The phenomenon of mobbing among young employees in relation to the size of the organization in Poland

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Abstract: The article is deals with the phenomenon of mobbing affects young people taking their first steps on the labour market in relation to the size of the organization. It is obvious that mobbing has a deep impact on individuals. Nevertheless, it also has profound, consequences for management in the organization, quality of management and atmosphere in the organization, which consequently translates into the performance of the whole organization. The objectives of the article were achieved by using the survey questionnaire research tool. The conclusions of the article can provide important guidance to management practitioners, giving an insight into the situation of mobbing depending on the size of the organization.

Keywords: mobbing, questionnaire, organization's size, management, Poland

1. Introduction

Mobbing in literature is defined as moral, psychological and often physical persecution in the workplace, which is repetitive. This phenomenon is equal to psychological or physical bullying, (Safina &Podgornaya, 2014) and specific activities, interactions or processes considered to be harassment must be repeated at regular basis (Einarsenet al., 2003; Duffy & Sperry, 2012).

Mobbing carries a huge risk as it can cause a total mental and physical breakdown in the persecuted worker – which can lead to burnout. Burnout among employees leads to a deterioration in the performance of the organization due to poor productivity and employee involvement (Yesilbas&Wan, 2017; Arnejčič, 2016). Mobbing has also consequences for employees' organizational attitudes (Ertureten et al., 2013). Hence, the issue of the fight against bullying is of paramount importance as organizations are consistently looking ways to reduce occupational stress to improve the productivity of their employees (Qureshi et al., 2015).

Many studies are limited to individual groups of organizations in the private or public sectors (Vveinhardt&Streimikiene, 2017). Nevertheless, the studies show that there is a higher the risk of experiencing mobbing in the public sector (Hutchinson & Jackson, 2015). Furthermore, there are claims that organizations with many employees, male-dominated

organizations, and industrial organizations had the highest prevalence of victimization (Einarsen&Skogstad, 1996), bullying also seems more prevalent in SMEs without a people-oriented culture and in family businesses (Baillien et al. 2011).

The article concerns the phenomenon of mobbing that affects young people taking their first steps on the labour market in relation to the size of the organization. It is obvious that mobbing has a deep impact on individuals. The objectives of the article were achieved by using the survey questionnaire research tool. It is vital to analyse the phenomenon of mobbing because it not only affects individuals, but also has profound, very serious, consequences for management in the organization, quality of management and atmosphere in the organization, which consequently translates into the activity and outcome of the whole organization (Matthiesen&Einarsen, 2001; Qureshi et al., 2015). The conclusions of the article can provide important guidance to management practitioners, giving an insight into the situation of mobbing depending on the size of the organization. This paper comprises five sections. Following this introduction is a brief review of the literature on trade a phenomenon of mobbing and its impact on organizations. The next section presents the method used in order to achieve the aim of this paper. Then, the results of empirical studies conducted in the group of respondents. The article concludes with the conclusions of the study carried out.

2. Analysis of mobbing and its impact on organizations

Mobbing is defined as a horizontal form of harassment in the workplace, due to the fact that it occurs between two or more people working in the same position in the hierarchy of the organization, both in the lowest positions, up to those in top management positions. In the case of harassment of a person at various levels in the organization (e.g., harassment of a subordinate), the literature refers to the concept of bossing, which is a type of abuse, directed from a senior position to a lower-level person in the organizational hierarchy (Birknerováet al., 2021). However, mobbing is commonly used to describe all situations in which an employee, supervisor or manager is systematically, repeatedly repressed by colleagues, subordinates or superiors (Shelton, 2011; Duffy & Sperry, 2012). There are claim that it usually targets bright, successful, and creative people (Senol et al., 2015), but it should be kept in mind that any employee can meet with this behaviour.

Research into workplace bullying shows that mobbing not only has a dramatic and destructive impact on victims of bullying, but can and very often also has a negative impact on the organization as a whole (Matthiesen&Einarsen, 2001). Many studies suggest that bullying and intimidation can also have a negative impact on witnesses or bystanders and consequently affect relationships across the organization (Hoghet al., 2011; Hoel& Cooper, 2000; Vartia, 2001). It is specified as the mobbing has a negative effect on organizational commitment as well (Yüksel et al., 2011). It should be emphasized that people working in organizations are increasingly exposed to covert psychological violence in the workplace (Arnejčič, 2016). Mobbing has serious consequences for both the person being bullied and the organization (for the organization as a whole). Moreover, it entails major personal, family, professional and social implications (Batsi&Karamanis, 2019).When it comes to the organizational level, it inhibits, and often even prevents, the development and productivity of persons employed in particular positions. Such a significant impact of the phenomenon of

harassment at work not only on individuals, but also on the operation and management of organizations makes this phenomenon widely described by scientists (Duffy & Sperry, 2012).

Mobbing involves a variety of activities. The most common forms of harassment are: undesirable influence of managers on employees, demanding for obedience at all costs and degrading behaviour(Arnejčič, 2016), social exclusion, ridicule, imposed prohibitions and demands, and humiliation (Cacioppo & William, 2008), psychological and physical violence (e.g., undermining the authority/ridicule of the employee in the presence of the team, deliberate assignment of tasks that are very difficult or impossible to carry out, disregard for employee ideas and suggestions), aggression (threats/intimidation of the employee), abuse (sexual subtext behaviour towards the employee, insulting)(Branch, 2008). Mobbing is both subtle and difficult to identify situations, such as gossiping behind the victim's back or skipping it when sending emails with relevant information, as well as extreme and drastic events such as threats of physical violence (Warszewska-Makuch, 2008). The mobbing behaviour may be considered instrumental to achieve a certain goal—for example, to make a certain person leave the company or to receive a certain position at the cost of someone else (Zapf &Einarsen 2005).

