

## RESEARCH ON MOBBING AND BULLYING AT WORKPLACE

**Mirela Bucurean**

*Management and Marketing Department, Faculty of Economic Sciences, University of Oradea, Oradea, Romania  
mbucurean@uoradea.ro*

**Abstract:** *In this paper we intend to research two aspects at work, mobbing and bullying. The both aspects are negative and they have negative consequences on safe and health at work. The persons confronting such problems may no longer perform daily tasks and come, sooner or later, to resign. After leaving their jobs it is very probable for these persons to suffer a posttraumatic stress. So, these issues must be deeply analyzed in order to found methods of prevention. As an employee, the ideal situation is to have a safe and healthy workplace. The employers have to create and maintain it. A safety and health management system that managers could adopt is necessary for improving the work environment. This system, that is unique for every organization, has to contain rules, principles, generally what the people in the organization have to do to prevent injuries and illnesses at workplace. A safety and health management system differ a lot from one organization to another and that depends mainly on the dimension of the firm and especially on the level of hazardous. The most important thing is the system to work for a certain organization, no matter how simple or complicated it is, to be put into practice and the result to be a safe and healthy workplace. From theoretical point of view we have defined these concepts, finding the difference between mobbing and bullying. The terms mobbing and bullying are very similar, both referring to the perpetual psychological violence committed at the workplace. While the term "mobbing" refers to psychological aggression that comes from the colleagues, the term "bullying" refers to the same issue, but this time psychological aggression that comes from a person with a higher position. We also pointed out the effects of these two negative phenomena on the victim and the most common tactics adopted by bullies. We studied these theoretical aspects in practice as well. We chose investigation as a research method. 100 first-line and middle managers from Bihor County were questioned related to mobbing and bullying issues. Our objective was to find out to what extent they confront with these negative aspects and how they deal with them.*

**Keywords:** *mobbing; bullying; emotional abuse; safe workplace; stress; mental illness.*

**JEL classification:** *M10; M12; M14.*

### 1. Introduction

Emotional or psychological abuse involves any verbal or nonverbal behavioural attitude that produces a negative impact on a person's emotions. Emotional abuse occurs in different types of relationships, including at work. It can appear either between employees at the same level, this case we talk about mobbing, or between employees at different levels, when we can talk about bullying. This phenomenon occurs no matter it is about men or women, young or old ages, high or low level of education. Being touched by this negative phenomenon, they simply could hate their workplaces. These persons feel every working day as a torture. Some people are incapable to cope with this situation and simply get sick. The person who is abused is most of the time an efficient employee, not an ordinary one. The emotional abuse affects the health condition of the person who is abused who could have problems as: sleep problems, breakdowns, irritability, depression, concentration problems, panic attacks or even heart attacks.

The workplaces where the persons must cope with emotional or psychological abuse are emotionally unsafe workplaces. These people feel as they go to a battle without weapons

every morning when they hear the alarm clock for going to work. The question is: Should the employees' show how they feel?

An article in Workforce magazine (2014:11) has an interesting answer for this question. It boldly stated: "Mental illness is the workplace's dirty little secret. Employees want to hide it and employers don't want to hear about it."

In our days the normal behaviour regarding this issue must be another one; both the employees and employers should recognise they face this issue. The key factor in coping with this problem is to recognize it first. On the one hand, for the employees there should be no shame in accepting the fact that the emotional abuse is present at workplace. The employers, on the other hand, must not deny that sometimes employees could have emotional problems that require attention.

## **2. How to Tell the Difference between Mobbing and Bullying**

The term "mobbing" comes from the English verb "to mob" (meaning "move too close to someone") and the Latin word "mobile vulgus" ("the crowds' motions"). In an organizational environment, mobbing refers to aggression, persecution or psychological violence perpetuated by one or more employees to one or more colleagues. The aggressive employees' purpose is to isolate the victim in order him/her not to exert his/her tasks anymore.

The bullying term is very similar but the one who is aggressive is the manager, a person who has a higher position. His/Her behavior could be described:

- unjustified unequal treatment of certain employees;
- imposing arbitrary sanctions on an employee;
- assigning tasks that the employee cannot realistically fulfil;
- assigning humiliating tasks;
- social isolation;
- sexual harassment of an employee, etc.

The manager's purpose could be to determine the employee to resign.

On the other hand, a conflict is not considered mobbing or bullying if:

- it is an isolated incident;
- is the teasing at work;
- aims to motivate the less performant employees.

An inappropriate interaction or process needs to take place repeatedly in a period of about six months, to be considered mobbing. A mobbing type behavior more than once a week, for more than six months is considered the threshold value for the diagnosis of mobbing.

