

Bullying and Mobbing in Academe: A Literature Review

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Abstract

This review of the current state of literature in regards to academic mobbing found that the most common types of bullying were psychological and emotional attacks, often directed towards an academic by either administrators, other academics and faculty, or even students. Many risk factors are related to academic mobbing, including sex, sexual orientation, gender, race and ethnicity, rank or seniority, work experience, and age. Incidents of academic bullying often lead to multiple negative outcomes on victims, including physical, emotional and psychological damages, as well as various work-related and institutional consequences. Some coping strategies are summarized. Universities and academia in general, should help foster a culture and an environment of civility. More specifically, policies of respectful workplaces should be created and enforced, with a focus on reducing or eliminating incidents of academic mobbing.

Keywords: Bullying, mobbing, academia

Introduction

Work conflicts often arise from differences between departments, job ambiguities, lack of communication, dysfunctional systems or environmental stress (Kathman & Kathman, 1990). In the academic sector, conflicts may arise from disagreements between administrators, faculty members, or between administrators and faculty. Bullying can occur during these conflicts, especially when unresolved differences linger between two or more people or groups. Bullying inflicted in the workplace, also named mobbing, involves different forms of abuse directed towards others by one or multiple co-workers (Faria, Mixon, & Salter, 2012; Hecker, 2007).

Workplace mobbing can be inflicted by means of verbal, emotional, or psychological abuse (Faria et al., 2012). Often marked by unreasonable and abrasive behavior, workplace mobbing usually presents an imbalance of

power between the perpetrator and the target. The offensive behavior is frequently and regularly inflicted onto a target, persisting or escalating over a prolonged period of time exceeding six months, time and again, even on a daily basis (Ahmad et al., 2017; Hecker, 2007).

Academic mobbing is a type of workplace bullying inflicted on targets in an academic workplace. Faculty or administrators can inflict mobbing in the form of intentional harm that may be emotional or psychological in nature, however it has also been reported that students can be the perpetrator (Lampman, 2012). This is usually done to create an environment that feels unsafe for the targeted colleague, in order to force them to terminate their employment. Unfortunately, this type of mobbing and bullying rarely goes reported (Keim & McDermott, 2010). Remaining silent does not help raise awareness to reduce the risks of this type of violence in the workplace (Fogg, 2008; Hecker, 2007), particularly in non-western countries (Ahmad et al., 2017) or in non-syndicated environments.

In spite of notable gaps in the literature in regards to specific workplace violence and bullying in academic environments, a study by Lampman (2012) did find four significant predictors of bullying: being a woman, being of racial or ethnic minority, being of a younger age, and not having a doctoral degree. These findings are similar to multiple other studies (Ahmad et al., 2017; Faria et al., 2012; Frazier, 2011; Hecker, 2007; Johnson-Bailey, 2015; Lampman, Crew, Lowery, & Tompkins, 2016; Misawa, 2015). Dentith et al. (2015; p.33-34) best summarized why colleges and universities were favourable locations for bullying:

“The uniqueness of college and university settings – with the tenure and promotion process, ambiguous expectations, and subjective evaluations – requires constant critical inquiry and reflection upon the impact on faculty careers, development, and academic freedom resulting from the potential for bullying and uncivil cultures.”

A study by Misawa (2015) revealed three types of bullying: (1) positional bullying, (b) counter-positional bullying, and (c) unintentional conspirative positional bullying. Positional bullying is seen when a person of power targets a colleague of lower power, while counter-positional bullying is a “*type of bullying engaged in by a person who is in a position of less power but whose positionality empowers them to bully a person disenfranchised by race, gender, or sexual orientation*” (Misawa, 2015; p.8). Unintentional conspirative positional bullying is a combination of both positional and counter-positional bullying. In the case of unintentional conspirative positional bullying, the target is situated between a group of two perpetrators, whereby one is of higher power and the other is of less power; the target is bullied similarly in light of their race, gender, or sexual

orientation (Misawa, 2015). These three types of bullying are often seen in the academic environment.

