

# BEHAVIORS PERCEIVED AS MOBBING BY EMPLOYEES AND THEIR EFFECTS ON THEM

Maryam Jalalifarahani

Taft Islamic Azad University, Taft Branch  
Taft, Iran  
[mjalalifarahani@gmail.com](mailto:mjalalifarahani@gmail.com) ;  
[jalali@taftiau.ac.ir](mailto:jalali@taftiau.ac.ir)

**Abstract**— Mobbing is a phenomenon that occurs in the organizational context and consists in hostile actions, aggression (verbal, physical, sexual), professional discredit, contempt, isolation etc. All these behaviors are performed by a person/group of persons on a person/group of people, the ultimate goal being, most times, the exclusion of individuals/group of individuals from the organization. Such behaviors are counterproductive and have long-term effects on the physical and mental health of the person assaulted. The paper describes the phenomenon of hostile action types that constitute the phenomenon of “mobbing”, its causes and effects. It also emphasizes the benefits of identifying the first signs of the emergence of this phenomenon in time.

**Index Terms**—mobbing, bullying, working place aggression, harassment.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Internationally, extensive research on harassment, bullying and mobbing (grouped under the term inappropriate behavior) has been conducted over the last years, especially in Europe. Inappropriate behavior is recognized worldwide as a serious problem in the work environment and has been shown to have severe consequences for both health [14] and job satisfaction of victims [28]. Until recently there was insufficient information in the literature about this phenomenon.

A definition and the use of terminology around inappropriate behavior remain unclear. [6] characterized mobbing as psychological aggression that often involves groups of mobbers rather than a single person, whereas [29] pointed out that bullying is indefinable because a wide range of behaviors refer to the phenomenon and so it is too complicated to assign it one specific definition. For instance, it took approximately 15 years of concerted working effort between the United States Supreme Court and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to get clarity on the definition of sexual harassment [29]. [16] emotionally expressed her dissatisfaction on the subject of a definition of bullying. Mobbing behavior is a type of negative communication that occurs between individuals and that negatively affects them. Constantly deriding a person, interrupting him, implying that he is a liar and raising gossip about him are some of the examples of this type of behavior [25]. According to [10] mobbing behavior is defined as “psychological violence” or “psycho-terror” by one or several persons against another person or

several other persons through systematically hostile and unethical practices [25]. In mobbing behavior, the victim is influenced by wearing him out in the environment where he is found and by isolating him from his surroundings [13]. As a result of the mobbing behavior he suffers, the victim loses his self-confidence. The ultimate objective is usually to remove the victim from the workplace [19].

Having derived from infinitive verb mob, the word is defined as psychological violence, emotional siege, harassment, molestation or hallowing (Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, 2005). Leymann at the onset of eighties used the same concept to identify long-term hostilities and violence amongst co-workers. [10] notes that hostile and unethical communication directed in a systematic way by one or a few individuals mainly towards one individual is psychological terror or mobbing. This situation is expected to last each repeating day or minimum for a six-month period. Mobbing is known to be the actions directed to certain people as systematic emotional abuse and harassment. Regardless of the fact that the problems of victims have long been recognized, it was only after 1992 that tangible efforts in the diagnosis and appropriate treatment methods for this long-existing problem have come to surface [4].

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The initial studies made in Europe and America found that such behavior caused a major loss of blood for organizations. In the initial studies made in Sweden by [9] it was found that 3.5 % of the working population suffered mobbing. In addition, it was estimated that the probability of a working person suffering such behavior during his life was 25 % [10]. Studies made in the USA found that 82 % of employees faced with mobbing behavior had to leave or lost their jobs. It was found that 34 % of them left due to health reasons associated with mobbing and 44 % as a result of the organization’s performance evaluation system, either on their own initiative or through a management decision. Employees who do not leave although they suffer mobbing behavior experience a fall in their productivity and miss future promotion opportunities [26]. Research studies in the area of mobbing behavior show that employees who suffer mobbing behavior experience biological and psychological health problems. [28] said 23 % of employees who suffer mobbing behavior in the workplace

experience psychological disorders as a result. According to [25] when mobbing behavior heavily affects the victim, it may cause health problems such as depression and a heart attack in the victim. This situation drags the victim as far as suicide.

