Cultivating a Safer Organizational Climate in the Public Sector: Mistreatment Intervention Using the Four Pillars of Lifelong Learning

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Abstract: Workplace mistreatment damages employees and organizations and should be mitigated. Thus, the present study's primary goal was to develop, employ, and evaluate an intervention program to promote a safer organizational climate in a public sector organization. In this study, UNESCO's four pillars of lifelong learning were applied to alleviate mistreatment and promote a sustainable and safer climate. Using a qualitative research method, employees were interviewed once before a sequence of two workshops to capture their experiences and perceptions regarding mistreatment, and again a few weeks after completing the intervention to exemine its impact. The first workshop raised an awareness of mistreatment, and the second provided the participants with practical and personal tools to cope with mistreatment. The intervention was found to increase knowledge and understanding and allowed for the acquisition of competencies and tools that enhanced employees' ability to spend time together, improve their social climate, and flourish personally and professionally. Limitations and implications for future research are also discussed.

Keywords: mistreatment; intervention; learning to be; learning to know; learning to do; learning to live together; organizational climate

1. Introduction

Workplace mistreatment is a broad term covering a wide range of interpersonal harms that employees might encounter at work [1] (p. 54). Sadly, the prevalence of workplace mistreatment is high, with one in every three workers experiencing abusive behaviors at work [2,3]. The negative impact of mistreatment at work is unquestionable [1,4,5].

Workplace mistreatment is associated with psychological distress, burnout, anxiety, depression, and a general reduction in well-being, outcomes identified as affective outcomes, as noted in a literature review [6]. The authors observed two additional types of effects. In one category, attitudinal outcomes, mistreated workers become less motivated and committed, and their coworkers and managers become less satisfied with their work. In the other category, behavioral effects (such as retaliation [7]), employees may damage the organization's property and production processes in response to their victimization, or they may leave the organization.

Given the relevance of workplace mistreatment to both employees and organizations, the literature is rich in definitions and research tools. While most studies have dealt with mapping types of mistreatment and understanding their impact [6], some have focused on the boundaries of adverse interpersonal behaviors [2,8], as in the case of workplace incivility [6,9], or emotional abuse [10]. Other definitions of mistreatment have focused on the perpetrator's identity, as in the case of abusive supervision [11] or mistreatment by customers [12,13].

However, very few studies have sought to identify intervening factors [14–19]. Only a limited number of these studies have measured the effects of active interventions [20], and

even these have tended to neglect the organizational level [1], which has been recognized as crucial for a successful intervention process [1,18,21]. Furthermore, most studies have reported a weak impact [1], and none of the interventions used a clear theoretical framework, such as the four pillars of lifelong learning.

The four pillars of the lifelong learning framework presented by Delors [22–24] are widely considered a key international reference for the conceptualization of learning in today's world [25]. Delors proposed four closely linked pillars that constitute learning as a continuous process throughout life. The underlying concept is that a holistic approach is needed to develop the knowledge and skills required for a sustainable future founded on changes in values, behaviors, lifestyles, and interactions between individuals and societies [26]. The framework discusses the knowledge and understanding of the learned subject and the ability and desire to continue learning (i.e., the pillar of learning to know); transferring knowledge to the professional and practical spheres and acquiring tools and patterns of behavior in order to act in the real world, including in unforeseeable situations, formal and informal (i.e., learning to do); fully developing creative potential as individuals (i.e., learning to be); and cooperating as a society, using the knowledge and skills that nourish the need and ability to live together (i.e., learning to live together) [24,25,27,28]. The framework has been used in studies in varying contexts [29–32].

Thus far, no use of the framework to mitigate various mistreatments has been reported. However, the framework, which was initially proposed as an educational framework, has been adopted in the organizational setting [33]. Its elements have been recognized as underlying effective organizational training [34,35], and the framework has been acknowledged as appropriate for the purposes of moral instruction [28,36]. It can, therefore, be viewed as a framework for the cultivation of a moral organizational climate.

Accordingly, the present study's primary goal is to develop, employ, and evaluate an intervention program in a public sector organization, aimed at promoting an ethical organizational climate. Using a clear and robust framework of lifelong learning, consisting of the four pillars of learning to know, learning to be, learning to do, and learning to live together [24], for the first time in the context of mistreatment, an intervention program was executed. Thus, the current study contributes to knowledge about mistreatment interventions and their impact, and more specifically about nuances in the public sector, a context which has been neglected until now.

