# EXPERIENCE OF WORKPLACE PSYCHOLOGICAL HARASSMENT

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**Abstract.** *Background.* In most countries workplace psychological harassment is a pronounced problem resulting in a number of negative consequences both for individuals and organizations.  Profound understanding of this phenomenon may help foresee the start of psychological harassment, thereby protecting the employees and the very organization from negative consequences. Psychological harassment is mostly researched by using quantitative methods. It is important to reveal the manifestation of this phenomenon via the unique and individual experience of people who have undergone workplace psychological harassment. *Purpose.* To reveal the experience of people who have been affected by workplace psychological harassment. *Methods.* The participants were five people from 28 to 65 years old. All participants have experienced psychological harassment at work for at least 5 months. The data were collected through semi-structured interview. An interpretive phenomenological analysis was employed to achieve the goal. *Results and conclusions.* People who have experienced workplace psychological harassment tend to feel guilty and underestimate themselves. The analysis revealed the occurrence of this phenomenon which affects the dignity of a person: screaming, harsh / abusive communication, etc. The participants who suffered from workplace psychological harassment have experienced a variety of negative psychological consequences: strong, deep emotional reactions, such as despair, guilt, helplessness, etc. The analysis has also revealed the psychical consequences caused by painful experience: headaches, nausea, loss of appetite, weight loss, insomnia, etc.

**Keywords:** workplace psychological harassment, qualitative study, interpretative phenomenological analysis.

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## INTRODUCTION

The global practice shows that in most of the countries workplace psychological harassment is a relevant problem resulting in a number of negative consequences both for individuals and organizations and the state economy (Yamada, 2000; McMahon, 2000; Monks & Coyne, 2011).

Vveinhardt and Žukauskas (2012) note that constantly increasing competition raises increasingly bigger danger for the group and the persons of the group and interpersonal relations. A number of factors have influence on this such as attitudes, values, social groups, cultural, national, etc. Fast growth of new technologies increases the need for greater qualification, and this not only demands higher qualification, but also reduces the number of jobs. Psychological harassment, abuse, bullying and abusive behaviour are regarded as a frequent situation in a number of organizations (Deery, Walsh & Guest, 2011; Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). Even though on the international level there is no single accepted definition, yet this may be understood as repetitive and lasting nonphysical persecution/ harassment at work, which has a humiliating effect on the victim (Guerrero, 2002).

Various research (Deery et al., 2011; Guerrero, 2002) contribute to the theoretical development of this phenomenon and its practical aspect: by consulting the employees who have experienced workplace psychological harassment and the very persecutors. Good and profound understanding of this phenomenon may help foresee the start of psychological harassment and increase of it, thereby protecting the employees and the very organization from negative consequences (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011).

The research into the area of workplace psychological harassment, carried out in Lithuania and abroad, show negative individual (physical, emotional, social and economic welfare is infringed), social and economic consequences (Astrauskaitė, 2009; Cowan, 2012; Malinauskienė, Obelenis, & Žopagienė, 2005; Kolodej, 2005; Vveinhardt, 2011; Zapf, 1999). Workplace psychological harassment is traditionally researched by using quantitative methods, yet a qualitative research perspective may help in better understand the phenomenon (Pietersen, 2007). The novelty of this research is determined by the aim to reveal the manifestation of this phenomenon via the unique and individual experience

of people who have suffered workplace psychological harassment – to look at this shocking life experience from the qualitative perspective. According to Kolodej (2005), psychological harassment is a phenomenon which has its own dynamics and can be constructively opposed if one has sufficient amount of knowledge and is prepared for proper intervention and open review of the conflict. Hence the **objective** of this research is to reveal the experience of the persons who have suffered from workplace psychological harassment in Lithuanian sample.

## BACKGROUND

### Theoretic context of the research into psychological harassment

*The conception of psychological harassment and the theories explaining it*

There are various terms defining basically the same phenomenon, such as: *workplace bullying, workplace abuse, workplace psychological harassment, psychological terror, scapegoating, workplace hostility (*Crawshaw, 2009); *moral harassment* (Guerrero, 2004), *workplace emotional abuse* (Keashly & Harvey, 2005), *mobbing* (Leymann, 1990), etc. Despite the fact that there are a number of concepts and definitions, Vartia (2003) notes that the following major common features of workplace psychological harassment may be singled out:

1. Hostile, regularly repeated behaviour: one-time conflict is not considered to be a psychological attack (this feature helps to differentiate between psychological harassment and one-time ambiguities, conflicts at work, emerging as a result of every day encounters) (Keashly & Harvey, 2005; Vartia, 2003).

