

HOW TO TACKLE MOBBING IF IT IS NOT FICTION

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Abstract The purpose of the article is to explore the essence of “mobbing”. Perpetrators and targets, their motivation and actions are thoroughly analyzed. Both negative (psychological and physical) and even positive examples of its impact on the people are given. Higher educational institutions turned out to be the most vulnerable to it in Ukraine for the past seven years. Practical tips are given to the person who is mobbed and those who mob are warned about their self-destruction.

Keywords: Mobbing, bullying, target, academic, university

What is mobbing? The term comes from animal psychology. Sometimes you may notice a group of birds, swallows or blackbirds chasing an eagle or hawk. Such mobbing is known as anti-predatory behaviour. Mobbing may thus function to divert the predator from areas where there are young birds, or simply to confuse and make it move away. But what happens when the ugly duckling is cruelly pecked by the flock because he looks different or when piranhas attack and bite one of their species? Something must have gone wrong but not with the one who is attacked but with the whole attacking group. Unfortunately, the same happens among humans. Some researchers say that about 40 percent of employees experience mobbing in their workplace. Studies have shown that between 25% - 91% of academics are mobbed in the workplace [1, p.].

The term “workplace mobbing” was coined by Leymann, an occupational psychologist who investigated the psychology of workers who had suffered severe trauma. He noticed that some of the most severe reactions were among workers who had been the target of “an impassioned collective campaign by coworkers to exclude,

punish, or humiliate” them. Many researchers use the term mobbing to describe a negative work environment created by several individuals working together [2, p. 3]. Some researchers use the term workplace bullying to describe the creation of a hostile work environment by either a single individual—usually a boss—or several individuals. The word mobbing is used in those situations where a target is selected and bullied by a group of people rather than by one individual. However, every group has a ringleader. This ringleader can be an extrovert or introvert, introvert ringleaders are more dangerous. They incite supporters to engage in opposing interaction with the selected target. The ringleader, or chief bully, gains gratification from encouraging others to do it and actually it’s a feature of people with psychopathic personality.

Targets are usually anyone who is "different" from the organizational norm. Usually, victims are competent, educated, resilient, outspoken, challenge the status quo, are more empathic or attractive and tend to be women, aged 32 to 55. Targets also can be racially different or part of a minority group. Gossip is spread behind his back before the target is unaware of what is going on and previously loyal co-workers provide damaging rumours. Because an employee is being targeted and criticized, he or she may be seen as a "troublemaker" by others and thus be ignored and isolated by other positive people. Ex loyal friends can thus turn against him and he is left socially isolated. The target receives humiliation and ridicule. It takes away a person's safety in the world, dignity, identity, and damages his or her mental and physical health. The effects also have a negative impact on the target's family, friends and his well-being in general.

There are 5 stages of mobbing:

1. Denial and Disagreement

Mobbing usually starts with a disagreement or some other form of criticism (such as an investigation, rebuke, warning, suspension, termination, evaluation, or report) toward the target.

2. Anger and Aggression

The victim usually responds in anger as his reputation, job, and salary may be at risk. However, responding in anger is precisely what the mobbers desire, as it makes the employee appear to be unfit for the job.

3. Bargaining

The perpetrator of the mobbing begins to involve the management. Often, management will be persuaded by the false statements portraying the victim (in case they are not involved). The victim often feels misunderstood and alone at this stage, but appealing to management does not always produce positive outcomes.

4. Depression

Many people who experience workplace mobbing can experience symptoms of depression whether during their time at the job or only after they have left. Other symptoms include difficulty with concentration, changes in sleep and appetite, feelings of hopelessness, sadness, low energy, and sometimes suicidal ideation. Besides stress disorders and psychosomatic diseases often occur. The person can begin to be less productive at work.

5. Acceptance

Eventually, the situation will resolve in one way or another. The mobbing may decrease, the employee may quit or be fired [3, p. 2]

Organizations that are driven by bureaucracy, e.g., government departments, are likely to be the most toxic. They appear to have policies and procedures to ensure a safe workplace, but they will redefine bullying as a “personality conflict” and end up offering no real protection. As a matter of fact, bad behavior is tolerated and left to escalate. The best way to deal with workplace mobbing is to increase resilience, practice self-care and get out as soon as possible. It is often impossible to win against organizations that tacitly support mobbing. Five steps that you can take to ensure recovery are [4, p.1]:

1. Document everything in detail. From the earliest signs of something wrong, keep a journal of all the incidents you experience. The more evidence you have, the better your recourse to legal action later.