1.1. Mitigation of Mistreatment

Despite its importance, the mitigation of mistreatment has received little attention in the literature [20]. Reviews of mistreatment interventions found that the impact of the limited number of interventions was weak, with only four controlled before-and-after studies [1]. Of the three interventions that were classified as being of moderate quality, two were rated as effective, and one was rated as partially effective. The authors attributed the weakness of these interventions to their neglect of the organizational viewpoint. In this context, several antecedents required for effective interventions were noted, of which the culture of the workplace was one [37]. Other researchers adopted a micro-level perspective. One example focused on enhancing resilience as an effective way to address incivility in the patient care environment through cognitive rehearsal [38].

Other scholars have used asynchronic learning models to decrease incivility [20]. For the most part, these interventions have been conducted in healthcare organizations and in academia [18,20,21,38,39], but not in other public service contexts. Moreover, although all these interventions were based on learning, none were founded in a holistic view; that is, none was aimed at creating sustainable change based on lifelong learning as a way of increasing the ability of individuals to respond to change and to flourish.

1.2. The Present Study

The present study's goal is to construct, apply, and evaluate an intervention program in a public sector organization based on the four pillars of education, while addressing

personal learning and social context in a comprehensive learning framework. It is hypothesized that the intervention program will promote a healthier culture in which employees learn how to live together as an organizational community that values personal safety, peer support and ethical values.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Sample and Tools

The intervention program was held within one department of a public organization in Israel. Prior to the workshops, out of a population of 75 training participants, purposive sampling was used to select 18 interviewees from each of the three main role groups in the department (administrative employees, professional staff, and middle managers), and from different ages and tenure. The research team made the selection prior to the beginning of the training, and thus, the participants were anonymous to the trainers.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 employees, each of whom participated in the intervention training. Tenure ranged from 5 to 20 years, with an average of 15 years. Most of the interviewees (16 of 18) were women, representing the department's gender ratio as a whole. The first round of interviews took place before the employees attended the two sequential workshops that constituted the mistreatment intervention. The second round of interviews took place three weeks after the second workshop.

The first interview's objective was to understand the knowledge, feelings, thoughts, perceptions, and behaviors in the unit, concerning mistreatment, as perceived by the employees, and to serve as a baseline for the evaluation of the post-intervention interviews. Following the first interview, all 75 employees attended the intervention (i.e., the two workshops). Several weeks after the second workshop, the 18 employees were interviewed again. The second round of interviews was held to understand the participants' experiences within the intervention, to examine if any shifts occurred in feelings, thoughts, and perceptions regarding mistreatment, to see whether the intervention promoted individual and organizational learning, and to evaluate the impact of the intervention itself.

The intervention:

The current intervention's goal was to reduce the occurence of mistreatment by raising awareness of it and by providing personal and organizational coping tools. The intervention consisted of two workshops conducted in the organizational premises, with three weeks separating the first workshop from the second one. Each workshop lasted four hours and involved groups of 15-20 employees.

The intervention was designed specifically for the current project, being the first of its kind in Israel. Its design was based on the theoretical and scientific knowledge-base of organizational mistreatment and the theory and practice of the emotional intelligence (EI) and EI organizational training [34].

The first workshop aimed to raise participants' awareness of mistreatment and to discuss past incidents. It explored the characteristics, conditions, and impacts of organizational mistreatment. The second workshop, conducted three weeks later, aimed to provide participants with tools for dealing with future mistreatment experiences and to promote a safer organizational climate. This second workshop exposed participants to EI's theoretical and empirical foundations and its relevance in promoting ethical behavior. This workshop also dealt with personal social–emotional skills, such as empathy, self-awareness, self-regulation, and stress tolerance mechanisms, which are needed to cope with mistreatment. The second workshop also stressed the importance of social–emotional groups in the organizational context.

This intervention design was selected to have a sustainable impact [34] by adopting a lifelong learning framework [24]. The workshops were designed to use various methods that included discussions, personal and group exercises, analysis of victims' testimonials, and discussions about participants' personal experiences.

In particular, drawing on a view of intervention as a process that spills over from the dyadic relationship between perpetrator and victim into the social environment, the

workshops were developed to emphasize group learning (learning to live together) to trigger a change in the organizational climate.