2. Helplessness of the victim that is nonexistence of the power balance between the victim and the persecutor. Psychological harassment may be considered to be such a situation where the victim perceives oneself as unable to protect oneself or to escape from such a situation. Hence there is no psychological harassment where both parties are equally strong.

3. That is a phenomenon of interpersonal relations between two or several persons/ a group. Usually psychological harassment takes place

between employers and their managers with regard to the positions above them in hierarchy (Einarsen, 2000; Vartia, 2003).

The theory of the model of the process of workplace psychological harassment (Poilpot-Rocaboy, 2006) explains that the factors of this process consist of three interrelated levels: the person experiencing psychological harassment (victim), the employee using psychological harassment (persecutor) traits and the organizational culture and other characteristics of it.

Even though there is not much evidence that personal traits are directly related to psychological harassment (Poilpot-Rocaboy, 2006), yet in the research carried out (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007) it was noticed that the employees who had experienced psychological harassment (victims) had a lower self-esteem and lower social competence; in some cases they had a certain trait separating them from the entire working group, for example, different age, different gender, disfigurement, or they demonstrated such behaviour which was in contradiction to the norms of the group and had a high need for achievements (Zapf & Einarsen, 2003).

Employees using psychological harassment (persecutors) had a higher level of aggression (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007). Zapf and Einarsen (2003) proposed three major reasons related to the characteristics of an individual using psychological harassment: self-regulatory processes related to the threat to self-esteem, lack of social competences and behaviour motivated on the micro-political level, which is related to the competition within the organization, especially those cases where structures and the work duties are unclear.

Yet it is recognized that solely personal characteristics do not explain psychological harassment at work even in those cases where personal characteristics are especially important, and this does not reduce the liability of management and employers for the management and prevention of this problem (Zapf & Einarsen, 2003).

Research has been carried out (Einarsen, Raknes, & Matthiesen, 1994), which proves that managing style (lack of support, understanding of the manager; no clarity in the instructions and feedback; authoritarian management style, that is where a manager threatens to achieve his goals, as well as intimidation, authority) is one of the key factors determining the emergence of psychological harassment at work.

Psychological harassment usually emerges in organizations which do not pay sufficient attention to the organizational culture, values, where the conflicts arising among the employees are dealt carelessly and are not solved, the same is to say about discriminating processes (Hoel & Salin, 2003).

Hence the theory of the model of psychological harassment (Poilpot-Rocaboy, 2006), explaining the workplace psychological harassment, takes into consideration the interoperability between the victim, persecutor and characteristics of a certain organization.

*The consequences of workplace psychological harassment*

The relevance of psychological harassment is emphasized by the significantly negative consequences for an individual, organization and the society (Vveinhardt & Žukauskas, 2012). The consequences of psychological harassment have been analysed by a number of foreign academics (Einarsen & Hauge, 2006; Farmer, 2011; Leymann, 1990; Vartia, 2001; Vveinhardt, 2011). They are usually analysed on the individual, organizational or societal level; since negative consequences for an individual are analysed, the damage to the entire organization becomes evident. Poor psychological and physical condition of the humans, decreased motivation and poor involvement into the work do have influence on the economic indicators of the organization, which are related to the satisfaction of the humans with work. According to a number of authors (Farmer, 2011; Leymann, 1990; Vartia, 2001), psychological harassment causes long-term stress, which results in stress due to intensity, long duration and dysfunctional relations for an individual as well as psychosomatic pain and torment.

*Consequences on the individual level.* The research shows (Kolodej, 2005; Laymann, 1996; Zapf, 1999) that psychological harassment has a strong negative influence on an individual. A person experiences strong physical and psychological health problems mostly on an individual level (Vveinhardt, 2011). An individual may experience lack of sleep, feel tired, feel lack of energy (chronic fatigue) (Leymann, 1990; Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik, & Alberts, 2006). Kolodej (2005), indicates the problems of lack of concentration and loss of memory, distrust in oneself, decreasing self-esteem, loss of orientation, despair, increased sensitivity, constant thoughts about bullying, harassment at work (thinking about what will happen on the following days, etc.); depression, seeking intensively for

justice. Most authors (Kolodej, 2005; Leymann, 1990; Tracy et al., 2006), having conducted research, established that the most frequent consequences of psychological harassment have influence on the psychic and physical condition of the employee.