2. Give yourself space and time to figure things out. Look for someone in authority you can trust at work to tell it. See a doctor for stress leave and a worker's compensation claim.

3. Get a good recovery team to stop the isolation. A good psychologist will help you develop recovery strategies. A good lawyer will help you initiate legal action (but not in Ukraine where there isn't any legislation law concerning mobbing). A good doctor will treat. Family and friends will understand, believe and support you.

4. Make self-care a priority. Focus on what you love. Engage in daily spiritual practice and follow a good diet and exercise.

5. Engage in meaningful life activities. Set new goals. Be proactive and positive.

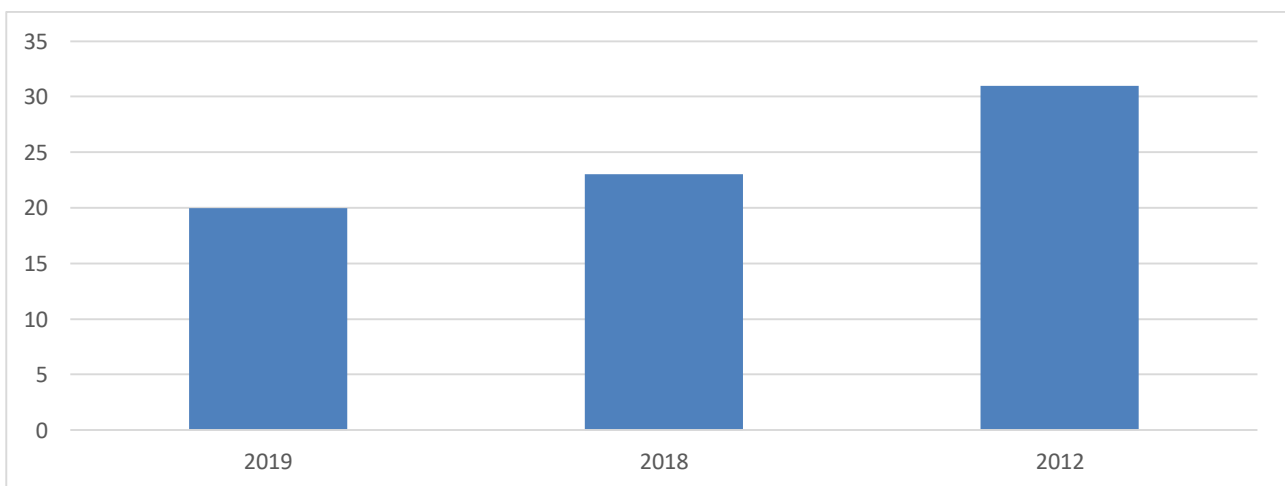
Workplace mobbing can be inflicted by means of verbal, emotional, or psychological abuse [5, p. 723]. Remaining silent does not help raise awareness to reduce the risks of this type of violence in the workplace [6, p. 3]. Dentith et al. [7, p. 34] best summarized why colleges and universities were favourable 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 [8, p. 10] 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" [9, p.8]. These three types of bullying are often seen in the academic environment. Academics are the target, while the perpetrators are faculty members, administrators, or even students.

The most common consequences reported by mobbed faculty can be classified as physical and psychological. In fact, the most prevalent consequences of academic mobbing include depression [11, p. 10], general stress [12, p. 440] or stress-related

illnesses and other health issues. Some stress-related illness and other health issues [13, p. 184] associated with being a mobbing victim include musculoskeletal and digestive problems, sleep disturbances change in eating patterns, and an increase in drinking and smoking.

While there are many negative outcomes associated with academic mobbing, some studies have shown small benefits. 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 [14, p.723]. Some optimism and positive thinking may be helpful to cope with the negative effects of mobbing. While many such incidents do cause long-term negative effects if professors encourage themselves the long-term effects of academic mobbing could potentially include a new position at a new institution with an increased salary.

