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PORTRAIT OF A WORKER EXPERIENCING MOBBING IN ORGANISATION

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Abstract

Purpose - to identify the prevailing types of mobbing, the effects on employees, the awareness of managers of the problem and possible solutions.

Design/methodology/approach - quantitative survey. The survey data were analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) version 24.0.

Findings - Mobbing negatively affects employees' psychological and physical health, motivation, performance, trust in the organisation, and motivates them to change jobs. The study found that mobbing is widespread in organisations and that mobbing problems go unaddressed. Mobbing was found to affect employees who work on the premises of the organisation rather than remotely. The results also show that mobbing problems affect men more than women.

Research limitations/implications - 387 employees took part in the study, 70.5% women and 29.5% men. The disproportion between men and women in the sample may cause some limitations of the study.

Practical implications -It is hoped that this article will help to raise public awareness and prevent possible mobbing incidents, as the best way to control mobbing in organisations is to create an environment that is not conducive to the spread of mobbing.

Originality/Value - A study shows that teleworkers are less likely to experience mobbing in their organisations.

Keywords: organisation, mobbing, mobbing consequences.
Research type: original research.
JEL classification: I1.

Introduction

Mobbing in organisations is no longer a new phenomenon but has increased significantly in recent years. According to Bortnik (2017), "mobbing is a persistent, immoral, abusive behaviour that has a negative impact on a person's social, psychological and physiological development. Mobbing disrupts the development of the organisation and the life, health, and development of employees". Mobbing negatively affects both the employees and the organisation itself. The consequences of mobbing on an organisation can be varied, but the most significantly affected area is human resources, as victims of mobbing often leave the organisation, while the motivation of the remaining employees, the trust in the organisation, the feeling of alienation, and the performance of the organisation are affected (Yilmaz, 2021, p. 631).

There are different types of mobbing in organisations. Mobbing can be between employees with the same job title and directed from managers to those below them. Negative actions can also be directed against managers, and there is also a mixed variant. It is often difficult to identify mobbing, but we can identify risk factors and distinguish between a healthy organisational environment and an environment affected by mobbing.

Relatively few researchers in Lithuania have looked at mobility issues in organisations. The most important work on this topic has been published by Vveinhardt (2016). There are also other individual studies, e.g., Pacevičius and Janulytė (2009); Andriukaitienė (2016); Karosaitė (2020). Meanwhile, the issue of mobbing has received attention from a wide range of researchers abroad. Recent studies by Anjum et al. (2018); Goralewska-Slonska (2019); Kohnke and Winiarski (2019); Bulut (2019); Mujtaba and Senathip (2020); Serhat (2021); Yilmaz (2021); Vaxevani et al. (2022); Sayilan and Aydin (2022), among others.

In the study, a theoretical analysis was conducted, and quantitative research data was collected to describe a typical employee experiencing a mobbing situation in a typical organization. To achieve the goal, the prevailing types of mobbing in organizations are discussed, the impact of mobbing on employees is examined, the level of awareness of management and human resources departments about mobbing is revealed, and methods of solving mobbing problems in organizations are considered.

The first part of the paper discusses the theoretical aspects of mobbing, such as the concept of mobbing, types of mobbing, its causes, and possible consequences. The second part of the paper presents the methodological part of the study and presents and discusses the results of the quantitative study. The results of the study are summarized and finally tables and charts of the results are presented.

1. Theoretical background

The literature defines mobbing as a planned, long-term process designed to cause a worker or groups of workers to experience psychological strain, humiliation, and stress in the workplace through a series of malicious and deliberate acts. It is a social problem that many professionals face in the workplace (Vaxevani et al., 2022, p. 176). Mobbing is understood as workplace bullying, exploitation, inappropriate behaviour, emotional abuse, and psychological violence. Mobbing is defined as a continuous, complex process targeting an individual or group of individuals (Bulut, 2019, p. 2). There are different types and manifestations of mobbing in organisations. Negative actions are not only directed against one group of employees, but it can also take place between employees with the same job title, negative actions can be from managers against their subordinates or subordinates against the

manager. However, the most common perpetrators are senior managers or people with power over the victim (Kohnke & Winiarski, 2019, p. 45). The literature also mentions mixed cases of mobbing between employees and management:

- Nekoranec and Kmoshena (2015, p. 50) identify the following types of mobbing employees:
- Instigators: a) Finds ways and forms of psychological terror; b) Choose the victims; c) They experience a sense of satisfaction in terrorising the victim.
- Random offenders. This is usually the case when a minor conflict turns into a long-lasting feud and no effort is made to resolve it.
- Accomplices. They either actively support the instigator's behaviour or simply passively observe and do not intervene to help the victim.

