

## **Bullying at Work: Effects of the Victim's Pro and Antisocial Behaviors and of the Harassed's Overvictimization on the Judgments of Help-giving**

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### **Abstract**

According to Weiner's model, help-giving has various determinants such as social and individual causes, affects and responsibility. The aim of this study was to test the determinants of help in bullying cases. Sixty scenarios of bullying at work, varying according to the kind of harassment, the victim's pro or antisocial behaviors, and the victim's antecedents of bullying, were given to sixty participants (30 men and 30 women of superior / subordinate status in hospital/company). They had to judge the probability of helping. The results showed that the intention of help-giving increased 1) with the kind of bullying: persons whose health was attacked received more assistance than insulated persons, 2) with the victim's prosocial behaviors as opposed to antisocial behaviors and, 3) when the persons had no antecedents: unovervictimized persons received more help than overvictimized ones.

**Keywords:** moral harassment, bullying, overvictimization, antisocial and prosocial behavior, help-giving

### INTRODUCTION

Moral harassment<sup>4</sup> is a psychological process characterized by psychological and moral suffering of a worker, inferred in a context of work to which it is bound. More exactly, it is a means of striking a blow at the moral contract which binds the person to his/her work (Viaux & Bernaud, 2001). Leymann (1996) defines mobbing as a sequence of actions that occurs frequently (at least once a week) over a rather long period, and consists of comment and hostile schemes expressed by one or more persons toward a target individual. It consists of repeated and prolonged infringements of an employee's personal dignity. For Hirigoyen (1998), it refers to any unfair behavior that can show up as actions, words or written acts aimed at striking a blow at the personality, dignity, and/or physical and psychic integrity of a person and that endangers the person's employment or spoils the climate of work. This phenomenon is explained in an individual way by identifying the characteristics of the bully and the victim (Hirigoyen, 1998).

Research on bullying can be divided into three fields. The first identifies characteristics of bullies, victims and their organizations (Agervold & Gemzoe-Mikkelsen, 2004; Courcy, Savoie & Brunet, 2004; Einarsen, 2005; Faulx & Guezaine, 2000; Guezaine &

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<sup>4</sup> In this paper, the terms harassment, mobbing or bullying will be used alternatively. Zapf and Leymann (1996, p. 162) concluded from their discussion of terminology in a special issue that ... " 'mobbing', 'bullying', or 'harassment' are used interchangeably". In fact, bullying is currently used in England and the United States, while mobbing is employed in Northern European countries. The term bullying emphasizes physical aggression and is less current in companies, but it is not absent and in this research certain scenarios evoke physical violence. French researchers frequently use the term moral harassment at work (to insist on the moral and psychological suffering which characterizes all the victims) to evoke all the kind of categories of LIPT (Leymann Inventory Psychological Terrorization). The United States uses the term harassment often in association with the problems of sexual harassment.

Faulx, 2003; Hirigoyen, 1998, 2001; Leymann, 1996; Viaux & Bernaud, 2001; Zapf & Einarsen, 2005). For example, Canadian studies show a reverse relation between the quality of working climate and the increasing of harassment and aggression (Courcy *et al.*, 2004; Simard *et al.*, 2004). Harassment and provocation are correlated with bad relations between units or departments (Simard *et al.*, 2004). Moreover, provocation is correlated with other variables relating to climate, such as non-realization of the self, bad quality relations between colleagues and with the supervisor, and non-stimulation at work. The second research trend evokes the consequences of the attacks on health (Einarsen, 2005; Hirigoyen, 1998, 2001; Kudielka, 2004; Leymann, 1996; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2001, 2004; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001, 2002a and b; Viaux & Bernaud, 2001; Zapf & Einarsen, 2005; Zapf & Gross, 2001). The third trend concerns research about the judgments toward the bullying situations, the victims and the bully. In this field, authors have shown that personal and organizational characteristics influence judgments of equity (Desrumaux-Zagrodnicki, Lemoine, & Mahon, 2004) and responsibility (Balducci, 2002; Desrumaux, 2007). Numerous organizational variables, such as the style of management and the climate of the company, influence and explain the harassment. Thus, harassment is considered more equitable when the climate is based on rules and procedures (Desrumaux-Zagrodnicki *et al.*, 2004) and the victim is considered more responsible if he/she has already been victimized (Desrumaux, 2007) and when he/she evokes internal explanations (Desrumaux, 2007). These judgments partially explain the lack of help-giving. It is striking to note that victims often report a lack of social support (Leymann, 1996; Poilpot-Rocaboy, 2000; Viaux & Bernaud, 2001; Zapf, Knorz & Kulla, 1996). A second important effect is the silence of both victims and their colleagues. This silence can be explained by the victim's shame, the fear of being definitively labelled as a victim. They also are afraid of increasing their illtreatment if they try to oppose the bully and of losing their job.