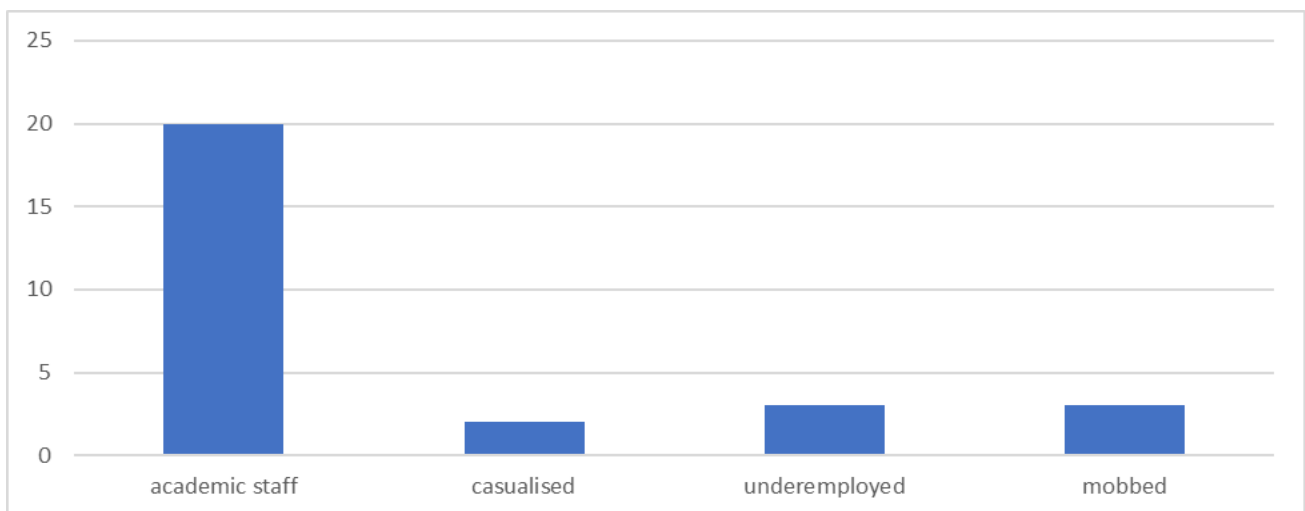
If you ask me whether there is mobbing in Ukrainian universities I would unwillingly answer “Yes”. I must admit my co-workers are nice and friendly people. But since a period of teaching FL for Specific Purposes has been shortened twice, correspondingly, our tenures and contracts have been shortened five times and the budget was slashed too. Approximately a third of my colleagues have quitted the job or have been fired for the past seven years. (Pic. 1)



Pic. 1 FLD Academic Staff in 2012-2019

The last competition for a year contract was conducted so cunningly that two-stage secret ballot allowed to sieve unwanted candidates in a well-prepared and thoroughly organized way. Just a group of the staff voted against some candidates

paying no attention to their credentials and accomplishments, only because they were told to do so. Our faculty has been split into two campuses: obedient and alien. The first are privileged, they are given attention, promotion, heavy workload, support, and respect. The last are being always criticized, punished for the smallest violation, rejected in getting information, publicly humiliated at the meetings or simply ignored. Provided it happened among co-workers with no or very small period of acquaintance, but when it happens among those who have known each other for 20 years and more, it looks like a terminal and catchy disease. You are simply told, "Lump it or go away". One of the fired tried to file a lawsuit several times but in vain. Two of them suffer from casualization, three are underemployed whereas supporters of the ringleader enjoy 140-150% of an ordinary teacher's hours. The colleague who was brave enough to speak the problem out at the staff meeting has been made a scapegoat. (Pic.2)



Pic. 2 Targeted Academic Staff

To my mind, something must be done not only on the authorities' level but everyone should become aware of the danger, danger of ruining ourselves. I have been always interested in psychology and I am an akin follower of Howard Gardner Theory of Multiple Intelligences. Had I an opportunity to add one more intelligence, I would say it must be the Intelligence of Staying A Human Being. When there was a war in Yugoslavia, people there suffered greatly, I suppose, even more from incited hatred than from the war itself. In my opinion, people of that period, like the Patriarch of Serbia Pavel is the best example of being not only a patriot of Serbia and

an outspoken leader of the Serbian Orthodox Church but the Greatest Personality ever. “A person can not choose the time or place, when and where he was born, nor the conditions and circumstances in which he will live. It is not up to us. But what depends on us and what is expected of us is to be people - always and everywhere. Under all conditions and all circumstances. So that God would recognize us as people, our ancestors would recognize us, our contemporaries would recognize ...” - that’s what the Patriarch of Serbia Pavel said.

Mobbing is a very complicated and dangerous phenomenon in any workplace. It is usually this kind of psychological impact that is the most dangerous because it has a number of consequences that have a negative impact on every person and the whole organization. So, if you want to flourish now and then at your working place and not to be the black sheep of the family, put your conscience into the freezer under 100 degrees below zero. In case you can't do it, either quit or don't keep silence. Brilliant words: "Treat others as you want to be treated" will help you to feel in another person's shoes, possibly become more human and make the right choice.

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