According to Pacevičius and Janulytė (2009, p. 188), hostile behaviour can be influenced by the victim's personal characteristics, such as race, nationality, age, disability, marital status, or sexual orientation. Aggression can also be triggered by certain positive personal characteristics such as talent, aptitude, integrity, competence, or strong work motivation. It is such traits that may cause the aggressor to want to direct negative actions towards the victim. Low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence can lead to becoming a victim of mobbing. According to Kohnke and Winiarski, people without friends in the workplace are particularly vulnerable. Young, foreign-educated, talented workers are also very likely to be victims, as their skills start to threaten older workers. There are also situations where pre-retirement age workers start to become disengaged from the workforce. Single women, divorcees, single mothers, and those without high qualifications are at high risk. On the other hand, mentally strong women who do not succumb to moral terror and who avoid the company of other women working in the company can also become victims (Kohnke & Winiarski, 2019, p. 46).

Kohnke and Winiarski (2019) also define the characteristics of a potential aggressor. The aggressor is neurotic, timid, highly jealous and controlling. They are usually a person who has a lot of privilege and power to humiliate other people. The aggressor has very low self-esteem and is constantly trying to maintain his or her position at work. He is critical of the achievements of others and usually overestimates his own abilities. When a more talented person enters the workplace, he or she will start to compete, defend his or her position and use a deliberate strategy to get rid of the rival.

According to Guobaitė-Kirslienė and Blažienė (2020), hostile behaviour may be difficult to identify at the beginning, but over time it can become very aggressive.

Mobbing can include the following acts (Vaxevani et al., 2022, p. 177):

- Gossip to destroy the victim's reputation.
- Mocking the victim's appearance.
- Exclusion from colleagues, what can lead to humiliation and isolation in the workplace.

- Concealment of professional information that adversely affects the victim's professional activities.
- Use of administrative and operational measures against the victim: transfer to another department or assignment to an unqualified post.
- Increasing workload.
- Constant and excessive criticism, which causes the victim of mobbing to feel stressed, distrustful of his or her professional abilities and lowers self-confidence.
- Sexual harassment in the workplace.

Serhat (2021, p. 292) mentions the following main organisational and administrative reasons for mobbing: "excessive hierarchical structure, reduction in human resource costs, inadequate leadership and management, ineffective recruitment and selection processes, lack of internal communication, and the use of harassment as a means of ensuring discipline and efficiency".

Mobbing is most often driven by organisational structure, processes, unequal distribution of positions, competition between employees, and a reward system oriented towards financial success in the organisation (Karosaitė, 2020, p. 207-208). Management structure, inadequate leadership and poor HR practices can be some of the main factors of mobbing in an organisation (Mujtaba & Senathip, 2020, p. 26). Bortnik (2017, p. 57) argues that modern organisations with more employees are more likely to experience bullying within the organisation. Mobbing is more prevalent in large organisations because there are more opportunities for groups of unethical people to form. Serhat (2021, p. 291-292) lists the characteristics of a 'healthy' organisational environment:

- Duties and job descriptions are very clear.
- There is a culture of cooperation.
- Goals are common and shared.
- Open communication and communication within the organisation.
- The right organisational structure.
- The organisation's strategies are clear and open.
- Conflict, debate and argument are welcome.
- Communication in an organisation is direct.

A healthy organisational environment is characterised by an appropriate organisational structure, clear networks, values, roles, and job descriptions. They have a culture of cooperation, open communication, direct communication and welcome the expression of opinions. The table below shows the possible risk factors for mobbing (see Table 1).

