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New Risks in Hybrid Work and Teleworking Contexts—Insights from a Study in Portugal

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Abstract

With the development of information and communication technologies, analysing new risks of moral harassment at work is becoming increasingly pertinent, especially with the expansion of teleworking and hybrid working (a mix of remote and face-to-face work per week) in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. In an attempt to respond to the new issues of labour regulation, this study places special emphasis on new risks of moral harassment in hybrid work and teleworking contexts, considering both the international and European framework and the legal regime in Portugal, identifying its specificities. With the rise in teleworking in the post-pandemic period, the online monitoring of workers has accentuated the difficulty in drawing the line between managerial power and harassment. Moral harassment at work is a persistent challenge and organisations must recognise, prevent and respond to inappropriate behaviour in the organisation. The results of this study—based on the results of an online survey completed by employees (with employment contracts)—show that teleworking employees recognise that they have been pressured, above all, both to respond to messages quickly and pressure to work beyond hours and suggest possible gender differences in the way harassment in hybrid work and teleworking contexts is reported.

Keywords: information and communication technologies; hybrid work and teleworking contexts; moral harassment at work; new risks

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1. Introduction

1.1. Expansion of Teleworking and New Risks

The expansion of remote working through information and communication technologies (ICT)—clearly facilitating communication between people and organisations and confirming a permanent process of broad interactivity at work—is gaining increasing importance in the world of work. This situation has been exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, which highlights the importance of ICT not only for organisations but also for the economy and society. This has led to a considerable increase in the use of teleworking and the emergence of hybrid work. Although there are disadvantages (De Vries et al. 2019; Vacchiano et al. 2024), there are many advantages to teleworking, making the organisation attractive to employees, increasing flexibility and strengthening the organisation's resilience (Morgan 2004; OECD 2023a).

In the current post-pandemic context, several companies have preferred to adopt teleworking or hybrid working systems, i.e., mixed systems in which the employee spends part of their time working from home and the other part in person at the organisation. And hybrid work will henceforth be a strong trend in labour practice, as international studies indicate (Eurofound 2020a, 2022; ILO 2020b, 2021; Castaneda et al. 2022; Teevan 2022; Deloitte 2025).

Thus, as part of this digital transition movement and the expansion of remote working, involving an ever-increasing number of teleworkers, it is certain that new legal problems will arise that labour law will have to deal with (Supiot 2020). And, as Supiot notes, performance monitoring will be very important for rethinking subordinates' working relationships, presenting new opportunities but also new risks, particularly in terms of moral harassment.

It is therefore necessary to understand whether work carried out in remote and hybrid work contexts can trigger new forms of moral harassment at work.

Although the scope of the concept is recognised internationally, there is no single concept of moral harassment. However, we can define moral harassment at work, in its broadest sense, as behaviours that affect employees, with the aim or effect of disturbing or embarrassing them or creating a hostile, intimidating or destabilising environment. Considering the specific challenges of digital work, it is also necessary to include in the various categories of harassing practices all kinds of pressure to capture images, sounds, or other data related to privacy; to work beyond normal working hours; to respond quickly to messages or to deny resources (ICT) to carry out a hybrid work or teleworking activity.

The purpose of this article was therefore to investigate the existence (or not) of moral harassment during teleworking and hybrid work, as well as to identify the forms of moral harassment and who perpetrates it.

At the international level, most countries consider moral harassment to be the exposure of one or more workers to humiliating, repetitive and prolonged situations at work. Harassment can be physical (e.g., physical attacks, pushing), psychological (e.g., verbal abuse, intimidation, isolating a person, withholding information, slandering and ridiculing, devaluing rights and opinions, setting impossible targets and deadlines, underutilising talent) and/or sexual (e.g., sexual assault, innuendo) (ILO 2020a). The legal systems developed in different countries generally associate harassment at work with an organisational factor and a considerable risk to the health and well-being of those exposed (Hoel and Cooper 2000; Renaut 2003; Salin 2008a, 2008b; Baillien et al. 2011; Dragano et al. 2011; Salin and Hoel 2011; Ballard and Easteal 2018; Kawada 2020; Sudhanshu et al. 2023; Vacchiano et al. 2024). Studies indicate new physical and psychosocial risks at work, such as the intensity of work caused by meeting tight deadlines and almost permanent control of work (Eurofound 2019a, p. 15). Other studies show a relationship (direct and indirect) between moral harassmen and job insecurity (Baillien and De Witte 2009) or work overload (Duxbury et al. 1992; Junça et al. 2022). Still others focus on the causes of workplace bullying, studying the interaction between workload and job autonomy, suggesting that high-stress jobs are related to both being a target and a perpetrator, but through different processes (Baillien et al. 2011). There have also been studies investigating workplace bullying by identifying victims (Coyne et al. 2000, 2003) and others examining the role of observers' behavioural analyses in convicting victims (Diekmann et al. 2013).

In addition, various studies have shown a link between moral harassment and lower job and organisational satisfaction, work-related stress and the impact on mental health, as well as psychosomatic symptoms such as depression, anxiety, irritability and sleep problems (Kivimäki et al. 2000, 2003; Hoel et al. 2004; Hansen et al. 2006; Niedhammer et al. 2006; Hauge et al. 2007; Hansen et al. 2011; Evesson et al. 2015; Eurofound 2015; Friis et al. 2018).

Other studies identify the wide range of harmful workplace behaviours that are consistent with the phenomenon of moral harassment worldwide, for example, 'psychological harassment, personal harassment, power harassment, workplace aggression, workplace harassment or abusive supervision' (Ballard and Easteal 2018). The term mobbing was adopted by Leymann (1990), who used it to describe hostile acts carried out by individuals with the aim of getting someone to give up their job or position. Later, the psychiatrist Hirigoyen adopted the expression 'harcèlement moral' (Hirigoyen 2001).

On the other hand, since the 1970s—with Carroll Brodsky's book The Harassed Worker (Brodsky 1976)—to the present day, the issue has been analysed at a multidisciplinary level but has also been linked to gender equality (Blumenthal 1998; Salin 2003, 2008b; Eriksen and Einarsen 2004; Berg 2006; Berdahl 2007; Leskinen et al. 2011; Vartia and Leka 2011; Leskinen and Cortina 2014; Sojo et al. 2016; CBI 2018; Pietiläinen et al. 2020; Eurofound 2022; Blindow et al. 2024). Salin (2008b) points out that the gender of the manager and the provision of information and training to raise awareness of harassment influence organisational responses. Berg's (2006) study indicated a moderately strong relationship between the experience of everyday sexism and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and the results shown by the Blumenthal (1998) study indicate that the gender effect is relatively small, suggesting caution in establishing the reasonable woman standard (a 'reasonable victim standard'). The Bourgeois and Perkins (2003) study also indicates that the results in women only show a difference compared to men when there is a power relationship involved, which supports a sociocultural explanation that harassment is influenced by power differences. The study by Leskinen et al. (2011), on the other hand, considers that women who are victims of sexual harassment show significant reductions in professional and psychological well-being and that these findings underline the seriousness of gender harassment, which deserves greater attention, from both the law and the social sciences. It should also be noted that according to the European Working Conditions Telephone Survey 2021 (EWCTS), women are more exposed (than men) to the risks of adverse social behaviours at work, such as burnout, exhaustion, anxiety and depression. The EWCTS found that, on average, 12.5% of EU workers experienced some form of adverse social behaviour at work in 2021, but that the percentage of women who experienced adverse social behaviour at work was consistently higher than that of men (Eurofound 2023b).

It is therefore also revealing when studying the emergence of new risks of harassment in remote work by identifying whether women are more prone (than men) to harassment in hybrid work and teleworking contexts.

