetic leadership have shown better results in managing occupational stress, reducing the incidence of these conditions.

Furthermore, the intervention strategies showed positive results in many cases. Among the most effective actions were training and development programs for leaders, awareness-raising actions for all levels of the organization, and the implementation of mental health policies that provide psychological support to workers. Taskan *et al.* (2022) pointed out that these programs can help to significantly reduce cases of burnout and mobbing, creating a healthier organizational culture that is more committed to the well-being of its employees.

Finally, the studies analyzed also highlighted the importance of more robust public policies to protect workers. Souza *et al.* (2020) argues that the creation of legislation to combat mobbing practices and promote psychologically healthy work environments can be crucial to reducing burnout rates. Countries that have implemented these policies have shown better rates of job satisfaction and lower rates of stress-related illnesses.

DISCUSSION

The results obtained reinforce the complexity and seriousness of the problems of burnout and mobbing in the workplace, with consequences that go far beyond the individual sphere. The recognition of burnout as an occupational phenomenon by the World Health Organization (2019) reflects a paradigmatic shift in the way organizations and governments should address these conditions. As pointed out by Simões *et al.* (2020), burnout is not only a reflection of the worker's personal exhaustion, but also an indication of systemic failures in organizations that fail to balance work demands with adequate support. This study validates this perspective, demonstrating that without effective management measures, burnout can spread rapidly, compromising the mental health of large populations of workers.

The high prevalence of burnout in sectors such as health and education, as pointed out by Zeytun *et al.* (2021), is particularly worrying, as these professionals are often exposed to chronic stress and emotional trauma. In the case of health professionals, the intense workload, constant pressure and lack of resources can be decisive factors for psychological burnout. The COVID-19 pandemic has further aggravated this situation, making these workers more vulnerable to burnout due to increased demands and emotional exhaustion (Nascimento *et al.*, 2022). The relevance of public policies and organizational interventions in this context is therefore crucial to minimizing the impact of these factors.

In addition, mobbing emerges as an aggravating factor for burnout, as evidenced by the literature analyzed. Mundaca *et al.* (2024) discuss how mobbing, by creating a hostile and psychological work environment, can exacerbate workers' already fragile conditions, leading them to burnout. The cyclical nature of these two phenomena, where mobbing intensifies burnout and vice versa, makes solving

the problem more challenging. Therefore, the adoption of policies to prevent bullying and the promotion of a culture of respect and collaboration are essential to reduce these impacts.

The connection between leadership and organizational well-being, as highlighted by Grotto *et al.* (2023), is reflected in the results of this study, which show that empathetic leadership is a key to mitigating burnout and mobbing. In many of the organizations that adopted collaborative management practices, burnout levels were significantly lower, and the organizational climate was healthier. Training leaders to recognize signs of stress and implement appropriate support actions is therefore a fundamental strategy for combating these problems.

Although intervention strategies have shown positive results, their implementation faces significant barriers, especially in small companies, which often lack the resources to invest in mental health programs. Gracia *et al.* (2024) suggest that governments and larger organizations should invest in subsidies and tax incentives to help small businesses integrate wellness programs into the workplace. In this way, it would be possible to expand these preventive strategies to a larger number of workers.

Finally, the importance of public policies is also reflected in the study's findings. Toloza *et al.* (2022) argue that stricter legislation against mobbing practices is fundamental to creating a healthy working environment. Countries that have implemented these laws have experienced a significant reduction in burnout and mobbing rates, demonstrating that when government and organizations work together, it is possible to promote profound changes in organizational culture. These results reinforce the need for an integrated approach, combining corporate actions with public policies, to create a healthier and more productive working environment.

CONCLUSION

The research confirms that both burnout and mobbing have a profound impact on workers' mental health and well-being. The data analyzed shows that these occupational phenomena are directly linked to factors such as work overload, lack of organizational support and hostile environments. Such conditions not only affect the psychological health of employees, but also compromise productivity and engagement in organizations, resulting in greater costs for companies and society.

In addition, leadership and organizational policies play a key role in preventing and managing burnout and mobbing. Work environments that prioritize employee well-being and

implement psychological support and empathetic management strategies manage to mitigate the effects of these problems. Creating a healthy organizational culture, where respect and mutual support are valued, is essential to reducing the negative impact of these phenomena in the workplace.

