

# Methodological, ethical and legal problems of measuring and counteracting workplace mobbing

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## About the author

**Katarzyna Durniat**, Ph.D, is a psychologist and a doctor of humanities specialised in the field of Work and Organizational Psychology. She holds the position of an Associate Professor at the Institute of Psychology, University of Wrocław, Poland. As an academic and a consultant, she mostly focuses on organizational behaviours (from ethical to counterproductive behaviours), organizational climate, employees' competences and their assessment, job selection and recruitment procedures. She is an expert in the field of workplace mobbing/bullying having studied mobbing in Poland and abroad for almost two decades. Her expertise grew out from clinical experience and practice, while she was working with and supporting the victims of mobbing in Poland, acting as a member of a National Anti-Mobbing Association (2004–2006). She also consults, diagnoses and prepares expert opinions on mobbing in organizations. Since 2006 she has been working on the methodology and testing her own method (called SDM Questionnaire) for diagnosing mobbing. Katarzyna Durniat is the author of over 40 scientific publications (in Polish and English) and dozens of academic speeches and presentations, most of them focusing on a variety of aspects (i.e., specificity, dynamics, cultural biases, perception, antecedents and consequences, methods and methodology) of workplace mobbing. She is also an active member of the Polish Association of Organizational Psychology (PSPO) and the European Association of Work and Organizational Psychology (EAWOP).

## Abstract

The paper looks at theoretical and methodological problems, as well as legal and ethical issues, connected with diagnosing and counteracting workplace mobbing. Firstly, the author briefly presents the mobbing research tradition and points to current international approaches to and methods of measuring mobbing in the workplace. The author comments on the possibilities and limitations of the implementation of some methods, which are commonly employed in mobbing research and shares some doubts about the universality and international usage of the “mobbing/bullying tools”, which were developed under specific socio-organizational circumstances. Then, the paper discusses the legalities and practicalities of preventing and fighting mobbing in the context of Polish and European legislation. The author points to a wide spectrum of ethical and legal aspects of counteracting and dealing with mobbing. In conclusion, the author recommends that corporations and businesses should take

all possible preventive steps to minimise the risk of mobbing, given that, apart from adversely affecting employees' health, career, work engagement and job satisfaction, it substantially damages their reputation.

*Keywords:* mobbing/bullying, measurement, anti-mobbing law, prevention

## Introduction

The issue of mobbing, in some countries called workplace bullying, does not have a long social or scientific tradition, although it has probably been present in social interactions and organizations since their beginning. The word “mobbing” derives from the Latin *mobile vulgus* meaning an “unsteady, threatening crowd” and was used for the first time by the ethologist Konrad Lorenz in relation to the aggressive behaviour of wild animals vying to stave off an intruder (Lorenz, 1963). The Swedish doctor Peter-Paul Heinemann (1972) used this term for the first time in the context of human aggressive behaviour. A couple of years later, a Swedish psychologist Heinz Leymann (1986) endowed the term with a new meaning (now widely accepted and recognizable in most European countries), using it in reference to a specific form of aggressive behaviour and unethical communication in the workplace (cf., Leymann, 1990b, 1996). Actually, the interest of scholars in the mobbing phenomenon was initiated and developed mostly in Scandinavian countries (e.g., Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Leymann 1986, 1990b, 1996; Vartia, 1996, 2001). Nevertheless, by now the issue of mobbing has been intensively researched all over the world (e.g., Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2003, 2011; Keashly & Jagatic, 2011; Power et al., 2013; Salin et al., 2019).

Moreover, in recent years mobbing has become one of the focal points of social, ethical and legal concern. On 20 September 2001, the European Parliament passed a resolution on harassment at the workplace (European Parliament, 2001) calling on the EU Member States to counteract workplace mobbing and sexual harassment, and thus reflecting the implementation of the provisions of the Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs. Poland, after Sweden, France and Belgium, was the fourth country in Europe to pass a legal anti-mobbing act, which was introduced into the Polish Labour Code in May 2004 (Polish Labour Code art. 94<sup>3</sup>, § 2), together with Poland's accession to the EU. Since that time the issue of workplace harassment and mobbing has gained added importance, which substantially increased public awareness of mobbing as well as practitioners' attention and scientists' interest. Scientific studies (Nielsen, Notelaers, & Einarsen, 2011; Zapf, Escartin, Einarsen, Hoel, & Vartia, 2011) suggest that approximately 10% - 17%

of employees experience workplace mobbing, though (depending on the measurement instruments and methodology applied in particular studies) the prevalence rates cited by different sources vary widely (Nielsen et al., 2009; Nielsen, Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2010).