The victim's silence and the witnesses' non-intervention can be explained by the attributions toward the victims and the just-world theory (Lerner, 1980; Hafer & Bègue, 2005). Based on the belief in a just world (Lerner, 1980), the witnesses of aggressions do not react because they attribute behavioral or moral responsibility to the victim for what happens to him/her. Yet, a number of investigations have documented the fundamental role played by perceptions of responsibility in help giving (Betancourt, 1990; Meyer & Mulherin, 1980; Reizenzein, 1986; Schmidt & Weiner, 1988; Weiner, 1996). Moreover, recent studies show that having a piece of information about overvictimization increases the witnesses' feeling that the victim is responsible for what happens to him/her (Desrumaux & Dechacus, 2007).

Thus, the question of what determines the witnesses' intervention seems central and needs to be investigated. For Weiner (1996), the intention to help a person depends on the victim's ability to control what happens to him/her. If the person is supposed to be able to control what happens to him/her, the probability of giving help is less important than when he/she is supposed not to control the event. Furthermore, for Weiner (1996), ability to control and intention are two antecedents of personal responsibility. According to Weiner's model (1996) and Rudolph, Roesch, Greitemeyer, and Weiner (2004) meta-analysis, the positive or negative affects have a strong effect on help-giving and are strong mediators between cognitions and help. The more the sympathy, the more the likelihood that support would be given and the less the other is rejected, whereas the greater the anger, the less the social support and the greater the tendency to reject (Weiner, 1993). Thus, a negative piece of information, such as responsibility of the victim, induces negative affect which decreases intention to support the victim. In his responsibility-based theory of social conduct (Weiner, 2001), attributed responsibility triggers affective reactions which are the proximal causes of prosocial behavior. Yet, recent studies on harassment show that victims are considered responsible for what happens (Desrumaux, 2007) and that the overvictimization (defined as

the inclination of a person to be again victimized) decreases the intention to help (Desrumaux & Dechacus, 2007). Thus, negative information, such as the fact of being overvictimized, increases the feeling that the victim is responsible for what happens to him/her and decreases the intention to support this person. We can think that not only will a negative piece of information, such as the victimization, modulate the help-giving but the bullied's positive or negative behaviors will also increase or decrease the support. Thus, we can predict that positive or negative behaviors, such as pro or antisocial behaviors at work of the mobbed worker, will condition the reaction toward him. That is what we will test in this study. Thus, the main aim of the present study is to test the hypothesis that the kind of harassment, the overvictimization and the harassed worker's pro/antisocial behaviors will modulate the decision to give help.

These deviant behaviors at work can be defined as "*all behavior which deviates from the socially admitted norms and in this way undermines the organization or one of its members*" (Rioux, Savoie & Brunet, 2003, in Leblanc et al., 2004, p. 62). Roberge, Rioux, Brunet and Savoie (2004, in Simard et al., 2004, p 78) elicit a classification of these behaviors in two categories, depending on the target (either the organization or the person): respectively, the antisocial anti-organizational behaviors at work and the anti-individual behaviors at work. The anti-organizational behaviors at work include three kinds of deviances: deviances of property, which implies damage or appropriation of things belonging to the organization (e.g., "to steal the material of the company"), deviances of production, which imply a decrease of the quality or of the quantity of work (e.g., "dealing with personal business during his/her working hours") and political deviances, which imply passive resistance, deceitfulness, a skirting of the rules and procedures of the organization (e.g., "to circumvent the procedures as soon as the opportunity arises"). The anti-individual behaviors can be of three kinds: harassment (mocking remark, discrimination: undermining of psychological integrity of the person), physical aggression (attacking the physical integrity of the person) and provocation (slander, domination, rejection...).

