

MOBBING AND BULLYING IN THE WORKPLACE AND HOW YOU SURVIVE IF YOU ARE MOBBED

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Abstract

Workplace violence especially mobbing and bullying has become an important problem in the workplace behaviors. This problem affect of whole employees, and it is moving from the streets to the workplace. Workplace stress, which could be caused by task content, such as dimensions of the job, and/or the role property, including social aspects of the job and relations among the employees from ali levels, cause physiological, and behavioral problems.

The objective of this article is to provide an understanding of general term of mobbing and bullying. In addition to this study aim to analyzes how to avoid being the target of mobbing and what can you do if you become a target of mobbing.

Keywords: Mobbing, Bullying, Types of Bullying and Mobbing

Introduction

Economical developments and globalization that have been experienced for the last few decades brought change to the organizational agenda by means of mergers, acquisitions, outsourcing, downsizing and etc. Precautions taken by the organizations to adapt new economic settings and competitive environment conditions, resulted in an increase in the rate of perceived pressure and stress of employees (Kompier and Cooper, 1999). It is implied that workplace stress, which could be caused by task content, such as dimensions of the job, and/or the role property, including social aspects of the job and relations among the employees from ali levels, cause physiological, and behavioral problems ranging from cardiovascular diseases to depression (Muchinsky, 1996). In addition to task content and job property, organization of work and management, individual competencies, other environmental and organizational conditions, and need for others have potential to cause physical and psychological harm on employees, which leads to stress that threatens the well-being of individuals (Cox and Griffiths, 1996). Although ali work related problems were called stress until the middle of the 20th century, during the last decades bullying or mobbing have been used to define work harassment and persecutions .

As a term, mobbing is firstly used by Konrad Lorenz (cited in Leymann, 1996) to describe behavior set of small animals exhibited in dangerous situations to defeat

themselves against a single larger enemy. The term was applied to psychology by Heinemann (cited in Leymann, 1996) to define the violent behaviors of a group of children directed to a single one. Mobbing was applied to the work settings by Henrick Leymann (1996) to define specific type of aggressive behaviors, such as hostile and unethical communication styles, directed to one employee at workplace. Since then, bullying has been subject to an increasing interest of organizational studies. Although first studies started in Scandinavia; during the 1980s and spread to the other European countries, such as Great Britain, The Netherlands, and Germany (Zapf, Knorz, and Kulla, 1996), it is a new study field in Europe, South Africa, Australia, and the USA.

1. Workplace Bullying/Mobbing

Before the conceptualization of the term mobbing, it was studied as a part of deviant and counterproductive workplace behaviors, since it refers to illegitimate intentional behaviors directed to a member of the organization by the others (Sackett and DeVore, 2001). Workplace deviant behaviors were classified according to their severity, ranging from minor to serious, and the target behavior, organization directed and interpersonal behaviors, including property deviance, production deviance, personal aggression, and political deviance. Personal aggression comprises of harassment, and political deviance including behaviors like gossip and blaming which are also considered as negative workplace acts. In addition to these, inappropriate verbal and physical actions were also considered as components of deviant workplace behaviors. Therefore, it is possible to suggest that intense levels of bullying could be a predictor of counterproductive behaviors at workplace, such as making other employees to do their works incorrectly and giving damage to the belongings of the others (Ayoko, Callan, Hartel, 2003).

In English, the word mobbing is used to define attacking in large number in the case of excessive anger and enthusiasm, whereas the word bullying is used to define treating in overbearing and intimidating manner. Leymann (1996) defined mobbing as "psychological terror" involving ethically unacceptable communication and/or behaviors directed to one individual by a single or a group of individuals that push the individuals in a helpless and defenseless position. In another definition of mobbing, Zapf (1999) implied that mobbing is a type of psychological aggression that includes a group of mobbers. In other words, bullying could be seen between two individual or between a group and an individual. On the other hand, Einarsen and Raknes (1997) described bullying as exhibition of unwanted behaviors toward one or more employees which results in humiliation and stress in the target individual and problems in performance and work environment of the organization. It is indicated that bullying could be seen in the form of verbal, physical, and subtle acts like isolation and devaluation of work performance, which might have an intention to frighten or punish the target individual.

Workplace bullying also defined as repeated and enduring aggressive behaviors intended to be hostile (Einarsen, 1999). Therefore a single and isolated event could not be named as bullying or mobbing. In other words, behaviors that are in a repeated and persistent

manner and directed to one or more employees are called bullying. In sum, workplace bullying could be defined as exhibition of a repeated and persistent aggression by an employee or a group of employees toward another one (Zapf, 1999). The severity of bullying and the major difference between a normal workplace stress and bullying depends on the frequency and longevity of the negative acts rather than what is done to the victim. Vartia (1996) implied that negative behaviors in a repeated, persistent, and continuous manner could be considered as bullying. Therefore, typically single negative act could not be considered as bullying. Moreover, operational definition of mobbing stated that only instances where negative behaviors were repeated at least weekly for a minimum duration of six months were to be classified as mobbing (Leymann, 1996).