Moral harassment is a persistent challenge in organisations and is particularly relevant in the context of rapid changes in work organisation, digital transition and the expansion of remote working. Failure to recognise, prevent and respond to inappropriate conduct and/or illegal behaviour in the workplace generates mistrust throughout the organisation. Furthermore, on an individual level it reduces motivation and on a collective level it jeopardises the company's good performance. The intensification of this social awareness and the public debate on unacceptable behaviour and practices at work has emerged since the 1990s, reinforcing the importance for companies to proactively address harassment at work. And it has required an adaptation of the practices to be adopted in the workplace, regardless of the location, size, sector or type of company (Hanot 2010). In cultures where these unacceptable behaviours are not combated, they send a strong message that such behaviours are tolerated. And this danger remains in the context of the expansion of the use of ICT at work and remote working. What is more, employers should be heavily involved in promoting a good working environment, defining acceptable behaviour in their internal regulations and punishing certain unacceptable behaviours and practices (Ansoleaga et al. 2019; ILO 2020a, p. 16). The literature has also studied people's exposure

to 'negative' behaviour at work and its strong interconnection with management, as well as the explained relationship between stress or distress (Einarsen et al. 1994, 2011; Einarsen and Skogstad 1996; Zapf et al. 1996; Einarsen and Raknes 1997; Einarsen 1999; Matthiesen and Einarsen 2001, 2004; Hoel et al. 2004; Glaso et al. 2007; Skogstad et al. 2007; Hoel and Einarsen 2010; Nielsen et al. 2010; Notelaers et al. 2010; Zapf et al. 2011; Hincker 2012; Nielsen and Einarsen 2012).

So, as identified in the literature, there are three challenges regarding harassment in teleworking: to make workers' legal obligations to prevent harassment at work effective; strengthening prevention and training policies; and apply standardised procedures to deal with cases of non-compliance (Fernández Collados 2024a, 2024b). The literature also emphasises that the consequences for victims of harassment are wide-ranging and can range from anxiety, depression and stress to, in extreme cases, suicide (Martinez Jiménez 2024, p. 241).

Thus, as well as creating risks to people's safety and health at work, harassment imposes numerous costs on workers, companies and society (Giga et al. 2008; Pillinger 2017; Friis et al. 2018; Pradhan and Jena 2018). In addition to the loss of the victims' well-being, these costs include lost productivity, higher workforce turnover, increased absenteeism, a reduction in the ability of companies to optimise talent, the increase in expenditure on medical and social assistance or judicial investigations (Evesson et al. 2015; Hoel and Cooper 2000; Kivimäki et al. 2020; ILO 2021, 2022).

Specifically with regard to digital harassment, the literature indicates that this phenomenon creates new risks for workers, beyond health, in particular related to personal and professional protection (honour), privacy and confidentiality of communications, including data protection (Altés-Tárrega and Aradilla-Marqués 2023). The literature on cyberbullying in the workplace (Jönsson et al. 2017) identifies this phenomenon as 'traditional bullying via electronic means', similar to other concepts proposed for school cyberbullying Farley et al. (2021) also presents cyberbullying in the workplace as similar to face-to-face bullying in the workplace, characterised by the persistent nature of the conduct. ILO research states that the phenomenon has been used to describe aggressive behaviour carried out via ICTs (Aloisi and De Stefano 2020; Altés-Tárrega and Aradilla-Marqués 2023) and literature identifies a great deal of identity between cyberbullying and face-to-face bullying (Privitera and Campbell 2009; Cowen Forssell 2016, 2019).

There are certain defining characteristics of harassment that vary according to digital media, with distinct characteristics that differentiate it from conventional face-to-face harassment (Altés-Tárrega and Aradilla-Marqués 2023), firstly because this harassment can be perpetrated by third parties (outside the workplace) and is perpetrated remotely in cyberspace (Wolak et al. 2007; Dooley et al. 2009; Jönsson et al. 2017). With the ongoing digital transition movement, various studies have warned of the emergence of 'new psychosocial risks'—in terms of working conditions, workers' health and well-being—related to work intensity and labour control (Eurofound 2019b). Hence the pertinence of choosing this theme to guide our research.

With the development of teleworking, the online monitoring of workers has intensified the employer's control, for example, by sending messages or e-mails, pressuring them to respond immediately (Aloisi and De Stefano 2020; Altés-Tárrega and Aradilla-Marqués 2023). And non-compliance with the duty to abstain from contact is more likely to happen in the case of teleworking, since the teleworker is often at home, isolated (Eurofound 2021b; Rebelo et al. 2024). This can lead the teleworker into situations of burnout, it can trigger psychological illnesses associated with work-related stress, such as anxiety or depression, and it can represent moral harassment (Eurofound 2018). In particular, the literature has

explored the impact of psychosocial risks and challenges in the digital age, particularly in relation to occupational mental health (Zlatanović and Škobo 2024).

The global movement of technological change—and, in particular, the rise in the use ICT and new forms of work (such as teleworking and hybrid work)—brings new risks of moral harassment at work, highlighting the relevance of its study, given that it aims to respond to a gap identified in the international literature specifically on the subject of new risks in hybrid work and teleworking contexts.

1.2. International Framework—The ILO's Warnings on Harassment and New Risks

In 2019, at its centenary 108th session, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) adopted both Convention 190 and Recommendation 206 on Harassment. Thus, the ILO recognised that violence and harassment are a significant threat to the safety and health of workers and can constitute a violation or abuse of human rights that is incompatible with safe and decent work. Violence and harassment are distinct but interlinked concepts and in this ILO Convention they are presented as unacceptable practices 'aimed at or likely to result in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm' (Article 1). As early as 1981, Convention No. 155 on Safety and Health at Work specified that 'health' does not only indicate the absence of disease or infirmity, but also 'the physical and mental elements affecting health, which are directly related to safety and hygiene at work' (Article 3(e)). Furthermore, it specifically focused on how violence and harassment could be managed through occupational safety and health (OSH) measures, including regulation, policies, programmers and management systems. Violence and harassment at work are multifaceted phenomena with multiple actors: the perpetrators of violence and harassment in the workplace; the victims of this violence and harassment; and 'any bystanders/witnesses' (ILO 2020a, p. 11).

The adoption of ILO Convention No. 190 on Violence and Harassment in 2019, which entered into force on 25 June 2021, establishes in international law the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment, along with the obligation of states to respect, promote and realise this right. This Convention (and accompanying Recommendation 206) sets out the basic principles to be implemented by countries, linking equality and non-discrimination with occupational safety and health in a single instrument and thus ensuring a broad scope of personal protection. Although some countries have provisions on violence and harassment in labour-related legislation, the adoption of Convention No. 190 and Recommendation No. 206 reinforced the social partners' commitment to implementing laws and policies that shape a future of work based on dignity at work (ILO 2022).

Convention 190 defines violence and harassment broadly, considering it to cover 'a range of unacceptable behaviours and practices, or threats thereof, whether a single or repeated occurrence, which aim at, result in or are likely to result in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm and include gender-based violence and harassment' (C190 2019). The definition thus covers all forms of violence and harassment—verbal, physical, social or psychological—including gender-based violence and harassment. It centres on the unacceptability of practices or threats and their effects on victims. This Convention applies to situations of violence and harassment that occur at any time and in all circumstances related to work, including online, in offices, in the worker's home (particularly in the case of teleworking), public places, during meals or breaks, and while travelling to and from work. Furthermore, it covers the formal and informal economy, the public and private sectors, as well as any worker and person who works regardless of their contractual status.

In 2020, the ILO's Safe and Healthy Working Environments Free from Violence and Harassment report (ILO 2020a) analysed workplace violence and harassment as a significant threat to worker health and safety (increasing the risk of accidents at work),but also

highlighted its negative impact on productivity and the organisation's reputation. According to this document, there are many factors that contribute to violence and harassment at work (ILO 2020a, p. 13) and these include psychosocial risks and occupational stress (which can be understood as a psychosocial problem). Violence and harassment can have physical and mental consequences and increase stress levels, which is why it is often considered a psychosocial disorder in itself (*ibidem*). And, drawing on another Eurofound (2015) study, this report recognised that people who work in a high-stress environment are very prone to workplace harassment and individuals who experience harassment are more likely to report stress Furthermore, this study indicates that work-related stress can also occur when workers have little control over how (or when) their work is done, have little autonomy in their work, or when they are not involved in decisions that affect them or their clients (ILO 2020a, pp. 13–14).