The phenomenon of mobbing, its scale and prevention are key factors in the proper functioning and management of the organization. The impact of bullying can manifest itself at individual employees, departments or cells of the company, as well as at the general – organizational level, sometimes at the same time at levels. The negative effects of bullying can result in a decrease in employee engagement, resulting in dysfunctions for the whole organization (Yesilbas& Wan, 2017). Workplace harassment is seen as the reason for the escalation of conflicts in the workplace, which negatively affects the perception of the organization by its employees and their motivation to act (Leon-Perez et al., 2015).

As regards solutions to this problem they may be different depending on the size of the organization. Nevertheless there a few comprehensive answers to this problem. Organizations should be guided by the principles of corporate social responsibility, which broadens the perception of human resources as important organizational capital and provides opportunities for the integral development of the concept of physical and mental security of employees (Vveinhardtet al., 2017; Leymann, 1996). The problem of harassment as a factor of psychological and/or physical harassment can be addressed,for instance, by developing common values in the organization, creating internal prevention structures, organizing training of managers and employees on the phenomenon of mobbing (Gkorezis&Kastritsi, 2017; Ciarnieneet al., 2017; Psunder, 2011; Georgiadis &Pitelis, 2016).

3. Method

In order to investigate the phenomenon of mobbing affects young people taking their first steps on the labour market in relation to the size of the organization in Poland the questionnaire was used as a research tool. It should be stressed that, due to the different conditions of organizations depending on the number of employees employed in them, scientific literature abounds in many works, dealing with management issues in the organization precisely in terms of the size of the organization (e.g., Van Looy& Van den Bergh, 2018; Ying Hong et al., 2019). The online survey questionnaire consisted of 12 questions and a metric. In order to achieve the survey's objectives, the survey was addressed

to randomly selected young people who have their first work experience behind them. The data was collected from March 13, 2021 to March 23, 2021.

The study sample consists of 1,072 respondents, of which 797 were women (74.3%) and 275 were men (25.7%). The age structure of the respondents is shown in Figure 1.
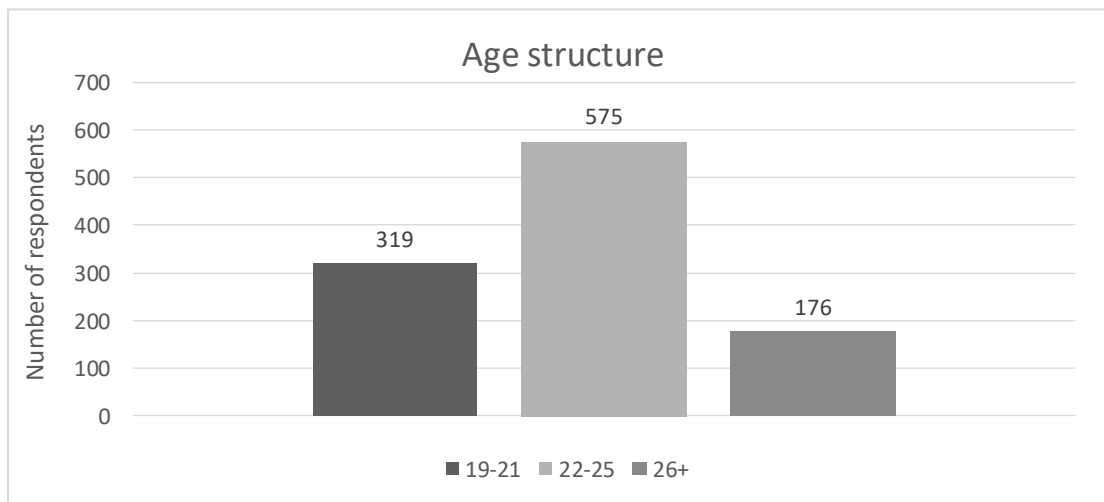

Figure 1. Age structure of respondents. Source: own study.

In the 19-21 age range, 319 respondents took part in the survey, representing 29.8% of the study sample, in the 22-25 age range – 575 respondents representing 53.6% of the sample, while those over the age of 26 accounted for 16.4% of the respondents. Figure 2 shows the structure of respondents when it comes to the seniority.
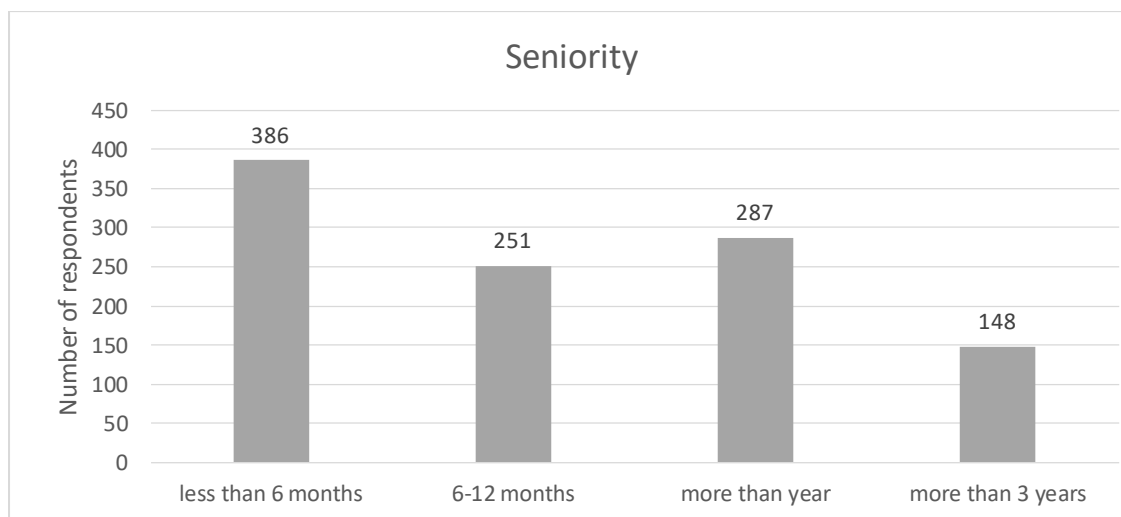

Figure 2. Structure of respondents in terms of their seniority. Source: own study.