Prosocial behaviors have been less often studied in the workplace (Bierhoff, 2002) and the link between the deviances and citizenship or prosocial behaviors has been very little studied. Bierhoff (2002) considered that the terms of helping, prosocial behavior and altruism are closely interrelated, but considered "helping" as the broadest term including prosocial behavior, which includes altruism. Thus, we will understand by prosocial behaviors the whole of the behaviors intended to help others without seeking an obvious personal interest.

Prosocial organizational behavior (POB) is defined as "a behavior which is (a) performed by a member of an organization, (b) directed toward an individual, group, or organization with whom he/she interacts while carrying out his or her organizational role, and (c) performed with the intention of promoting the welfare of the individual, group, or organization toward which it is directed" (Brief & Motowidlo, 1986, p. 711). The organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) is defined as "a discretionary behavior of employees that contributes to the effectiveness of the organization" (Organ, 1988) and involves the measurement of two components, altruism and generalized compliance (Organ & Ryan, 1995). The consequences of OCB for companies are an increasing of performance and productivity (Podsakoff, Ahearne, & MacKenzie, 1997). As POB concerns both organization oriented and individual oriented behaviors, we define the prosocial organizational behaviors at work as: "any voluntary behavior which helps to preserve the organizational standards/rules and works to maintain the well-being of the members of the organization". Three types of prosocial organizational behaviors are defined (in correspondence with the three organizational antisocial behaviors). Our aim is to propose reciprocal behaviors to compare the effects of the two kinds of behaviors. Prosocial behavior of property consists of an availability of worker's personal material to the organization (e.g., "to make many professional calls on his/her private

phone"). Prosocial behavior of production consists of behaviors aiming at increasing the quality and the quantity of work (e.g., "to invest himself strongly at work"). Political prosocial behavior consists of an active commitment, an acceptance of the rules and procedures of the organization (e.g., "to propose new installations in order to improve the service"). We will take into account these two kinds of behaviors (pro/antisocial) to test their influences on judgments.

Examining the specific categories of anti-social acts, Juvonen (1991, 1992) reported that peers were perceived as responsible for bragging and rule breaking, and that these categories of deviance elicited anger and dislike. The greater the perceived responsibility, the greater the anger, the less the social support and the greater the tendency to reject. Thus, antisocial behaviors will increase the anger and the feeling of responsibility and will decrease the help.

Consequently, we assume that a victim will be given less support, firstly, when he/she has emitted an antisocial organizational behavior as opposed to a prosocial organizational behavior (H1), secondly, when the kind of harassment is considered as less serious (to silence someone or to insultate as opposed to an attack on health) (H2) and thirdly, when the worker has already been victimized (H3).

Given the inequity of the situation, we assume that in cases of serious acts of bullying (to attack health, to humiliate) the judges will take less into account the anti and prosocial behaviors in deciding whether to support the victim (H4).

If a victim has already been victimized and if he/she has emitted prosocial behavior, the effect of the overvictimization on the judgment of assistance is likely to be intensified. The judges, thinking that he/she emits political prosocial behaviors through fear of being again harassed, will take more into account the overvictimization. Thus, we expect in the case of political prosocial behavior that overvictimization will decrease the intention of help as opposed to the absence of overvictimization (H5).

The participants working in hospital will have more intention to give help in the case of prosocial behavior when they can identify with the victim. Conversely, they will give less help than people working in factories in the case of antisocial behavior, because they cannot identify with the employee. Prosocial behaviors will increase the intention to help as opposed to antisocial behaviors but this effect will be accentuated in a hospital as opposed to a factory (H6).

The managers tend to be more moderate: they will take the behaviors less into account. Subordinates in the company will give more help when the harassed worker has emitted prosocial behaviors, and less help when he has emitted antisocial behavior, than the executives (H7).

