

PERSONALITY TRAITS AND LOW CREATIVITY ARE KEY FACTORS IN VICTIMS OF MOBBING

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ABSTRACT --Mobbing is an escalating process during which the person becomes the target of negative social acts. It is associated with psychological problems such as: anxiety, depression and loss of self-esteem. Some researches on mobbing described victims as conscientious, rigid and compulsive, with pre-existing symptoms of anxiety and depression. The personality of victims could play a critical role in bullying, hence some characteristic within individuals may predispose victims to being bullied. Furthermore, victims of mobbing were described as having lower social skills. Thus, the victims of mobbing may exhibit rigid answers to the attacks thereby reinforcing the mobber. These answers can be interpreted as a lack of creativity. In this context, the current study investigates personality, according to the Big Five theory, and creativity. This study was carried out on 58 subjects divided into: victims with 30 subjects and controls with 28 subjects. Both groups were homogeneous for age and jobs. Results showed that victims exhibit: lower creativity, lower energy, lower emotional stability, lower openness and lower creativity (fluency, flexibility and originality) when compared to controls. Hence, personality and creativity seem to be problematic in victims of mobbing and play an important role in mobbing behavior.

KEYWORDS-- personality, Big Five, creativity, mobbing, quasi-Experiment.

RESUMEN

El mobbing es un proceso de escalamiento durante el cual la persona se convierte en blanco de actos sociales negativos. Se asocia con problemas psicológicos como: ansiedad, depresión y pérdida de autoestima. Algunas investigaciones sobre mobbing describieron a las víctimas como concienzudas, rígidas y compulsivas, con síntomas preexistentes de ansiedad y depresión.

La personalidad de las víctimas podría desempeñar un papel crítico en la intimidación, por lo que algunas características de los individuos pueden predisponer a las víctimas a ser acosadas. Además, se describió a las víctimas de mobbing con menores habilidades sociales. Por lo tanto, las víctimas del mobbing pueden mostrar respuestas rígidas a los ataques, reforzando así al mobber. Estas respuestas pueden ser interpretadas como una falta de creatividad.

En este contexto, el estudio actual investiga la personalidad, según la teoría de los Cinco Grandes, y la creatividad. Este estudio se realizó en 58 sujetos divididos en: víctimas con 30 sujetos y controles con 28 sujetos. Ambos grupos fueron homogéneos por edad y trabajo.

Los resultados mostraron que las víctimas exhiben: menor creatividad, menor energía, menor estabilidad emocional, menor apertura y menor creatividad (fluidez, flexibilidad y originalidad) en comparación con los

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controles. Por lo tanto, la personalidad y la creatividad parecen ser problemáticas en las víctimas del mobbing y desempeñan un papel importante en el comportamiento del mobbing.

PARABRAS CLAVE:

personalidad, creatividad, mobbing, casi experiment

I. INTRODUCTION

Leymann (2019) defines “mobbing” as “a specific type of aggressive behaviors such as hostile communication styles direct to one or more employees at the workplaces”.

Some researches use the term of mobbing for this phenomenon (*e.g.* Leymann), other consider mobbing as a type of bullying (Tehrani 2010). The definition of mobbing at work is harassing, offending, socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone’s work tasks. In order to be labeled as mobbing (or bullying) to be applied to a particular activity, it has to occur repeatedly and regularly (*e.g.* weekly) and over a given period of time (*e.g.* about six months). Mobbing is an escalating process in the course of which the person ends up in an inferior position and becomes a target of systematic negative social acts (Einarsen, et al. 2003). Mobbing is associated with lowered psychological well-being and mental health problems including irritation, anxiety, depression and loss of self-esteem (Hogh et al. 2016; Romeo et al. 2013; Trépanier et al. 2015). In fact, for victims, mobbing can cause highly damaging effects such as sleep problems (Hansen *et al.*, 2014), anxiety, fatigue (Reknes et al. 2014), depression, risk of cardiovascular disease and post-traumatic stress disorder (Hogh et al. 2016). For organizations, negative outcomes of mobbing include absenteeism, high turnover, replacement costs, lowered productivity, performance, grievance procedures, and loss of public goodwill (Hoel et al. 2001). Looking broader, Giga et al. (2013) point out at cost to society including health care and medical treatment, welfare, premature and ill-health retirement, cost to criminal justice system and loss of productivity (Mulder et al. 2016). The relationship between personality and exposure to mobbing have been examined in a wide range of studies. The researches on victim’s personality are divided into two areas:

1) personality as an outcome for being victim (Coyne et al. 2000) because victims develop changes in personality due to workplaces mobbing;

2) victim’s personality plays an important role in mobbing behavior. In particular, Einarsen and Skoostad (1996) found that victim’s coping and conflict management skills are lower than controls and shyness contributed to being bullied. In fact, Matthiesen and Einarsen (2015) found that provocative victims manifested low level of self-esteem and social competency combined with high level of aggressiveness. Moreover, victims were described as conscientious, rigid and compulsive Zapf (1999).

Coyne et al. (2000), found that victims had pre-existing symptoms of anxiety, depression and lower social skills than average and avoided conflict by tending to give away. Victims of mobbing have been shown to portray a poor self-image as well as being anxious in social situations (Matthiesen & Einarsen 2001).

Balducci et al., (2011), using the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2 (MMPI – 2) (Butcher *et al.*, 1989) found that victims’ personality profile showed a high neurotic component, including a marked depressive tendency and paranoid ideation related to over sensitivity and suspicion of other. Specifically, the average MMPI-

2 personality profile showed abnormal elevations on scales Hs (Hypochondria), D (Depression), Hy (Hysteria) and Pa (Paranoia) (Romeo *et al.*, 2013).

Coyne, Seigne and Randall (2000), using ICES Personality Inventory (Bartram 1994, 1998) in a study on 60 Irish victims of bullying, found a lower level of extraversion with more neuroticism and conscientiousness (Deniz & Ertosun 2010).

The personality traits, according to the Big Five Theory, *i.e.*, an individual's tendency to think, feel and so on, can be structured into the five broad dimensions: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness to experience (MacCrae & John 1992). Extravert persons prefer quantity and intensity of interpersonal interactions (Pervin 1993) and are predisposed to experience positive emotions (Watson & Clark 1997). Furthermore, extraversion has been found to be related to subjective well-being (DeNeve & Cooper 1998; Judge *et al.* 2002) and higher job satisfaction (Judge *et al.* 2002). In contrast, the introvert is more internally aware and reflective, and may be more attentive to aggressive behaviors (Nielsen *et al.*, 2017).

People with low agreeableness are said to be mistrustful and skeptical (McCrae & Costa 1987). In all likelihood, they might behave in such a way that may provoke others, thereby increasing the risk of experiencing harassment from others (Nielsen *et al.* 2017).

Conscientiousness is the individual's degree of organization, persistence and motivation in goal-directed behavior (McCrae & Costa 1991) and relates to the "control of impulse". Judge *et al.* (2000) found a clear positive relationship between conscientiousness and job satisfaction.

People with high scores in neuroticism show feelings of nervousness, worrying and insecurity. Neuroticism is negatively related to job satisfaction (Judge *et al.* 2012). These people, experience more negative life events than other individuals (Magnus *et al.* 1993) owing to their essentially pessimistic nature, and run a greater risk of being exposed to, as well perceiving, workplace harassment (Nielsen *et al.* 2017).

Finally, openness to experience refers to an individual's interest in culture and to the preference for new activities, experiences and emotions, and is related to scientific and artistic creativity, divergent thinking and political liberalism (Judge *et al.* 2012). Since mobbing victims were described as conscientious, rigid and compulsive (Zapf 1999) they could have low scores on openness to experience as well as low creativity. Hence, the personality and manner of victim play a critical role in bullying. As an outcome, some characteristics within individuals may predispose victims to being bullied (Deniz & Ertosun 2010). Some researches show that there are some relationships between the psychological characteristics of personality and creativity (Conte *et al.* 2018a, Conte *et al.* 2018b; Kashapov and Lebina 2009; Kashapov *et al.* 2016).