Main difference between the terms mobbing and bullying comes from the focus of the conducted research. It was argued that mobbing research focuses on organizational factors and its effects on the victim compared to bullying specific research which is focused on personality and behaviors of the bully and the victim. Another difference comes from type of negative behaviors considered. Researchers who prefer to use the term mobbing proposed that bullying refers to physically aggressive behaviors whereas mobbing refers to indirect collective harassment. Also, it could be suggested that the term bullying, generally, is used by the English speaking countries, and the term mobbing generally is used by the European countries.

Beside mobbing and bullying, in order to point the same issue, different terms, such as work harassment, non sexual harassment (Zapf and Einarsen, 2001), and victimization (Einarsen and Raknes, 1997) have also been used in the literature. However, it is obvious that all researchers agree that bullying, mobbing, harassment, and victimization consist of aggressive and hostile behaviors that are perceived negatively by the subject.

2. Types of Bullying and Mobbing

Leymann (1996) defined five different dimensions of mobbing according to the impacts of it on the target individual; effects on the victims' 'possibilities to communicate adequately', 'possibilities to maintain social contacts', 'possibilities to maintain their personal reputation', 'occupational situation', and 'physical health'. Zapf et al., (1996) defined seven different sub-categories of bullying behaviors; attacking with organizational measures, social isolation, attacking the private life and attitudes, physical violence, verbal aggression, and rumors. Another classification proposed by Einarsen & Raknes (1997), introduces three main sub-category for bullying; 'personal derogation', 'work related harassment', and 'social exclusion'.

According to the typology of Leymann (1996), giving no opportunity to communicate by the management, being exposed to the verbal attacks, threats and attacks aiming to dismiss the individual from the work constitute the first dimension of mobbing; 'effects on the victims' possibilities to communicate adequately'. The second dimension, impacts on 'possibilities to maintain social contacts', includes isolation and obstruction of

communication by the colleagues and/or the management. 'Effects on victims' possibilities to maintain personal reputation', the third dimension, comprise ridiculing behaviors like gossip, making fun of the physical and personal attributes of the target individual. 'Effects on the victims' occupational status, the fourth sub-dimension, involves behaviors like forcing the target to do meaningless tasks and/or not giving any tasks. The fifth, and the final sub-dimension, 'effects on victims' physical health, comprise physical attacks, threat of physical attacks, sexual harassment and delegation of dangerous work tasks.

Sub-categories defined by Zapf et al. (1996) indicate that the first factor 'attacking the victim with organizational measures', consists of behaviors directed to isolate and undermine the professional skills of the target. The second dimension, 'attacking the victims' social relationships with social isolation', is composed of behaviors aimed to restrict the communication channels of the victim through rejection of communication. The third sub-category, 'attacking the victims private life', involves criticizing private life, making fun about the personal attributes and private life. The fourth sub-dimension 'physical violence', comprise sexual harassment, threats of physical violence, and use of violence. 'Attacking the victims' attitudes', the fifth dimension, consists of negative behaviors directed to ethnicity, religion and political views of the target individual. The sixth sub-category, 'verbal aggression', involves critics of personal work and verbal threats and the final dimension contains rumors.

Einarsen and Rakness (1997) put forth 'personal derogation', 'work related harassment', and 'social exclusion' as the main sub-dimensions of bullying. The first factor includes underestimation of thoughts and work performance, personal criticism, and verbal abuse. The second dimension, 'work related harassment' involves negative behaviors directed to the performed work tasks and the last dimension, 'social exclusion', includes behaviors aimed to socially isolate the target individual.

Among the negative workplace behaviors, the most usually experienced forms of bullying were composed of behaviors aimed to undermine professional skills of the target and behaviors constituting rumors, verbal abuse, and practical jokes (Mikkelsen and Einarsen, 2001). In contrast to these findings, sexual harassment occurs as the less common dimension of bullying. For example, Mikkelsen and Einarsen (2001) discovered that 0.3 to 3.9 % of Danish respondent reported occasional sexual harassment, and Hoel and Cooper (2000) found out that only 1.2 % of the respondents had experienced sexual harassment. In the light of the previous research, literature indicate that sexual harassment at workplace could be accepted as apart of bullying at workplace or as a different problem alone. However, sexual harassment could be considered as a type of workplace bullying, since it might be accompanied by other negative workplace behaviors and could be a form of victimization, for example offending through jokes including the sexuality of the abused individual (Bjorkvist et al., 1994).