2.2. Procedure

The management of the public organization under study chose to introduce the training and selected an organizational unit to participate in the pilot training, with the aim of extending it to other units. Employees of the selected department were informed about the process, and an introductory session preceded the interviews and workshops for all employees and managers in which the forthcoming training was announced. Following this introductory session, employees were selected to take part in the interviews. The purpose of the interviews was explained, confidentiality was assured, and informed consent was obtained from each of the participants.

The trainers were academics and practitioners specializing in mistreatment, social-emotional learning, and organizational training. The organization's legal entities and top management approved the process and tools before the workshops took place, and non-disclosure agreements were signed between the college and the public organization legal entity.

2.3. Data Analysis:

The four pillars of lifelong learning provided a framework for thematic analysis of the before and after interviews [40]

The themes related to each of the pillars were identified in a thorough and dedicated process. At the same time, the researchers were open to the possible emergence of new themes. The before and after interviews were analysed separately. Pre-training interviews provided the baseline regarding mistreatment and expectations from the training. The post-training interviews captured the impact of the training. The two sets of interviews regarding each pillar were then combined, to reveal the impact of the training vis-à-vis the organizational and personal starting point, and whether and in which ways it met or did not meet participants' expectations and needs.

3. Results

Analysis of the interview responses revealed that the mistreatment prevention training was perceived as dealing with essential and relevant personal and organizational issues that can arise in any organization, and particularly within the public sector, given its highly hierarchical and tenure-based structure. This view was prevalent, although the climate of the department in which the training was held was perceived as positive overall. As indicated in Table 1, the analysis also revealed impacts of the training corresponding to the four pillars of lifelong learning [24] (learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together) that created an overall positive view of the training, with training elements that supported learning on each pillar, alongside points for improvement.

3.1. Learning to Know

The 'learning to know' pillar relates to the understanding and use of knowledge, as well as the ability to learn continuously [24]. In this sense, trainings should aim to provide knowledge and create understanding, encouraging participants to learn more about the topic.

Analysis of the interview responses revealed high perceived gains on the 'learning to know' pillar, with the training meeting participants' expectations, as expressed in the pre-training interviews. Gains on this aspect were attributed to the training, which created a broad base of knowledge, building on the minimal knowledge at the start of the program (i.e., the initial round of interviews).

A number of principal themes related to this aspect emerged from the analysis of the interview responses: awareness of the phenomenon, knowledge and understanding, gauging expectations, and a desire for further learning.

Table 1. Themes related to the four pillars of lifelong learning.

Pillar	Theme
Learning to know	Awareness of the phenomenon Knowledge and understanding Gauging expectations A desire for further learning
Learning to do	Permission to act. Knowing how to act Paying it forward
Learning to be	Awareness of the role of personal skills Self-awareness Personal development
Learning to live together	Getting to know each other. Sharing experiences Group learning Solidarity and support

3.2. Awareness of the Phenomenon

The participants attributed to the training a broad awareness of mistreatment as a workplace phenomenon. Although the participants had heard of, witnessed, and in two cases also personally experienced inappropriate behaviors at work, they had considered it to be part of organizational life and had been unaware of its existence as a defined phenomenon. The training, therefore, allowed them to name their experiences and to identify them as unacceptable organizational behavior.

One participant, for example, made the following observation: *The truth is that I didn't know the term mistreatment before . . . and the best thing that came out of the workshops is that they created awareness, among both employees and managers* (P5). Another developed the same point: *We are fortunate that we do not have this phenomenon here, but awareness is very, very important, for everyone* (P12). Awareness was perceived as the first step in change: *It is a malicious phenomenon . . . and if it will not be given a place, and called by name, it will never change. It is essential for the weaker employees, those who do not have support or power* (P1).

3.3. Knowledge and Understanding

Most participants noted significant gains from the program in terms of their knowledge and understanding of mistreatment. The main gains concerned an understanding of what mistreatment is, what behaviors it includes (and what behaviors are not considered mistreatment), its frequency, causes, manifestations, and likely effects (particularly its emotional toll). As one participant noted: *In the workshops, we learned to see what mistreatment is, what behaviors are related to it, and what happens to people who experience it* (P7). Regarding the boundaries of mistreatment, another participant explained: *I have learned, for example, that not every anger burst . . . is considered mistreatment . . . that only if you see that it is purposeful and frequent, then it is, you see?* (P8).

In particular, participants discussed learning that mistreatment can happen to anyone in any organization, and is not the fault of the victim. One participant put it this way: *Most people think that such a thing will not happen to them because they are nice people, social people, who never fought with anyone before . . . until they see these people, who are just like them, and hear their stories* (P16).