## Experiment

### *Design and Participants*

Sixty participants (thirty men and thirty women ; 15 male executives, 15 male non-executives, 15 female executives and 15 female non-executives) between the ages of 30 and 52 ( $M = 39.63$ ,  $SD = 6.73$ ) produced a judgment concerning the probability of helping according to the following design ( $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 6 \times 5 \times 2$ ). This design included three within-subject variables (S2: overvictimization of the bullied worker/no; B6: antisocial/prosocial behaviors of the mobbed worker; K5: kind of bullying) and three between-subject variables: kind of company (hospital/factory), hierarchical status of the judges (managerial/nonmanagerial), sex of the judges.

The participants were recruited at work and were working in hospitals as doctors or as nursing employees and in manufacturing companies as managers or as subordinates.

After reading the scenario, participants had to rate the intention of help-giving by answering the question “*How likely would you be to give help to employee X?*” on a continue scale of 10 cm ranging from (not at all) to (entirely).

### ***Procedure and Measures***

#### ***Material***

The questionnaire was presented as an survey on interpersonal relations at work. Sixty scenarios were built for this experiment.

According to the classification of Leymann (1996), five kinds of acts were chosen relating to the five categories of LIPT (Leymann, 1990): to silence someone, to insulate, to slander, to humiliate, to attack health.

The bullied person’s overvictimization included two modalities (had already been a victim of similar schemes / had never been such a victim). The antisocial behaviors were for production deviance, (“*has dealt with his personal business during his working hours*”), for property deviance (“*has removed the material of the company*”), for political deviance (“*has circumvented the procedures and rules of the company when the opportunity arose*”). The prosocial behaviors were for production (“*has invested himself strongly in its work*”, for property (“*has made lots of professional phone calls with his private phone*” and for political behavior (“*has suggested new installations for the correct operation of the company*”). The scenarios read as follows:

Example 1: “*X invested himself strongly at work. Regularly for four months, his/her supervisor has made him/her carry out humiliating tasks. X had never suffered similar acts during a previous job*”.

Example 2: “*X has dealt with his/her personal business during his/her working hours. Regularly for months, his/her supervisor has attacked his/her health. X has already suffered similar acts during a previous job*”.

### **Results**

Analysis of variance (Table 1) yielded three main effects. Firstly, the intention to help depended on the kind of harassment ( $F(4, 208) = 12,52, p < .001$ ): attacking health induced the highest intention as opposed to others ( $LSD, p < .001$ ). Hypothesis 1 was confirmed. All the harassment acts showed differences between them ( $p < .001$ ), with these exceptions: to silence somebody did not differ from to slander or to humiliate, and to slander did not differ from to humiliate.

Secondly, as predicted in Hypothesis 2, the emission of prosocial behaviors increased the intention to help, as opposed to antisocial behaviors ( $F(5, 260) = 38,19, p < .001$ ) The comparisons showed that the three prosocial behaviors were significantly different from the three antisocial behaviors ( $LSD, p < .001$ ); the three prosocial behaviors showed no mutual differences and the three antisocial behavior showed no mutual differences. Thirdly, the intention to help increased when the harassed worker had not already been victimized, as opposed to the victimized worker ( $F(1, 52) = 4,16, p < .05$ ) as predicted by Hypothesis 3.

One first-order interaction between the kind of harassment and the behaviors was significant ( $F(20, 1040) = 2,59, p < .001$ ). Insulating the victim decreased the intention to help in the case of antisocial behaviors. As predicted in Hypothesis 4, when the perpetrator attacked health, the intentions to support the victim were higher and the judges took less into account the specificity of the emitted behaviors: if they intervened more in the event of prosocial behaviors in comparison to the antisocial behaviors, they did not differentiate between the three deviances (Fisher  $LSD, ns$ ). In the same way, they did not differentiate between the three kinds of prosocial behaviors ( $LSD, ns$ ). When the bully humiliated, two of the deviances,

production and political, did not make a difference (*LSD*, *ns*), but the deviance of property decreased the intention to support the victim (*LSD*,  $p < .001$ ).