Concerning creativity, Guilford (1959) considers creativity as an ability to abandon stereotypical thinking and regards divergent thinking as the basis of creativity. Likewise, Ilyin (2014) describes creativity as an ability to find solutions in unusual situations.

Again, Guilford (1951; 1956; 1959; 1960; 1986) considered creative thinking as involving divergent thinking and emphasized fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration. Guilford claims that creative thinking is different from divergent thinking, because creativity requires sensitivity to problems as well as abilities to redefine, which include transformation of thought, reinterpretations and freedom from functional fixedness in solutions (Kim 2006).

Generally, the victims of mobbing tend to exhibit the same answers to the attack of mobber and this is a reinforcement for the mobber. For example, the victim could show suffering and anger. Lack of creativity in these reactions could reinforce the aggression behavior of mobber because there are the expected answers from a victim of bullying. In contrast, a divergent answer could puzzle the mobber. Furthermore, Seligman (2011, 2018) demonstrated that a sense of well-being, and optimistic point of view and “trust towards the others” are related to a change in thinking through creativity abilities.

This study aims to verify whether the victims of mobbing show different personality traits when compared to controls by administering the Big Five Questionnaire in its Italian version (BFQ).

Furthermore, a creativity test (Torrance Test of Creative Thinking) in its Italian version (TTCT), was administered to verify if they were characterized by lower creativity than controls.

Both BFQ and TTCT tests were administered to 30 victims of mobbing and to 28 control subjects comparable for age and professional activities.

II. Methods

Participants

This study was carried out on 58 subjects (34 female and 24 male), divided into: (i) victims with 30 subjects and (ii) controls with 28 subjects.

Both groups were homogeneous for age (45.7 ± 11.0 years) and jobs.

Subjects were invited to come to the Sardinian Observatory of Mobbing to take part in the research. Each subject was administered the BFQ and TTCT.

All subjects had to fill in a personal data questionnaire and an informed consent.

The privacy rights of human subjects have been observed.

This research was approved by the Ethical Board of the University.

Instruments

Big Five Questionnaire

In the Italian version of Big Five Questionnaire (BFQ) (Caprara et al. 1994), the main dimensions are:

Energy: this term is associated with the word “Extraversion” (McCraw and Costa, 1987). This dimension is organized into two sub-dimensions: “Dynamism”, referring to expansiveness and enthusiasm, and “Dominance”, referring to assertiveness and confidence (Caprara et al. 1994).

Friendliness: this term is associated with the word “Agreeableness” (McCraw and Costa, 1987). This dimension is organized into two sub-dimensions: “Cooperativeness/Empathy”, referring to sensitiveness towards the other’s needs, and “Politeness”, referring to kindness and trust (Caprara et al. 1994).

Conscientiousness: this term is related to the impulse control in both its proactive and inhibitory aspects (McCraw & Costa 1987). This dimension is organized into two sub-dimensions: “Scrupulousness”, referring to orderliness and precision and “Perseverance”, referring to capability of fulfilling one’s own tasks and commitments.

Emotional Stability: this term refers to the aspects of “negative affectivity” and “Neuroticism” (McCraw & Costa 1987). This dimension lies onto two sub-dimensions: “Emotion Control”, referring to cope with one’s own emotionality and “Impulse Control”, referring to control irritation and anger.

Openness: this term refers to the factor “Openness to Experience” (McCraw & Costa 1987). This big dimension lies onto two sub-dimensions: “Openness to Culture”, referring to moodiness of one’s own cultural interest, and “Openness to Experience”, referring to the interest towards different cultures, people, habits and style of life.

Lie is a “control factor” and it is meant to assess the “social desirability” type of the response set.