Among those surveyed, the shortest working period, i.e., less than 6 months, has 36% of the test sample. As regards length of service between 6 and 12 months, 23.4% of respondents declared such seniority. Over a year, 26.8% of respondents work and 13.8% of those with

more than 3 years of experience in the research sample. Figure 3 shows the distribution of respondents in terms of the size of organizations in which they are employed.

Figure 3. The distribution of respondents in terms of the size of organizations. Source: own study.

Among respondents in the smallest organizations – up to 10 people work 30.5%. The largest group is people employed in companies with up to 50 employees – 36.1%. Companies with up to 250 employees employ 12.8% of those surveyed, while the largest organizations with more than 250 employees employ 20.6% of respondents. In order to achieve the objectives of the study, i.e., to determine the degree of harassment among young workers depending on the size of the organization, the questionnaires collected were analysed and collected according to the size key of the organization. The results of the studies will be presented in the next part of this article.

4. Results
4.1.Workplace atmosphere

In the first question of the survey, respondents were asked to describe the atmosphere in their workplace. They were to make assessments on the basis of a 5-point scale, in which 1 means bad, hostile atmosphere, while 5 – the best, very friendly. The distribution of the answer to this question, taking into account the size of an organization, is shown in Figure 4.
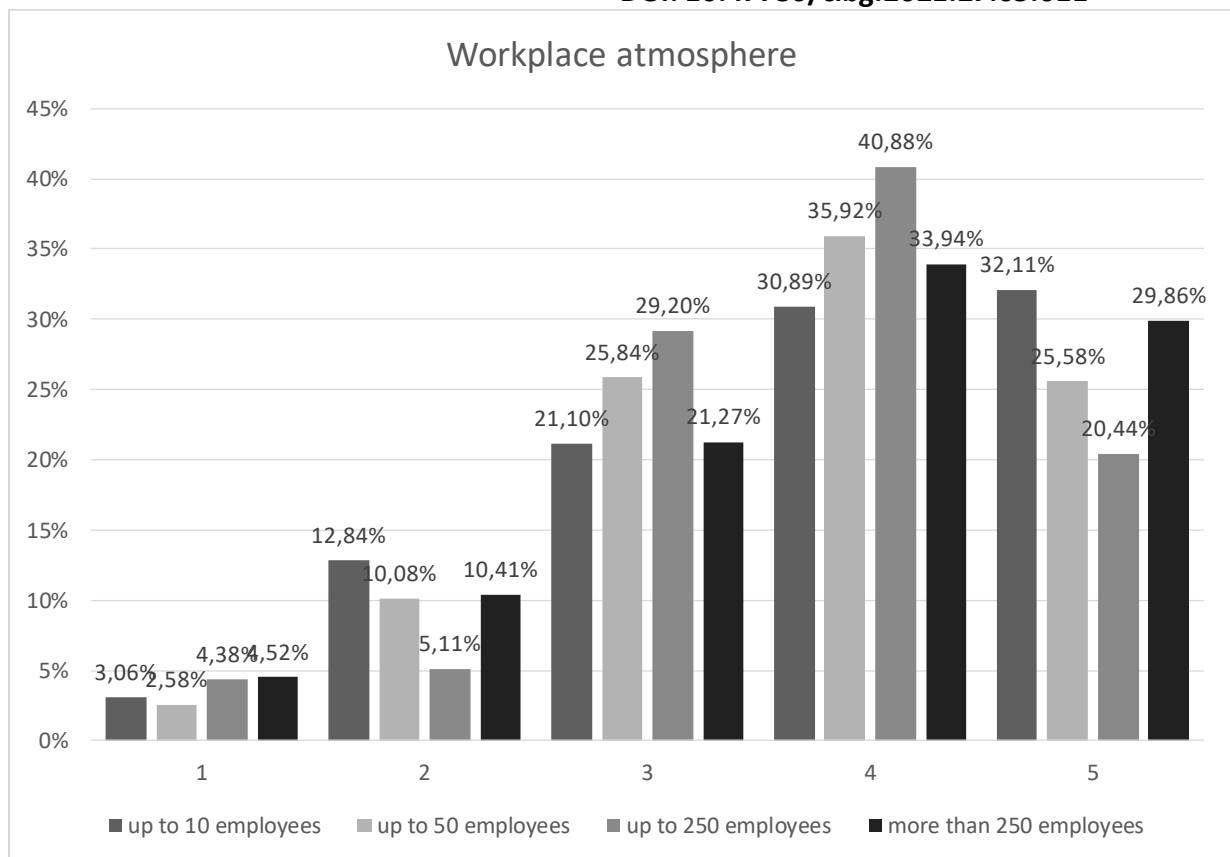
Figure 4. The distribution of respondents' opinions on workplace atmosphere. Source: own study.