The researchers found five categories of effects on the victim of these two negative phenomena:

- it is not allowed to the victim to speak
- the victim is isolated
- the victim is disconsidered in front of the colleagues
- the victim is discredited from the professional point of view
- the victim's health is affected.

## **3. The Most Common Tactics Adopted by Bullies**

Studying deeply the categories of effects on the victim, Gary Namie, PhD, director of the Workplace Bullying Institute, says there are 25 tactics adopted by bullies; we list below 15 tactics that we consider the most common ones:

- Falsely accusing someone of "errors" not actually made.
- Using the "silent treatment" to "ice out" and separate from others.
- Exhibiting presumably uncontrollable mood swings in front of the group.
- Making up own rules on the fly that even she/he does not follow.

- Disregarding satisfactory or exemplary quality of completed work despite evidence.
- Harshly and constantly criticizing having a different 'standard' for the target.
- Starting, or failing to stop, destructive rumours or gossip about the person.
- Encouraging people to turn against the person being tormented.
- Yelling, screaming, and throwing tantrums in front of others to humiliate a person.
- Abusing the evaluation process by lying about the person's performance.
- Using confidential information about a person to humiliate privately or publicly.
- Retaliating against the person after a complaint was filed.
- Making verbal put-downs/insults based on gender, race, accent or language, disability.
- Making undoable demands– workload, deadlines, duties — for person singled out or assigning undesirable work as punishment
- Encouraging the person to quit or transfer rather than to face more mistreatment.

What an employee must do if his/her colleagues or bosses use the tactics listed above?

If a person becomes a victim of one of these two forms of psychological violence at work he/she must not hide this fact, on the contrary, he/she must give it a special attention because the effects could be dangerous. He/she must study which are the options to fix things. It would be useful for him/her to collect evidence and talk to the witnesses related to a possible testimony if he/she wants to submit a complaint.

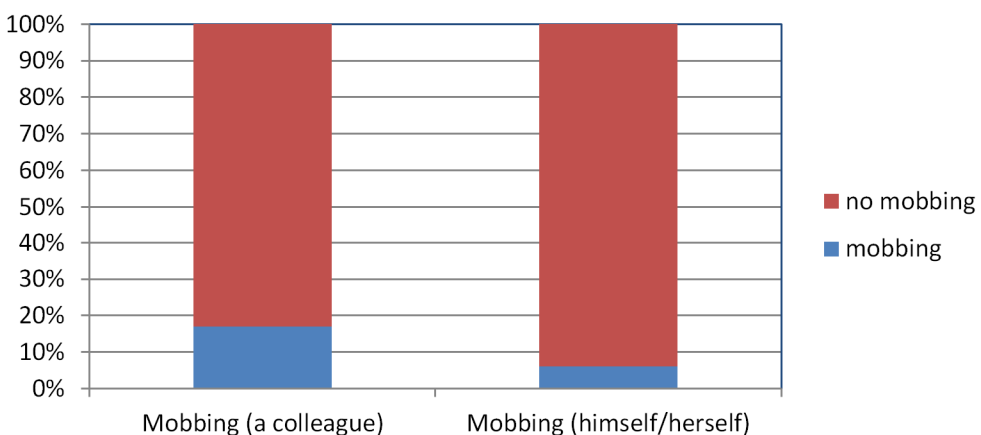
#### 4. Research Methodology, Results and Discussions

The research is a descriptive one; in order to implement this quantitative research, the investigation was chosen as a research method. In this view, there was drawn up a questionnaire. The data base has in total 100 first-line and middle managers from Bihor County, 50 women and 50 men. 48 people completed the questionnaire, which means that response rate is 48%. From those 48 people, 19 are women and 29 are men.

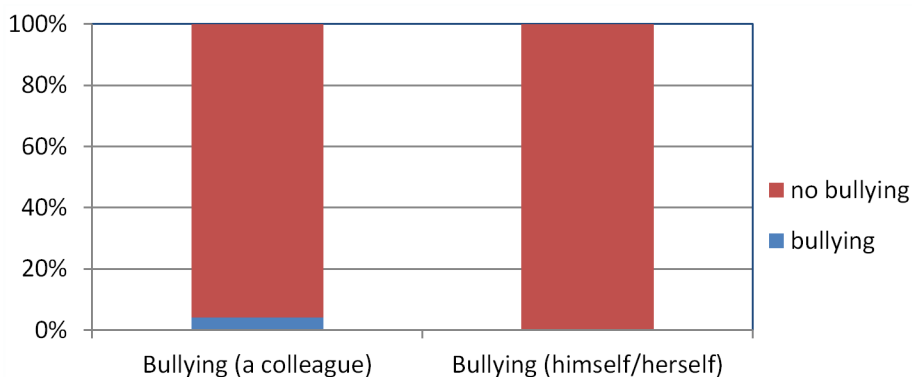
Our objective was to find out whether the respondents confront with mobbing or bullying at their workplace.