A second first-order interaction between the behaviors and overvictimization was significant ( $F(5, 260) = 2,28$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Overvictimization decreased the intention of aid as opposed to non-overvictimization for political prosocial behavior (*LSD*,  $p < .01$ ). Hypothesis 5 was confirmed. Overvictimization decreased the intention of aid, as opposed to non-overvictimization, for anti-production behavior (*LSD*,  $p < .006$ ).

A third interaction between behaviors and kind of company was significant ( $F(15, 260) = 8,41$ ,  $p < .0001$ ). When the victim had emitted antisocial behaviors, hospitals gave less help than factories and when they had emitted prosocial behavior, factories helped less than hospitals, as predicted in Hypothesis 6.

A fourth interaction between overvictimization and kind of company was significant ( $F(1, 52) = 9,70$ ,  $p < .002$ ). In the case of overvictimization, there were no differences between hospitals and factories. When the worker was not overvictimized, the judges in hospital helped more than the participants in factories.

A fifth interaction between status and the pro and antisocial behaviors is significant ( $F(5, 260) = 7,4$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In conformity with Hypothesis 7, managerial judges moderate their opinions as opposed to subordinates, who give less help in the case of antisocial behavior and more aid in the case of prosocial behavior.

A first second-order interaction was significant between the kind of harassment, the pro/antisocial behaviors and the overvictimization ( $F(20, 1040) = 1,81$ ,  $p < .01$ ). When the worker was overvictimized, the judges took less into account the kind of harassment than when he had never been victimized, for production prosocial behavior. In the case of overvictimization, the judges took more into account the kinds of harassment than in the case of non-overvictimization for production deviance. A second second-order interaction was significant between the kind of company, the kind of harassment and the pro/antisocial behaviors ( $F(20, 1040) = 2,45$ ,  $p < .0003$ ). When the worker was overvictimized, the judges took less into account the kind of harassment than when he was not overvictimized, for production prosocial behavior. When the bullied was overvictimized, the judges took more into account the intrigues when he wasn't, for production deviance. In the event of antisocial behaviors, the employees in hospital helped less than the employees in companies, whereas in the case of prosocial behaviors, the reverse occurred. However, these differences were not significant in the case of attacks to health for the three antisocial behaviors and in the cases of several intrigues for property deviance.

## Discussion

Prosocial behaviors increase the intention to assist as predicted by Hypothesis 1. There is a hierarchy in the intentions to give help according to the type of harassment. Attacking health initiates the most heightened intention to support, and incontestably and clearly differs from the other behaviors. In addition, all the harassment acts were distinguished, with these exceptions: to silence someone did not differ from to slander and from to humiliate, and to slander did not differ from to humiliate. The fact of insulating the victim dramatically decreased the intention to support him/her (especially in the cases of antisocial behaviors), although this act could be considered as serious too.

In fact, every behavior emitted by the workers had an important effect on the decision, because the intention to help was very high in the case of prosocial behaviors and was below the mean in the case of antisocial behaviors. However, the participants did not really make distinctions between the three antisocial behaviors and between the three prosocial behaviors, as if the positive or negative orientation of the act had more importance than the goal (property/production/political).

The judges in hospital were, overall, more lenient with respect to the victims and helped more in the event of prosocial behaviors. We can explain this result, firstly, by the fact that the hospital is a place where the prosocial behaviors are predominant and are an integral part of the professional practices. Secondly, prosocial behaviors include altruistic acts and help-giving and are prevalent in care services. On the other hand, the employees in hospital were also less helping when the employee emitted antisocial behavior. This stigmatization is more difficult to understand, because doctors and nurses are not supposed to make differences between their patients. It is possible that antisocial behaviors induce in the doctors and nurses negative affects such as anger and thus decrease the intention to help. Lastly, as previous results showed, (Desrumaux, 2007), the fact of knowing that somebody is overvictimized decreased the intention to assist. This appears paradoxical, because we might think that an overvictimized person needs more to be helped than another one. Moreover, it is possible that the judges differentiate between physical problems and psychological problems. Weiner, Perry and Magnusson (1988) found that individuals with somatically originated problems and stigmas (linked with diseases) were rated low on perceived personal responsibility and elicited little anger and much sympathy. On the other hand, persons with mental or behavioral stigma were perceived as responsible for their social stigma and evoked much anger and little sympathy. It also explains why, when the victim at work suffered from attacks on his health, the judges had the highest intention of help-giving as opposed to all other kinds of harassment.