The analysis of the results obtained shows that there are no significant differences in the assessment and perception of the workplace atmosphere in terms of organisations of different sizes. Respondents to the vast majority of respondents have a positive view of the atmosphere in their organisation. However, the differences in marginal assessments can be pointed out. In organisations with up to 250 employees, 20.44% of respondents indicate that the atmosphere is very friendly, while the highest percentage (32.11%) indicates a great atmosphere in the smallest organizations (up to 10 employees). The opposite is the case when considering much worse assessments. The bad atmosphere (rating 2) is indicated by the smallest organizations (12.84%), and the least in organizations up to 250 employees (5.11%). In summary, the biggest fluctuations in ratings take place in the smallest companies.

Another task of the respondents was to determine how employees are treated in the workplace of the persons surveyed. Namely, it was necessary to indicate whether workers were treated in the same way or whether there were groups treated worse or distinguished. The structure of the answer to this question is shown in Figure 5.
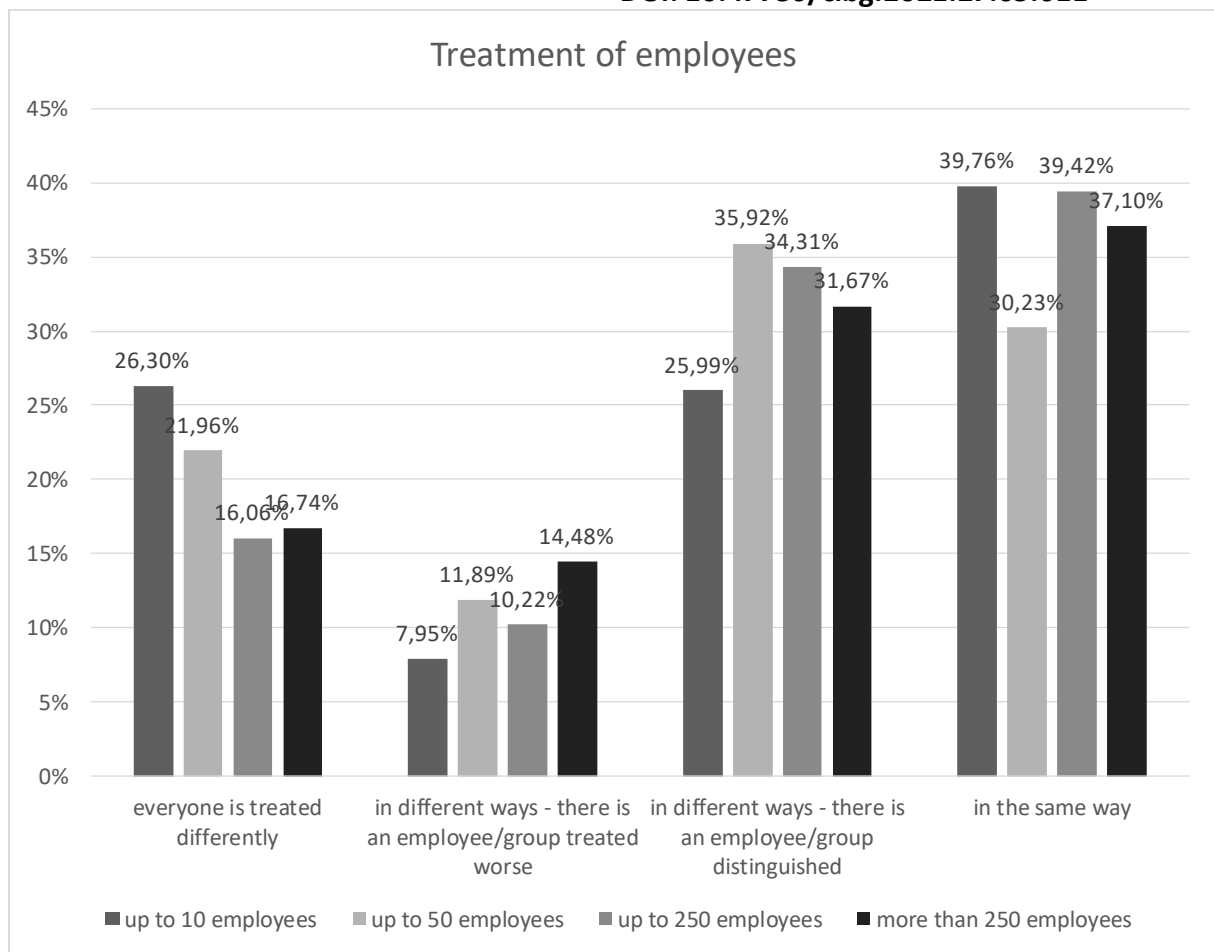
Figure 5. Opinion of respondents on the treatment of employees in their organization. Source: own study.

As regards the treatment of workers, the situation is very similar to the distribution of the answer to the question of the atmosphere at work. The positive situation is that in all but in organizations (up to 50 employees), the majority of respondents believe that workers are treated equally. In all types of organizations, subjects rarely encounter the situation that there is a group that is treated worse – which is also a positive sign. It is also worth noting that in the smallest organizations there are again large fluctuations in responses – almost 40% of respondents believe that everyone is treated equally, and at the same time for less than 30% of respondents everyone is treated differently.

Very often, respondents face a situation where there is a group of distinguished people. In all organisations with more than 10 employees, this percentage is more than 30%. It should be stressed that there are also no significant differences for this study, in terms of the size.

