

# Reliability and Validity of a Romanian Version of the Negative Acts

## Questionnaire

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**Abstract.** Since 2010 the interest in workplace mobbing has been increasing in Romania too. The Negative Acts Questionnaire is one of the most frequently used questionnaires for assessing these issues. The purpose of this study was to develop a Romanian version of the NAQ. The multi-occupational sample of 268 Romanian employees was recruited from various private and public work areas. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient for the entire NAQ scale was 0.88. A three-factor model was obtained from the exploratory factor analysis and the Cronbach Alpha coefficients for the three subscales were 0.76 (work-related mobbing), 0.81 (person-related mobbing) and 0.71 (other discriminatory criteria-related mobbing). A comparative analysis allowed us to identify a similarity of the person-related mobbing subscale between our three-factor model and the ones of Stale Einarsen and Bjorn Inge Raknes (1997), Gonzalez Trijueque and Grana Gomez (2009) and Jiro Takaki et al. (2010). This Romanian version appears to have acceptable levels of internal consistency, reliability and factor validity.

**Key words:** workplace mobbing, perpetrator, victim, scale development, factor model

### I. Introduction

The assessment of workplace mobbing is a difficult process because of the influence of certain factors. The most important ones are the lack of a unique definition of mobbing and also the fact that various instruments to assess the phenomenon are used. Consequently, as Vittorio DiMartino and his colleagues (2003) mentioned, “When it is used a precise definition to measure workplace mobbing and it refers to a constant experience, lived weekly, only an average of 4% of the population has been abused. If we include cases of occasional abuse, it reaches a percent of 10%. By contrast, where the respondents were labeled as abused, if they experienced one or more negative acts associated with workplace mobbing, the figures were between 10% and 40%” (p.40). So the incidence of workplace mobbing, based on the number of negative acts, is higher than the one suggested by self-reporting such behaviors. This reality is based on the idea that some

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targets do not perceive these acts as abusive or the fact they avoid to admit it, because it is seen as a sign of weakness. Although “the analysis of workplace mobbing is new, the phenomenon is old” (Heloani, 2004, p.101), and the lack of standardized tools to investigate its activity stimulated the research in this area.

As a result, over the last two decades, several questionnaires has been developed such as: Inventory of Psychological Terror (Leymann, 1990), Bergen Bullying Index (Einarsen et al., 1994), Work Harassment Scale (Björkqvist, Österman & Hjelt-Bäck, 1994), Negative Acts Questionnaire (Einarsen & Inge Raknes, 1997), Cuestionario Individual Sobre Psicoterror, ninguneo, Estigmatización y Rechazo en Organizaciones Sociales (Piñuel & Oñate, 2001; Fidalgo & Piñuel, 2004), Workplace Incivility Scale (Cortina, Magley, Hunter Williams & Day Langhout, 2001), Escala de Acoso Psicológico en el Trabajo (Martínez et al., 2002), Cuestionario de estrategias de acoso psicológico LIPT-60 (Gonzalez de Rivera & Rodríguez-Abuin, 2003), MOBB-90 Questionnaire (Boada, Vallejo De Diego & A. Colet Virgil, 2003), Recursos, Emociones/ Experiencias y Demandas Cuestionario (Salanova et al., 2003), Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (Garcia et al., 2004), Generalized Workplace Harassment Questionnaire (Rospenda & Richman, 2004), Cuestionario de Acoso Psicológico en el Trabajo (Moreno-Jiménez, Rodríguez-Muñoz, Garrosa & Morante, 2005), Uncivil Workplace Behavior Questionnaire (Martin & Hine, 2005) and Cuestionario de Acoso Psicológico Percibido (Consuelo Morán, Mónica Teresa González & René Landero, 2009).

Currently, two of the most frequently used questionnaires have focused on workplace mobbing and harassment which are the original and the revised versions of the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ). Based on a review of the literature and on a series of case studies, Ståle Einarsen and Bjørn Inge Raknes developed this questionnaire which consists of 22 items measuring the exposure to specific negative acts that are typical for mobbing. The items refer to both direct and indirect behaviors but do not require respondents to label themselves as targets of psychological abuse. NAQ was used in various sectors from different countries such as: Austria (Niedl, 1995), Norway (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997; Nielsen et al., 2008), Denmark (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001), U.K. (Hoel et al., 2001; Lewis, Sheehan & Davies, 2008; Einarsen, Hoel & Notelaers, 2009), Finland (Salin, 2001), United States (Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy & Alberts, 2004; Out, 2005; Stelmaschuk, 2010), Portugal (Araujo, McIntyre & McIntyre, 2004), Lithuania (Malinauskiene, 2004), Canada (Out, 2005), Australia (O’ Farell, 2006), Belgium (Notelaers, Einarsen, De Witte & Vermunt, 2006; Baillien, Vanbeselaere & De Witte, 2008), China (McCormack & Casimir, 2006), Brazil (Cavalcante Gonçalves, 2006), Italy (Giorgi, Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2006; Giorgi, 2009), Turkey