*Psychological consequences:* strong, deep emotional reactions, such as despair, guilt, anger, helplessness, great anxiety, lust for revenge, rage. There may be psychosomatic and psychiatric consequences: such as depression, mania, psychosomatic pain (broadly discussed as a physical consequence), post-traumatic stress disorders (tension resulting from a repetitive event, anxiety, fear, sadness, etc.) (Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Einarsen, 2000; Kolodej, 2005; Leymann, 1990; MacIntosh, Wuest, Gray, & Aldams, 2010; Martina & LaVan, 2010).

*Physical consequences:* headache, stomach ache, sickness, nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite. In one research it was noted (MacIntosh et al., 2010) that the employees undergoing this would suffer from digestion disorders only by thinking or getting ready to go to work. They also have a backache, choke, dizziness, insomnia and wake up in the middle of the night, suffer from fatigue, decreased efficiency, loss of energy, heart and coronary problems (chronic fatigue) (Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Einarsen, 2000; Kolodej, 2005; Leymann, 1990; MacIntosh et al., 2010; Malinauskienė et al., 2005; Tracy et al., 2006; Meseguer, Soler, Saez, & Garcia, 2008).

*Consequences on the organizational level*. It is difficult to assess the consequences caused by the psychological harassment at work for the organization (Martino, Hoel, & Cooper, 2003), yet some of the consequences are indisputable, such as incapacity for work, the employees' requirement to compensate for the damage (Martino et al., 2003), the probability of unlawful dismissal (Yamada, 2000) and possible legal proceedings with regard to them (Vveinhardt, 2011). Decreased efficiency, work quality, increasing turnover of employees and training new employees, deteriorating relations with the clients (a consequence of deterioration of the work quality) and a deteriorating image of the organization are the consequences affecting the performance and the results in one way or another (Hoel, Sparks, & Cooper, 2001).

Psychological harassment is mostly researched by using quantitative methods; there are not so many qualitative researches carried pot in this area (MacIntosh et al., 2010; Pietersen, 2007). Pietersen

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## Participants

The chosen research sample is small and meets the objective of the research. Application of a small sample principle is significant from the methodological point of view, since the chosen data analysis method requires comprehensive and separate analysis of each of the cases, and research participants have to represent the perspective rather than population (Smith, Larson, & Flowers, 2009).

Purposeful sampling was applied. Research participants had to be the persons having experienced psychological harassment at work for at least 5 months. Five research participants took part in the research, who voluntarily contacted the researchers having seen an advertisement inviting to participate in the research or replied after being recommended as possible research participants (see Table 1). Research participants did not know each other. The invitation to take part in the research was placed on the billboards in the premises of two organizations. The organizations were selected by applying a convenient method and the announcements were hung in the companies that allowed placement of announcements.

**Table 1.** *Demographic characteristics of research participants*

| The name of the research participant (changed) | Gender | Age | Marital status | Education, type of work | Duration of psychological harassment at work |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rūta | Female | 51 | Divorced | Higher education, sales manager | 5 years |
| Tomas | Male | 51 | married | Higher education, Construction engineer | 5 months |
| Agnė | Female | 65 | married | Higher education, accountant | 5 years |
| Saulė | Female | 28 | married | Higher education, English philology graduate, translator | 2 years |
| Ignė | Female | 48 | married | Higher education, theatre director | 6 months |

### Procedure of the research

To ensure anonymity, research interviews were held in specifically selected premises, suitable for the research participant, without any other additional people, where the researcher and the research participant would be. To record the experience of the research participant as well as possible emotions, pauses, intonation, etc., the interviews would be recorded into a dictaphone (after receiving a prior written consent of the participants). The following major research questions were presented to participants:

1. Would you please tell us how you felt when you first started to feel that something was different at work from what it used to be?