Mobbing behavior is also found out by research conducted in educational institutions [23] [24] [2]. In a research study conducted in educational institutions, [11] found that teachers faced mobbing behavior from school managers, inspectors, colleagues, families and students. In a research study by [31] concerning work stress and mobbing suffered by teachers in England, it was found that suffering from weariness caused by stress and especially from physical symptoms led to more days of nonattendance at school. Similar results are noted in a research study by [12] on teachers in Turkey. The results of this study have shown that teachers who suffer mobbing behavior develop stress and fatigue syndromes. It is quite difficult to establish the causes of mobbing behavior. On this subject [6] states that methodological problems complicate experimental research concerning the phenomenon. However, it is possible to establish the main areas where mobbing behavior occurs. [9] emphasizes that four factors are influential in the occurrence of mobbing behavior at organizations: deficiencies in the design of work, deficiencies in leadership behavior, the social position of the victim, and low moral standards in the department. [6] investigated the factors influential in the experience of mobbing behavior in Germany and found them to be organizational factors, factors concerning the social system of the working group and individual factors.

[25] describe mobbing concept as emotional attack. [6] in his research had established a meaningful relationship between mobbing and unfavorable working conditions and social life explains mobbing at work as systematic, daily and emotionally damaging actions by one or a few people towards one target person or a few people rarely. [20] believes mobbing is practiced consciously or unconsciously and it is quite likely that employees shall face job dissatisfaction, motivation loss, unproductively not to mention a number of physiological disorders. In particular the kind of mobbing behaviors witnessed in educational institutes ad performance. [17] state that victims of mobbing experience adverse physiological, psychological and emotional impacts. [5] list the relevant mobbing behaviors such: threatening professional status and personality of employees, excluding from social environments, irrational loads of work, unpredictable acts and physical damages. All these experiences leave intolerable negative effects on victims. These effects can be visualized in preventing social communication of the victim, distancing the victim from other employees by affecting his/her social relations, diminishing self-esteem, burdening the victim with futile tasks and assigning the victim with life-threatening duties that disorder physiological health [9]. They may all result in labeling the victim, social isolation, hopelessness and inclination towards psychosomatic/ psychiatric disorders [10]. Mobbing is not only influential on the psychology and psychological trauma of the victim but on his/her family as well [18]. Mobbing may also result from lack of cooperation or

various conflicts that prevent flow of information [7] research findings suggest that when the managers render social support there is decline in mobbing, yelling at the victim, criticisms and verbal attacks; when mobbing victim receives social support of colleagues then the victim is socially alienated in a lower level and faces less mocking of his/her private life. Behaviors of bullying and mobbing are commonly and more frequently experienced in different ways in all organizations including social services and healthcare and educational institutions particularly [17].

### III. MAIN BODY

In 1990, Leymann, through 300 interviews, found 45 specific behaviors that abusers use against their victims. He classified these behaviors into five categories: 1. actions that can block the expression of victim: he/she cannot express his/hers views in front of his/hers boss, he/she is interrupted when speaking, he/she is not allowed to support his/hers point of view, malicious remarks are made against him/her, he/she is insulted, disparaged, criticized, both professionally and personally, his/hers ideas are considered childish and unfeasible, even if they have the potential to implementation. 2. Actions to isolate the victim: offenders never talk to the victim or, if the `victim` tries to start a conversation, they answer monosyllabically, with hostility, the victim is not allowed to speak to another person, the victim is distributed in a place that isolates him/her from colleagues, the physical presence of the victim is ignored. 3. Contempt actions against fellow victim: the victim is spoken against and various rumors about her and her actions are launched, he/she is ridiculed and considered mentally ill, the victim's political or religious beliefs are attacked, there are jokes at the expense of the victim's origin, nationality and privacy, the payment is unfair. 4. Professional discredit of the victim: the victim is not assigned tasks or the tasks assigned are above or below his/her level of qualification, some of these being unnecessary or absurd; the tasks assigned are frequently changed and he/she is required to perform humiliating tasks. 5. Actions to compromise the health of the victim: tasks that are dangerous and harmful for his/her health, the threat with physical violence, easy physical aggression as a warning, serious physical assault, trouble at work or at home, sexual assault of the victim. It is estimated that of all specific mobbing behavior, the worst is the aggressive behaviour (physical aggression, sexual assault) [3]. Often, however, hostile behavior is not alone, but accompanied by others. The combination of several behaviors can produce effects which are more serious than the appearance of a single behavior. Frequency of mobbing behavior more than once a week, for more than six months is considered the threshold value for diagnosis mobbing. [10] identified four stages of the process: The first phase is one in which there are some differences of opinion or disputes between employees, most of these being natural for a dynamic and progressive organization. In fact, there are many cases where these are attenuated by themselves. When this does not happen and conflicts persist, the situation