(Yildiz, 2007), Spain (Moreno Jiménez et al., 2007; González Trijueque & Graña Gómez, 2009), Japan (Takaki et al., 2009; Kiyoko & Henley, 2010), Korea (Seo & Leather, 2008). This fact facilitates both comparative and cross-cultural studies.

In Romania, a country still in a transition period, some studies were conducted inside the organizational environments centered on the existence of favorable conditions for the mobbing phenomenon. There was a high level of obedience and tolerance of the individuals or the persistence of inefficient management patterns due to the influence of mentality. The investigative approaches which focused exclusively on workplace mobbing are extremely limited, and their results are not well-known. Therefore, we only point out Adina Dinu's micro-research (2005), Peter Kovacs' micro-research (2006) and theoretical mini-synthesis (2008), Tudor George Cătălin's theoretical article (2008) and Georgeta Pânișoară's article (2009).

Given the above information and the lack of studies in Romanian, the purposes of this study were:

- (1) to develop a Romanian version of the NAQ using a back-translation method;
- (2) to examine the internal consistency, reliability and the factor validity of this instrument on a sample of Romanian employees;
- (3) to compare our findings with those of the studies in other countries.

## **II. Method**

### ***Participants***

268 employees, males and females, aged from 19 to 65 years, participated in this study. The sample was equally recruited from public and private organizations as well as from different Romanian geographical areas such as Arad, Cluj, București, Constanța, Bacău, Târgu Neamț, Suceava and Iași. The subjects had different professions and the employees' gender was not considered as a criterion for recruitment.

Regarding the professions of the recruited participants from the public area, they ranged from nurses in public hospitals and secondary and university professors, to diplomats from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, officials from town halls, probation officers and lawyers from local departments of the Ministry of Justice. As for the private sector, the employees were recruited from large and small firms to private banks. All 268 employees completed the questionnaires. The employees were not compensated for their participation.

### ***Measures***

In order to measure the levels workplace mobbing we used a version of the Negative Acts Questionnaire revised by Canadian psychologist Jennifer Out (2005). NAQ was initially developed by Norwegian researchers Ståle Einarsen and Inge Bjørn Raknes (1997), and it was based on existing literature and interviews with victims of bullying at work.

The questionnaire was translated into Romanian and translated back by three bilingual individuals and then an English specialist compared the original and back-translated questionnaire to identify any differences in the meaning of item. NAQ was initially applied to a test group of 32 participants to determine their internal consistency. Cronbach Alpha coefficient was 0.83. In the same preliminary stage, the participants were asked to label each negative act included in the questionnaire as psychological abuse in the workplace or not from their perspective, and to answer using yes or no. Given the existing cultural differences regarding the phenomenon, this step was necessary in order to eliminate the possibility that one or more items in the questionnaire should not be considered as psychological abuse of the Romanian participants. We are aware that labeling these negative acts or not is one that brings limited support to our investigation. However, it is welcomed in the context of studying the abusive behavior topic.

This 20 item version refers to both direct and indirect behaviors and does not require the respondents to label themselves as targets of psychological abuse (table 1). Two items of the original version („funny surprises”, and „reactions from others because you work too hard”) were excluded by the psychologist mentioned above, and a self-labeling item („have you been bullied at work?”) was included. The self-labeling item was based on Einarsen and Raknes’ definition of workplace psychological: “A situation when one or more individuals exert negative actions against one or more persons repeatedly in a certain period of time, a situation where the victim of the negative act is struggling to defend themselves. We do not only mean a single episode of harassment.” For all 21 items, the respondents had to answer on a five-point scale (0 = never, 1 = now and then, 2 = monthly, 3 = weekly, 4 = daily) whether they have experienced or not those negative acts at work.

### ***Procedure***

This study was presented to the participants having as aim to investigate employees’ satisfaction at work in order to avoid their skepticism towards the topic of psychological abuse within the organization. The measures were administered and completed individually during many sessions over several months. The variable type of organization was checked by having an equal number of employees from the public and private organizations. As for the

variables gender and level of academic education, they could not be checked because some participants did not fill in all the requested information.