Knowledge and understanding were perceived as prerequisites for dealing with mistreatment, building on awareness. One participant, who had suffered severe mistreatment in the past, clarified the point: *When it happened to me (mistreatment), I was unprepared. I never thought that such horrible and difficult things exist in organizations. I think it is essential that everyone will be prepared and . . . knowledgeable about it* (P1).

3.3.1. Gauging Expectations

Participants also gauged their expectations of proper management workplace behaviors, examining their reality through the lens of mistreatment, asking themselves whether they were experiencing mistreatment and setting personal boundaries. One participant made this observation: *Once you know what behaviors are considered mistreatment, you can examine if you are experiencing it* (P8). Another explained further: *Perhaps we were aware that such behaviors exist, but we thought that if nobody talks about it, then it's ok, and we have to put up with it. Now we realize that it is not so* (P5).

Mistreatment has become a topic of discussion in the organization following the training: *We now all ask ourselves and each other: Is this mistreatment? We can talk to mid-management about it too* (P11). This led some employees to reassess their work relations and their superiors' behaviors: *I have been scared to take a break to eat or to stay at lunch a few minutes extra, in fear that [my boss] will say something, or think that I am not dedicated enough. I realized that I should not walk around feeling like this all the time* (P8). Others extended their reflections and expectations to life more generally: *Once you know what mistreatment is, you can examine whether you have been living like that all your life, putting up with abusive parents, spouse, bosses* (P7). These knowledge-based reflections led to expectations of a safe place and civil behaviors: *After you become aware of mistreatment and understand what it is, you realize that, sorry, it doesn't have to be like this at work and outside it, and that no one is allowed to talk to you like this* (P3).

Participants also critically examined organizational reactions to mistreatment. They identified instances of mistreatment being ignored, speaking to offenders but not taking any action against them, or transferring either the victim or the offender to a different department in the same organization: *In my past position there was someone, my manager, who really abused us, especially me. And I was transferred, as a punishment, which turned out to be a prize for me, but was not the right thing to do* (P6)

Gauging their expectations of the organization, participants noted that they expect it to take measures against the offender. Participants expressed this point in the following terms: *We didn't think about it much before because we didn't think someone would do something about it. Now we expect that they will do something* (P10); *Now [after the training], I know that the manager that used to mistreat her employees shouldn't have just been transferred to another unit, rather she shouldn't have continued to work at all* (P3). An employee who had suffered severe mistreatment in another unit made a similar point: *I am glad that I am in this new department, and not there anymore, but what did I have to leave while he [the offender] is still in the same place and position?* (P1).

3.3.2. Desire for Further Learning

In line with lifelong learning aims, participants noted continued interest and involvement in the topic. This was expressed by discussions after the end of the training in which they shared mistreatment stories, examined workplace situations in relation to their reality in and outside the workplace, raised questions, and looked for answers: *Since the end of the training, we all talk about mistreatment, in the halls, coffee corner, and offices. We joke: Is this mistreatment? And we seriously examine it* (P11); *I talk about mistreatment outside work, with family and friends, and I am reading about it, I want to understand it more. It remains present even after that the workshops have finished* (P5).

3.4. Learning to Do

The 'learning to do' pillar emphasizes the transfer of knowledge from the learning environment to the professional and practical sphere, and dealing with formal and informal situations at work and elsewhere [22]. In the context of this study, learning to do, both as an expectation at the pre-training level and after the training, refers to knowing how to deal with mistreatment, both personally (what to do in such cases) and formally (what organizational mechanisms are available). The participants gave the following descriptions: *If, God forbid, such a thing would come my way, in our department, I need to be equipped with*

what it takes to deal with it, and so should the organization (P12); *I expect the training to give us a process with a solution at the end, not just awareness* (P1; *People need to know that there is someone to turn to, and who it is, and what to do . . . because when something happens, they ask: Why didn't you say something? I didn't have who to address. Who should have I addressed? It has to be clear* (P10).

The themes that emerged in relation to the impact of the training were permission to act, knowing how to act, and paying it forward.

3.4.1. Permission to Act

The training was experienced as providing the participants with the legitimacy to ask questions and discuss issues related to mistreatment—*legitimate and illegitimate workplace behaviors* (P2)—and how to deal with them. This was in contrast to the past, in which misbehavior was usually normalized, not discussed, and not confronted: *I, too, was hesitant to stand up and speak, but having a name for mistreatment, knowing that there is something behind it, I know I will now act if needed* (P11); *If it happened to me now, I would act, for sure. I would not let it slide, or think it is part of organizational life* (P12).