may degenerate into mobbing. In the second phase, conflicts already begin to affect the victim's psychological balance. The first negative effects from prolonged stress appear: anxiety, insomnia, even panic attacks. The third stage is usually the one in which the victim's rights are violated, situation that is tolerated and indirectly decided by the management unit, which leaves the conflict unsolved. Typically, the leadership starts with the preconceived notion of the victim's guilt. Credit is given to the department head or, if applicable, to the majority of employees, never to the person subject to mobbing. The fourth phase is the toughest, characterized by stigma, social isolation and even the dismissal of the victim. Another researcher of the phenomenon of mobbing, Harald Ege, has identified another dimension of the phenomenon: the cultural dimension. According to Ege, Leymann's model is suitable to Swedish reality, or at most it may extend to the Scandinavian scope. Leymann investigated the phenomenon, this not being as true and valid in other countries. Researching the phenomenon in Italy, Ege identified the cultural dimension of the phenomenon and updated the stages of the phenomenon in the context, thus resulting in a 6-phase model. The cultural factor is important, as specified in the organizational theories and intervention procedures. Culture is a crucial factor, as the scientists from Tavistock Institute and American authors that deal with organizational development claim.

[8] defined phases of the mobbing process (six phases Italian model) as follows: 1. Zero stage: considered a pre-stage, an initial situation identified and validated in Italy and completely unknown in North European culture, state 0 is the psychological conflict. In this pre-stage there is no desire to destroy, but to stand out, to be superior to others. 2. First stage: conflict directed. At this stage the conflict is directed towards a certain person, a victim is identified. The conflict, which until then had a general dimension, is now targeted. The objective of the aggressor is not, this time, to reach the top but to destroy his/her opponent, to remove the individual. At this stage the conflict is not limited to the job, but turned to private matters. 3. second stage :the appearance of mobbing. The attacks don't cause psychosomatic symptoms or the illness of the victim yet, but create discomfort, anxiety, anger. The relations with colleagues deteriorate and the victim wonders why. 4. Third stage: the first psychosomatic symptoms. The victim begins to show some health problems and this may extend to longer periods. Common symptoms are: feeling of insecurity, insomnia, problems with digestion. 5. Fourth stage: errors and abuses in human resource management. mobbing becomes public and is often encouraged by errors of assessment by the department staff. Previous phase leads to victim illness and disease frequencies lead to colleagues' suspiciousness. 6. Fifth stage: worsening of the individual psychophysical condition At this stage, the victim is in a state of real despair and hopelessness. Mild or severe depression appears, psychotropic treatment consists of psychotherapy, which only really improves since work problems remain and, even more, they get worse. 7. Sixth stage: exclusion from work. The final result is the exclusion of the mobbing victim from work, either through

self-discharge (resignation) or through dismissal or through early retirement or even a traumatic event like suicide, the development of obsessive mania, murder or aggression directed at the aggressor. This phase is the natural consequence of the previous one: depression makes the individual find a way out, either by resignation or by dismissal; a more serious case is that the person is forced to take early retirement. The worst situation is when the mobbing leads to extreme acts.

#### IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Mobbing has devastating effects on the person concerned: its effects on the mental and the psychological reduce work capacity, produce loss of self-confidence. Victims often develop some disorders like: state of depression or anxiety, stress, adjustment disorder. Psychosomatic symptoms are very common in people who are victims of mobbing phenomenon. Some authors [4] state that `Mobbing can cause severe illness, occupational and learning disability, social exclusion, and even suicide`. As a result of the actions of "mobbing", the victim is led to resign or falls into a lower hierarchical position. Initially, before doing so, the results can be seen in the victims' absenteeism from work or periods of illness (sick leave) frequencies. These results, visible from this moment, are harmful both to the individual (his mental and physical condition) and the organization (the productivity decreases, the tasks previously performed by the victim have to be done by another person and so on). During mobbing, the victim loses progressively: his/her influence, credibility, respect of others, health, work enthusiasm, confidence, dignity, power to make decisions, friends, family, and even health. [21] believes that effects of mobbing are felt in two main plans: the organizational plan which is a professional relationships degradation, damage or degradation of the quality of communication, lack of commitment, absenteeism, staff turnover, frequent sickness leaves, "cracks" in the company's image etc. And the social plan which is impaired ability to maintain natural relationships with family, social group or social institutions.

The Purpose of mobbing can be varied, but always destructive; it aims to remove a person who is considered somehow "undesirable, uncomfortable" in an organization either by its removal, or by coercing him/her to resign. The phenomenon recently theorized is, however, well known in most organizations. There is almost no person who has not experienced at some point in his professional life, a labor dispute or problems at work. This does not mean, however, that all these people are victims of mobbing phenomenon. From the perspective of mobbing purpose, [8] - psychologist specialized in mobbing phenomenon – defined mobbing as: action (or series of actions) repeated over a long period of time, made by one or more mobbers to hurt someone (a person who will be called a victim of the phenomenon or a mobbed person) systematically and with a purpose. Therefore, those that mobbing always have purpose. The goal is, synthetically speaking, professional, psychological and social destruction of the victim.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

Mobbing is not a constructive, normal conflict, a crisis that ends quickly, within a limited time. It is a series of persecutions, attacks and humiliations that occur slowly, subtly and persist for a long time (more than 6 months). The phenomenon is so strong and disabling due to its duration. However, when identified in time, we can intervene and stop the phenomenon, its devastating effects, both at the individual and organizational level. Thus, the effects on the victim's family are stopped. These effects cannot be neglected, the victim suffers and transmits the suffering to the spouse, children, parents; the stress attacks the family which will compensate the victims' frustrations and sorrows only for a period until the family ends its resources, at which point it enters the crisis because the victim becomes a threat to the integrity and health of the family. From this moment on, the family is interested in self-protection and counterattacks the victim. Thus, the victim becomes a double victim, because he/she is deprived of the understanding and help of the family which, unconsciously, protect themselves and no longer support the loved ones. If the phenomenon is identified in time, the effects of mobbing on the victim, consisting of health problems (somatization and nervous tension, palpitations, tremors, trouble breathing, expression, gastric and digestive problems, insomnia, sleep problems: nightmares, interrupted sleep; intellectual dysfunctions: concentrating and remembering difficulties, dizziness and fainting), financial problems (caused by frequent medical consultations, medication, psychotherapy, job loss and therefore the loss of monthly income), social problems (the social image is devastated, friends and colleagues are lost one by one) can be stopped. Mobbing also has devastating effects on the organization, especially economically: for example an entrepreneur is familiar with the negative effects of this phenomenon will counter it efficiently and rapidly. Identifying mobbing at an early stage should enhance the prevention of mobbing [15]. But if there is no intervention, the efficiency of a person who is mobbed may decrease up to 40%, decreasing the productivity of the organization as well [8]. The social consequences are not to be neglected. If the employees are not happy with the atmosphere at work and communicate this to the outside world, the image of the organization suffers and the competing companies can take advantage of this. In this case another entity has to suffer from mobbing: society itself. In conclusion, stopped at the right time, the phenomenon does not cause the above mentioned devastating effects at an individual, domestic, organizational and social level.

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