According to ILO, violence and harassment at work are worldwide phenomena that affect one in five employed people (22.8% or 743 million) during their working lives. Of those who have suffered violence and harassment at work, 31.8% have suffered more than one form and 6.3% have faced all three forms (moral, physical and sexual) in their working life. In addition, 8.5% (277 million) of employed people have experienced physical violence and harassment at work in their working lives (ILO 2022, p. 8). Furthermore, psychological violence was the most common form of violence and harassment reported by both men and women, (17.9% or 583 million) employed people having suffered it in their working lives. By age, 23.3 per cent of young workers (aged 15 to 24) say they have experienced violence or harassment, just like 20.2% of workers aged 25 to 34 and 12.0% of those aged 55 and over. By gender, young women are more likely than young men to suffer violence and harassment at work (26.8% versus 20.8%) (ILO 2022, p. 27), with women employees being 2.5 percentage points more at risk of violence and harassment than men (ILO 2022, p. 33).

Almost five out of ten people who have experienced gender-based discrimination have also faced violence and harassment at work, compared to almost two out of ten who have not experienced gender-based discrimination. On the other hand, the incidence of violence and harassment among women who experience gender-based discrimination is higher than for men (50.9% and 46.8%, respectively) (ILO 2022, p. 35) This report also reveals that 54.4% of employees who have suffered violence or harassment have told others that they have been a victim (60.7% of women, compared to 50.1% of male victims) (ILO 2022, p. 38).

Strengthening reporting channels in companies is important because there is still a fear of talking about personal experiences of violence and harassment. As ILO points out, only 54.4% of victims share their experience with someone, often only after they have suffered more than one form of violence and harassment, and to tell friends or family instead of using informal or formal channels (ILO 2022, p. 8).

1.3. European Framework—Historical Evolution of the Prevention of Moral Harassment and New Risks

It should also be emphasised that the issue of preventing moral harassment and new risks has been developed at European level at various levels.

In 2001, the European Parliament Resolution on Moral Harassment in the Workplace No. 2339 considered deficiencies in work organisation as causes of moral harassment. This European Parliament Resolution on Moral Harassment in the Workplace—which in its text took into account, among other things, the Resolution of 25 October 2000 on the Social Policy Agenda—stressed that moral harassment constitutes a potential health risk, representing 'a serious problem of working life' for organisations.

Directive 2000/43/EC, of 29 June 2000, of the Council of the European Communities understood moral harassment as a form of discrimination, (unwanted behaviour related to

racial or ethnic origin), with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of the person and creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or destabilising environment'. In other words, since the beginning of this century, the European Union has called for policies to prevent harassment at work, with the aim of realising workers' rights to dignity and physical and psychological integrity. Also in European Parliament Resolution 2339/2001 on bullying in the workplace (2001/2339(INI)), it was understood that moral harassment constitutes a major risk to people's health, especially with regard to stress-related illnesses (European Parliament 2001). In fact, in companies (especially in the larger), organisational factors such as a lack of awareness of psychological well-being and the company culture itself become important in conditioning the working environment.

Also the European Social Dialogue generated the so-called 'new generation' texts, such as the Framework Agreement on Work-Related Stress (EU-OSHA 2004) and the Framework Agreement on Harassment and Violence at Work (EU-OSHA 2007). According to this Framework Agreement on Harassment and Violence at Work, there are various forms of harassment and violence that can affect workplaces (Business Europe 2007). These forms can be physical, psychological and/or sexual and can take the form of an isolated incident or more systematic patterns of behaviour. On the other hand, it can occur between colleagues, between superiors and subordinates or by third parties such as clients, patients or pupils. Finally, they range from minor cases of disrespect to more serious acts, including criminal offences, which require the intervention of public authorities (EU-OSHA 2010, p. 2). EU-OSHA understands harassment as repeated and deliberate abuse, threats and/or humiliation in work-related circumstances (EU-OSHA 2009). It can be practised by one or more employers (or hierarchical superior) or workers, with the aim or effect of undermining a person's dignity, affecting their health and/or creating a hostile working environment (EU-OSHA 2010, p. 3). It should be mentioned that the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) was set up to collect, analyse and disseminate professional information in the states to raise awareness of the safety and health of workers in the EU (EU-OSHA 2013, 2017).

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound for short) emphasises that the prevention of moral harassment at work should be seen as a central element in improving the quality of employment (Eurofound 2015, 2018). This organisation recognises that there is a change underway in work management and that there is a correlation between moral harassment at work and work carried out under heavy pressure or with reduced or precarious job security. In addition, deficiencies in work organisation, internal information and organisational context are identified as causes of moral harassment, which can have inevitable consequences for workers. And the Foundation has been carrying out research into this issue (Eurofound 2013, 2015), as well as on the topic of conflicts in the workplace (Eurofound 2018, p. 15). By studying all the changes in human resource management methods that have reconfigured the organisation of work since the beginning of this century, Eurofound has highlighted that there is a link between, on the one hand, moral harassment at work and, on the other, work carried out under high stress and in more imposing working conditions (Eurofound 2020b). Furthermore, this organisation points out that the causes of moral harassment include deficiencies and problems in the organisation of work, which can result in degrading behaviour and conduct, with repercussions for the well-being of workers and the organisation's working environment.

In European countries, increasing importance has been attached to the protection of rights relating to the dignity and integrity of workers. Particularly with regard to the level of exposure to risks in the workplace and the defence of a 'good working environment' and 'decent work'. Indeed, harassment can have serious repercussions on both the working

environment and the general well-being of the worker, as well as increasing absenteeism and lowering productivity at work (Einarsen et al. 2011). This situation has a very negative impact on society as a whole (Eurofound 2013, 2015, 2024b).

More specifically, digitalisation offers possibilities and advantages that did not exist in the past (Iqbal et al. 2021), including for processing, storing and communicating information, as well as temporal and spatial flexibility. Faced with this new context, new demands are emerging for teleworking and hybrid work that will not be exactly the same as those for face-to-face work (Eurofound 2020b). And given that the global impacts of the expansion of teleworking have yet to be analysed (Eurofound 2020a, 2021a), it seems particularly relevant to explore the issue of moral harassment in teleworking, which will be of growing interest as part of the digital transition movement.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, several studies on quality of life and work have been developed by Eurofound and the study 'Living, working and COVID-19 e-survey'—which aims to capture the far-reaching implications of the pandemic for the way people live and work across the EU—analyses, for example, the theme 'Quality of life—Feeling tense (% response)', seeking to assess the degree of tension at work to which workers are subjected (Table 1). What this data suggests is that, on average, 'feeling tense' increased from 17% in 2023 to 22% in 2024 in all EU countries (with the exception of Luxembourg, where it fell from 20% in 2023 to 14% in 2024, and Germany, from 17% in 2023 to 14% in 2024). According to these figures, the situation is particularly serious in Greece (increasing from 35% in 2023 to 45% in 2024) and Cyprus (increasing from 33% in 2023 to 36% in 2024) (Eurofound 2023a, 2024a).

Table 1. Quality of life—Feeling tense (% response), according Eurofound.

	6th Round March 2023		7th Round May 2024	
	Yes	**No**	**Yes**	**No**
European Union	17	83	22	78
Austria	11	89	11	89
Belgium	14	86	20	80
Bulgaria	16	84	17	83
Cyprus	33	67	36	64
Czechia	14	86	17	83
Germany	17	83	14	86
Denmark	9	91	17	83
Estonia	20	80	19	71
Greece	35	65	45	55
Spain	9	91	17	83
Finland	5	95	16	84
France	25	75	29	71
Croatia	14	86	24	76
Hungary	17	83	29	71
Ireland	9	91	23	77
Italy	19	81	23	77
Lithuania	13	87	21	79
Luxembourg	20	80	14	86

Table 1. *Cont.*

	6th Round March 2023		7th Round May 2024	
	Yes	**No**	**Yes**	**No**
Latvia	18	92	28	72
Malta	18	92	30	70
Netherlands	9	91	15	85
Poland	23	77	33	67
Portugal	17	83	20	80
Romania	16	84	24	76
Sweden	13	87	25	75
Slovenia	14	86	18	82
Slovakia	15	85	20	80

Sources: (Eurofound 2023a, 2024a).

The remote working environment can encourage antisocial behaviour, so it will be crucial for traditional management practices to adapt (Eurofound 2024b). In several EU member states, online forms of abuse are often seen as extensions of traditional face-to-face harassment, rather than as a specific phenomenon that requires specific regulation, but other countries have amended legislation to include online harassment (Eurofound 2024a, 2024b). For example, Denmark has explicitly recognised 'digital harassment' in its laws (idem). Preventing harassment at work, both in person and online, is difficult and employers have a fundamental role to play in this, especially by implementing clear health and safety policies and identifying prohibited behaviour (Eurofound 2024b). As this document points out, although online harassment at work is less studied than face-to-face harassment, it is just as damaging to mental health and therefore requires new and specific interventions by labour legislators (*ibidem*).