In addition, the attribution is a determinant of helping behavior and the fact of knowing that a person has already been victimized engages his responsibility and decreases the motivation to help. The more a worker is victimized, the more the observer can feel anger, the more he is afraid to be compared to the victim and the more he will consider the victim as responsible, as explained by the just-world belief with regard to the victims (Lerner 1980; Hafer & Bègue, 2005). Finally, moral harassment can be considered as a mentally originated stigma and as an internal, controllable cause, which decreases help-giving.

## **Conclusion**

The kind of bullying, as well as the pro or antisocial behaviors at work emitted by the victims, are real modulators of the judgments of help-giving. The emission of prosocial behaviors and the fact of never having been victimized increase the intention to help. The work environment (hospital/company) also has an important effect on the judgments: the workers known to have emitted prosocial behaviors will be given more help than those known to have emitted antisocial behaviors and this effect is stronger in hospital than in company. In the same way, the subordinates will help more in the case of prosocial behaviors and help less in the event of antisocial conducts than the superiors.

Thus, the fact of dissemination of a negative piece of information on the behavior of a badgered employee can explain colleagues' non-intervention. Ultimately, only positive information given about the victim increases the aid. This positive information is bonded to positive affects and the affects are directly linked to social support (Juvonen, 1991, 1992; Weiner, 1993). However paradoxically, it is sometimes because of this type of prosocial behaviors that the employee, arousing the jealousy of a superior or colleagues, becomes a target to badger (Hirigoyen, 2001; Poilpot-Rocaboy, 2000). Ultimately, negative information such as the antisocial behavior, the responsibility (Weiner, 2001, Rudolph et al., 2004), the overvictimization undoubtedly induce negative affects and decreases help. Moreover, the witnesses think that the victim can still exert control on the events, that he/she can react, whereas often he/she is frightened by the situation.

Certain kinds of harassment such as the fact of physically or morally insulating the victim, considered as less serious, decrease this intention of assistance, which contributes to

perpetuating the situation. To come out of this process of harassment which is based on judgments, without leaving the company, the victim should be presented not as a stigmatized person but as able to leave behind any negative information about himself and seeking care to develop himself near others by prosocial behaviors at work. It is possible in this case that he or she will obtain social support of the environment, provided, however, that this professional environment can work in conformity with the normally expected human conducts at the workplace.

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Table 1: variance analysis of the effects of variables on help-giving judgment

	<i>Ddl</i>	<i>MC</i>	<i>Dl erreur</i>	<i>MC erreur</i>	<i>F</i>
Intention of help-giving					
Pro/antisocial behaviors	5	763.01	260	19.97	38.19***
Kind of bullying	4	93.08	208	7.43	12.52***
Overvictimization	1	18.49	52	4.44	4.16*
Bullying x pro/ anti social behaviors	20	12.44	1040	4.80	2.58***
Pro/anti social behaviors x 5 overvictimization		11.13	260	4.87	2.28*
Pro/antisocial behaviors x kind of 5 company		229.63	260	19.97	11.49***
Overvictimization x kind of company	1	43.09	52	4.44	9.70**
Bullying x pro/antisocial behaviors x 20 overvictimization		7.03	1040	3.81	1.84**
Bullying x pro/antisocial behaviors x 20 kind of company		11.81	1040	4.80	2.45**
Bullying x status x overvictimization	4	7.83	208	3.23	2.42*
Pro/antisocial behavior x status	5	147.96	260	19.97	7.40***
Status x kind of company x pro 5 /antisocial behaviors		106.93	260	19.97	5.35***

\* p < .05; \*\* p < .01; \*\*\* p < .001; ns = non significant