Items	p <sup>a</sup>
1. Someone withholding necessary information so that your work gets complicated	0.001
2. Unwanted sexual advances	0.118
3. Ridicule or insulting teasing	0.618
4. Ordered to do work below your level of competence	0.004
5. Being deprived of responsibility or work tasks	0.588
6. Gossip or rumors about you	0.345
7. Social exclusion from co-workers or group work activities	0.148
8. Repeated offensive remarks about you or your private life	0.110
9. Verbal abuse	0.448
10. Unwanted sexual attention	0.056
11. Hint or signals from others that you should quit your job	0.718
12. Physical abuse or threats of physical abuse	0.152
13. Repeated reminders about your mistakes	0.030
14. Silence or hostility as a response to your questions or attempts at conversation	0.252
15. Devaluing of your work and efforts	0.033
16. Neglect of your opinions or views	0.588
17. Offensive telephone calls or written messages	0.998
18. Devaluing of your „rights” and opinions with reference to your gender	0.260
19. Devaluing of your „rights” and opinions with reference to your age	0.883
20. Exploitation at work such as private errands	0.520

Table1. Items of the Negative Acts Questionnaire and type of organizational differences in responses to each item

<sup>a</sup>: differences depending on the type of institution in response to each item were assessed with the Mann-Whitney-test

### III. Results

Because we hadn't already use a validated version of the Negative Acts Questionnaire on the Romanian population, we calculated Cronbach Alpha coefficient for the entire sample of 268 participants and the value obtained was 0.88. We also did an exploratory factor analysis to see how the questionnaire items grouped into factors (table 2). We note that Jennifer Out, the Canadian psychologist from whom we took this version of the questionnaire, was not interested in doing a factor analysis. So, we set the minimum absolute value of coefficients to 0.50 and the number of factors to

3. In fact, in the international scientific area, there also are others three-factorial model. So, the Varimax rotation grouped the items into a three-factor model with 16 items.

	Work-related mobbing	Person-related mobbing	Other discriminatory criteria-mobbing
Item 1	0.66		
Item 13	0.64		
Item 15	0.64		
Item 16	0.77		
Item 20	0.50		
Item 3		0.65	
Item 6		0.62	
Item 8		0.76	
Item 9		0.63	
Items 11		0.58	
Items 14		0.61	
Item 10			0.69
Item 12			0.76
Item 17			0.59
Item 18			0.68
Item 19			0.50
Eigenvalues	31.819	43.949	51.049
Total Variance			
Explained	17.973%	34.907%	51.049%

Table 2. Exploratory factor analysis of the Negative Acts Questionnaire assuming the three-factor model that the author obtained (Varimax rotation matrix)

Factor 1 which we labeled as work-related mobbing consisted of items 1, 13, 15, 16 and 20. We labeled the second factor as person-related mobbing; it included the items 3, 6, 8, 9, 11 and 14. Factor 3 consisted of items 10, 12, 17, 18 and 19; it was labeled as other discriminatory criteria - related workplace mobbing. The third factor experienced different labels from one factorial model to another, depending on the items that were grouped within it as well as the researcher's options. As for the first two factors, the same labels are found in other factorial models and also in the existing taxonomies of the types of workplace mobbing.

The Cronbach Alpha coefficients for each of the three factors indicated good internal consistency, and the value of 0.81 allowed us to conclude that the most stable seems to be the person-related mobbing factor. The other values obtained are 0.76 for work-related mobbing and 0.71 for other discriminatory criteria - related workplace mobbing (table 3).

Although the objectives of this research were not aimed to continue the exploratory factor analysis to a confirmatory one or to set the factorial model as a reference, we consider that a brief overview of other models obtained on different samples during studies developed in other countries is relevant in order to note the issues which are similar or the different.

Scale/ Subscales	Cronbach Alpha coefficients	M	SD
Work-related mobbing (subscale)	0.76	3.54	3.19
Person-related mobbing (subscale)	0.81	3.47	3.65
Other discriminatory criteria-related mobbing (subscale)	0.71	.94	1.89
Scale NAQ	0.88	9.98	8.52

Table 3. Reliability of NAQ. Cronbach Alpha coefficients, means and standard deviation for the three-factor model

The first factorial model developed in 1997 belonged to the authors of the questionnaire, Ståle Einarsen and Inge Bjørn Raknes. It was initially obtained on a 22-item version of the questionnaire applied to a sample of 464 Norwegian marine employees working in the engineering industry and, in the end, included 16 items like our model. Even though five factors were distinguished at the beginning, the last two were considered unstable and so only three remained as personal derogation, work-related mobbing and social exclusion. We identified a high similarity regarding the negative acts which affect the person and not the profession between the Norwegian researchers' model and ours. This finding is supported by the four common items that are 3, 6, 8 and 9.