2. Would you please remember and tell us what were you going through in your life at that time?

3. Would you please tell us how your body reacted?

4. Would you please tell us what thoughts you have?

5. What feelings, emotions and thoughts do you have when you remember this experience now?

### The ethics of the research

All participants signed a consent form for participation, which allowed recording and transcription of the interview. The participants were informed of their rights to refuse or to discontinue their participation in the study. Altering the names of research participants in the transcribed material allowed participants' identities to be concealed.

### Analysis of the research data

The data of this research was analysed in several stages in accordance with E. Lyons and A. Coyle (2007) and J. A. Smith (2013).

1. Reading the same interview several times (careful reading of the transcribed interview and understanding it) and signing the comments on the left side of the text.

2. The interpretative part of the interview was the creation of topics on the basis of data content, emotions of the respondent, nonverbal communication, speech characteristics, which were created on the

basis of phenomenological comments and signed on the right-hand side (recommended).

3. Joining the topics/sharing them into super-ordinate themes. A list of topics was written down and information was sought which topics were interrelated, and which ones were not. By grouping of the themes, super-ordinate themes were created.

4. All of these steps were repeated with each interview. Pauses were made after each interview – some time was left in order to review an interview as a new one, to get insights into new topics.

5. At this stage, it was analysed which topics were repeated in the analyses of the interviews, and then meta-themes were prepared: the names of the super-ordinate themes that were interrelated were connected, a table of meta-themes was created, including quotations from the interview, which substantiate this kind of grouping, and a joint text was written: the explanation of meta-themes was provided, and they were illustrated by examples.

## Findings

Having analysed the interview of all the research participants by the stages of phenomenological interpretation analysis, three major meta-themes became evident, revealing the experience of the people who have experienced psychological harassment: the importance of self-realization, the desire to be respected/ important and negative thoughts and the response of the body. The meta-themes of the research and the examples illustrating them are provided in Table 2.

**Table 2.** *Meta-theme and the names of the super-ordinate themes of it with an illustrating example*

| Meta-theme No. 1. The importance of self-realization |
|---|
| **Work: desire to be useful/ accepted** |
| **Rūta:** "I was eager to go to work, I was doing everything – not only the tasks that I had to" (R, 3-4); |
| **Agnė**: "I want to work; it was a real fun [...] it just seems it used to be fun" (A, 142-143); |
| **Saulė**: "It was important for me to have an activity I like [...] I want to have something of my own, where I would feel good with my colleagues" (S, 61-62); |

**Table 2** *cont.*

**Low self-esteem/ blaming oneself**
**Rūta:** "I was convinced that everything I was doing was wrong" (R, 74);
**Tomas:** "It was strange, I did not understand what was wrong. I was looking for the guilt within myself" (T, 5);
**Ignė**: "You feel so as if you are not suitable for the job. I felt I was blamed for some issues and I was trying to look for reasons within myself, what were the things I was doing wrong" (I, 73-75).

**Search for the meaning, explanation of the painful experience**
**Rūta:** "That event and the illness helped me to meet several young people who needed me and I helped them to listen and I helped them with my words and thoughts" (R, 126-127);
**Tomas:** "This was so to say a good example, so to say, and I really have what to compare, and what work is really good now and which work is bad" (T, 28-29);
**Saulė:** "Of course, I was trying to see something in it so that it is meaningful, since otherwise it is difficult" (S, 81-82).

**Meta-theme No. 2. Aspiration to be respected, important**

**Experiencing permanent control/ persecution and disrespectful behaviour: "you are a human, you can feel everything"**
**Rūta:** "Every day I was told the same all over again/ the things I was not allowed to do during a day or two, such things" (R, 41-42); I was feeling pressure each day, each single day" (R, 36-37);
**Tomas:** "I had a feeling as if somebody/ somebody was breathing into my back" (T, 20);
**Saulė:** "my speech would be interrupted all the time – whether by glances, gestures, you notice everything, you are a human and you feel it all and experience" (S, 18-19);

**The sense of loneliness: "nobody will understand"**
**Rūta:** "nobody is interested in your concerns, pain and nobody needs this" (R, 118-119);
**Tomas:** "This is really difficult, you cannot share this with anyone, I mean, telling somebody, because you can understand this" (T, 63-64);
**Saulė:** "And who can you tell this, who will understand?" (S, 32-33).