Table 1. Risk factors for mobbing in an organisation

Risk factors	A letter in the organization
Lack of leadership; inappropriate leadership style	Lack of management knowledge about bullying in the organisation, inappropriate management style, lack of leadership, emergence of "leaders" of certain informal groups in the organisation.
Task uncertainty	Vagueness in the tasks and responsibilities given to staff, misuse of work assignments and inadequate appraisal of staff.
Communication	Poor or lack of communication within the organisation, and failure to respond to violations of individuals' rights within the organisation.
Unfavourable climate in the organisation	An inappropriate and unhealthy organisational climate, high levels of conflict, exaggerated competition, and lack of cooperation between colleagues.

Source: compiled by the author, based on Vveinhardt and Andriukaitienė, 2016, p. 4-5.

Mobbing is a silent form of violence that affects working relationships and the physical and psychological health of the victim. Mobbing causes moral, physical, psychological, and material harm, and affects professional and personal spheres of life (Grotto-de-Souza, Pohl & Aguiar-Ribeiro, 2022, p.671). Mobbing has a detrimental effect not only on a worker's mental but also on their physical health. Victims of mobbing often complain of anxiety, depression, and migraines, feel exhaustion, fatigue, insomnia, digestive disorders and ailments, and are addicted to cigarettes and alcohol (Bulut, 2019, p. 2).

The start of the mobbing process is defined by the prevention of employee development and the restriction of communication. This is followed by the restriction of certain communications and the undermining of reputation and achievements (Yilmaz, 2021, p. 632). The use of power, harassment, intimidation, bullying, humiliation, insults, criticism that interferes with work and various forms of victimisation have a negative impact on the spiritual, psychological, moral, social and physical functioning of the employee. The lack of appreciation of the employee's productivity, commitment to the company, and the absence of financial incentives lead to greater vulnerability, poorer performance, and depression (Grotto-de-Souza, Pohl & Aguiar-Ribeiro, 2022, p. 673).

Mobbing also has a negative impact on the organisation. Toxic behaviour can increase organisational costs, employee turnover, and reduce employee self-esteem, performance, and productivity (Grotto-de-Souza, Pohl & Aguiar-Ribeiro, 2022, p. 673). A toxic environment harms all stakeholders in an organisation because it creates a toxic work culture, managers, employees and what eventually grows into a toxic organisation. Such behaviour can severely damage the organisation through loss of a good corporate image, low self-esteem and morale among employees, high employee turnover and decreased productivity (Anjum et al., 2018, p. 2). Organisational management faces human resource problems when victims of mobbing become disillusioned with the organisation, start neglecting their tasks and eventually quit their jobs (Erdirencelebi & Sendogdu, 2016, p.101).

The first step in combating mobbing in an organisation should be to identify the problem. Once the problem has been identified, the victim has several options: change jobs, accept the current situation, or fight the mobbing by staying in the current job. It is important that the victim is aware of his/her rights and where to go in case of mobbing in organisations. This is the only way to make a difference for the victims of mobbing. As with other health and risk factors, the management of the organisation should immediately act by noticing signs and instances of mobbing (Sayilan & Aydin, 2022, p. 188). It is important to prevent the occurrence of mobbing by creating appropriate working conditions and safety levels, monitoring and documenting cases of mobbing, improving employee competences and awareness, and providing full assistance to victims of mobbing (Chudzicka-Czupała et al., 2017, p. 81).

2. Research methodology

The empirical research strategy is a quantitative survey - a questionnaire. After the questionnaire was developed, a pilot study with three respondents was first carried out to determine the comprehensibility of the questionnaire questions and the advantages and disadvantages of the questionnaire. Such a study is called a pilot study in sociology.

According to the latest official statistics portal data for 2021, Lithuania has a population of 2.801 million people. Of these, 1 million 280.2 thousand people are employed. The estimated sample for the survey is 383 respondents and the total number of interviewed respondents is 387. A random subset of the elements of the general set is selected, the prevalence of the required attribute is examined and the prevalence in the general set is inferred from it. The main criterion for the respondents is that they are adults, in employment. The sample is a random sample of employed persons aged between 18 and 74 years. All respondents completed the anonymous questionnaire voluntarily, without coercion or persuasion from anyone.