1.4. Moral Harassment in the Portuguese Legal System

Based on EU legislation—namely Directive 76/207/EEC of 9 February 1976 and Directive 2002/73/EC of 23 September 2002—the Portuguese legislator incorporated the legal regime of moral harassment into the Labour Code in 2003 and treated it as a form of discrimination, linking it to the principle of equality and non-discrimination. Later, in 2017, Law 73/2017, of 16 August, strengthened the legislative framework for the prevention of harassment, enshrining the obligation for the company to adopt codes of good conduct for the prevention and combat of harassment at work, whenever the company has seven or more employees (al. k) and also to initiate disciplinary proceedings whenever it becomes aware of alleged situations of harassment at work (al. l). Then, in Article 283(8) of the Labour Code, it states that the employer is liable for compensation for damage arising from occupational diseases resulting from harassment. The Portuguese Labour Code defines harassment in Article 29(2) as 'unwanted behaviour, namely that based on discrimination, practised on access to employment or in employment, work or vocational training, with the aim or effect of disturbing or embarrassing a person, affecting their dignity, or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or destabilising environment' (Article 29(2)). It should also be noted that in Portugal, on 16 February 2025, in compliance with Article 14(3), the aforementioned Convention No. 190 on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work, adopted in 2019, entered into force for the Portuguese Republic.

Teleworking has also been regulated in the Labour Code since 2003, but Law 83/2021 of 6 December and, more recently, Law 13/2023 of 3 April, amended this legal regime.

Teleworking is now considered to be work done under a legally subordinate regime, at a location not determined by the employer, through the use of ICT (Article 165(1) of the Labour Code). The hybrid labour regime is also made possible in Article 166(3) of this Code. Article 169 of the Labour Code stipulates that teleworkers have the same rights and duties as other workers in the company, particularly with regard to working time and rest periods.

As for the isolation of the worker, Portuguese law (Article 169-B) provides for a special duty on the part of the employer to reduce the isolation of the teleworker. However, this concern with the teleworker's isolation only relates to the loss of contacts and, therefore, skills acquired in the company. And this protection does not reflect the weakening of the teleworker in the face of situations of possible moral harassment (Almeida 2024). Article 169-A(4) of the Labour Code also stipulates that the power of management in teleworking must be exercised by means of the equipment and communication and information systems assigned to the worker's activity, according to procedures previously known to the worker. In this way, it will not be possible for the employer to follow all of the employee's movements, which is understandable, since most teleworkers work from home, which means that allowing the employer such powers would be tantamount to a possible invasion of the employee's private life. The legislator also requires that, when accessing the worker's home, the employer's actions are appropriate and proportionate to the objectives of the visit, namely respecting privacy and limiting them to what is necessary to check working conditions. So, it is forbidden to capture and use images, sound, writing, history or other means of control that could affect the worker's right to privacy.

In 2021, Article 199-A of the Labour Code enshrined a new duty for the employer: the duty to refrain from contact. This rule prevents the employer from contacting the worker during their rest period. In fact, excessive insistence on the part of the employer towards the worker could constitute moral harassment.

To reinforce this framework, it should also be mentioned that a report on the Portuguese labour context, by the Portuguese Ministry of Labour, entitled *The Green Paper on the Future of Work* anticipates a growing digital transition, considering the scale of automation and other transformations associated with work. This document emphasises the need to safeguard workers' right to privacy and regulate teleworking, drawing lessons from the experience of the pandemic (MTSSS 2022, p. 23).

The aim of this first section is to relate the digital transition to new types of work, namely teleworking and hybrid work, and also to the new risks of moral harassment. Although this topic is not specifically dealt with in the literature, it is worth drawing attention to the importance of analysing it in order to prevent deterioration in working conditions in a context of expanding hybrid work. So it is important to investigate this issue in order to respond to the need to know how to prevent or mitigate the negative effects of these increased risks associated with teleworking and hybrid work. The digital transition and the recent emergence and expansion of hybrid work warrant careful analysis from this perspective, justifying specific research.

This article is therefore based on analysing the research questions of whether teleworkers have ever experienced pressure situations that amount to harassment and, if so, in what form and by whom. As mentioned in this section, the literature indicates that moral harassment constitutes a potential risk to employees' health and is therefore a serious professional problem for organisations. However, the issue of harassment in teleworking and hybrid work has not yet been addressed and the new psychosocial risks for employees in the case of teleworking should be specifically investigated in order to understand and prevent these forms of harassment. In fact, moral harassment has serious repercussions not only for the employees, but also for the work environment, as it can increase absenteeism

and decrease productivity at work and also has a negative impact on society in general. In this respect, it should be noted that given the scarcity of studies on this subject, it is relevant to associate moral harassment and telework/hybrid work.

It was therefore important to empirically study some research questions: RQ.1—Was there (or was there not) moral harassment while teleworking in a hybrid work regime? If so, with the following sub-research questions: a. Is the experienced moral harassment independent of gender? b. Is the experienced moral harassment independent of education level? c. Is experienced moral harassment independent of marital status? d. Is the experienced moral harassment independent of job category? e. Is the experienced moral harassment independent of age group? RQ.2—What situations of moral harassment are experienced in teleworking in hybrid work? and RQ.3—Who practised the moral harassment?

After analysing the literature on the subject, the next section—material and methods—will focus on presenting how the study was developed, based on exploratory research. Sections 3 and 4 present the results of this study and discuss these results. Finally, Section 5 draws the conclusions and recommendations for future research.

2. Material and Methods

2.1. Research Strategy

As mentioned in the Introduction, this study began with a framing of the topic, through an analysis of the literature both on moral harassment and telework at international and European level and in the Portuguese legal system. The research strategy was designed to apply a quantitative approach and identify the new risks of harassment in teleworking and hybrid work. As this was an exploratory study, it sought to open avenues for future research on this topic.

Considering the gaps in the literature on the specific study of this topic and given the great topicality and relevance of the subject, based on the framework made in the previous section and on the research questions, at empirical level we sought to find out, through a questionnaire survey, whether the respondents—hired under a hybrid work regime—had suffered moral harassment while teleworking.

To this end, three questions were considered in the questionnaire:—Whether, or not, moral harassment was experienced during teleworking in a hybrid work regime?—What situations of pressure/moral harassment were experienced when teleworking in hybrid work?—Who perpetrated the moral harassment? The subject of our research has become relevant, especially considering the demanding context of digital change at work and given the growing relevance of the search to identify new risks of moral harassment specifically in teleworking and hybrid work. All the more so because, at the same time, gaps were identified in the literature on this subject, which could promote a new line of research. The questionnaire survey was made available on the Internet, between 1 June and 30 September 2024, on two social networks (Facebook and Linkedin). The use of these networks made it possible to reach more respondents, since the research was not funded and the survey was only aimed at workers with an employment contract who were in a hybrid labour regime, which limited the sample greatly from the outset and surveys can be significantly improved by harnessing social media-based research (Orme 2020). The sampling plan for this research was drawn up according to its objectives and the characteristics of the target population, such as the availability and accessibility of the people to be surveyed. It was considered that non-probability sampling methods are particularly pertinent in research objects where there is no population list of the universe to be surveyed. Therefore, given the constraints inherent to the object of study, the units to be surveyed were selected non-randomly. The survey about hybrid work was administered to employees with an employment contract (a non-probability sample), seeking to understand if, during the time they were teleworking,

they experienced harassment. The questionnaire consisted mainly of closed questions and was structured in two parts: the first with a personal and contractual profile—gender, age, marital status, level of education, job category, employment contract and seniority—and the other part on working conditions in hybrid work. With a total of 15 questions, the survey was applied using Google Forms. At the start of the online survey, all participants were informed of the purpose of the research and were asked for their informed consent, guaranteeing the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses and informing them that their use was exclusively for statistical purposes. Participation of the respondents was voluntary and all participants gave their informed consent before answering the survey.