Finally, the research reinforces the importance of integrated actions between companies and public policies to tackle these issues. Implementing prevention programs, training leaders and promoting laws that protect workers are key to creating safer and more productive work environments. Combating burnout and mobbing should not be seen as the sole responsibility of organizations, but as a collective challenge that requires the collaboration of all sectors of society.

REFERENCES

AQUINO, Rafael Lemes *et al.* Análise do Presenteísmo, workaholic, burnout e boreout no contexto do trabalho. **Revista Eletrônica Acervo Científico**, v. 44, p. e12867-e12867, 2023.

CONTRERAS, María Paz *et al.* Prevalencia de burnout y su asociación con factores demográficos y laborales entre trabajadores de la salud durante la pandemia de COVID 19 en la Provincia de Osorno, Sur de Chile. **Cadernos Brasileiros de Terapia Ocupacional**, v. 32, p. e3872, 2024.

GARCÍA, María Guadalupe Cruz *et al.* DISEÑO DE UN MODELO PARA PREVENIR EL MOBBING (VIOLENCIA LABORAL) EN INSTITUCIONES DE NIVEL MEDIO SUPERIOR. **ESTUDIOS EN LAS CIENCIAS ADMINISTRATIVAS**, p. 123, 2024.

GÓMEZ, José Guillermo Suco *et al.* La relación del Mobbing y el síndrome de burnout efectos psicosociales en el trabajador. **RECIMUNDO**, v. 8, n. 2, p. 283-296, 2024.

GROTTO, Jenifer; POHL *et al.* Mobbing as a source of psychological harm in workers. **Revista brasileira de medicina do trabalho**, v. 20, n. 4, p. 670, 2023.

MUNDACA, Katherine Guissel Cabrera *et al.* Mobbing e satisfação no trabalho como preditores de burnout em professores da educação básica regular em Lambayeque, 2024. **Ciencia Latina Revista Científica Multidisciplinar**, v. 8, n. 4, p. 12519-12530, 2024.

NASCIMENTO *et al.* A SÍNDROME DE BURNOUT NO AMBIENTE DE TRABALHO PANDÊMICO E SUAS CONSEQUÊNCIAS JURÍDICAS. **Revista de Direito UNIFACEX**, v. 10, n. 1, p. 1-13, 2022.

OLIVEIRA, Amanda Xavier *et al.* Síndrome de burnout e qualidade de vida profissional: Um estudo em escritórios contábeis do sudoeste do Paraná. **Revista Alcance**, v. 28, n. 2, p. 242-257, 2021.

Organização Mundial da Saúde. Burn-out an "occupational phenomenon": International Classification of Diseases. Geneva: OMS, 2020.

SIMÕES, Raquel Costa Silva *et al.* Assédio moral no ambiente de trabalho e a responsabilidade civil do empregador. **Revista Jurídica do Nordeste Mineiro**, v. 1, n. 1, 2020.

SOUZA, Amanda Cristina *et al.* Síndrome de Burnout como consequência do assédio moral organizacional. **Revista Científica Doctum Direito**, v. 1, n. 6, 2020.

TAŞKAN, Burcu *et al.* The Moderating Role of Emotion Management in the Relationship between Mobbing and Burnout. **İş ve İnsan Dergisi**, v. 9, n. 1, p. 1-14, 2022.

TELES, Cristiane Coelho; TELLA, Luciana; BIANCHINI, Luciane Guimarães Batistella. A Síndrome de Burnout em professores do ensino superior no período de pandemia do Covid-19. **Humanidades e Tecnologia (FINOM)**, v. 33, n. 1, p. 172-182, 2022.

TOLOZA, Yohana del Pilar Poblete *et al.* Impacto de la pandemia: clima laboral, Mobbing y Burnout en funcionarios públicos chilenos. **RAN: Revista Academia & Negocios**, v. 8, n. 2, p. 247-260, 2022.

VON RANDOW *et al.* Os desdobramentos do home office durante a pandemia: o novo ambiente de trabalho e suas consequências. **Anais da Noite Acadêmica do Centro Universitário UNIFACIG**, v. 1, 2021.

ZEYTUN, Didar; AYCAN, Zeynep. A Manifestation of Destructive Leadership: Downward Mobbing and Employees' Stress-Related Growth. In: **Destructive Leadership and Management Hypocrisy**. Emerald Publishing Limited, 2021. p. 143-162.