This paper focuses on the effects of mobbing on faculty members in the academic workplace, through an in-depth literature review of scientific peer-reviewed articles.

Method

A systematic review of literature was performed to capture findings of studies describing academic mobbing and its effects on postsecondary level professors. In order to maximize the number of relevant articles, the social sciences database “ERIC” by ProQuest was searched using a specific set of terms. Asterisks were used in detailed searches when they were considered useful to include multiple forms of the same word (eg, searching for “mobb*” would retrieve mobbing and mobbed). The complete list of terms used includes: academic* AND professor* AND lecturer* AND conflict* and dispute* AND disagreement* AND problem* AND animosity* AND governance* AND control* AND manage* AND regulate* AND dominate* AND administer* AND mobbing* AND bullying* AND intimidate* AND harass* AND torment* AND threaten* AND coerce* AND oppress* AND effect* AND influence* AND repercussion* AND burden* AND consequence* AND student * AND pupil* AND scholar* AND graduate* AND undergraduate* AND learner* AND class* AND course* AND program* AND seminar* AND lecture* AND session* AND academ* AND mob* AND workplace* AND bull* AND facul*.

Articles were screened by searching for key terms found only in the title. All citations were then manually screened by reading the abstract and eliminating any articles that were not relevant to academic mobbing.

The structured ERIC search yielded a total of 32 relevant citations and 23 unique results meeting the criteria described above. Table 1 shows the number of total citations and relevant citations of each search term used. Of the 23 unique citations, 17 were retained and included in this literature review. Of the 6 that were excluded, two were student dissertations or theses while four did not lead any access to full text.

Table 1. Results of search terms yielding relevant articles

Search Term	Total Citations	Relevant Citations
((academic* OR professor* OR lecturer*) AND (conflict* OR dispute* OR disagreement* OR problem* OR animosity*) AND (governance* OR control* OR manage* OR regulate* OR dominate* OR administer*))	16	8
((academic* OR professor* OR lecturer*) AND (mobbing* OR bullying* OR intimidate* OR harass* OR torment* OR threaten* OR coerce* OR oppress*) AND (effect* OR influence* OR repercussion* OR burden* OR consequence*))	4	1

((academic* OR professor* OR lecturer*) AND (mobbing* OR bullying* OR intimidate*))	23	5
((academic* OR professor* OR lecturer*) AND (mobbing* OR bullying* OR intimidate*) AND (student* OR pupil* OR scholar* OR graduate* OR undergraduate* OR learner*))	7	2
((academic* OR professor* OR lecturer*) AND (mobbing* OR bullying* OR intimidate*) AND (class* OR course* OR program* OR seminar* OR lecture* OR session*))	1	1
(academ* AND mobb*)	2	2
(workplace*) AND (mobb*)	3	3
(academ* AND bull*)	65	8
(academ* AND bull* AND facul*)	4	2

Results and Discussion

Overall, studies have shown that between 25% - 91% of academics are mobbed in the workplace (Ahmad et al., 2017; Fogg, 2008; Lampman, 2012). Incidents of bullying are reported where academics are the target, while the perpetrators are faculty members, administrators, or even students. Different forms of bullying between academics and administrators include psychological and emotional attacks, often directed towards an academics work duties (Ahmad et al., 2017; Faria et al., 2012; Frazier, 2011; Hecker, 2007; Keim & McDermott, 2010).

This however differentiates from mobbing incidents in which the student is the perpetrator. Lampman et al. (2016) reported six different types of bullying inflicted by students on professors including: hostility, anger, or aggression (HAA), rude, disrespectful, or disruptive behaviors (RDDDB), intimidation, threats, bullying, or accusations (ITBA), challenging, arguing or refusing behaviors (CARB), unwanted sexual attention (USA), and sexual harassment (SH).