Beyond the training content itself, the decision to bring the training to the organization and to pilot it in the unit provided the basis for the permission to ask, discuss, and act, as it was perceived as a testament of a general organizational commitment to preventing mistreatment and as a corporate act of care for employees' safety and well-being. In the participants' words: *It feels good that the organization thought about it, took the initiative. Makes me feel safe, that they care about us* (P15); *I now know that such cases will not meet deaf ears. Such cases will be heard* (P14); *I think it is essential to know that if employees feel that something is wrong, they will have someone to turn to . . . so that things are not swept under the carpet. If you have a problem, you can lay it on the table, and we will try to help you. I think we feel that now* (P3).

These feelings were enhanced by the participants' perception of the training as novel and pioneering, leading the way to others, which created feelings of pride in their department and themselves, as well as a sense of partnership: *Our department took a bold move in which we became involved in a ground-breaking training program* (P16); *It's a huge thing that we were involved in this, to create a wake-up call and put this important topic at the center of discussion* (P6); *It is like a wheel which we are the first to push and give it the power to keep rolling. The more other organizations will join, the more it will make a lasting change* (P14).

Furthermore, and not unrelatedly, the permission to act was based on perceived management involvement in the training, both in its design prior to the training and in the participation of middle managers in the training itself: *Throughout this process, superiors took part as coordinators, so the management team was exposed to the training to the same extent that the employees were* (P7).

3.4.2. Knowing How to Act

Prior to the training, the majority of participants expected to receive clear guidelines for actions and supporting organizational mechanisms: *I expect the training to give us a process with a solution at the end, and not just raise awareness* (P1); *I expect to be presented with a structured mechanism that will help me know what to do. If it would have happened until now, I may turn to [certain colleagues] and say: you know, he yelled at me. But I am not sure this is what I would do now, or if this would have been the right way to do it* (P4); *I want to know that there is someone who listens to me in a very serious and empathetic way, that is there to help me, and that will do his or her utmost to help* (P5); *We need specialists in this; every organization needs one, a specialist that will know everything from A to Z, that will follow up on everything, make this knowledge percolate into the organization, that will echo it all the time, make it part of the daily discussions, and see the little details. Designated groups should be formed that will know and be updated about new rules and regulations, and will be active and passionate about it* (P8).

However, in contrast to the sense of having permission to act and a general organizational commitment to act, most participants felt that the training did not provide them with a clear and detailed view of how to act. Rather than attributing it to the training itself, this

was attributed to the organization, which still has no clear plan, supporting mechanisms, or a designated person or unit to turn to in such cases: *In the end . . . I didn't understand what happens with mistreatment after it is revealed and exposed. Like, how does the organization deal with perpetrators, how will the office take care of the problem . . . because it wasn't outlined in training and it was missing* (P5).

Interestingly, the participants did not view the training or the organization less favorably for this lack of clarity regarding ways of acting. They attributed it to the pioneering nature of the training and saw it as part of a process to which the organization is committed and in which the training is just the first step. In this, they demonstrated a lifelong learning mindset: *It is still unclear what the organization will do, because it is all so new, and the organization still doesn't know how to deal with it. But they are working on it, and I am sure it will be finalized in the future* (P13); *I think that even if there is still not a structured way to do it, because this is in its infancy, and they do not yet know exactly how to do it, it is on the agenda and on its way* (P11); *It still didn't happen, but it will in the future . . . I think that people will see that it is for real, that the organization takes care of such cases, and something is done, if one hears such a thing, they know the process* (P10).

3.4.3. Paying It Forward

Although possible ways of acting were not entirely clear, many participants described "paying forward" the general knowledge and understanding gained in training to help and support others who experience mistreatment, to encourage them to act and make a positive change: *I feel that now that I know [about mistreatment], I can help others, relatives and friends and family, and it creates ripples of impact* (P13); *My sister-in-law has experienced severe abuse from her boss. I told her that she is experiencing mistreatment and that she should not tolerate it, and advised her how to act . . . Before the training, I didn't know what to advise here because I knew nothing about it* (P7); *I tell family and friends. It creates ripples of effect, and they become stronger . . . they understand that such things should not happen, and that they may face this [mistreatment] too sometimes, and that they should do something now* (P10).

