

# The existing unbearable burden at the workplace: mobbing

## Mini review

Everyone is facing some hardships in work-life such as long hours of work, difficult tasks, production-consumption relations, and situations like time management problems and excessive workload which open the way to fatigue and stress for people. The reason for tiredness at the workplace for individuals is not the workload in itself, but the energy-consuming interpersonal and fluctuating relationships. The most stressful and tiring occupations are the ones that require human interactions and the ones that focus on the public services sector. And as a result, facing intimidation and harassment forms a part of the emergent modern capitalist culture, a concept known as mobbing.

The word mobbing became famous in recent years and turned out to be a concept that is widely known. What is mobbing? Leymann<sup>1</sup> defines mobbing as, “a continuous, systematic and planned unfriendly or bad treatment by a person or a group towards a person or a group.” The aim of it is to intimidate, bully, sadden, exhaust, and out-group a person. By putting the individual under pressure, he or she would either accept working submissively and without conditions or give up the job. The concept of psychological harassment was described by Leymann<sup>1</sup> in the 80s as a long-term, oppressive and aggressive behavior among the employees. Initially, it became popular in the European countries such as Norway and Sweden but later was accepted all over the Europe and America. Many types of research have been conducted, especially in the Municipalities of the Scandinavian countries, Universities along with the voluntary participation of unions which assisted in finding support for this type of research to understand the pressure and intimidation among the employees and to find solutions for these problems.

Psychological intimidation or mobbing, combines all the negative and systematic behaviors by one or more people, that is targeting an individual.<sup>1</sup> According to Leymann, for the behavior to be defined as mobbing, it has to continue occurring for at least a 6 months period, must occur at least once a week, and must be directed to an individual who as a result would be distressed and under stress due to being exposed to the mobbing behavior.

Another factor in mobbing behavior is the power imbalance between individuals. What is meant by power here is not only the physical power, but also having an authority, social recognition, and control of a wider circle of colleagues at the working-environment by being senior and more effective. It also includes being recognized for a long time and sometimes it includes gender. Individuals or groups somehow cannot tolerate those who are different from themselves and therefore treat them as separate or different, exclude them, demean and begin to act hostile towards them. That is why, the fresh and new workers in an organization, who are younger, and more educated, socially and culturally, advanced intellectual individuals, having the creativity and the ones that can think differently are usually the ones who become the victims of mobbing. Because those individuals are already different due to having diverse backgrounds, therefore, they do not easily comply with and obey the rules of the group or community like men working in an environment where women are

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the predominant, women working in an environment where men are the majority, young people working in places where the elder workers are the majority, or elders working in places where young workers are considered as the majority are always at risk of being a victim of mobbing.

Davenport et al.,<sup>2</sup> stated that individuals who are exposed to mobbing are well-mannered, logical, capable of reasoning, guided by themselves, not by others, and have high emotional intelligence.

Besides, in interviews with people who have been targeted through the mobbing behavior, it is seen that such people are more superior, intelligent, talented, creative, success-oriented, honest and reliable. Those who cannot act diplomatically are targeted more by psychological intimidation because they bring new ideas and, as a result, are looked at with concern that they pose a threat to the higher-level staff.<sup>3</sup> It seems that mobbing victims attract the attention and jealousy of others because they are highly successful and super talented.

Mobbing in a sense attacks social capital, as mobbing can happen to blue-collar employees as well as white-collar professional workers. It even occurs in a finer, deeper, and more secretive and more sophisticated manner among the higher educated individuals. While it is more obvious among the blue-collar workers physically and verbally, it can be indirect, hidden, and organized among the educated individuals. Mobbing usually arises in people with jealousy, envy, and experiencing or living with inadequacy and narcissistic tendencies. These individuals sometimes create small groups to hide their insufficiency, so that it would allow them to spread and use their ideological and political opinions for their own interests, causing deep-rooted separations between employees working in organizations.

There might also be organizational factors leading to mobbing like in those authoritarian and hierarchical structures in institutions, lack of direct communication channel between the bottom and the top, absence of clear communication, the fact that when job descriptions and expectations are not clear, they may lead to intimidation, occasional conflicts between employees at the workplace. It is unavoidable to have disagreements and conflicts but not every conflict or argument that happens once or several times is considered as mobbing as these could be forgotten, closed, or even heal by time. The main problem is that if these conflicts prolong and turn into a kind of violence is when mobbing tends to occur.

Yet contrary to popular belief, chief and supervisors do not always cause pressure and mobbing. In trained professional occupations, subordinates are also mobbing the superiors; they even plan it among themselves, so that they would target their superiors in an organized manner. This type of mobbing is mostly directed to male managers through female employees. In such cases, female employees exhibit a passive-aggressive attitude by not fulfilling their duties, weakening the job and then claiming that they have experienced discrimination due to their gender, and they even start slander campaigns against their superiors.

Mobbing negatively affects the mental health of the targeted individuals. It develops slowly and reaches unbearable limits after a certain time. For this reason, the victim would emotionally get weary and may experience serious psychological problems. Mobbing victims may also frequently experience physical illnesses. To sum up, mobbing negatively affects the victim emotionally, socially, and economically. Mobbing sometimes becomes very unbearable, to the extent that the individuals may quit the job or it may cause them to have negative thoughts such as suicide attempts or even violence at the workplace. That is why large and institutionalized companies provide their employees with awareness training on mobbing. Such training educates and makes both employees and managers aware of this issue, therefore, it would reflect positively on the organization, and would increase support, solidarity, healthy relationships, and motivation among employees, and as a result, it would contribute to the total productivity of the organization. For this reason, all public and

private institutions, organizations, companies, and non-governmental organizations need to provide these training and seminars for their employees.<sup>4</sup>

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## Conflicts of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest to declare.

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