Only one study reported that 18% of students were being bullied by a professor (Marraccini, Weyandt, & Rossi, 2015).

Common types of Academic Mobbing

The most common types of bullying include: undermining of professional competence (Ahmad et al., 2017; Fogg, 2008; Hecker, 2007; Johnson-Bailey, 2015), increasing administrative duties (Faria et al., 2012; Frazier, 2011; Keim & McDermott, 2010), increasing teaching duties (Faria et al., 2012; Frazier, 2011), reducing research and teaching resources (Faria et al., 2012; Fogg, 2008), and excluding the target from social conversations or activities (Fogg, 2008; Keim & McDermott, 2010). However, these are not the only types of bullying that academics may face on a daily basis. In many instances, their hard earned work may go unnoticed or not recognized or may even be too often noticed and monitored (Ahmad et al., 2017). Co-authors and supervisors have also been reported to inflict academic mobbing

by requiring their colleagues to publish work under their own names to receive a research grant (Ahmad et al., 2017) or to improve publications (Johnson-Bailey, 2015). Other types of mobbing incidents include spreading rumours (Faria et al., 2012), constantly being interrupted (Fogg, 2008; Johnson-Bailey, 2015), being denied promotion, and being yelled at during meetings or interviews (Fogg, 2008).

In addition to being targeted by administration and faculty, there are cases in which academics reported being mobbed by their own students. Lampman (2012) reported multiple types of mobbing that students would use to emotionally, psychologically, and in rare instances, physically harm their professors. Professors reported that students often distract the professor by continually interrupting during lectures or creating disturbances through non-class-related conversations. They also reported that many students would request easier exams or assignments from their professors, as well as make up exams or extensions for assignments missed. Students were also reported to verbally abuse and mob their professors by yelling or screaming, accusing the professor of racism or discrimination, and shouting derogatory or sarcastic remarks. Much like administrators or other academics, professors sometimes have their authority challenged and credentials questioned by students.

In addition, the professors in Lampman's study (2012) also revealed that some students even went as far as threatening their professors with lawsuits or grievances and physically threatening, harming, or using a weapon against them. It was also reported that sexual behavior directed towards the professor was seen in the classroom, which included students flirting, making sexual comments, or looking at the professor suggestively (Lampman, 2012).

Another study by Faria et al. (2012) concluded with two types of mobbing. They class these as type A and type B downward mobbing. In the type A downward mobbing situation:

“... a malicious and anxious administrator will try to reduce the professor's salary as much as possible (or avoid its growth) so that a scholar who seeks employment elsewhere will face a better salary and benefits prospects in the academic labour market.” (Faria et al., 2012; p.725)

In the type B downward mobbing case:

“... the administrator likes the productive contribution of the professor, but dislikes the professor. The administrator's intent is to make the professor leave the institution, while still retaining and enjoying the laurels conferred by having a highly-productive department.” (Faria et al., 2012; p.724)

Hecker (2007) also reported that it may often be gender, race, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, ethnicity, nationality, or other factors that cause the start of mobbing, although the targets are often successful academics, productive and excelling in their work while receiving many awards, grants, and honours (Dentith et al., 2015). The following sections will observe the relations between personal characteristics (such as sex, sexuality, gender, race, ethnicity, and rank) and rates of academic mobbing.

Academic Mobbing based on sex, sexual orientation, and gender of the victim

While few studies examine the consequences of academic mobbing, multiple studies observe the relationship between sex, sexual orientation, and gender in regards to academic mobbing (Ahmad et al., 2017; Hecker, 2007; Johnson-Bailey, 2015; Lampman et al., 2016; Misawa, 2015). Findings vary from study to study. In fact, a recent study by Ahmad et al. (2017) found no significant differences in exposure to workplace bullying between male and female academics. Yet, when observing academic mobbing inflicted by students on professors, Lampman (2012) found that 63.3% of women, versus 50.2% of men, reported serious incidents of bullying, aggression, or sexual attention perpetrated by their students.