3.5. Learning to Be

'Learning to be' is defined as learning that aims to develop one's personality and to act with growing autonomy, judgment, and personal responsibility [22]. It emphasizes personal development [28], with a broad social–emotional focus on skills such as self-awareness, coping, self-esteem, and confidence [25].

While expectations for personal development within the training were limited, in the post-training interviews many participants described the training as addressing personal skills related to coping with mistreatment. This element was perceived as unique and highly valued, both in terms of mistreatment and trainings more generally, at work and beyond it. Central themes that emerged in relation to the 'learning to be' pillar included awareness of the role of personal skills, self-awareness, and personal development.

3.5.1. Awareness of the Role of Personal Skills

Prior to the training, very few participants had discussed personal skills in relation to mistreatment, which was typically viewed as an organizational problem. An exception was the participant who had suffered severe mistreatment in the past: *I consider myself a strong woman, not easy to break. However, after the mistreatment I experienced in the previous department, I realized it takes more to cope. As I suffered a lot and paid the price, I would like to develop coping skills in the training. I think everyone should, in case it happens to them* (P1).

Among the participants who had not experienced mistreatment, the training was found to develop an awareness of the role of personal skills in coping with mistreatment: *It created an awareness [of] personal skills, and how those act out in some cases, which made us notice things that we have not seen before* (P8). They also noted becoming aware of the concept of emotional intelligence and of social and emotional competencies, which the majority had not previously been familiar with, and the role they play in coping with mistreatment and

succeeding in various life spheres: *When we spoke about personal skills, emotional intelligence, and empathy, it was valuable for us and contributed to our lives. It seems like everything that we spoke about as a remedy for mistreatment applies to many areas of our lives. I felt it contributed to my life outside of work, too* (P13).

3.5.2. Self-Awareness

Self-awareness was described as laying the foundation for self-development: *If a person has basic awareness, and they hear the things that were discussed in training, they start examining themselves and making changes* (P6). Indeed, following the training, participants felt that they had begun to develop skills, or were prepared for making changes: *I think that consciously or unconsciously, once we were exposed to these topics of developing personal, social-emotional skills, it did change something in us, in every one of us, I think, even if some of us have not practiced it much yet* (P4).

Describing the enhancement of self-awareness, the foundation of emotional intelligence (EI), one participant noted: *Learning about ourselves made us more aware of who we are, how we think and act, and what we need to develop to cope* (P2). Several main areas of self-awareness emerged from the interviews. In one of a number of references to improved awareness of personal accountability and proactiveness, one participant said, *I now [after the training] understand that if I have a responsibility regarding my work, I have to take responsibility for myself too, . . . and be proactive . . . and that I can do it* (P3). Adding assertiveness to the self-awareness, a participant shared the following observation: *I realized it doesn't have to be [a certain way], I can influence situations, speak up, express my opinion, and not accept everything that is being said or done to me. I am taking the first steps now* (P16). Another participant added: *When you look at yourself, where you allow things to happen to you and where you don't, today, after the training, I know that there is a greater chance that I will stand up for myself than I did before* (P18).

3.5.3. Personal Development

The 'learning to be' aspect was particularly valued by the participants as having an impact on their lives beyond work. While change was described as being in its infancy, mainly in terms of view shift and their tendency to act, the participants showed an understanding of its pace, viewing personal development as a long-term process, and thereby demonstrating a lifelong view of learning: *Personal development and change is a process which cannot be achieved in a workshop or two, it requires a long-term, consistent and overarching process* (P12): *You cannot expect people to behave differently. To change people's behaviors, much work is required, more intensive and consistent work, working on the foundations, following up on it, and rewarding good behavior. While the training created awareness and laid the foundation for change, I don't think you can expect change at the beginning stage* (P1).

Discussing social responsibility, one participant said: *In the past, if my child told me something that happened to a friend, I would think: What do I care? Lucky that it didn't happen to me. Now I feel that I think of it differently: Like, what? Why did they do that to him? I realize I can make a difference, go to school and talk about it, express my opinion, and help* (P14).

3.6. Learning to Live Together

The 'learning to live together' pillar of lifelong learning seeks to provide learners with the opportunity to participate in learning communities, to work on joint projects, and to share knowledge and cooperate [28]. Learning to live together implies feeling affiliated to a group, understanding other people, respecting differences [25], appreciating interdependence, working together, and managing conflicts [22]. Together, these form a foundation for a respectful and ethical workplace climate, and they are particularly important in the public sector in which employees' internal mobility and attrition rates are low.