To summarise the structure of the questionnaire identified the personal profile of the respondents on the one hand and the working conditions in hybrid work on the other. With regard to the personal profile of the respondents, we identify respondents by sex (Q.1); by age, with three age ranges, between 18 and 35 years old, between 36 and 50 years old and 51 years old or older (Q.2); by marital status, with 3 categories, i.e., married or in a civil partnership, single and widowed, divorced or separated (Q.3); by the number of children, with four categories, no children, one child, two children or three or more children (Q.4); by educational qualifications, with 4 categories, up to 9th grade, up to 12th grade, bachelor's degree, master's degree and doctorate (Q.5); by job category, with 4 categories, administrative staff, technicians, managers, administrators or Directors and teachers/researchers (Q.6); by the types of employment contracts, with 4 categories (Q.7); by seniority, with 4 categories, less than 5 years, between 5 and 10 years, between 11 and 20 years and more than 20 years' experience (Q.8). On the other hand, regarding the identification of working conditions in a hybrid regime, respondents were asked. The questions presented were closed to make it easier the analysis and processing of the results: whether they had worked previously and whether in a teleworking or in-person regime (Q.9); whose initiative was the agreement on the hybrid working regime (Q.10); about how many days they worked remotely per week (Q.11) or whether they considered hybrid work advantageous compared to face-to-face work (Q.12), and if so, what is the main advantage (Q.13), whether the respondents had been victims of moral harassment while working remotely and what situations they had experienced (Q.14); and finally, if so, who had perpetrated the harassment (Q.15).

Therefore, given the significant post-pandemic expansion of the hybrid work modality and the gap identified in the literature on the new harassment risks associated with this work modality, this research proved to be crucial. And the results of this online survey have made it possible to obtain specific and innovative data on the subject, since they investigate harassment and risks/pressures in hybrid working. The aim was to explore the potential for understanding the most common forms of moral harassment while teleworking in hybrid work and identify their origin. The participants—all of whom had an employment contract and worked in a hybrid labour regime (a requirement that conditioned the validation of responses)—answered a structured questionnaire that assessed their experiences in this emerging form of work, as well as the various risks in the workplace. The survey collected data on the respondents' personal and contractual profile characteristics, as well as experiences of pressure/harassment in the workplace related to hybrid work and teleworking. The data was then explored to identify relationships between personal and contractual profile characteristics and the participants feelings on different forms pressure/harassment.

2.2. Participants

Participants in this study were the respondents. In the questionnaire survey specifically on hybrid work, the responses of a total of 225 participants were validated. The survey

was aimed only at workers with an employment contract and working in a hybrid work regime (a mix of teleworking and face-to-face work) and was made available online on social networks between 1 June and 30 September 2024. Of the total of 225 participants, 52.4% were male and 47.6% female. By age, the participants were divided into three groups to facilitate information processing: the first group, aged 18 to 35 years (25.3%); the second group, aged 36 to 50 years (40.4%); and the third group, aged 51 years and older (34.2%). From those participants, and regarding the number of children, respondents who reported having no children (35.6%), two children (33.3%), one child (21.8%), and three or more children (9.3%) were identified. Furthermore, with regard to marital status, 57.3% said they were married or in a consensual union p, 26.2% were single and only 16.4%were widowed, divorced or separated. As for educational qualifications, 44% of respondents had obtained a master's degree or doctorate, 43.1% said they had a bachelor's degree and only 12.9% had completed the 12th grade.

As for job category, technicians (37.3%), managers (including Managers, Administrators, or Directors) (28.4%), other categories (18.2%), and administrative staff (10.7%) were reported. In terms of seniority, respondents with more than 20 years' experience (34.7%), less than 5 years (33.3%), between 11 and 20 years (17.3%), and between 5 and 10 years (14.7%) were identified. Finally, it should be emphasised that the vast majority of respondents (84.9%) had open-ended and full-time contracts.

2.3. Data Pre-Processing and Cleaning

The dataset required minimal preprocessing due to its structured format and high quality. The target variable was categorical, and no additional transformations were deemed necessary for the analysis. The primary objective was to explore the relationships between the target variable and other features directly, preserving the raw patterns in the data for meaningful analysis.

3. Results

Statistical analysis was applied to the information collected—through an online questionnaire survey of workers with an employment contract (non-probabilistic sample) in a hybrid work regime, during the months of June to September 2024—and the association between categorical variables was analysed using the Chi-square test (Agresti 2002). Through the association between categorical variables analysed by the Chi-square test it was possible to conclude that, in general, both males and females are subject to pressures or conditions captured by the target variable categories, but the specific categories vary in frequency.

In response to RQ.1 on whether respondents had been victims of moral harassment while teleworking, the first result of this study that should be highlighted is that the majority of respondents did not identify having been victims of moral harassment or forms of pressure in the course of their teleworking activity (58.2%).

Of the respondents who reported having been victims of moral harassment in various forms, female respondents (9.1%) were more likely than males (4.0%) to report experiencing a hostile, degrading, or destabilising environment. However, pressure to capture images, sounds, or other privacy-related data was reported at similar levels across genders, with females at 6.8% and males at 6.0%. Regarding pressure to respond quickly to messages, males reported higher levels (46.0%) compared to females (40.9%).

Notably, while women reported higher percentages in categories related to workplace hostility and overwork, men reported higher percentages in categories associated with resource limitations and communication demands. Although based on respondents' perceptions these findings suggest that workplace pressures may be distributed differently

across genders, but the statistical analysis does not confirm a strong gender-based pattern in harassment experiences. This fact is important to explore in future research because both groups may be experiencing different resources and demands, or men and women may be experiencing the same situation but perceiving it differently.

The relationship between the participants characteristics and different workplace harassment and pressures were explored using WEKA 3.8.6 (Figure 1).

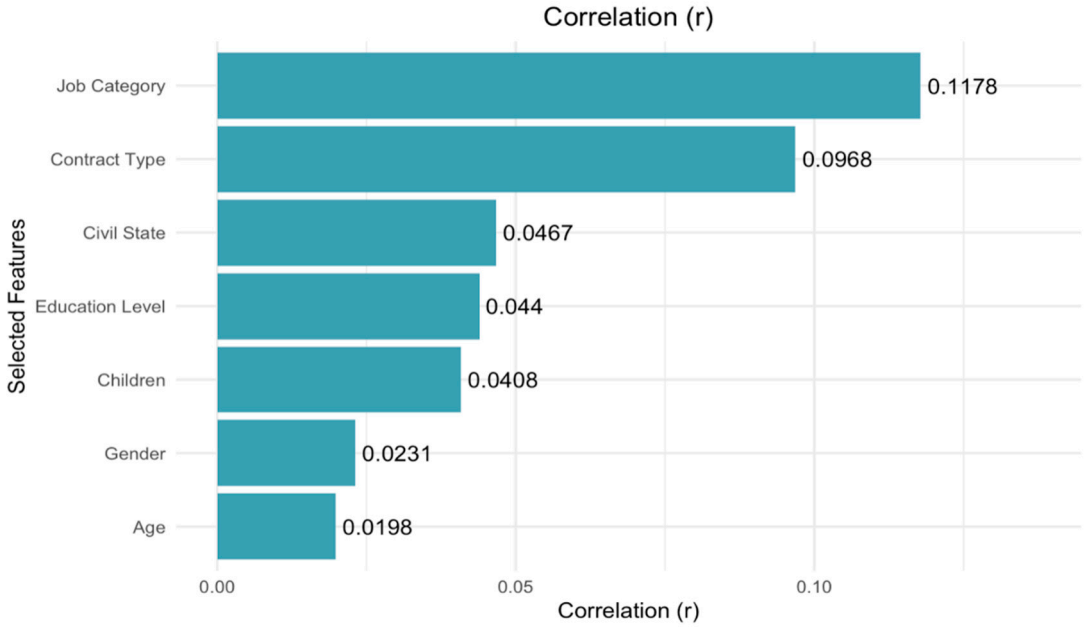

Figure 1. Relationship between the participants socio-demographic characteristics and different workplace harassment and pressures.

While correlation-based feature selection (CFS) identifies features with strong correlations to the target variable and minimal correlations with each other, the features in this study had low correlation values (below 0.2). Despite this, all features were retained due to their relevance to the research question. Certain features, even with low individual correlations, may collectively contribute to the model's performance or provide insights into underlying phenomena. Including all features ensured a comprehensive evaluation of potential interactions and dependencies across variables.