The rates of bullying for males and females vary also according to the type of bullying. Women faculty report significantly more incidents of CARB and Rddb, while men are eight times more likely than women to report incidents of SH (Lampman, 2012). Women are somewhat more likely to report incidents of ITBA, though these findings are not statistically significant (Lampman, 2012).

When it comes to incidents of serious aggression, such as death threats, Lampman (2012) reports that women faculty were 2 to 3 times more likely than men to have voiced a death threat. In regards to sexual harassment, men were “*12 times more likely to say that their own behaviour had been misinterpreted as sexual interest by a student than were women*” (Lampman, 2012; p.196). Another study by Lampman et al. (2016) also found that women were more likely to be at greater risk of, and result in more negative consequences from academic bullying.

While focusing on the individuals being mobbed, Ahmed et al. (2017) and Lampman et al. (2016) examined the characteristics of the perpetrator and found that 63.1% of victims reported that a male was the administrator or other faculty perpetrator, while only 26.2% of victims reported females as the perpetrator. Males also appear to be the main perpetrator of bullying when a student inflicts it. In fact, Lampman et al.

(2016), found that the typical student perpetrator is an undergraduate male under the age of 29.

Sexual orientation is equally invoked as a risk for academic mobbing. A study by Johnson-Bailey (2015) reported that professors of color and gay colleagues were often targeted and threatened by their students. Misawa (2015) reported similar findings. In addition, they found that gay male faculty of color report hostile experiences from administrators, departmental chairs, and their colleagues. Often in these cases, the perpetrators are white and heterosexual administrators, colleagues, and students (Misawa, 2015).

Academic Mobbing based on the race of the victim

In addition to sex, gender, and sexual orientation being linked to academic mobbing, race is also an important factor (Frazier, 2011; Hecker, 2007; Johnson-Bailey, 2015; Lampman, 2012). In many instances, African American faculty are targets of academic mobbing, revealing multiple barriers they face in regards to tenure and promotion. These barriers include devaluing of their scholarship, next to impossible deadlines, lack of mentoring, isolation, and racial microaggressions (Frazier, 2011). One African American academic in a study by Frazier et al. (2011), even revealed that her committee expressed that she should focus research on Black people since she was herself Black. In another study, *“one tenured Black woman was told she needed to spend extra years in rank (regardless of her record of accomplishments) because the men in her department didn’t advance as quickly”* (Johnson-Bailey, 2015; p.45). Unfortunately, the most common barrier that faculty of color face is academic mobbing due to their race. In many instances, it is impossible to prove that they are being mobbed because of their gender or race, except when the perpetrator openly attributed it to that reason (Johnson-Bailey, 2015). Even when faculty of color would try to defend themselves, they would often be accused of being biased against White faculty (Johnson-Bailey, 2015).

When gender and race are considered, the events of academic mobbing occur regardless of rank. Such circumstances were reported in a study by Lampman (2012) who found that women and racial or ethnic minorities all report increased incidence of mobbing by their students. In some cases, students even went as far as switching classes or sections just to avoid the professor (Johnson-Bailey, 2015).

Academic Mobbing based on rank and work experience of the victim

Ahmad et al. (2017) reported that 28.4% of respondents claimed that the perpetrator was of a superior rank to the target, 22.6% of respondents accuse a perpetrator of the same rank and 21.4% of respondents indicate that the perpetrator was of a junior level. As well, 13.6% of the participant

faculty indicated that the perpetrator only held an administrative position (Ahmad et al., 2017).