Prior to the training, participants made little mention of expectations regarding learning to live together, which relates to feelings of being part of a group, understanding

others, and working together. Mistreatment was typically viewed from a personal, victim–perpetrator perspective or an organizational perspective, and not as a climate characteristic. Only two participants expected the training to bring together segmented groups who do not have an opportunity to interact in their daily work or to create solidarity among employees: *I would increase the interactions between the different groups through the training, because to date they are very closed-off and separated from each other. There is no way that I would go to another group [i.e., an internal subunit] to say hi, and how are you? This would never happen. And vice versa* (P10); *[I expect the training] also to educate for solidarity, solidarity among colleagues. That if you see that your colleague is being mistreated, you act rather than ignoring it and staying silent* (P11).

Post-training interview analysis revealed that the training had contributed to this aspect, both with respect to mistreatment and more generally. The main themes that emerged in relation to the impact of the training in this aspect were getting to know each other, sharing experiences, group learning, and solidarity.

3.6.1. Getting to Know Each Other

The participants felt that the training, which was conducted in a group format, allowed them to connect and converse, and thus to get to know people from other units and roles and know people in their unit in a more profound sense: *We got to know each other better. We don't have time for that during regular work hours. We don't get opportunities such as these on other occasions* (P15). Another participant made the same point: *It was like a break from work for us, it allowed us to sit in a group and talk* (P9).

3.6.2. Sharing Experiences

The training provided opportunities to share workplace experiences in general, and mistreatment-related experiences in particular. Hearing other people's stories encouraged personalization and an understanding of mistreatment on a deeper and more emotional level, while sharing stories helped those who had experienced mistreatment feel less alone.

Overall, the exchange of experiences made it possible to offer and receive sympathy and understanding, creating greater closeness and connectedness among the participants: *You hear other people's experiences, how it is in their office, and you hear that someone jumps in—it is the same with us. You hear about people who walk around feeling hurt, still, feeling pain, you understand mistreatment and understand them* (P13). *[The training allowed us] to hear each other, to share. People think that it must be only in their unit, that other places have ideal working relationships. And then they hear about this colleague and this boss. It changes everything. It can change the way we work. It eases the stress* (P14). The only exception was the participant who had experienced severe mistreatment: *I came with a lot of experience. I felt a big gap between my views regarding mistreatment and those of others . . . there were things said that I could not relate to, and even made me angry and resentful, such as forgiving perpetrators* (P1).

3.6.3. Group Learning

The training, which involved discussions in groups both big and small, helped to create a deeper understanding of workplace relations through hearing different views and questions, and through discussions of various aspects: *These workshops bring other issues to the surface. There is dialogue. This one says one thing, and the other adds something else, and we discussed different topics. I learned from what others said, and shared ideas too* (P4).

Solidarity and Support

Participants not only provided emotional support to each other within the training but also felt that they were more likely to support each other at work, emotionally and behaviorally, in the future: *I believe that we would help and support each other more if one of us would be mistreated, and more generally. And if someone would be afraid to speak for himself, others would encourage him or speak on his behalf. This is something else the training has helped with* (P9).

4. Discussion

The primary goal of this study was to build and evaluate a mistreatment prevention intervention program based on two sequential workshops. This is one of very few interventions to use a pre-post measurement model [1], and it is the only one that has utilized the framework of the four pillars of lifelong learning as a framework for intervention.

The training aimed to enhance a respectful and ethical climate through the four pillars of learning, a framework that brings together both a personal-development perspective and a broader organizational climate perspective. The framework includes the learning to live together component, which highlights the social perspective of mistreatment and a key element in mitigating it. The training was generally well-accepted from the outset and was evaluated positively by the participants; it was recommended for wider distribution.

Mistreatment was perceived as a prevalent issue, something that may arise in any organization, regardless of its current climate. Mistreatment-prevention training was, therefore, perceived as essential in an organizational context, and in particular for public sector organizations. Nonetheless, such training was perceived as innovative and novel, and not a typical part of formal corporate training. These perceptions created an initial openness to and engagement with the training, along with a sense of pride. The training was viewed as starting a process of change, even a revolution, along the lines of the anti-sexual harassment movement. Participants noted a sense of personal pride in taking part in such a "pioneering act," as well as a sense of pride in the organization and the department, for demonstrating care for its employees and social responsibility by leading change, enhancing the sense of a safe environment.