The results of our research are presented in Figure 1 and 2. We analysed the answers to the following questions:

- Was one of your colleague offended by other colleagues? (Figure 1)
- Were you offended by your colleagues? (Figure 1)
- Was one of your colleague offended by his/her boss? (Figure 2)
- Were you offended by your boss? (Figure 2)



**Figure 1:** Mobbing at workplace



**Figure 2: Bullying at workplace**

- 17% (8 out of 48 persons) claimed that one of his/her colleague was offended by other colleagues
- 6% (3 out of 48 persons) claimed that he/she was offended by his/her colleagues
- 4% (2 out of 48 people) claimed that one of his/her colleagues was offended by his/her boss
- 0% (0 out of 48 persons) claimed that he/she was offended by his/her boss.

## 5. Conclusions

The two negative aspects we theoretically and practically analyzed in this paper have critical consequences on both the victim, by losing self-confidence, anger, frustration, unemployment and the company, by low productivity, loss of reputation and the key employees. People resort to mobbing to cover their own weaknesses and shortcomings; this is an unpredictable, irrational and unfair phenomenon. Mobbing victims are people qualified above average, they are enthusiastic, smart, dedicated people who are considered a threat by colleagues.

Unfortunately, both, the employers and the employees want to hide these negative aspects. In Romania, a study (<http://www.ziaruldeiasi.ro/stiri/hartuirea-morala-la-serviciu-cum-o-identificati-si-cum-o-puteti-dovedi--126418.html>) shows that 25.7% of participants said that a colleague was offended by their colleagues or bosses, but when it came to himself only 7.4% said they were offended. 24.7% said that a colleague has been criticized and 19.5% believe that a colleague do not integrate into the team. 41% of respondents admitted that the boss or colleagues screaming at each other at work. The research was conducted on a representative sample of the population aged 18 to 65 from four regions: Bucharest-Ilfov, South-Muntenia, North-West and Centre.

In our research the employees also did not recognize they are victims of mobbing or bullying. The respondents stated that their colleagues were offended by the colleagues or boss (in a small extent, indeed), but they were not.

The cruel truth is that the both phenomenon exist in our company and it is even harder to deal with them if the employers and employees do not recognize their presence at work place. The prevention of harassment at the workplace is an important element for better working conditions. We propose the following methods of prevention:

- to be formulated anti-harassment policy,
- to be improved psychosocial climate at work,
- to create an organizational culture with standards and values against bullying,
- the employees to have the opportunity to participate at trainings in conflict management area.

In the Romanian law there was a vacuum regarding harassment at the workplace until recently, but law 229/2015 have created in Romania the legal basis for sanctioning the harassment and discrimination at work.

The employees can prove harassed by various evidence accepted by law, such as photos, statements, documents, audio and video footage, emails containing insults or humiliation, etc. The employees may appeal several authorities: National Council for Combating Discrimination (CNCD), the Labour Inspection, and the National Agency for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, courts or Anti-Mobbing Centres.

## References

1. Law J., Betts G., Longhurst C. and Brindley B. (2006) *A Dictionary of Business and Management*, Oxford: University Press.
2. Namie G., *How to deal with a bullying boss*, Available: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jacquelynsmith/201309/20/how-to-deal-with-a-bullying-boss>, [10 January, 2017].
3. McHugh J. and McHugh S. (2012) *Understanding Business*, Irwin: McGraw Hill
4. Mondy R.W., Sharplin A. and Premeaux S.R. (1994) *Management: Concepts, Practices, and Skills*, Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
5. Pettinger R. (2012) *Management: a Concise Introduction*, Irwin: McGraw Hill.
6. Workforce magazine, Available: <https://www.payscale.com/compensation-today/2014/11/the-emotionally-unsafe-workplace-how-bullies-tyrants-and-narcissists-are-hurting-your-business>, [7 February, 2017].
7. Ziarul de Iasi 28.04.2016, Available: <http://www.ziaruldeiasi.ro/stiri/hartuirea-morala-la-serviciu-cum-o-identificati-si-cum-o-puteti-dovedi--126418.html>, [10 January, 2017].