Lampman (2012) found that faculty with less teaching experience, not holding a doctoral degree, not tenured, having a lower faculty status or being younger, reported increased incidents of bullying by their students. While these characteristics often describe a young, up-and-coming professor, other authors found that higher ranked faculty still encountered incidents of mobbing. For instance, faculty attaining a higher rank were more difficult to manage by administrators, and thus led to incidents of mobbing (Faria et al., 2012; Johnson-Bailey, 2015). An increase in power also revealed that some faculty members would abuse the power they had, rendering them a perpetrator of academic mobbing (Fogg, 2008). Faculty with more power often has more academic freedom, which can also become a factor of academic mobbing (Dentith et al., 2015).

Academic Mobbing based on age of the victim

Unlike other studies with varied results in regards to the previous factors of academic mobbing, age appears to lead to similar results for most studies. In fact, it is common to find that younger faculty reports more incidents of bullying, whereas older faculty are at lower risk. Ahmad et al. (2017) as well as Lampman (2012) report that faculty in their 40s are at a higher risk of workplace bullying, while those in their 50s are at a lower risk. This may be influenced by rank, since younger faculty are often of a lower rank and some might have yet to complete their doctorate or receive tenure (Lampman, 2012). However, older faculty are still involved in academic mobbing, since many of higher rank will abuse their power, becoming a perpetrator of mobbing (Dentith et al., 2015; Fogg, 2008).

Consequences of Academic Mobbing

Academic mobbing is often inflicted by the means of verbal, emotional, or psychological abuse (Faria et al., 2012; Lampman, 2012). Faculty, administrators, and even students often inflict mobbing on targets through the form of intentional emotional or psychological harm (Lampman, 2012). The following sections will describe the psychological, work-related, and cost-associated consequences of academic mobbing. The long-lasting effects of academic mobbing, coping methods used, and some positive outcomes of academic mobbing will also be discussed.

Physical and Psychological consequences of Academic Mobbing

The most common consequences reported by mobbed faculty can be classified under physical and psychological. In fact, the most prevalent consequences of academic mobbing include depression (Cassell, 2011; Keim

& McDermott, 2010; Lampman et al., 2016), general stress (Cassell, 2011; Hecker, 2007; Lampman et al., 2016), or stress-related illnesses and other health issues (Cassell, 2011; Keim & McDermott, 2010; Lampman et al., 2016). Some stress-related illness and other health issues associated with being a mobbing victim include musculoskeletal and digestive problems (Cassell, 2011), sleep disturbances (Cassell, 2011; Keim & McDermott, 2010), change in eating patterns, and an increase in drinking and smoking (Keim & McDermott, 2010). A comprehensive summary of the physical, emotional, and psychological consequences of academic mobbing can be seen in table 2.

Table 2 – Summary of reported physical, emotional, and psychological consequences of academic mobbing in alphabetical order

Anger (Dentith et al., 2015)
 Anxiety (Lampman et al., 2016)
 Confusion (Dentith et al., 2015)
 Damaged personal relationships/family issues (Cassell, 2011; Lampman et al., 2016)
 Depression (Cassell, 2011; Keim & McDermott, 2010; Lampman et al., 2016)
 Despair (Lewis, 2004)
 Destructive behaviors (Fogg, 2008)
 Difficulty concentrating (Lampman et al., 2016)
 Embarrassment (Lewis, 2004)
 Fear (Afraid of student or tormentor, exposed as victim) – (Lampman et al., 2016; Lewis, 2004)
 Foolishness (Lewis, 2004)
 Hopelessness (Lewis, 2004)
 Humiliation (Lewis, 2004)
 Inferiority and withdrawal (Lewis, 2004)
 Pain (Dentith et al., 2015)
 Phobias (Cassell, 2011)
 Pointlessness (Lewis, 2004)
 Powerlessness (Lewis, 2004)
 Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Cassell, 2011; Keim & McDermott, 2010)
 Reduced self-esteem (Cassell, 2011)
 Reluctance acceptance/denial of experiences (Lewis, 2004)
 Sadness (Lewis, 2004)
 Stress (Cassell, 2011; Hecker, 2007; Lampman et al., 2016)
 Stress-related illnesses and health issues (MSK, digestive, sleep disturbances, change in eating patters, increased smoking/drinking) (Cassell, 2011; Keim & McDermott, 2010; Lampman et al., 2016)
 Self blame (Cassell, 2011)
 Self doubt (Dentith et al., 2015)
 Shame (Lewis, 2004)
 Social isolation (Cassell, 2011; Hecker, 2007)
 Suicidal thoughts (Cassell, 2011)