4.2. The phenomenon of mobbing in the workplace

Subsequent questions of the survey were closely related to mobbing and an attempt to determine the degree of occurrence of this phenomenon. Figure 6 shows the distribution of respondents' responses to a question about signs of discrimination in their workplace.
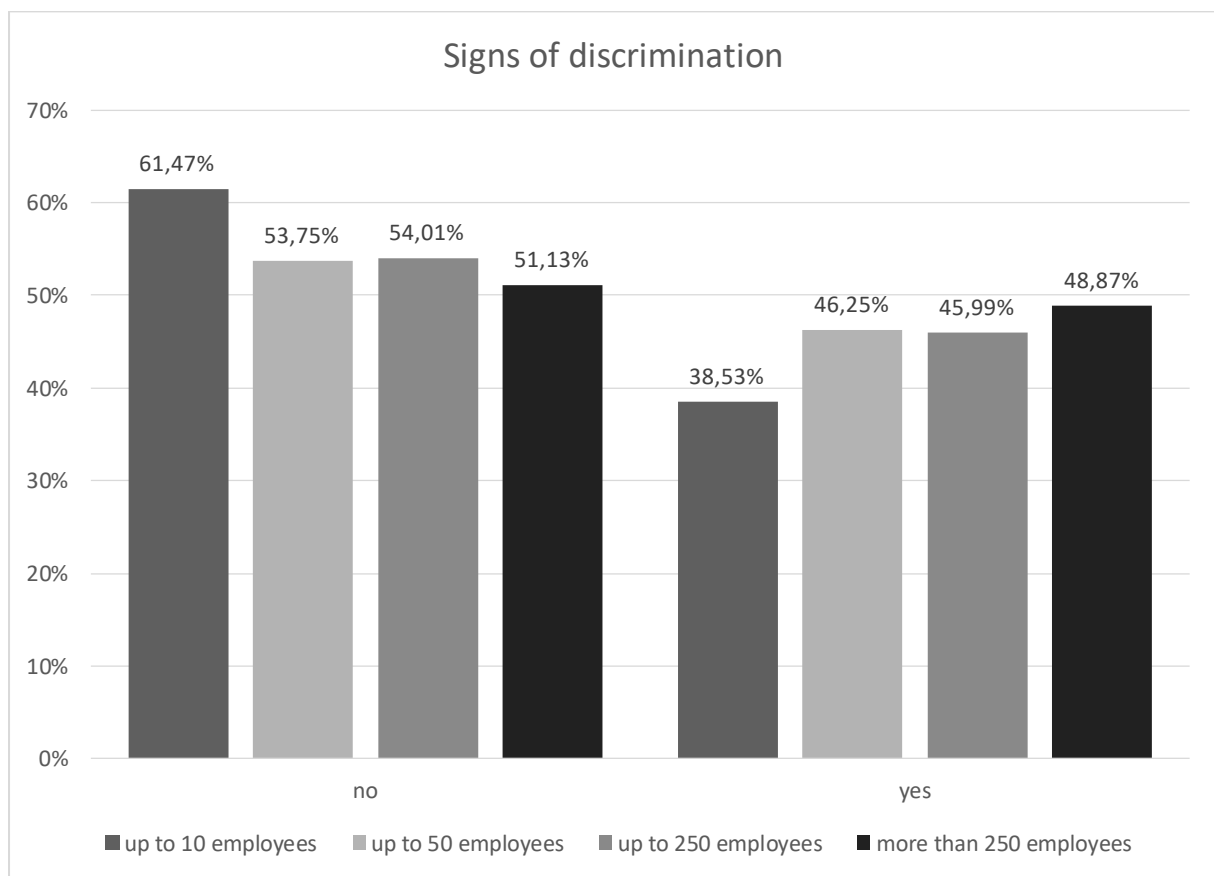
Figure 6. Signs of discrimination in the workplace. Source: own study.

The best situation with regard to the phenomenon of discrimination against workers occurs in the smallest companies (up to 10 employees), where more than 60% of respondents do not see signs of discrimination. In other cases, the percentage of people who have met and not encountered this phenomenon is at a similar level and hovers around 50%. The least favourable situation occurs among those surveyed working in the largest organizations (more than 250 employees), where as many as 48.87% of respondents faced signs of discrimination against employees.