To analyse the relationships between different variables, categorical associations were tested using Chi-square analysis. The Chi-Square test was employed due to the categorical nature of both the target variable and predictor variables, making it suitable for evaluating associations between these variables. Additionally, Fisher's Exact Test was utilised for scenarios involving small sample sizes or when assumptions of the Chi-Square test (e.g., minimum expected frequency) were not met. These tests were chosen to ensure robust and reliable insights into the relationships within the dataset.

Additionally, visual representations of key findings were generated to aid interpretation.

The results indicated no statistically significant association between gender and the types of harassment experiences reported, as the p-value exceeded the 0.05 ($p = 0.5056$) threshold and a X-squared = 5.3025. To further investigate Fisher's Exact Test was also incorporated in the analysis. The results suggested that while descriptive statistics show differences in reported experiences, these variations are not statistically significant within this dataset ($p = 0.5179$).

While some teleworking challenges, such as privacy pressures, show minimal gender disparity, others—like extended working hours and workplace hostility—highlight persistent inequalities. The results do not reveal any significance, so it is crucial to visualise

the data in order to understand whether being a man or a woman affects situations of harassment in teleworking in any way.

To further explore the strength and direction of the relationship between the variables relating to personal and contractual characteristics of the respondents and telework harassment, a correlation analysis was implemented using WEKA. No cut-off point was applied when including features into the Random Forest model.

The model effectively classified the majority of instances, achieving a high accuracy of 85.78% and a substantial Kappa statistic (0.7479), indicating strong agreement between predicted and actual values. The performance was further evaluated using a confusion matrix, which revealed balanced classification across most classes. The model demonstrated robust performance, as evidenced by the balanced F1-scores and high ROC Area values, highlighting its reliability in identifying patterns and distinguishing between telework harassment situations.

Related to RQ.2—What pressure/harassment are experienced when teleworking?, two main results emerged from this study: the first, concerning 'pressure to respond quickly to messages' (18.2%), it should be noted that this is the category most mentioned by both genders, with 40.9% of women and 46.0% of men indicating this issue. As for the second most significant answer, 'pressure to work overtime' (16.4%), a substantial percentage of both genders mention this issue, although women (43.2%) face it slightly more often than men (36.0%). Next, the answer 'pressure related to surveillance (pressure to capture images, sounds or other means of controlling privacy)' was mentioned evenly between genders (6.8% of women, 6.0% of men), and 8.0% of men answered 'refusal to provide tools for teleworking', while no women mentioned it (Figure 2).

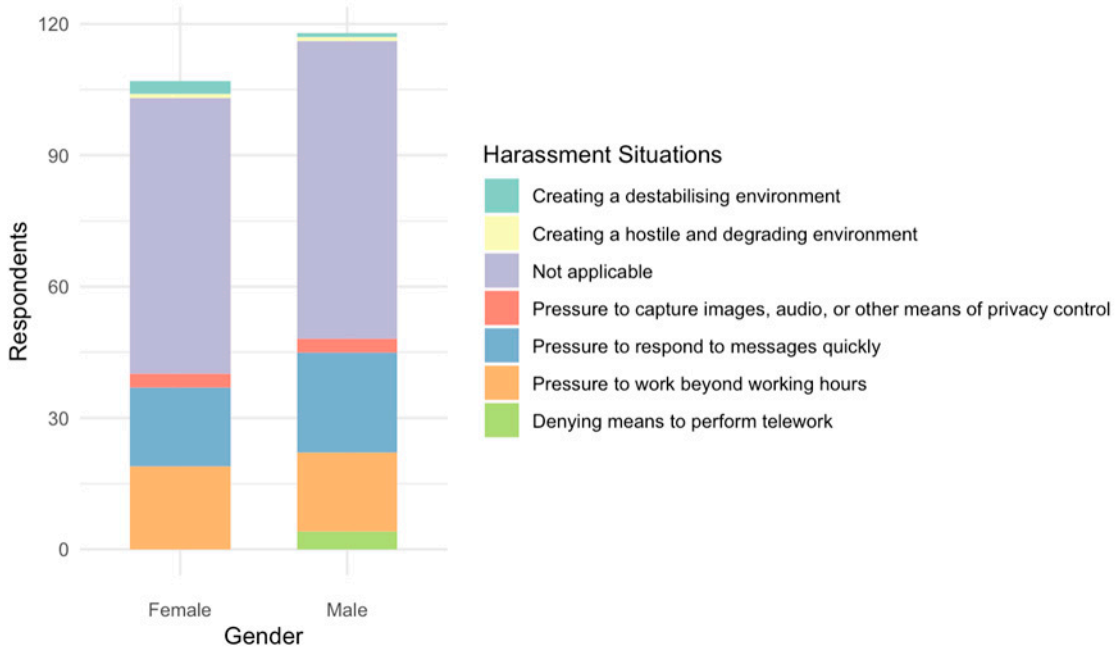

Figure 2. How are telework harassment situations related to gender?

As for RQ.3—Who perpetrated this pressure/harassment?, 41.5% of the respondents said it was their hierarchical superior, 22.3% work colleagues, 12.8% the employer and 23.4% other entities. A Pearson's Chi-squared test was performed to examine the association between respondent gender and reported perpetrator of harassment. The contingency table included five categories: employer, colleagues, others, supervisor, and NA (missing or no response), and responses were stratified by gender (Male, Female).

The test result indicates no statistically significant association between gender and reported perpetrator type: X-squared statistic: 7.01; *p*-value: 0.076. The stacked bar chart also suggests potential gendered differences in how harassment is reported:

- Reports involving supervisors and employers are slightly more frequent among men than women.
- Reports citing colleagues or others appear more balanced across genders.
- Moreover, a substantial proportion of respondents did not identify the perpetrator (NA category), slightly higher among men (30.2%) than women (28.0%) (Figure 3).

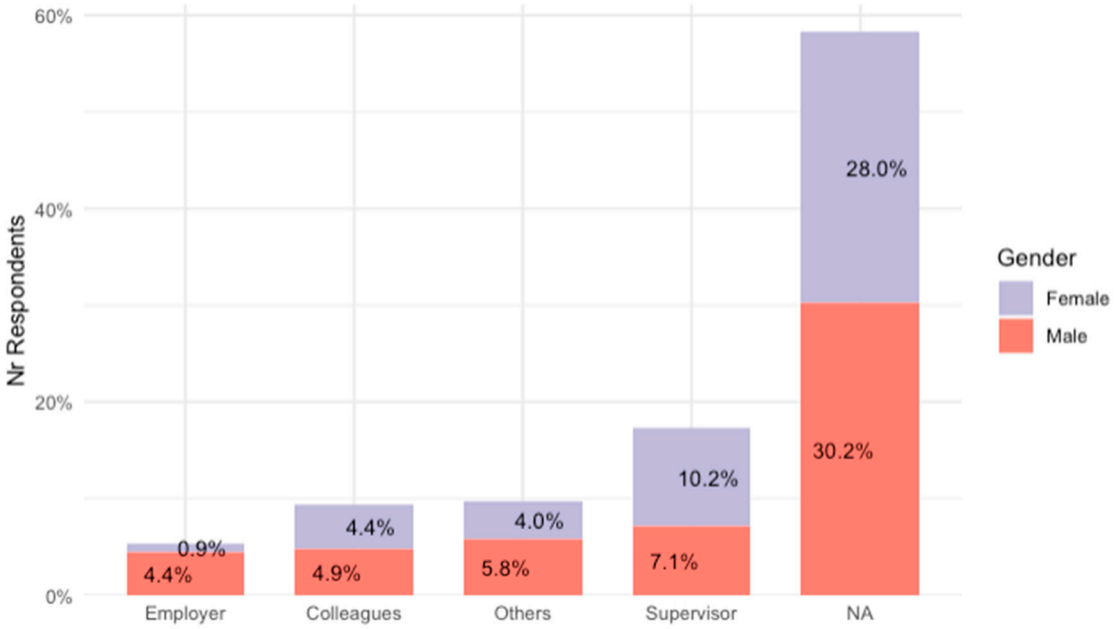

Figure 3. Who perpetrated the harassment?