The BFQ is made up of 132 sentences equally distributed into 11 scales.

For these factors, raw scores have been converted into standard scores (T scores) with mean 50 and standard deviation 10.

Torrance Test of Creative Thinking (TTCT)

This Test aims to assess the individual’s capacity for creativity (Torrance, 2000).

The TTCT has two versions: TTCT-Verbal (forms A and B) and TTCT-Figural (forms A and B).

The TTCT-Verbal has two forms, A and B, and consists of five activities: ask-and-guess, product improvement, unusual uses, unusual questions, and just suppose. Each activity must be achieved in a given time. The stimulus for each task includes a picture to which people respond in writing (Torrance 1974; Kim 2006).

The TTCT-Figural form A and form B consist of three activities: picture construction, picture completion and repeated figures of lines or circles.

Ten minutes are given to complete each activity. In Activity 1, the subject must construct a picture using shapes (*e.g.* pear or jellybean) printed on the page. The proposed stimulus must be a part of the final picture (Kim 2006). Activity 2 asks the subject to make a drawing using 10 incomplete figures. Activity 3 is made up of three pages of lines or circles. These stimuli must be a part of the final picture.

Torrance (1974) recommended the creation of a game situation, avoiding the anxious feelings usually associated with testing.

Four sub-scales were considered for measuring:

Fluency: this ability is measured by the number of relevant ideas. It is related to the ability to produce a number of figural images from a unique stimulus (Bart et al. 2017; Kim 2017).

Originality: it is measured by the number of unfrequent ideas. The originality lists have been prepared for each item. The common responses are counted as 1 (Bart et al. 2017; Kim 2017).

Elaboration: the final score of elaboration comes from the number of added ideas. This skill demonstrates the subject’s ability to develop and elaborate ideas (Bart et al. 2017; Kim 2017).

Flexibility: the final score comes from this ability to generate various different ideas using several different strategies.

For these tests, raw scores have been converted into standard scores (T scores) with mean 50 and standard deviation 10.

III. DATA ANALYSIS

The data consist of the answers of each subject to the BFQ and to TTCT.

In order to ascertain the differences between victims and controls in personality in agreement with BF model, a mixed ANOVA, 2x5 was performed. Factors were: Groups (2 levels: Victims and Controls), BFQ (5 levels: Energy, Friendship, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability and Openness).

A mixed ANOVA 2x7 with Group (first factor, two levels: Victims and Controls) and TTCT (second factor with seven levels. For the verbal form: Fluency-V; Originality-V, Flexibility-V. For the figural form: Fluency-F, Originality-F, Elaboration-F and Flexibility-F).

After ANOVAs, Duncan test was performed at $p < 0.01$ in order to discriminate between means.

IV. RESULTS

Mixed ANOVA 2x5 showed highly significant results for the interaction between Groups and BFQ ($F=4.82$; $df=4/225$; $p < 0.01$).

Duncan test showed:

1. a significant difference for Energy between Victims and Controls ($p < 0.05$) (Fig. 1);
2. a significant difference for Emotional Stability for Victims and Controls ($p < 0.05$) (Fig. 2);
3. a significant difference for Openness for Victims and Controls ($p < 0.05$) (Fig. 3).