**Support: I am important outside work**
**Rūta:** "I was trying to talk with my mother/ but she /// is an old person and (sighs) and still she managed to listen to me and understand" (R, 77-78);
**Tomas:** "Somehow they would see that if I already had a headache, or else I was not talkative, then we would just sit silently for a while" (T, 118-119);
**Agnė:** "my husband understood me, that it was very difficult for me, and he supported me all the time, and the most important thing is that I did not need to fight and argue" (A, 81-82);

**Meta-theme No. 3. Negative thoughts and the response of the body**

**Status of holding vigil and inability to control thoughts**
**Rūta:** "my head was spinning from insomnia. It seems that it will explode" (R, 98-99);
**Tomas:** "I would be persecuted constantly, sometimes both my body and mind had to have rest, I was trying not to think, I was doing my best not to think about this, not to talk about this" (T, 47-48);
**Saulė:** "Oh, I would have a lot of on my mind – I would sometimes wake up early in the morning and think that, oh no, I have to go to work again" (S, 60).

**Table 2** *cont.*

**Constrained body – "making do things forcibly"**

**Rūta:** "every small little touch of anything, each minor task becomes really difficult// everything is done with great // difficulty // and for a very long time" (R, 71-72);

**Tomas:** "And I come home aaaand / for half an hour I lie, so to say, and physically to have rest and, and, and so // mentally" (T, 26-27);

**Agnė:** "and I was making myself do all of this, forcing myself, I was even doing this at home" (A, 87).

**Negative reactions of the body**

**Rūta:** "I would come to work, I would even tremble as I would see the face, and the heart would beat awfully, and I could not even breathe // and those words, and the facial expression, and the same sentences each day would make me tremble and I could throw up" (R, 87-88);

**Saulė:** "I would have a strong headache, and I would not want to eat, it was a bad feeling, anyway" (46-47);

**Ignė:** "The tension would be so intensive that even now, so many years after this, if I see her, I still have some kind of process in my body" (I, 90-91).

## Discussion

The experience of the research participants revealed that what they experienced was not merely rude forms of communication. One of the research participants was hospitalized as a result of psychological harassment after a diagnosis of depression. The research participants were experiencing psychological harassment from 5 months to 5 years. This may be confirmed by research of Leymann (1990) stating that workplace psychological harassment may usually be described as a repetitive phenomenon lasting from 5-6 months to 5 years.

The analysis of the experience of the persons who have suffered from psychological harassment at work revealed the importance for self-realization for a person. The research participants were referring in the history of their experience about the importance of work. Most research look into the reasons of this phenomenon, the consequences, the process, etc. (Einarsen, 2000; Owoyemi & Sheehan, 2011; Pompilia et al., 2008; Vartia, 2003), and only a few analyse this through the prism of an experienced person (MacIntosh et al., 2010; Pietersen, 2007), hence there are few researches revealing this experience. The research of Pietersen (2007), as well as our research, showed that the research participants had not received any recognition from the persecutors.

The analysis of this research showed that the research participants had been blaming themselves and had a low self-esteem: they were

looking for guilt within themselves, their self-esteem had decreased. The results of this study are in agreement with other studies which show that the people rejected in their work environment feel lack of self-confidence, unnecessary, guilty (Leymann, 1990; Pranjić, Maleš-Bilić, Beganlić, Mustajbegović', 2006). The research participants of the research of MacIntosh and colleagues (2010) also reveal this experience. Other researchers also indicate lack of self-confidence, decreasing self-esteem, increased sensitivity (Kolodej, 2005; Leymann, 1990; Tracy et al., 2006). Such negative experience as if splits into parts or divides the life history of an individual, and where this is vulnerable, the person loses stability (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008), and the sense of guilt may be one of the features of depression (Emdad, Alipour, Hagborg, & Jensen., 2013). The sense of guilt, low self-esteem resulting from psychological harassment at work becomes evident in the experience of the participants of this research as well as in a number of other studies.

The analysis of this work also revealed the experience of participants which is related to disrespectful behaviour, constant control, harass-ment. Psychological harassment may have different forms: verbal abuse, mockery and nicknaming, dissemination of rumour not true to fact, hu-miliation of the person (Stephen, Walsh, & Guest, 2011). This confirms the research results received, revealing rude communication, speech, constant persecution, gossip, rumour, interruption while speaking, etc. Verbal abuse at work is also revealed by the research of Pietersen (2007) and Macintosh and colleagues (2010). Other research (Keashly & Harvey, 2005; Leymann, 1990; Pranjić et al., 2006) defines psychological harass-ment as constant, abusive, threatening, intentional behaviour, the ob-jective of which is to make the victim feel depressed, humiliated, vul-nerable. The consequence of these processes is broken self-confidence, stress and its consequences, and this became evident in the research results.