Statistical *Package for Social Science* (SPSS) version 24.0 was used for the statistical analysis of the survey data. The data is divided into 4 relevant themes. Each theme is followed by the results of the study, a summary of the results and a table of the data:

I. Types of mobbing in organisations.

II. The effects of mobbing on workers.

III. Awareness of mobbing in organisations by the Organisation and Human Resources Department.

IV. Ways of managing mobility problems in organisations.

Demographic statistics, results and conclusions of the research are presented below.

3. Research results

387 employees took part in the survey. The majority – 70.5% of the sample was female, and 29.5% male. Around 14% were aged between 18 and 25, 64.6% were aged between 26 and 40, 20.9% were aged between 41 and 64, and 0.5% were aged over 65.

The survey results showed (see Figure 1) that 4.4% strongly agree and 17.8% agree that they currently experience mobbing in their organisation. However, 24.5% disagreed, while 30.2% strongly disagreed and 23% were unsure about the manifestations of mobbing in their organisation. It was found that employees who have worked longer in the organisation are more likely to agree that they are currently experiencing mobbing. Men are also more likely to agree than women. Mobbing is more common among those who work on the premises of the organisation than among those who work remotely or in a hybrid mode.

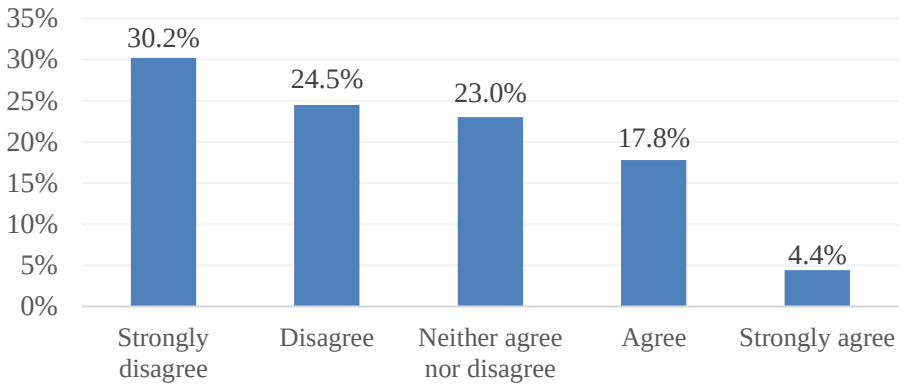


Figure 1. Frequency of mobbing in the organisation, percentage

The survey showed that 46.5% of the respondents are or have been subjected to mobbing in their organisation. Men (64%) were more likely to have experienced mobbing than women (39.2%). Those working on the premises of the organisation (63.4%) were also more likely to have experienced mobbing than those working remotely (22.9%) or in a hybrid mode (25.7%). Two thirds (66.7%) of workers who experienced mobbing experienced it from co-workers (horizontal mobbing), 22.8% from co-workers and a manager (hybrid mobbing), and 10.6% from managers (vertical mobbing) (see Figure 2).