Another issue raised in the survey questionnaire was the prevalence of bullying behaviour. Figures 7-10 show the responses of groups of by organisation size.
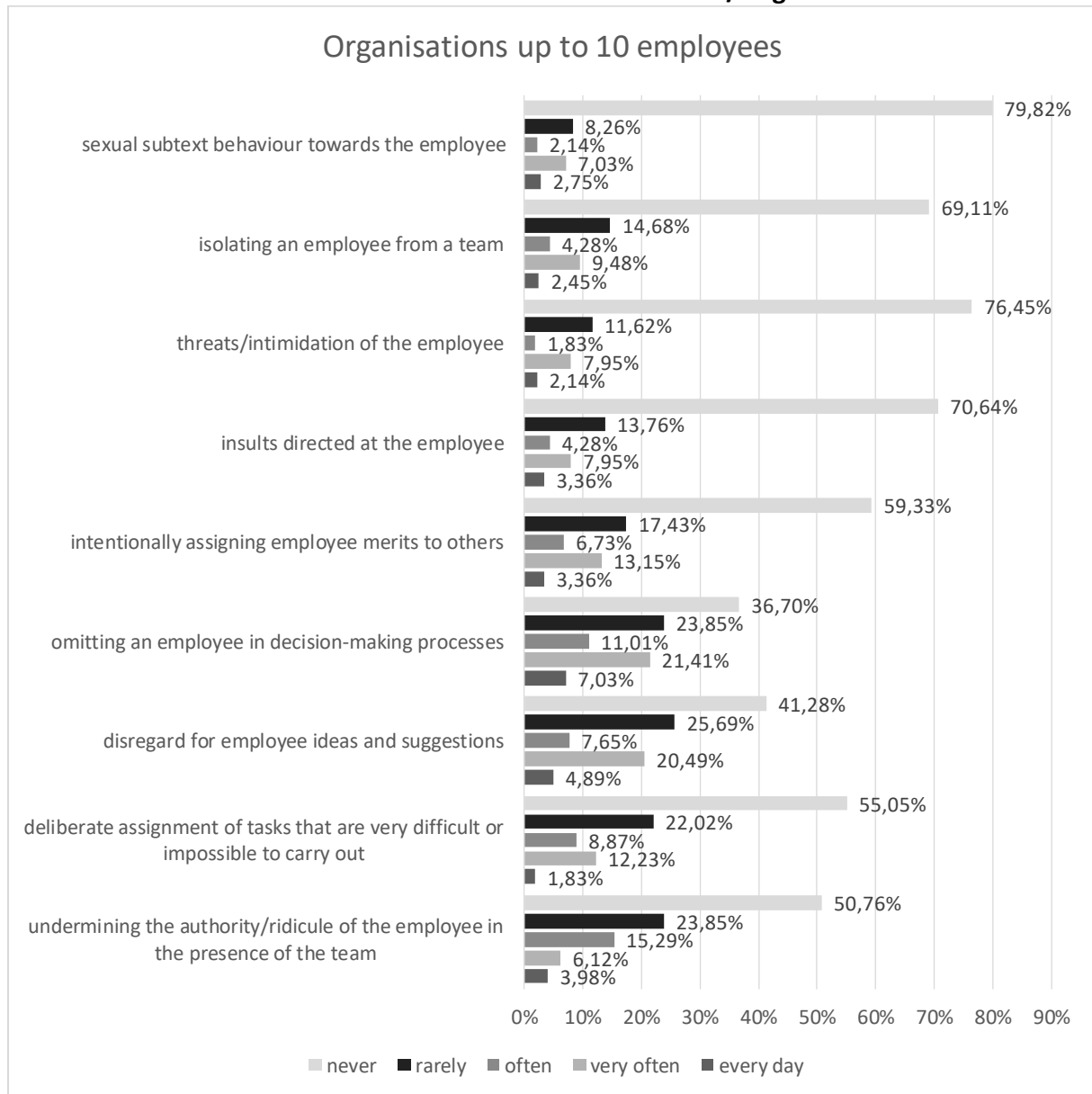
Figure 7. Mobbing behaviour in organisations up to 10 employees. Source: own study.
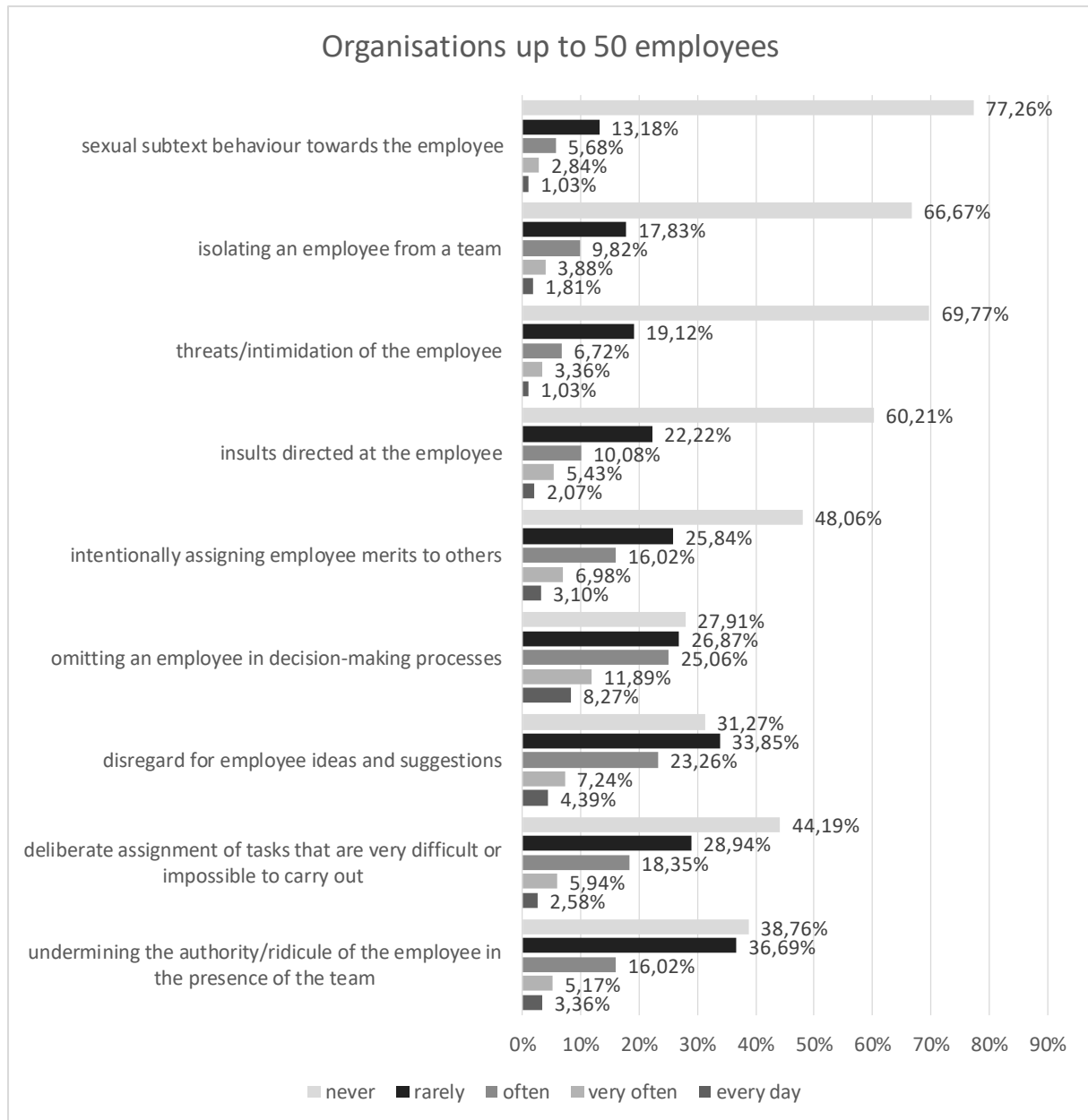