This research revealed various negative consequences experienced as a result of psychological harassment, and other research also show (Kolodej, 2005; Laymann, 1996; Zapf, 1999) that psychological harass-ment has a very strong negative impact on individuals. Mostly on an in-dividual level the person experiences physical and psychological health problems (Vveinhardt, 2011). Research has found that the most frequent consequences of psychological harassment affect both the psychological

and physical condition of the employee (Kolodej, 2005; Leymann, 1990; Tracy et al., 2006). There may be various negative consequences, which depend on the duration of this phenomenon, the frequency, forms of expression and the personal traits of the employee.

One of negative consequences of psychological harassment is the sense of loneliness. The participants of this research felt lonely, since they could not get assistance, encouragement and support from their environment. They attempted to quit their jobs and to finish this painful process at work – one research participant was happy to go on maternity leave, another one was happy to retire, and another one changed his job. All of this was an attempt to quit the job and to get out of the environment causing the painful experience. This coincides with the experience of the participants of the qualitative research of Macintosh et al. (2010) and Pranjic et al. (2006) research, where failure to get support, assistance from the colleagues and work environment conditions the sense of loneliness, helplessness and the decision to quit the job. At the same time, this also related to the emerging issue which reveals the support from the family members outside work or the fact that something helps to go through the painful experience that is activity within a safe, peaceful home or other environment. Similar results may be observed in other researches confirming the same – the results reveal the importance of interpersonal relations with family members (Kolodej, 2005; Leymann, 1990; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008; MacIntosh et al., 2010).

The analysis of our research data has revealed the emotional and physical consequences experienced by the research participants: the condition of alertness and inability to control one's thoughts, constrained body and various negative reactions of the body/ physical reactions. This coincides with the data of other research. The research results of MacIntosh et al. (2010) show that the women that have experienced workplace psychological harassment could not work as they did before, since they had health problems. Other (Namie, 2003) researches show that the people who have undergone workplace psychological harassment were going through a strong anxiety, they had sleep problems, attention deficit, a clinical depression was acknowledged (they could not arrive to work as a result of an illness or even hospitalization, and they were having panic attacks, post-traumatic stress disorder (tension, anxiety, fear, sadness, etc.) as a result of repeated events. (Bowling &

Beehr, 2006; Einarsen, 2000; Kolodej, 2005; Leymann, 1990; MacIntosh et al., 2010; Martina & LaVan, 2010; Sinha & Yadav, 2017).

It is difficult to evaluate the consequences caused by workplace psychological harassment for the organization (Martino et al., 2003), yet unfitness for work is undoubtedly one of the consequences. The results of this work also fail to reveal how this affected the organizations, the workplaces, yet one thing that is evident is the fact that efficiency was reduced, the quality of work deteriorated, and the interpersonal relations of the colleagues deteriorated – these are the consequences which in one way or another affect the results of the organization (Hoel et al., 2001).

Our research has helped to look at the phenomenon of psychological harassment from the perspective of the individuals who have experienced this: what they had to go through, experience, what consequences this caused and what consequences this had on their lives and the environment. There are few researches like this. Pietersen (2007), who has also researched the expression of psychological harassment from the perspective of the persons who have experienced it in the cultural context of South Africa, singled out the issue of discrimination. That was discrimination on the grounds of race, the research was carried out in a multiracial institution. Our research did not show signs of discrimination, the organizations researched were not multiracial, hence we may presume that the cultural context may have influence on the type of psychological harassment. The analysis of the individuals who have experienced psychological harassment at work has revealed that research participants did not apply for personal assistance in regard to the painful experience of workplace psychological harassment (except for one case of depression), and this is different from other research results, for example, in the qualitative research carried out in Canada (MacIntosh et al., 2010) women asked for assistance in regard to workplace psychological harassment within their organizations and outside them. We may presume that in the cultural context of Lithuania people are not sufficiently informed about psychological harassment in organizations, there is no prevention system dealing with workplace psychological harassment within the organization.