In spite of the painful and sometimes tragic consequences of bullying, many victims choose to remain silent, feeling that this is more tolerable than publicly fighting the situation (Fogg, 2008; Lewis, 2004). Yet, such an approach does not help towards reducing the prevalence of mobbing, nor its long-lasting physical and psychological outcomes (Dentith et al., 2015; Hecker, 2007; Lewis, 2004). On the contrary, it may help maintain the status quo. Some victims felt that the experience was still too raw and analyzing their *“experiences and revisiting the pain, the confusion, the anger, and the extreme self-doubt, was like opening up the wound, afresh”* (Dentith et al., 2015; p.33).

While multiple studies spoke about the long-term effects of academic bullying, Lewis (2004) best summarized them by indicating that suffering continues even after academics left their employment to get away from the bully. Some were “*able to marginalise their experience although never quite forgetting it, whilst for others, the bullying incident lingers beyond the direct encounter itself.*” (Lewis, 2004; p.293).

Table 3 presents a summary of consequences of academic mobbing by author, underlining the rates and the number of participants reporting on each physical, psychological and emotional effect.

Table 3 - Summary of physical, emotional, and psychological consequences of academic mobbing by author**

Authors	N	Consequences of academic mobbing	Number of participants affected
Dentith et al. (2015)	3	Slow recovery from illness	1 (33%)
		Change in job or resigned	3 (100%)
		Anger	3 (100%)
		Hopelessness	1 (33%)
		Confusion	3 (100%)
		Needed counselling	1 (100%)
		Self-doubt	3 (100%)
		Pain	3 (100%)
		Work-ethic questioned	2 (66%)
Lampman et al. (2016) §	287	Felt physically afraid	77 (27%)
		Had difficulty sleeping	98 (34%)
		Let a class out early or cancelled class because distraught by student	26 (9%)
		Avoided making eye contact with student during class	123 (43%)
		Tried to avoid the student outside of class	
		Had difficulty concentrating during class or while at work	169 (59%)
		Productivity at work has suffered	95 (33%)
		Personal live and relationships suffered	86 (30%)
		Felt like quitting your job	52 (18%)
		Afraid to be in the classroom alone with the student	57 (20%)
		Felt like you did not want to go to work	80 (28%)
		Became during that time period	
		Felt significantly anxious or stressed during that time period	72 (25%)
		Suffered from stress-related illness (e.g., migraines or stomach problems)	46 (16%)
		Needed medical treatment for stress-related illness	126 (44%)
		Went to see a mental health professional for help related to the incident	40 (14%)
Felt embarrassed to talk to colleagues about the incident	14 (5%)		
	6 (2%)		
Fogg (2008)	5	Suffered from a lack of sleep	49 (17%)
		Needed medical leave	1 (20%)
		Had to find other employment opportunities	1 (20%)
		Suffered weight loss	3 (60%)
		Saw a therapist	1 (20%)
Lewis (2004)	15	Felt Humiliation/shame/embarrassment/foolish	15 (100%)
		Had a lack of energy or motivation	4 (36%)
		Felt Belittled/incompetent/inadequate/worthless	7 (64%)