Figure 8. Mobbing behaviour in organisations up to 50 employees. Source: own study
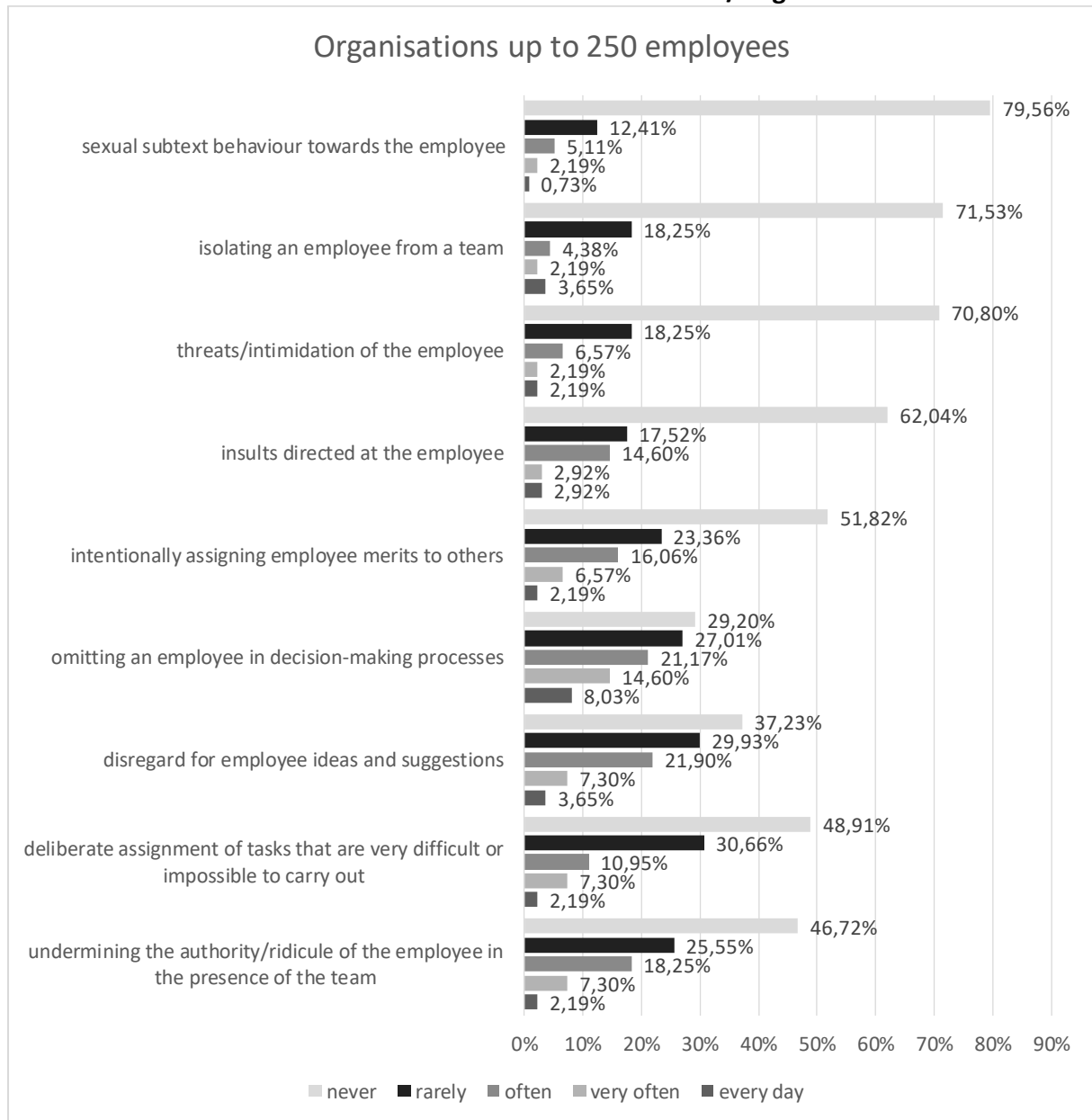
Figure 9. Mobbing behaviour in organisations up to 250 employees. Source: own study
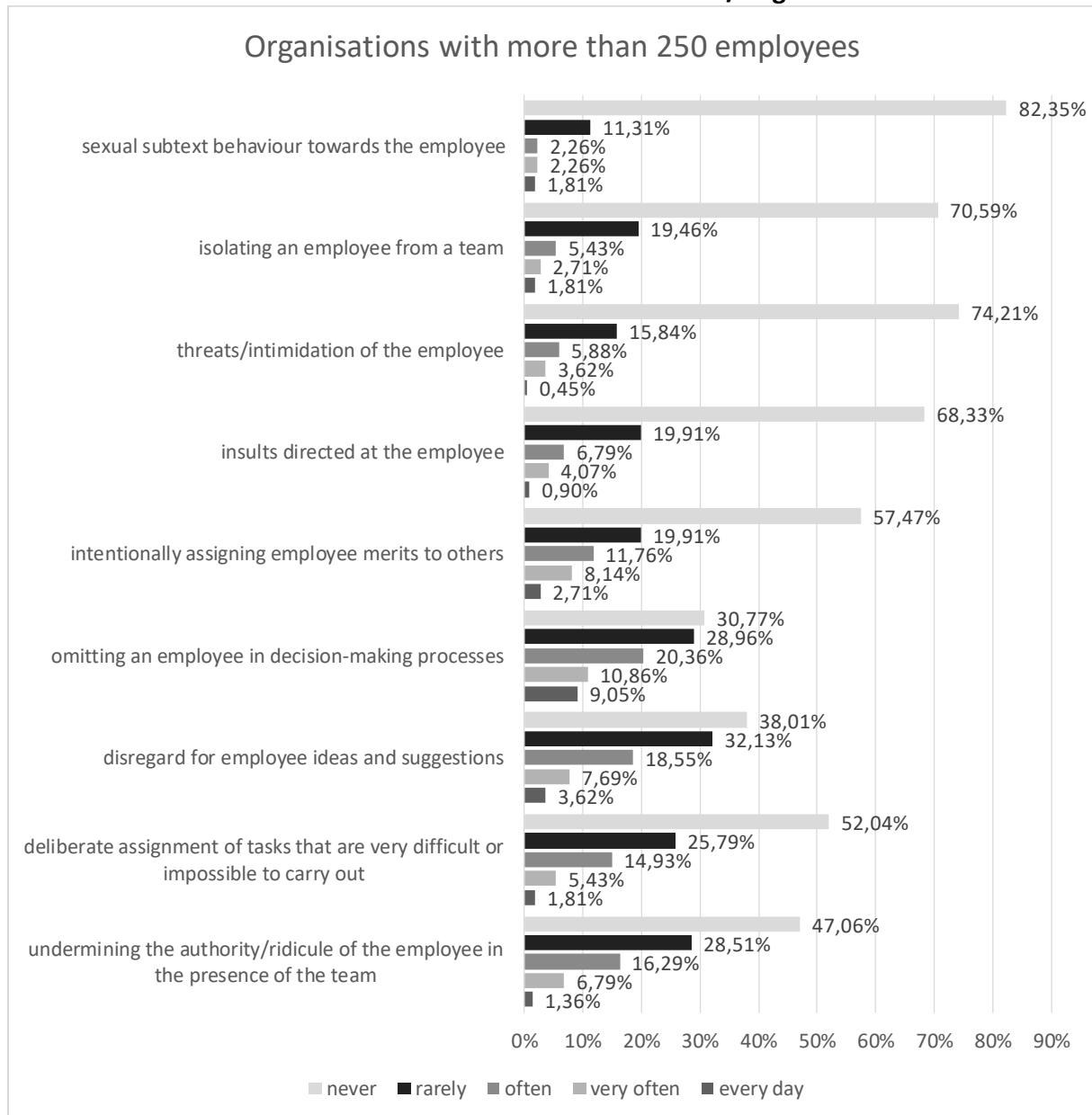
Figure 10. Mobbing behaviour in organisations with more than 250 employees. Source: own study