3. Direction of Bullying

Einarsen and Skogstad (1996) reported that a small number of the victims were bullied by their subordinates and a great number were bullied almost equally by their peers or supervisors. According to the results of a study conducted in Denmark, most of the victims in a manufacturing company bullied by their colleagues, in hospitals bullied by their peers or supervisors, and in department store bullied by their superiors, colleagues, and subordinates (Mikkelsen and Einarsen, 2001). Studies conducted in Great Britain point out that most of the perpetrators were generally managers. However, in a study conducted by professionals revealed that almost 17 per cent of business professionals were bullied by their subordinates (Salin, 2001). In line with the previous findings, Vartia and Hyyati (2002) reported that, among Finnish prison officers, 43 per cent of the bullies were superiors, 55 per cent were peers or colleagues and 5 per cent were subordinates. In addition to these, they found out that women were more often bullied by their coworkers compared to their men colleagues who were mainly bullied by their supervisors. Literature also indicates that men were mainly bullied by men, whereas women were bullied by both sexes.

4. Causes of Bullying and Mobbing

In order to explain the causes of workplace bullying, arguments implying the importance of work environment, personality, societal/social and psychosocial factors (Neuman and Baron, 1998) were proposed. It was suggested that the antecedents of mobbing could be examined under four main headings; individual level (Zapf and Einarsen, 2003), group level, social level, and organizational level. At the individual level, personality, demographic variables, and perception processes are explained. For group level the interaction between the victim and the perpetrator is examined. At the third level, social level, impacts of social changes are considered. At the organizational level, culture and the climate of the organization, leadership style, work organization, and job design are analyzed.

5. Information Available in Turkish

Bullying literature in Turkey is very limited and during the literature research few articles could be reached. Torun (2004) reviewed the workplace bullying by concerning definition and categories of bullying, organizational and individual factors related to bullying, effects of bullying at the individual level, and methods used to cope with bullying. Yüçeturk (2005) also reviewed the literature regarding the development of the term mobbing, importance of bullying in the organizations and its negative consequences, factors affecting bullying, global dimensions of bullying as a managerial problem, and

relationship between mobbing and sex. Another literature review, which examined sexual harassment and bullying as workplace traumas, was conducted by Solmus (2005).

Aytac, Bayram, and Bilgel (2005) designed a study to test prevalence of bullying, health complaints of victims, and the role of organizational support among public employees from three different sectors; health, education, and security. For that purpose they were analyzed 877 questionnaires and found out that 55.1 per cent of the participants were exposed to bullying and 47.4 per cent witnessed the bullying of others. In addition to these findings, significant differences for job satisfaction, anxiety, depression, and work related stress were found among the bullied and none bullied employees. Another empirical study, which examined the relationship between mobbing and conflict, revealed that intensity of bullying could affect the conflict management styles. Kutanis and Safran (2005), also, conducted a case study through focus group method where 27 employees of a hotel were included in the study.

In addition to Turkish literature mentioned above, book of Davenport, N., Schwartz, R. D., and Elliott, G. P. (1999); *Mobbing: Emotional Abuse in the American Workplace* was translated into Turkish. Another book which is present in Turkish is 'The Moral Harassment' of Hirigoyen (2000).

6. Consequences of Bullying

Bullying which is argued to be a demoralizing and fatal problem for employees than any other work-related stress, may also be defined as a severe form of social stressor at work and/or a critical life event (Mikkelsen and Einarsen, 2001a) that threaten the well-being. In line with the other work related stress conditions, it is possible to examine mobbing related problems under two main headings; individual level problems, such as headache and anxiety (Leymann and Gustafsson, 1996) and organizational level problems, like work absenteeism and declines in productivity (Einarsen et al., 1996).

Have you experienced the following behaviors in the workplace over a period of time?

- ü Increasing isolation or marginalization (e.g., being left out of key meetings, being avoided by colleagues, having your Office moved).
- ü Being the object of gossip or badmouthing by colleagues and superiors.
- ü Experiencing ongoing petty harassment or bureaucratic hassles (e.g., unusual audit of expense records/finances, misplaced or delayed administrative requests).
- ü Being given meaningless tasks or assignments.
- ü Being subjected to ongoing criticism, public humiliation, or ridicule.

Mobbing behavior is most likely to occur in a setting in which the work is complex and goals may be ambiguous. This is, of course, a common situation in academia and health care. Although there is some overlap with bullying (and the terms are used

interchangeably by some), mobbing is a group behavior in which superiors and coworkers repeatedly attack a colleague's competence, dignity, and integrity over a period of time (Davenport 2005). Like bullying, it is a form of emotional abuse, which can harm an individual's health, career, family, and the organizations that they serve.