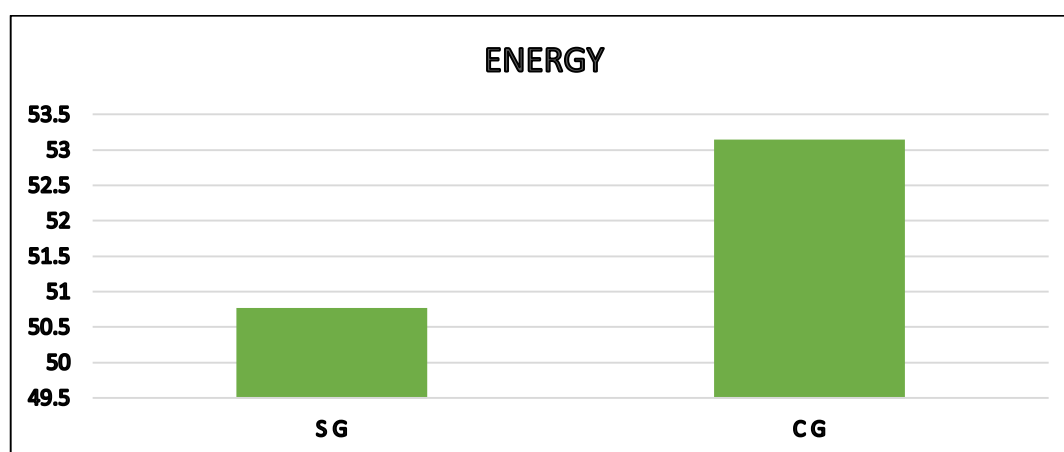


Figure 1: Means for the scores of Energy for Victims and Controls.

Fig 1 shows a statistically significant difference of means at $p < 0.05$ between Victims and Controls for Energy. The Victims showed a significant lower Energy than Controls.

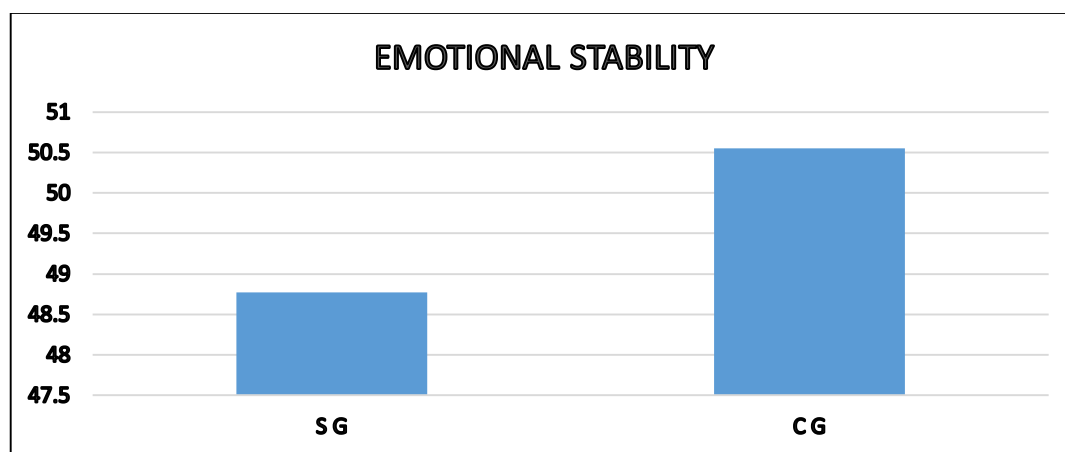


Figure 2: Means for the scores of Emotional Stability for Victims and Controls.

Fig. 2 shows a statistically significant difference of means at $p < 0.05$ between Victims and Controls for Emotional Stability. The Victims showed a significant lower Emotional Stability than Controls.