Generally, those latest factorial designs found in the literature, reviewed and analyzed, are refined and as the first common characteristic is grouping the items' questionnaire into three factors. One of these models is the one belonging to Jiro Takaki and his colleagues (2010); it was developed on a group of 737 workers from a marine engineering company in Japan. The three-factorial model differs do to the fact that it has only 12 items and the third factor is labeled sexual harassment by the researchers. When we make a comparative analysis between Takaki's model and ours, we find that most similarities are recorded on the person-related mobbing factor; the common items are 6, 8 and 9.

Another model that we want to briefly present was obtained by David González and José Luis Gran Trijueque Gómez (2009) after applying the

NAQ on a sample of 2,861 employees from various Spanish work areas. Although the authors have used the 23-item revised version of the NAQ, the factorial model obtained is relevant to these issues. The model also has three factors but the difference consists in labeling the third factor as physical abuse and the fact that it has 17 items. We note again that most similarities with our model are recorded by the person-related mobbing factor; the common items are 6, 8 and 11.

When we strictly refer to the analyzed models, the negative acts recognized as typical for the person-related mobbing, regardless of the nationality of the employees, are: „gossip or rumors about you” (item 6) and „repeated offensive remarks about you or your private life” (item 8). As for work-related mobbing, only one item was recognized as typical no matter the employees’ nationality, and that one is „someone withholding necessary information so that your work gets complicated” (item 1). This last mentioned negative act also recorded significant differences from the type of the organization ( $p=0.001$ ); it seems that the employees working in the private sector are more exposed to this behavior. Moreover, we also note the fact that 58.2% of the employees from private Romanian organizations reported workplace mobbing and only 41.8% of the ones from the public institutions.

#### **IV. Discussion**

Our research was aimed at verifying the internal consistency, reliability and the factor validity of the NAQ on a sample of Romanian employees. Subsequently, after the exposure of the results and all these factor models, some conclusions are necessary. The questionnaire has proven to be a useful tool for measuring negative behaviors at work given the fact that the results regarding internal consistency and validity of the instrument are more than satisfying. The Cronbach Alpha coefficients for the whole scale (0.88) as for the three subscales (0.81, 0.76, 0.71) were acceptable to high. It is also important to consider that some measurement errors could have been made.

Most previous studies of the NAQ have indicated that its structure includes at least three dimensions and two of them are labelled in the same manner. Those two dimensions are person-related mobbing and work-related mobbing that can also be found in Leyman’s theoretical approach. As for the third dimension, it had various labels from social exclusion to physical abuse or sexual harassment. We named it other discriminatory criteria-related mobbing. In this present study, the exploratory factor analysis also revealed three separate dimensions and each one included five or six items which may be considered sufficient for this analysis. The Cronbach Alpha coefficients were 0.81 for the person-related factor, 0.76



for work-related mobbing and 0.71 for other discriminatory criteria - related workplace mobbing. Further more, the values recorded in each of the three factors, as well as those of each item of the questionnaire provide a high degree of stability and consistency.

Our purposes were inspired by past research, such as the models of Ståle Einarsen and Inge Bjørn Raknes (1997), of David González and José Luis Gran Trijueque Gómez (2009) and of Jiro Takaki as well as his colleagues (2010). When we strictly refer to the analyzed models, the negative acts recognized as typical for the person-related mobbing, regardless of the nationality of the employees, are: „gossip or rumors about you” and „repeated offensive remarks about you or your private life”. As for work-related mobbing, only one item was recognized as typical no matter the employees’ nationality and that one is „someone withholding necessary information so that your work gets complicated”.

The comparative analysis of these models, including ours, allows us to conclude that, on one hand, the grouping differences of the items may be determined by the significance that each individual or social group gives to the abusive acts (especially to those related to work-related mobbing) and, on the other hand, we need to take into account a larger sample of employees in the next study. The three-factor model defined in this study may be an important milestone in the area of scientific research, even if it requires a confirmatory factor analysis to be used for diagnosing the phenomenon in all of Romanian. Therefore, our findings should be used with caution.

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