Mobbing can start with a conflict or any type of change. Westhues (2005), who has made a career studying academic mobbing, describes common factors that put an individual at risk and strategies for survival: "The worker most vulnerable to being mobbed is an average or high achiever who is personally invested in a formally secure job but somehow threatens or puts to shame a coworker and/or manager."... "Mobbing is initiated most often by a person in a position of power and is an attempt to eliminate the target."... "Not infrequently, mobbing spells the end of a target's career, marriage, health and livelihood" (Westhues, 2005).

Targets are typically highly principled individuals who trust in the decency and goodness of the organization. They are caught off guard by the disconnect between the stated and espoused institutional values and the actual mobbing behaviors that are tolerated by the same institution. According to Davenport, Schwartz, and Elliott, authors of the excellent resource, *Mobbing by a powerful person in the workplace*.

7. How to Avoid Being the Target of Mobbing

Ü Be alert to changes in leadership and possible disconnects between your values and theirs (see Bickel, *Academic Physician and Scientist*, September 2005). If you see this, you are best advised to plan on leaving; this may be an unexpected impetus to make a strategic career plan and decide whether you want to make significant changes. If you choose not to leave, you might consider how to best shelter yourself in your position so that you are less likely to be a target. This could lead to your choosing not to take on leadership positions such as head of the faculty senate, where you would have increased visibility and conflict with administration and rather focus on external disciplinary areas that give you recognition and reward. And it goes without saying that the organization loses a loyal, experienced academician when one believes he or she needs to make those kinds of choices.

Ü Check out with a trusted adviser whether there is a "gray" area in the values disconnect, or whether it is really black and white.

Ü Do a reality check with a trusted adviser whether what you are experiencing is real or are you overreacting (see Morahan and Katz, *Academic Physician and Scientist*, March 2007).

Ü Use various conflict management tools (Siders and Aschenbrener, 1999; Aschenbrener and Siders, 1999).

8. Instead Of Conclusion

What Can You Do if You Become a Target of Mobbing?

Recognize first that there is a name for what you are experiencing and, second, that you could have done little to prevent it. Some of the following strategies may be helpful:

- ü Assess professional options (short and long-term) and weigh all options carefully.
 - ü Practice emotional restraint—do not lose your cool, even if you think it is justified and would make you feel better at that moment; find a trusted person and a safe place offsite to vent.
 - ü Document everything (and keep the documentation in a safe place—NOT on your institutional computer).
 - ü Seek an outside opinion to see if you are overreacting—from trusted colleagues, a career coach, or legal counsel; although mobbing is not illegal in itself, mobbing behaviors may intersect with harassment, for example.
 - ü Use available resources (Westhues Judith Kapustin Katz : “If you find yourself marginalized, given fewer key assignments, and so on, use your time and energy to focus on scholarly activities and on networking with professional organizations outside the institution this may be the one ‘silver lining’ in what is otherwise a very traumatic personal experience.” Page S. Morahan, PhD: “Management and organizations need to become more aware of mobbing and the impact of these ‘milder’ types of mistreatment in the workplace— both on individuals and the organization.”).
 - ü Practice self-care: Mobbing, like bullying, is a form of emotional abuse and violence in the workplace; it may seem harmless but it can be devastating to the target. Targets may not recognize what is happening until it is very late and emotional abuse has taken a toll on physical

and psychological health.

- ü If you find yourself marginalized, given fewer key assignments, and so on, use your time and energy to focus on scholarly activities and on networking with professional organizations outside the institution—this may be the one “silver lining” in what is otherwise a very traumatic personal experience.

- ü If you are the colleague of someone whom you believe is a target of academic mobbing, you can support him or her by being a trusted “toxin handler” (see Grigsby, Academic Physician and Scientist, January 2006). You can also assist in eliminating or defusing the destructive gossip that often fans academic mobbing (see Grigsby, Academic Physician and Scientist, January 2007).

Targets of mobbing can and do survive with their personal and professional integrity intact. The same qualities that made an individual vulnerable to mobbing, such as holding

principles that are higher than those of the local powers that be, can help the target survive. View this challenge as an opportunity to use freed-up time and energy to focus on scholarly activities and/or further professional development. Management and organizations need to become more aware of mobbing and the impact of these “milder” types of mistreatment in the workplace both on individuals and the organization. Consequences include increased absenteeism or “absent presenteeism”; the latter occurs when people are physically present but their minds and hearts are not (Hemp, 2004). The results are lower job satisfaction, loss of productivity, and a decline in organizational communication (Cortina, 2001). Enlightened leadership can promote policies and procedures that reinforce expected ethical and Professional standards, such as codes of conduct and leadership training, and remain vigilant in lifting the veil on disconnects between espoused institutional values and permitted conduct. Academic health centers, in particular, can model professionalism at all levels of the organization, by taking the lead in recognizing the impact of workplace mobbing on the physical and psychological health of targeted individuals, as well as lowered effectiveness of these vital enterprises. We are interested in learning how common mobbing is in academic health centers, and what strategies individuals and organizations have used to address this issue.

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