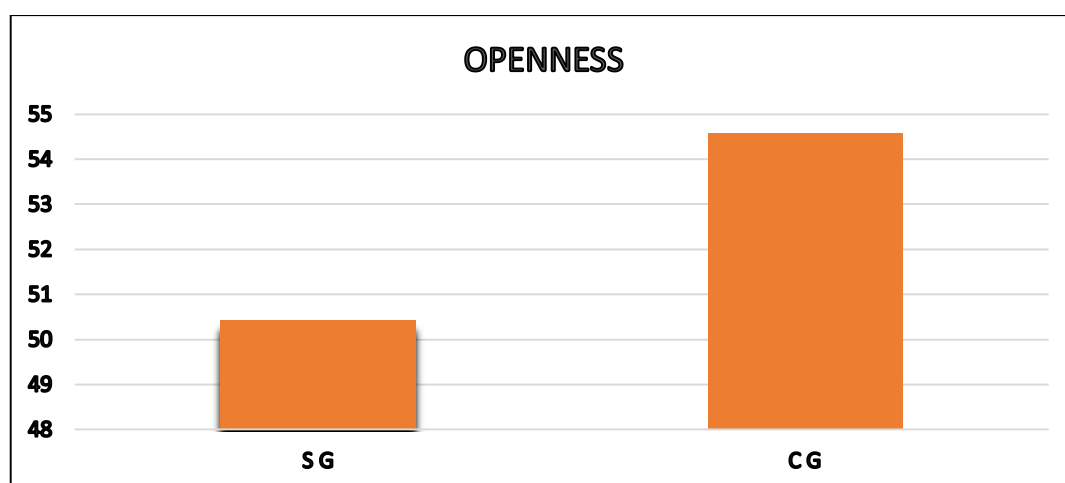


Figure 3: Means for the scores of Openness for Victims and Controls.

Fig. 3 shows a statistically significant difference of means at $p < 0.05$ between Victims and Controls for Openness. The Victims showed a significant lower Openness than Controls.

Therefore, results showed that victims of mobbing presented:

1. a lower Energy than controls. Higher extraversion was found to be related to subjective well-being (DeNeve & Cooper 1998; Judge et al. 2002). The introvert is more internally aware and reflective, and may be either more attentive or show aggressive behaviors (Nielsen et al. 2017);
2. a lower Emotional Stability than controls. Neuroticism is negatively related to job satisfaction (Judge et al. 2010) and is associated with a more negative experience of life events (Magnus et al. 1993). The Victims run a greater risk of being exposed to, as well as perceiving, workplace harassment (Nielsen et al. 2017);
3. a lower Openness than controls. In fact, mobbing Victims have been described as rigid and compulsive (Zapf 1999) with low creativity. This aspect could be a reinforcement for the mobber because the mobbing victim shows the same response to every attack.

The victim's personality could be an effective factor playing an important role in mobbing behavior.

Also, this current study aimed to investigate creativity aspects in the victims of mobbing.

Mixed ANOVA 2x7 with Group (2 levels) and TTCT factor (7 levels) showed a significant effect for Group ($p<0.01$), for TTCT ($p<0.01$) and interaction between TTCT and Group ($F=46.29$; $df=6/336$; $p<0.001$).

Duncan Test showed:

1. significant differences between groups for Fluency-V and Fluency-F ($p>0.05$) (fig. 4);
2. significant differences between groups for Flexibility-V and Flexibility-F ($p>0.05$) (fig. 4);
3. significant differences between groups for Originality-V and Originality-F ($p>0.05$) (fig. 4).
4. Elaboration-F was not significant ($p>0.5$).