4. Discussion

4.1. Implications

Having mentioned the results of the research questions in the previous section, it is now time to discuss them and explain their importance in the context of this research.

The first purpose of this study was to identify whether the respondents had been victims of moral harassment or forms of pressure in the course of their teleworking activity. And if so, to identify the difference between women and men. We then sought to identify the categories of new risks of moral harassment that the respondents had experienced in hybrid work and teleworking contexts. Finally, we tried to identify the perpetrators of the pressure/harassment.

In this study we have categorised various categories of harassing practices into three groups: ENVIRONMENT: create a hostile, degrading, or destabilising environment; PRESSURE: pressure to capture images, sounds, or other privacy-related data; to work beyond standard working hours; to respond quickly to messages; DENY THE MEANS TO TELEWORK: deny the resources (equipment and systems) to carry out teleworking (Figure 4).

The first result of this study that should be highlighted is that the majority of respondents did not identify having been victims of moral harassment in the course of their teleworking activity (58.2%).

Then, in identifying the categories of pressure/moral harassment that 41.8% of respondents said they had been victims of, the other result was that the most significant types of new risks revealed were 'pressure to respond quickly to messages' and 'pressure

to work overtime'. Finally, when it came to identifying the perpetrators of pressure/moral harassment 41.5% of respondents said that it came from their hierarchical superior.

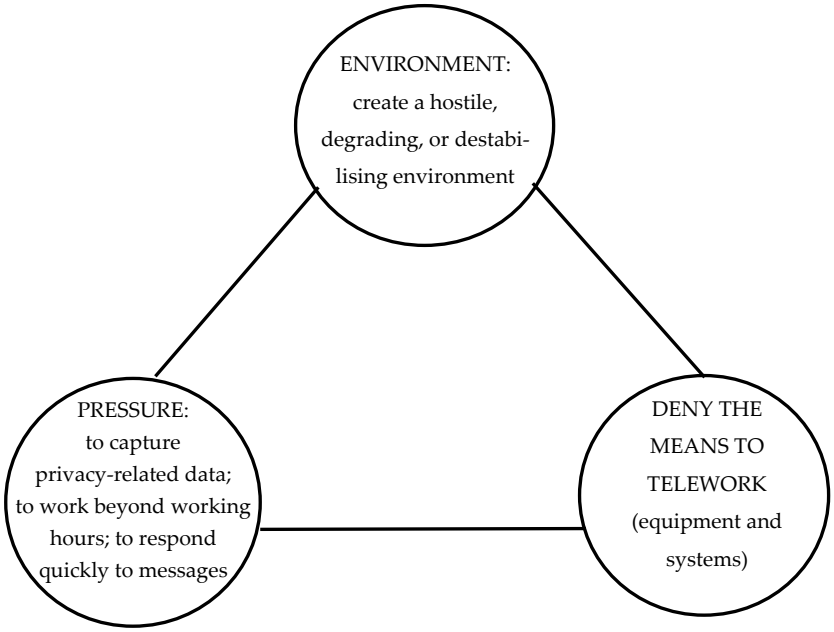

Figure 4. Harassing practices in remote and hybrid work contexts.

Two main results and two fundamental observations stand out in this study: the first relating to the 'pressure to respond quickly to messages' and the second to the response 'pressure to work overtime'.

These new risks can have practical implications related to the intensification of work and greater pressure, often leading to burnout, a problem that is gaining increasing visibility in the context of occupational health and safety policies in organisations. Physical and emotional tiredness is usually due to the stress and anxiety experienced in the workplace and this has the effect of reducing motivation to work. It is therefore important to continue and deepen the investigation of these results, reinforcing the understanding of the new risks in the context of remote work and hybrid work.

As for the second most significant response 'pressure to work beyond hours', a substantial percentage of both genders report this issue, though females (43.2%) face it slightly more frequently than males (36.0%). This finding may suggest gender disparities in work–life balance and reinforce social or organisational expectations that disproportionately affect women. This more significant situation among women may also be related to the fact that women prefer to work remotely, even to look after family members, and the fact that they feel they benefit from working remotely and tend to agree to work longer hours (Bathini and Kandathil 2019). This aligns with known gender disparities in work–life balance challenges, which confirms the data from the ILO (2022) study and other studies (Helkavaara et al. 2011; Blindow et al. 2024). Also confirms the study by Salin (2003) that the higher prevalence rates reported by women, which can be seen as the result of an interaction between higher rates of actual exposure to negative behaviour and fewer perceived possibilities to defend themselves.

These findings also seem to follow the OECD (2023b) study, according to which 51% of women who work remotely say they have the right to disconnect (compared to 57% of men who work remotely), which indicates professional and hierarchical gender imbalances.

With regard to other forms of pressure, such as 'creation of a hostile or degrading environment' while this is less common, females (9.1%) report it at more than double the rate of males (4.0%). Although this is a measure of respondents' perceptions, these results

suggest that women may be disproportionately affected by hostility in the workplace, which also confirms the data from the ILO (2022) study. They also confirm the studies by Pradhan and Jena (2018) on abusive supervision and prevention mechanisms to counter abusive supervision and also the study by Eurofound (2024b), that regulatory changes require empirical evidence to document the issue and indicate how to intervene to combat the phenomenon of moral harassment. In line with this literature and the findings of this article, organisations need to be able to make strategic use of this information to improve codes of conduct in companies. It is therefore very important to continue research into the new risks of moral harassment in teleworking and hybrid work contexts, especially among women.

It is worth mentioning that the response 'pressure related to surveillance (pressure to capture images, sound or other means of controlling privacy)' was reported evenly across genders (6.8% of females, 6.0% of males), suggesting no strong gender bias for this issue. It should be mentioned that this risk of capturing sound images or other means of controlling privacy is particularly serious, and should be further investigated in future research on this topic, considering that the legally protected good is privacy, which is protected as a right of personality, guaranteed by the Constitution and by other laws and regulations, such as Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of 27 April 2016, on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data.

Finally, 8.0% of males responded 'refusal to provide tools for teleworking', while no females report it. This aspect is also relevant, since in the teleworking regime the employer is legally obliged to provide the employee with equipment and systems—necessary for carrying out the activity and interaction between employee and employer—without which the employee will not be able to carry out their work. Therefore, in terms of comparative highlights, it should be noted that while women report higher percentages in the categories related to workplace hostility and overwork, men report higher percentages in the categories related to resource limitations and communication demands. This may suggest that women are more vulnerable, which corroborates the study by Bourgeois and Perkins (2003) and Berdahl (2007) which indicates that individuals who are less powerful in the hierarchy than the harasser are also likely targets.

Still related to RQ.1 the following sub-research questions were put forward: is the feeling of experienced moral harassment independent of your level of education?; is the feeling of experienced moral harassment independent of marital status?; is the feeling of experienced moral harassment independent of job category?, is the feeling of experienced moral harassment independent of age group?

A cross-tabulation was made between RQ.2 and all the other variables relating to the personal characteristics of the people who answered the questionnaire (Combined_Cross_Tabulation) and none of the *p*-values are below the common threshold of 0.05, suggesting no statistically significant association between the demographic variables/personal characteristics of respondents and the target variable categories.

Thus, from these results, implications can be established about the new risks of harassment in remote and hybrid work contexts. The first concerns situations of hostility in the workplace, through constant pressure to respond to requests/messages quickly, which should be prevented in organisations. The second concerns work–life balance: both genders struggle with the pressure of working overtime, requiring strategies to promote healthy work–life integration. This concern confirms the results of studies by Helkavaara et al. (2011). The third concerns the equitable distribution of resources: men report more problems with resource constraints, such as tools for teleworking, indicating potential inequalities in the allocation of resources, which should be the subject of further research.