This study has some limitations, which have to be noted. The data of this qualitative research does not show the experience of all the persons

who have experienced psychological harassment at work. Yet it is also important to take into consideration the gender of the research participants – only one of the participants was a man, therefore, to ensure a more comprehensive experience, it would be useful to include a similar number of male and female participants. The sample of the research is not homogeneous if we look at the age of informants and the period of experienced workplace psychological harassment (from 5 months till 5 years), it would be useful to include more homogeneous sample. It is also important to take into consideration that the subjective experience of research participants who have experienced the workplace psychological harassment a while ago could have been important for the memories of research participants, the meaning given to it.

It would be meaningful to carry out a qualitative research with other employees of the organization to find out how workplace psychological harassment affects other employees of the organization. In addition to this, it would also be meaningful to look into the phenomenon of psychological harassment from the perspective of persecutors.

## Conclusions

The analysis of experience revealed the importance of self-realization for a human: the importance of work, the wish to give meaning to painful life experience. Humans have experienced a strong sense of guilt and started to depreciate themselves, being unable to achieve self-realization at work as a result of the rude behaviour of colleague(s). The analysis of the experience of workplace psychological harassment also revealed the aspiration to be respected and important which is revealed via the experience of permanent control and disrespectful behaviour, the sense of loneliness and helplessness which is related to the lack of support at work. This research has revealed that psychological harassment was also expressed as shouting, rude/ abusive communication, permanent criticism, dissemination of rumour/ gossip, various negative facial expressions, constant "supervision". Research participants who have experienced workplace psychological harassment experienced various negative psychological consequences: strong, deep emotional reactions, such as self-depreciation, despair, guilt, helplessness, great anxiety, inability to control one's thoughts, depression. The

analysis of experience revealed the physical consequences caused by workplace psychological harassment: headaches, nausea, loss of appetite, loss of weight, insomnia and waking up in the middle of the night, more frequent heartbeat, irregular breathing and permanent fatigue. The analysis of experience of the people who have suffered from workplace psychological harassment has revealed that research participants did not ask for professional assistance with regard to the experience of painful workplace psychological harassment (except for one case of developing depression).

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## PSICHOLOGINIO PERSEKIOJIMO DARBE PATYRIMAS

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**Santrauka**. ***Problema.*** Daugelyje šalių psichologinis persekiojimas darbe yra aktuali problema, kuri sąlygoja daug negatyvių padarinių ne tik darbuotojams, tačiau ir organizacijoms. Gilus šio reiškinio išmanymas gali padėti numatyti psichologinio persekiojimo pradžią ir intensyvėjimą, taip apsaugant darbuotojus bei pačią organizaciją nuo neigiamų padarinių. Psichologinis persekiojimas daugiausia tiriamas taikant kiekybinius tyrimo metodus. Svarbu atskleisti šio fenomeno pasireiškimą per individualų ir unikalų psichologinį persekiojimą darbe išgyvenusių žmonių patyrimą. ***Tyrimo tikslas.*** Atskleisti nukentėjusių žmonių nuo psichologinio persekiojimo darbe patyrimą. ***Metodas.*** Tyrime dalyvavo 28-65 metų penki tyrimo dalyviai, patyrę psichologinį persekiojimą darbe nemažiau kaip 5 mėn. Duomenys buvo renkami pusiau struktūruoto interviu metodu. Duomenų analizei buvo

taikomas interpretacinės fenomenologinės analizės metodas. ***Rezultatai ir išvados.*** Psichologinį persekiojimą patyrę žmonės jaučia kaltės jausmą, nuvertina save. Analizė atskleidė šio reiškinio pasireiškimą, kuris veikia asmenybės orumą: rėkimas, šiurkštus, užgauliojantis bendravimas ir t.t. Tyrimo dalyviai, išgyvenę psichologinį persekiojimą darbe, patyrė įvairių neigiamų psichologinių pasekmių: stiprias, gilias emocines reakcijas, tokias kaip, neviltis, kaltė, bejėgiškumas ir t.t. Patyrimo analizėje išryškėjo skaudaus patyrimo sukeltos fizinės pasekmės: galvos skausmai, pykinimas, apetito praradimas, svorio kritimas, nemiga ir t.t.