From the results, it is clear that the intervention cultivated most of the four pillars, although a number of points for improvements emerged. Concerning the 'learning to know' pillar, participants were able to identify mistreatment and to notice that not all behaviors can be considered as mistreatment. They gained knowledge and felt that they would be able to draw on that knowledge in future settings. Most of the knowledge came from the first workshop, which was designed to promote the first pillar. Other intervention processes also identified knowledge transfer through training as a crucial component of an intervention [19,38]. It is, however, essential to present different experiences, including insights coming from those who have experienced mistreatment.

The second workshop was found to promote the pillars of 'learning to do' and 'learning to be', by discussing possible responses and personal coping skills. The second pillar, 'learning to do', concerns knowing what to do in case of mistreatment. However, although the participants reported greater willingness and confidence to react in case of mistreatment, as well as confidence in the organization's commitment to act, they sensed that they had not been provided with a solid organizational process that could be used if necessary. Formal organizational procedures have been identified as crucial for good intervention programs [1,18], but few interventions have examined anti-bullying procedures, and these results need further support [18].

The third pillar, 'learning to be', aimed to increase individuals' ability to cope with mistreatment. A similar approach emphasized resilience as a critical competency for intervention [34], and another focused on organizational compassion [21]. Similarly, but with a broader scope, the intervention program under study here emphasized self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, assertiveness, and stress tolerance, all of which are social-emotional competencies proven to be efficient in the mitigation of mistreatment [8]. Indeed, although the training was limited in time, participants felt that it benefited them with regard to their personal skills, both for work and for life; they adopted the notion of lifelong learning and demonstrated a desire to develop further.

The most interesting component in our comprehensive training program was the 'learning to live together' pillar. Interpersonal relationships and communication both act as resilience factors and create a respectful organizational climate, and this element was essential, as the participants came from various roles and positions within the organizational unit. The training provided them with opportunities to get to know other people's work

reality and to understand them better, which may contribute to better inter-role cooperation. In both workshops, the importance of learning to live together was emphasized through reflections, group work, and discussions. Embedding this component means embracing a more comprehensive view of intervention that takes the socio-cultural setting into account. It has been argued that relationships with colleagues during training processes promote collaborative inquiry [41], allow for the sharing of ideas, concerns, and doubts between peers, and facilitate peer learning [42], thereby supporting the other pillars. Although Blackwood et al. emphasized that social context matters [36], this has so far remained unaddressed in the context of mistreatment.

5. Conclusions

Identification, prevention and intervention are vital factors in mistreatment mitigation. The four pillars framework presented throughout the paper allows employees to cultivate a safer organizational climate in which these complementary components are enhanced by focusing on the social context of mistreatment intervention. The pillars are not separate processes, but rather complement each other.

Although we have responded to the call for a broader viewpoint on interventions [1], the training program's main shortcomings should be noted. First, in line with some of the participants' feedback, including organizational mechanisms and procedures alongside the comprehensive intervention program would benefit the intervention plan. Second, it was noted that the training focused on the victims' understanding, coping skills, and the ability to live together more than on the civil behavior competencies of the perpetrators. Itzkovich indicated that viewing mistreatment as a managerial behavior will allow for tuned intervention processes [43]; in the study, however, middle managers took part in the training and senior management did not. Since mistreatment trickles down the organizational hierarchy [44], the involvement of the latter in such training was deemed crucial. Higher management can benefit from the training and from hearing their employees' experiences and thoughts about mistreatment. If the training also takes place with people high in the hierarchy, leaders and not only mid-management, it will make a real change. They need to be a part of it. Additionally, the timeframe of the process did not allow for a profound personal and organizational transformation in skills.

In order to address this study's methodical limitations, further studies could develop and implement longer training programs to assess their impact and sustainability. Studies of larger and more diverse populations, including different types of public sector departments and organizations, would also allow the results to be generalized to other contexts. Finally, studies that use a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative measures with interviews, would provide useful validation for the findings of this study.

Despite these shortcomings, our new and comprehensive model succeeded in promoting a better organizational environment and in creating a commitment to promoting a mistreatment-free climate in the organization and beyond. The findings contribute to a wider integration of mistreatment prevention efforts and can be used to design effective training programs with the aim of creating organizations in which employees are respected and are able to flourish.

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