		Had a change in the behaviour or personality or mood	4 (36%)
		Developed a physical sickness	
		Was scarred or tainted experiences	2 (18%)
		Had feelings of isolation	2 (18%)
		Felt fear/anger/frustration/desperation	4 (36%)
		Felt a loss of control or power	8 (73%)
			4 (36%)
Hecker (2007) ¶	N/A	Stress, social isolation	N/A
Keim & McDermott (2010) ¶	N/A	Depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, Stress-related illnesses and health issues, exhaustion, burnout, changes in sleeping patterns, changes in eating patterns	N/A
Cassell (2011) ¶	N/A	Damaged personal relationships/family issues, depression, phobias, post-traumatic stress disorder, reduced self-esteem, stress and stress-related illnesses, self-blame, social isolation, suicidal thoughts	N/A

**Some of the 17 retained articles are literature reviews, theoretical or conflict management discussions, as well as instrument development and validation. Others did not discuss consequences of academic mobbing on the victims.

§Data adapted from “Lampman C, Crew EC, Lowery SD, Tompkins K. Women Faculty Distressed: Descriptions and Consequences of Academic Contrapower Harassment. *NASPA Journal About Women in Higher Education*. 2016;9(2):169-189”; table 3.

¶These studies were literature reviews and not original research based on a study population.

Work-related consequences of Academic Mobbing

In addition to physical and psychological consequences, victims of academic mobbing face multiple work-related consequences. In many situations, the physical and psychological effects of academic mobbing significantly impacted the work life of targets (Lampman et al., 2016). The most common type of work-related consequence is a tendency to quit the job (Cassell, 2011; Faria et al., 2012; Fogg, 2008; Lampman et al., 2016). Other work-related issues caused by academic mobbing include decreased productivity (Cassell, 2011; Fogg, 2008; Lampman et al., 2016), a dysfunctional work environment (Cassell, 2011; Fogg, 2008), decreased employee morale and loyalty, and increased absenteeism (Cassell, 2011).

In the case of academic mobbing inflicted by a student towards a professor, Lampman et al. (2016) reported that many professors would try to avoid the student outside of class, avoided eye contact with the student during class, not wanting to go to work, and was physically afraid of, and to be alone with the student.

Academic and Institutional Cost-Associated Consequences of Academic Mobbing

In addition to a significant negative impact on the professor, academic mobbing also poses multiple issues for the institutions. It was reported that academic mobbing can cause an institution or one of its departments to face problems such as increased difficulty in attracting new hires (Cassell, 2011; Fogg, 2008), more medical and workers’ compensation

claims, acts of sabotage/vengeance, and lawsuits (Cassell, 2011). Keim et al. (2010) mention that academic mobbing can be rather costly due to legal and counselling fees, settlements, turnovers, poor health of employees, and low morale. Moreover, mobbing may result in high costs for the target since they sometimes have difficulty getting a new position and thus suffer professionally, socially, and financially (Hecker, 2007). Even the prestige of a university or department may also suffer in the long term, as Faria et al. (2012; p.24) suggest:

“If the professor leaves the institution as a result of the administrator’s mobbing, the administrator wins in the short run since he gets rid of the hated professor, while keeping his legacy, through his publications, of an institution’s enhanced reputation. However, after a few years, the actual value of the former stock of publication depreciates, and if the professor’s replacements do not keep up in terms of productivity the institution and possibly the administrator are worse off.”

Positive outcomes of Academic Mobbing

While there are many negative outcomes associated with academic mobbing, some studies have shown small benefits to it, however counterintuitive they may seem. In some cases, the victim is glad to have left the institution, only to find a new one that recognizes their value and praises them for their work and ideas (Fogg, 2008).

Faria et al. (2012; p.723) present a motivating advice that would help those being mobbed:

“As an administrator’s effort to mob the professor increases, the optimal response by the professor is to increase his publication record so he becomes more marketable which, consequently, increases the professor’s income... When the scholar entertains the possibility of resigning and taking a job with another institution, he has to increase research effort and productivity, resulting in an acceleration of his earnings.”

Some optimism and positive thinking may be helpful beyond the immediate negative effects of mobbing. While many such incidents do cause long-term negative effects, if professors encourage themselves and each other, the long-term effects of academic mobbing could potentially include a new position at a new institution with an increased salary.