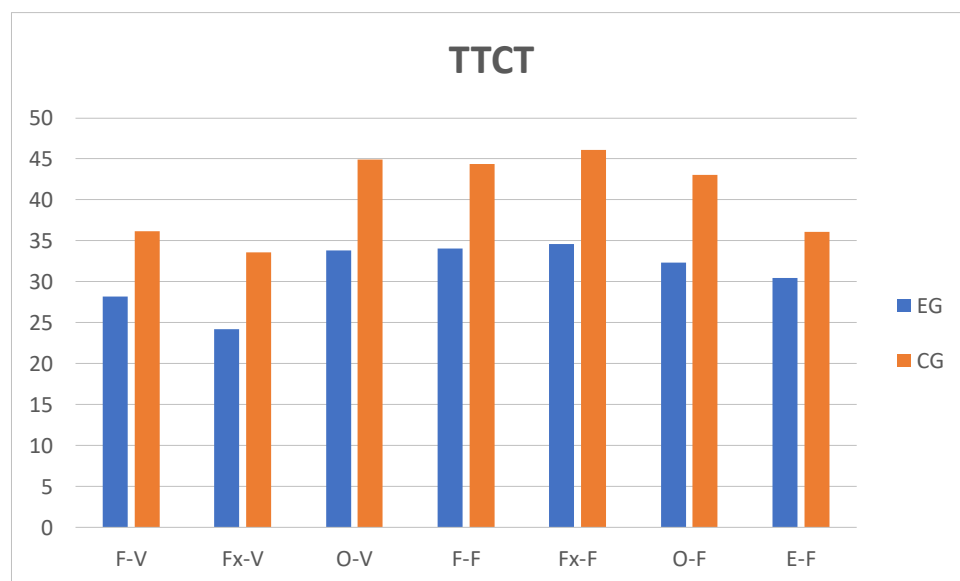


Figure 4: Means for the scores of TTCT for Victims and Controls. (F=Fluency; Fx=Flexibility; O=Originality; E=Elaboration)

Fig. 4 shows a statistically significant difference of means at $p<0.05$ between Victims and Controls for Creativity (TTCT factors).

In fact, the victims of mobbing showed lower flexibility, lower originality and lower elaborations the controls. These results confirm the idea of victims of mobbing as rigid and stereotyped (Zapf 1999).

V. DISCUSSION

The literature on mobbing focuses mostly on mobber's behavior. In fact, the common idea was that the mobber harass everyone that is near him/her, but the victim of mobbing is always the predestined victim also when he/she changes job and environment. Hence, this research focused on psychological aspects that could play an important role in mobbing behavior. In this context, our results confirm a lower conflict management skills ability in victims of mobbing.

In fact, they show lower energy, lower emotional stability, lower openness and than controls. In general, the victims of mobbing provide fixed and known responses to the attack of mobber rather than find new strategies. These results are in agreement with Deniz & Ertosum (2010). The personality and behavior of the victim play an important role in bullying: some characteristic within individual may predispose victims to be bullied.

Likewise, Einarsen and Skoostad (1996) found that victims' coping and conflict management skills are lower than others and this contributes to their being bullied. Moreover, Balducci et al. (2011) found that the victim's personality profile was characterized by a strong neurotic component, including a marked depressive tendency and paranoid ideation related to oversensitivity and suspicion of the other.

Again, these results confirm the results of Coyne, Seigne and Randal (2000) who found that the victims of bullying were less extraverted than controls but emotionally more instable.

Furthermore, the victims of mobbing showed lower flexibility, lower originality and lower elaborations the controls. These results confirm the idea of victims of mobbing as rigid and stereotyped (Zapf 1999). They show low creativity could reinforce the behaviors of the mobber, because they show a fixed response to every attack.

These results can be interpreted in the lights of Guilford's hypothesis (1959), who stressed creativity as an ability to abandon stereotypical thinking and considered divergent thinking as the basis of creativity. Likewise, Ilyin (2014) describes creativity as an ability to find solutions in unusual situations to become exposed to new things and to reflect deeply.

There are some relationships between psychological characteristics of personality and creativity (Kashapov et al. 2016). Fluency dimension measures the ability to produce a number of ideas from a unique stimulus (Kim 2017). A low level of Fluency could be associated with rigid and stereotyped behaviors, as observed in the victim's group in the current research.

Also, Flexibility dimension measures the ability to produce some conceptually different ideas (Torrance 2000). A low flexibility indicates a lower ability to change the unusual strategies and behaviors. In fact, these actions do not cause an effective change when the situation needs a qualitative change. A low level of Originality was observed in the victims. The Originality dimension is the ability to produce ideas beyond the obvious (Torrance, 2000), and is related to mental elasticity. The victims of mobbing show the tendency to provide immediately known responses rather than stretching the anxiety to seek more strategies. In contrast, a creative reaction by victims of mobbing would generate an opposite effect causing a discomfort in the mobber and making it desist. Finally, the victims of mobbing are lower in well-being because low creativity affects thinking. Consequently, they feel themselves more anxious and worried with high in meaningfulness and low in happiness (Seligman 2011, 2018). These aspects could reinforce the aggressive behavior of mobber and may predispose the victims to be bullied.

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