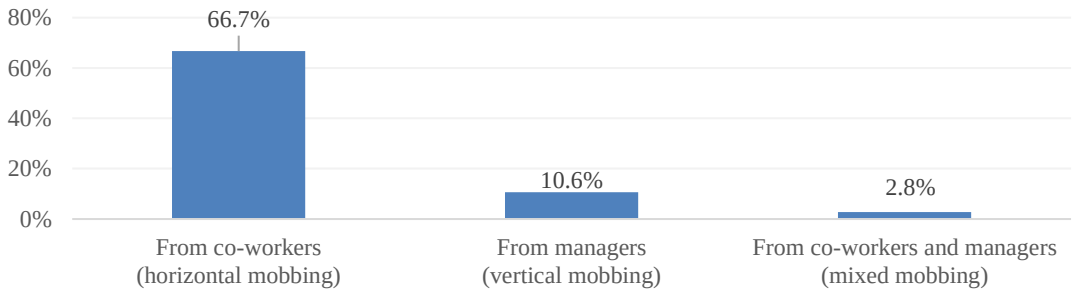


Figure 2. Types of mobbing experienced in the organisation, percentage

Women are more likely to be bullied by co-workers (74.8%) than men (54.8%). However, men are more likely to be subjected to mixed bullying (41.1%) than women (10.3%). Some 74.2% of those who have experienced mobbing have experienced hostility towards colleagues. More than half (59.7%) of the workers have experienced loss of motivation and plan to quit (52.9%). A quarter (29%) of those who have experienced mobbing have experienced a loss of performance and a change in their plans within the organisation (23.5%). Men were more likely than women to experience a loss of motivation (78.8% and 48.9% respectively), a deterioration in performance (52.5% and 15.6% respectively), a lack of trust in the organisation (56.3% and 36.2% respectively), and a change in career plans (41.3% and 13.5% respectively). Those working on the premises (63.2%) or in a hybrid mode (57.7%) were more likely to experience a loss of motivation than those working remotely (28.6%) (see Figure 3).

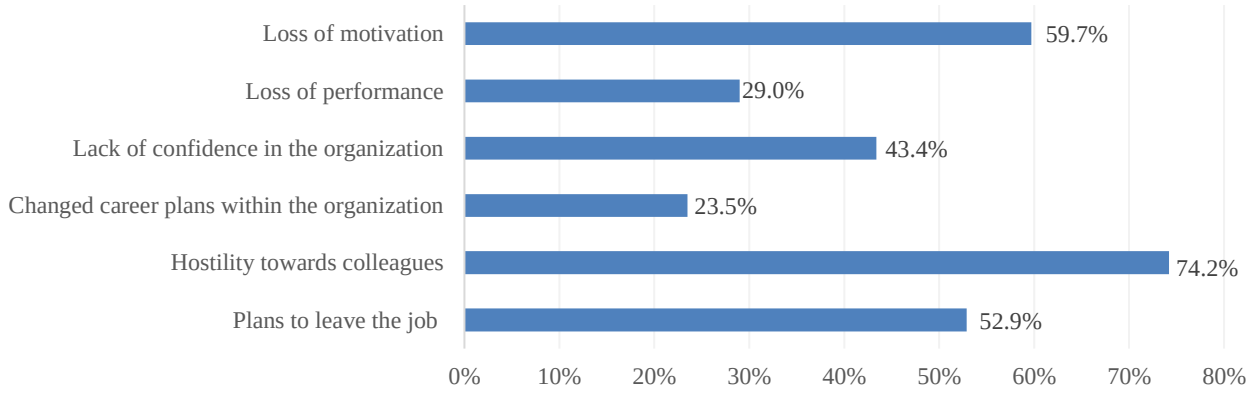


Figure 3. Consequences for employees of mobbing in the organisation, percentage

The survey found that 55% of respondents admit to mobbing in their organisation. About 6.6% of them strongly agree and 14.6% of them agree that the organisation's manager and the human resources department are aware of mobbing in their organisation. However, 42.3% strongly disagree and 12.2% disagree that they are aware of it (see Figure 4). It was found that the older the employees are or the longer they have worked in the organisation, the more likely they are to believe that the manager or the HR department is aware of this information (see Figure 4).

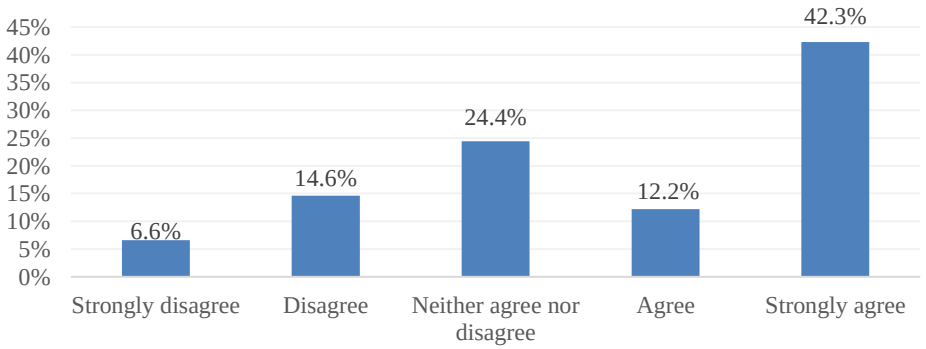


Figure 4. Organisation's awareness of mobbing incidents, percentage

The survey found that 89.2% of those who experience mobbing in their organisation (see Figure 5) believe that mobbing problems in their organisation are not solved. About 7.6% of them reported that employees report mobbing to management, which immediately deals with the cases, while only 5.2% reported that employees receive training on how to recognise and deal with mobbing. Similarly, only 3.2% of employees reported that the HR department regularly carries out investigations within the organisation and talks to employees about mobbing. 2.8% of those who experience mobbing stated that employees try to solve the problems themselves and warn the aggressors not to do so.