So, on the one hand, these results support the thesis that the use of ICT combined with new remote and hybrid working practices in the exercise of the employer's power of direction are introducing new forms of pressure in teleworking that can lead to moral harassment and that further research is needed into the relationship between teleworking and well-being at work (Martinez Jiménez 2024). These results confirm the studies that highlight differences in the incidence of harassment between men and women, also confirming gender disparities in this respect and especially relating it to forms of pressure linked to working hours. This may suggest that women experience more workplace hostility. This also confirms ILO (2022) studies, according to which employed women are more at risk of harassment than men and that the global impacts of the expansion of teleworking—particularly with regard to harassment—have not yet been analysed and should be investigated further (Eurofound 2020a, 2021a). Furthermore, these results show that the 'pressure to respond to messages quickly' and a 'pressure to work beyond hours' are the forms of pressure most felt by those who telework. These studies are in line with the studies on psychosocial risks at work by Dragano et al. (2011) and Eurofound (2019a), in particular the intensity of work and the almost permanent control of work. And these are findings that should be studied further in future research.

As for RQ.3, the results indicate no statistically significant association between gender and the perpetrators of harassment. However, the p-value of 0.076 suggests a marginal trend that merits further exploration, ideally with a larger or more balanced sample. As mentioned, the results for RQ.3 suggest possible gender differences in the way harassment is reported: while reports involving supervisors and employers are slightly more frequent among men (than among women), reports citing colleagues (or other people) are more balanced between the genders. In addition, the fact that a higher proportion of women left the question unanswered may reflect either a lack of experience with harassment or discomfort with publicising it. These descriptive patterns point to qualitative differences in the experience or reporting of harassment that may not be fully captured by the statistical test. Additional qualitative or follow-up analyses may be valuable in contextualising these findings. This may confirm the study by Salin (2003), according to which there are gender differences in moral harassment at work that result from a lower perception of the possibilities of defence and a lower reluctance to classify negative experiences as moral harassment, all of which are mediated by perceptions of power.

4.2. Limitations

It is also worth mentioning the limitations of this study. The main limitation is that, due to resource constraints, the analysis was based on a non-probability sample and the data cannot be generalised. To this extent, and since the results of this study cannot be generalised, its conclusions are limited to the perception and impact felt by the employees who took part. In addition, the fact that the survey was carried out online (namely on social media) may explain why a higher percentage of postgraduate, masters, doctorate, or bachelor's degrees. Therefore, the sample may only be representative of highly educated respondents and the results of the study may not be generalisable. This is also true in terms of the job categories. Furthermore, future research should also consider analysing sectors of activity. There are also other limitations to this study, because despite the results of this study, the chi-square test showed no statistically significant relationship between gender and the target variable, implying observed differences might not generalise. So, further qualitative data or larger sample sizes could provide more insights into the reasons for these trends.

As also mentioned above, it should also be noted that respondents' perceptions of some outcomes (i.e., communication demands, resources and actual demands) were not

measured, which becomes important because, for example, men and women may be experiencing different resources and demands or experiencing the same situation but perceiving it differently. It will therefore be important in future research to measure actual working conditions alongside perceptions.

Despite this, this pioneering study provides important information that can be explored in greater depth in future research, as it deals with a topic that has not yet been dealt with in the literature: the new forms of moral harassment that can arise in the context of the significant use of hybrid work.

Essential in future research on this topic will be to deepen the study of each of the modalities of new harassment risks identified in this study and their impact, as well as to understand the effectiveness of companies' internal regulations on harassment, combined with the creation of specific channels for reporting moral harassment. It will also be important to study the fight against harassment through these internal measures (internal reporting channels), as they allow the competent authorities (judicial or administrative) to prove the intent of the harasser (better access to information implies clear knowledge of the seriousness of the practice) and to understand whether the employer has taken measures to combat moral harassment.

4.3. Future Research

It will therefore be important in future research, to study the relationship between new forms of moral harassment in hybrid work and teleworking contexts, since moral harassment constitutes a potential health risk and a serious problem for organisations. The organisations need to be able to make strategic use of this information to improve their codes of conduct and thus prevent and combat new forms of harassment at work. It will also be important when studying the emergence of new risks of harassment in remote work to identify whether women are more prone (than men) to harassment in hybrid work and teleworking contexts. As mentioned above, future research could collect data on the employees' sector of activity and see if there are differences between sectors in terms of the risks of moral harassment. In future research, it will also be important to measure actual working conditions as well as workers' perceptions of this issue.

5. Conclusions

As highlighted in this article, in the post-COVID-19 pandemic period, the continued use of teleworking and the emergence of hybrid work pose new challenges for labour regulation.

As the literature has shown, hybrid work and teleworking have many advantages for employer and employee, including making the organisation attractive to employees, increasing flexibility and strengthening the organisation's resilience. However, as has also been identified in the literature, also have their disadvantages, and it cannot be ignored that it tends to create new forms of harassment at work and that it is associated with a considerable risk to health and well-being (work-related stress and the impact on mental health) of those exposed.

Thus, employers must be heavily involved in promoting a good working environment and preventing and combating moral harassment as it reduces motivation at an individual level and jeopardises the company's performance at a collective level.

This study is therefore justified by the growing use of teleworking and hybrid work, as well as by the gap identified in the literature specifically on the new risks of moral harassment in hybrid work and teleworking contexts, requiring their understanding for prevention.

From the survey that supported the empirical work of this study, it was possible to conclude that the two most significant forms of pressure that the respondents recognised as having been subjected to in teleworking while carrying out hybrid work were 'pressure

to respond quickly to messages' and 'pressure to work overtime', followed by 'creating a destabilising, hostile or degrading environment', 'pressure related to surveillance' (capturing images, sound or other means of controlling privacy) and 'refusal to provide tools' for remote working. From these, two key observations it should be noted that 'pressure to respond to messages quickly' is the most reported category for both genders, with 40.9% of females and 46.0% of males indicating this issue and 'pressure to work beyond working hours' is more frequent in women (43.2%) than in men (36.0%). It should be noted that while women report higher percentages in the categories related to workplace hostility and overwork, men report higher percentages in the categories related to resource limitations and communication demands.

From these results, two major implications can be established about the new risks of harassment in remote and hybrid work contexts: the first concerns situations of constant pressure to respond to messages quickly and the second concerns work–life balance and the pressure of working overtime. These new risks can have practical implications related, on the one hand, to increased pressure at work and, on the other, to the intensification of labour, often leading to burnout, and, on the other hand, to the fact that employees feel benefited by remote working and tend to consent to working longer hours and these findings should be further analysed in future research in terms of procedures to adopt in organisations, for example, in the exercise of management power. Central aspects of teleworking such as the isolation of the worker—which may (or may not) facilitate situations of moral harassment—and the intensification of working time, denying the worker's right to disconnect, should also be studied, not least because organisations need this information to improve (in terms of regulation) their codes of conduct for preventing and combating harassment. As for the perpetrator of the pressure/harassment, 41.5% of the respondents said it was their hierarchical superior and 22.3% their work colleagues. These results show a suggestive trend that may warrant further investigation with a larger or more balanced sample. What is more, they suggest possible gender differences in the way teleworking harassment is reported: while reports involving supervisors and employers are slightly more frequent among men, reports citing colleagues (or other people) are more balanced between the genders. The amount/percentage of time people worked in person compared to working remotely should also be assessed in future research, as should the differences between the sexes of the participants in the amount of time working remotely. Other qualitative or follow-up analyses may be useful to contextualise these results and reinforce the understanding of new risks in hybrid work and teleworking contexts.

As we have mentioned, this study has some limitations and the main limitation is that, due to resource constraints, the analysis was based on a non-probabilistic sample and the data cannot be generalised. Furthermore, there is no statistically significant relationship between gender and the target variable, which implies that the differences observed may not be generalised.

In conclusion, investigating new risks of moral harassment at work is a persistent and evolving challenge and organisations need to recognise, prevent and respond to inappropriate behaviour within the organisation. While the results of this study confirm certain trends observed in previous research, they also highlight the need for a more nuanced analysis. Future research should look more closely at the various aspects of the results of this study on the impact of moral harassment on hybrid work and teleworking contexts, such as the pressure to respond quickly to requests, the pressure to work overtime, the creation of a destabilising environment, the issue of surveillance of employees (the pressure to capture images, sounds or other means of controlling privacy) and the refusal to supply equipment and systems for teleworking. A new line of research could consist of investigating employ-

ees' perceptions of this issue alongside actual working conditions and by sector of activity of the employees, checking whether there are differences between sectors.

These aspects will be relevant for identifying and reflecting on the new risks of moral harassment in the context of hybrid work and teleworking, which constitutes a threat to workers' health and safety and is incompatible with the idea of safe work.

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