



Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences Section – 2006

I15 Forensic Evaluation of Psychological Reactions to Mobbing in the Workplace

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After attending this presentation, attendees will gain an understanding of business strategy, verification of effects, and evaluation methodology.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by demonstrating the value of conclusions based on elements of greater objectivity regarding both the quality of mobbing and the inter-psychic dynamics and consequences produced.

First, a business strategy could be conducted in such a systematic way with the use of instruments of psychological pressure in order to break the will of workers to the point of producing negative consequences on their health. The existence of an ample judicial investigation and two consecutive guilty verdicts allows for a clear understanding of the facts that act to remove the possibility of subjective interpretation.

Second, the concrete verification of the effects produced by mobbing on the psychological and emotional states of an individual, eliminating the doubt which always arises on this subject, that is to say, whether the event was truly mobbing, or only experienced as such by the worker.

Third, to help in the selection of the most correct methodology of evaluation of those cases in legal-medical circles that are different than those of clinical circles; the choice of the best-suited psycho-diagnostic tests; the differences between clinical and medical-legal diagnoses, etc. Above all because of the distinctiveness of this case, unusual with respect to typical, current case histories.

Due to the data that come from both clinical as well as judicial investigation. In a field of study where the risk of subjectivity is very high, this case offers uniform characteristics regarding both the alleged pathogenic working environment, as well as the chosen clinical observation method.

The focus of the study presented here is based on the presence of two uncommon factors that are in contrast to the usual observations of employees who complain of mobbing. One is the uniformity of the environment and the act of mobbing itself. The other is the significantly high number of workers observed (20). In this case a judicial proceeding was initiated and is currently being conducted, and the employer has been found guilty. The course of investigations made it possible to identify acts of mobbing with greater objectivity, dispelling possible doubts that the workers who were subjected to such actions were exaggerating the facts.

The work environment in question is that of a large and important industrial company in which, subsequent to the arrival of privatization, a certain number of employees in the late stages of their careers were offered the option of entry-level jobs. In cases of refusal, that employee was sent to work in a crumbling building situated inside the industrial complex, absent of work supplies, including desks and chairs in sufficient numbers for all. The transferred workers were not assigned any tasks, regardless of their level of education, their previous qualifications, or seniority reached.

During the course of their stay in the assigned workplace, in which these employees remained for about a year before the courts intervened by closing and sequestering the building, the workers began to present with significant psychological disturbances which included glaring behavioural reactions accompanied by agitation and the threat of self destructive behaviour.

At the request of the institution responsible for social security in Italy (INAIL), the presenters observed twenty of these workers at the Department of Forensic Psychiatry and the Department of Industrial Medicine of the University of Bari. Each of the subjects underwent psychiatric observation and was seen by an industrial physician. Each was also administered psycho-diagnostic testing. The presence of such similar conditions and pathogenic stimuli for all the subjects, whether regarding the mechanism of the action, or the duration of the exposure, has led the group studying these workers (comprised of psychiatrists, psychologists, and industrial physicians) to concentrate their attention on the manner and type of each individual's response to the mobbing elements. Among the more notable elements that seemed to have played a relevant role in determining the duration of the psychological reactions by the worker was the violation of one's professional and or working image, putting the employees' sense of security into a state of crisis that, up until that moment, were intact and well-recognized).

The obtained results (i.e., with regard to the type and duration of symptoms, the individual's experience, familial and environmental reactions, therapies provided, duration of exposure, etc.) are discussed in detail, and are supported by the scientific literature on the subject.

Mobbing, Psychological Reaction, Forensic Evaluation