The analysis of the responses received and the comparison of them between organisations of different sizes does not show any significant differences in the incidence of individual mobbing behaviours.

In any case, the phenomena most commonly found in organisations are: omitting an employee in decision-making processes, disregard for employee ideas and suggestions and undermining the authority/ridicule of the employee in the presence of the team. Convergence, regardless of the size of the organization, can also be observed among the least emerging behaviours. Among them, the least common are: sexual subtext behaviour towards the employee, isolating an employee from a team, threats/intimidation of the employee, insults directed at the employee.

5. Conclusions

The Fourth European Working Conditions Survey (Parent-Thirionet al., 2007) points out that mobbing affects around 5% of workers in Europe, with significant differences between countries due to cultural factors (Zapf et al., 2011). Many scientists point to various causes of mobbing. Among the most frequent are the following reasons: characteristics of the company, the personalities of employees, culture and organizational structure and social groups in the workplace or huge errors in the management (Leymann, 1996; Bas, 2011; Acar et al., 2014).

The aim of the article was to describe the phenomenon of mobbing which affects young people taking their first steps on the labour market in relation to the size of the organization. Although mobbing can affect anyone anywhere, most victims of mobbing do not know their rights and do not know how to behave, in the face of this phenomenon (Erdis et al., 2019). There are claims that in some industries mobbing may occur more frequently due to more appropriate conditions for the occurrence of this phenomenon (Vveinhardt&Sroka, 2020b;Birknerová et al., 2021). When it comes to size of the organization the phenomenon of mobbing has been observed in almost all companies regardless of their size – small, middle size, large and global companies (Vveinhardt&Sroka, 2020a) and study present in this paper proves that point.

Furthermore, studies have shown that there are no significant differences in the prevalence of harassment between organisations of different sizes. However, it can be shown that among the smallest organisations there are fluctuations in the assessment, in the case of the atmosphere at work and the treatment of employees. Almost 40% of respondents believe that everyone is treated equally, and at the same time for less than 30% of respondents everyone is treated differently and the highest percentage (32.11%) indicates a great atmosphere in the smallest organizations (up to 10 employees). The opposite is the case when considering much worse assessments. The bad atmosphere (rating 2) is indicated by the smallest organizations (12.84%). This may stem from the fact that not all the smallest organisations have standards of employee behaviour or onboarding – hence these different assessments of the situation may take place.

When it comes to specific forms of mobbing at work, the most common are: omitting an employee in decision-making processes and ignoring the employee's ideas and suggestions. This may indicate that superiors rarely use human capital in their organization, ignoring the ideas of employees.

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