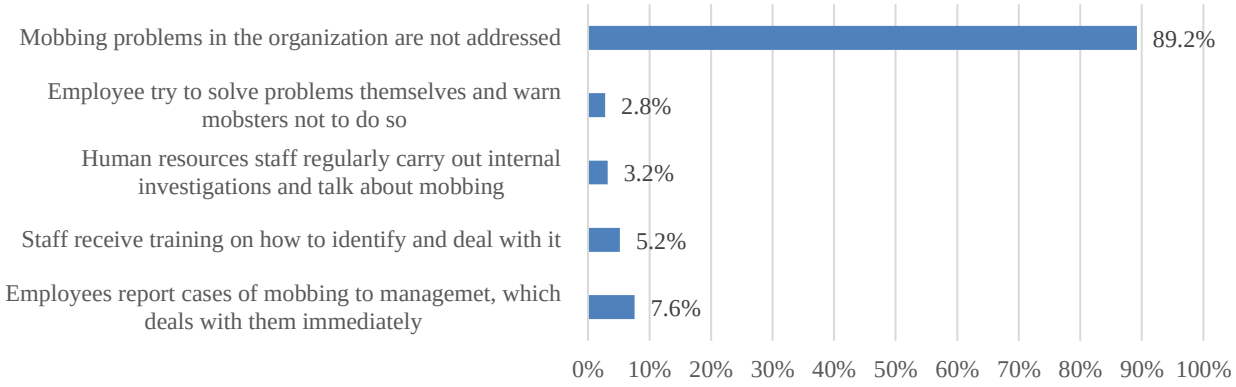


Figure 5. Managing mobbing problems in the organisation, percentage

Men (95.3%) are more likely than women (86%) to believe that mobbing problems are not addressed in the organisation. It was found that hybrid workers (21.5%) are more likely to report incidents of mobbing to management than those who work remotely (none) or on the premises (2.9%). Remote (100%) or on-site (94.8%) workers are more likely to believe that mobbing problems are not dealt with in the organisation than those who work hybrid (72.3%).

4. Conclusions

Mobbing is defined as a continuous, planned process against an individual or groups of individuals, with the aim of getting the victim to leave the organisation. Mobbing is understood as workplace bullying, exploitation, abuse, mistreatment, emotional abuse, psychological violence. The consequences of mobbing for the worker cover the professional, personal and health spheres. It has a negative impact not only on the employee but also on the organisation itself. Victims of mobbing experience reduced performance and productivity, a lack of motivation, a lack of trust in the organisation, and eventually leave the organisation, which poses challenges for the human resources department.

The survey showed that the majority of respondents believe that mobbing problems in organisations are not being tackled. The data shows that the majority of respondents experience or

have experienced mobbing in their organisations. Employees who have experienced mobbing report that mobbing leads to feelings of hostility towards colleagues, a decrease in motivation, a deterioration in performance and an incentive to leave the organisation. Mobbing was found to have a greater impact on those working on the premises. Remote and hybrid workers are less likely to experience mobbing. The results showed that men are more likely to face mobbing problems in organisations. They are also more likely to say that mobbing problems are not dealt with at all in their organisations and are more likely to experience mobbing from both colleagues and managers (mixed mobbing). Men are more likely to experience a decrease in motivation and a decrease in performance in a mobbed environment.

Identifying the problem, solving it and helping the victims of mobbing are important in the fight against mobbing. Victims should be properly informed and know where to go in case of mobbing in the organisation. The best way to prevent mobbing is to create a healthy and safe organisational environment with zero tolerance for mobbing.

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