Preventing and coping with Academic Mobbing

In general, it is reported that victims of academic mobbing have difficulty coping with the incidents due to the physical and psychological effects, particularly due to feelings of shame and embarrassment (Lewis,

2004). Therefore, many individuals prefer to remain silent (Fogg, 2008; Lewis, 2004). Another very common method of coping with academic mobbing is leaving the institution and searching for a new career (Cassell, 2011; Faria et al., 2012; Fogg, 2008; Lampman et al., 2016). However, Dentith and colleagues (2015) bring to light the process of analysis and writing by the participants in their study. In this process, victims were able to work through some of the necessary steps in self-healing, thus discovering a way to cope for themselves and other targets of academic mobbing (Dentith et al., 2015).

Other coping strategies such as talking and sharing their situation with colleagues might help the victims (Lewis, 2004). Keim & McDermott (2010; p.171) claim that seeking a trusted advisor constitutes the starting point in coping with academic mobbing. In that sense they mention that the advisor should be:

“Someone the victim trusts, who is outside of the work situation and familiar with academia. For example, a good choice would be an academic acquaintance or friend at another university... Together, they can explore what is happening and acknowledge those events that are and are not mobbing. Next step is to consider whether there is anyone at the work-site who is truly trustworthy and would keep a conversation confidential.”

Furthermore, depending on the severity of the situation, it is recommended that the victim seeks legal advice and counsel (Keim & McDermott, 2010).

While the victim of bullying must find ways to cope and deal with their situation, universities should also make an effort on their part as well. It is important that universities and academic departments first show a concern about the effects of bullying on faculty welfare and productivity (Lampman et al., 2016) and assess their workplaces for any potential incidents (Ahmad et al., 2017). It is then important to raise awareness and make faculty and administrators more aware of academic mobbing and its consequences (Hecker, 2007; Keim & McDermott, 2010). In doing so, administrators and faculty could also be made aware of certain groups that are more vulnerable to harassment (Lampman et al., 2016) and identify the need to train department chairs in recognizing, reporting, and responding to academic bullying (Dentith et al., 2015; Fogg, 2008; Hecker, 2007; Keim & McDermott, 2010; Lampman et al., 2016), since many lack training and are often unable to address the situation (Fogg, 2008).

To facilitate this, it is important to create strong workplace-harassment and anti-bullying policies that are enforced (Ahmad et al., 2017; Fogg, 2008; Keim & McDermott, 2010). These policies should include

designed interventions for helping victims through grievance processes (Ahmad et al., 2017).

Another method of potentially reducing incidents of mobbing would be to address and resolve incidents that may lead to mobbing. As an example, Paewai, Meyer, & Houston (2017) recommend that bullying may be prevented by addressing the challenge of managing workloads, since it could reduce the chance of conflict. Finally, both Lampman et al. (2016) and Frazier (2011) highlight the need to continue and improve research on how academic mobbing affects the workplace environment and how it can be prevented or moderated.

Conclusion

This review of the current state of literature in regards to academic mobbing found that the most common types of bullying were psychological and emotional attacks (Table 2), often directed towards an academic by either administrators, other academics and faculty, or even students. Many risk factors are related to academic mobbing, including sex, sexuality, gender, race and ethnicity, rank or seniority, work experience, and age. Incidents of academic bullying often lead to multiple negative outcomes on victims, including physical and psychological, with multiple work-related and institutional consequences. Universities should help foster a culture and environment of civility, and focus on reducing incidents of academic mobbing (Cassell, 2011).

There is still a need to close the research gap on bullying and academic mobbing, as the analysed studies did not examine all components of mobbing in academia. Future longitudinal research design and specific case studies may provide more in depth knowledge about the complex academic mobbing phenomenon, its consequences on the targets and effective coping strategies for victims and institutions.

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