The results of numerous studies indicate that mobbing leads to a range of negative consequences, both on the individual (Høgh, Mikkelsen, & Hansen, 2011; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012) as well as organizational and societal level (Hoel, Sheehan, Cooper, & Einarsen, 2011). The findings of a number of independently conducted studies confirmed that experiencing mobbing evokes a number of negative psychosomatic and physiological symptoms, such as headaches, backaches, sleep disorders, problems with concentration, etc. (Hansen et al., 2006; Høgh, Mikkelsen, & Hansen, 2012). The research shows that mobbing induces very strong psychological stress (Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2002; Marchand, Demers, & Durand, 2005) which can even evolve into the development of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2004; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002; Tehrani, 2012). Moreover, experiencing mobbing causes frustration, may lead to aggression, anxiety or chronic fatigue (Harvey & Keashly, 2003; Ireland & Archer, 2002). Furthermore, it negatively influences victims' self-esteem, lowers work engagement and work satisfaction and reduces employees' effectiveness (Durniat, 2011; Parzefall & Salin, 2010). Thus, it presents a threat not only to the individual concerned but also to the whole organization, its productivity and organizational image (Durniat, 2017; Hoel et al., 2011).

Despite the apparent social awareness of the gravity of mobbing and extensive research into it, it seems that both scientists and practitioners still have a lot to do in the field of the development of mobbing measurement tools and diagnosis (cf., Durniat, 2020; Nielsen et al., 2011; Notelaers & Einarsen, 2013) as well as of mobbing protection and intervention mechanisms (cf., Durniat, 2019; Durniat, Działa, & Krupa, 2016; Salin et al., 2020). In this article, the author will discuss some of the methodological, ethical and legal problems connected with diagnosing and counteracting workplace mobbing. All these issues or perspectives are intertwined and related to each other. The article relies on a combination of international mobbing research, Polish research, as well as organizational and legal circumstances and practices. The scientific issues will be presented in view of the current Polish anti-mobbing laws and regulations as well as organizational practices.

## Terminology, definitions and specificity of mobbing

One of the most often cited and internationally recognized scientific definitions of mobbing was paved by Leymann (1996) who stated:

*“Psychological terror or mobbing in working life involves hostile and unethical communication, which is directed in a systematic way by one or a few individuals mainly towards one individual who, due to mobbing, is pushed into a helpless and defenceless position, being held there by means of continuing mobbing activities. These actions occur on a very frequent basis (statistical definition: at least once a week) and over a long period of time (statistical definition: at least six months of duration). Because of the high frequency and long duration of hostile behaviour, this maltreatment results in considerable psychological, psychosomatic, and social misery.”* (p. 168)

Actually, this mobbing definition set a benchmark for most mobbing scientists and practitioners all over the world, despite the fact that a lot of them ignored Leymann’s call for distinguishing mobbing from bullying (Leymann, 1996), whereby bullying involves physical aggression and threat. In fact, bullying at school is strongly characterised by such physically aggressive acts. In contrast, physical violence is very seldomly found in mobbing behaviours at work. Rather, mobbing is characterised by much more sophisticated behaviours such as, for example, socially isolating the victim. I suggest keeping the word “bullying” for activities between children and teenagers at school and reserving the word “mobbing” for adult behaviour.

Unfortunately, nowadays these two terms are used interchangeably, despite their different scientific roots, traditions and the crucial difference in the kind of violence pointed out by Leymann (1996). In Poland (like in some other countries of Central and Western Europe), the Nordic term “mobbing” is used instead of the British “bullying” to describe the prolonged exposure of an employee to numerous unwanted and harmful behaviours which may appear in the workplace. Nevertheless, ironically, the Nordic researchers themselves are nowadays more prone to use the term “workplace bullying” (in contrast to “school bullying”) in reference to the phenomenon which they originally called “mobbing” (cf., Einarsen et al., 2011). This terminological inconsistency causes some misunderstandings about the actual meaning of both terms. For example, some scientists claim that mobbing (unlike bullying) should be associated with group (not individual) violence. Nonetheless, despite the fact that this understanding of the word “mobbing” is embedded in its etymology, it is not what Leymann (1986, 1990b, 1996) had in mind while introducing the term into the psychological literature and contrasting it with “bullying”.

Accepting the existing terminological incongruences and referring to the most recognizable scientific mobbing (or bullying) definitions and research (cf., Einarsen et al., 2003, 2011; Leymann, 1990b, 1996; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2004), one can distinguish some universal, mobbing defining criteria. At the top of them are: the frequency (repeatability and regularity) of the target's exposure to a variety of unwanted behaviours, the intentionality of these acts, the length of persecution, the imbalance of power between a mobbing target and a perpetrator, the inability of victims to defend themselves, and the appearance of negative and harmful mobbing effects. It is worth noting that a Polish psychological mobbing definition proposed by Durniat and Kulczycka (2006) contains most of the criteria, which appear in international scientific definitions. In particular, Durniat and Kulczycka (2006) stated that:

*"Mobbing is psychological abuse taking place between at least two partners of social interaction, systematically and intentionally applied by an oppressor (less often oppressors) against a victim (less often victims) in repetitive verbal and behavioural attacks. Mobbing has a mainly subjective character, but its effects are manifested by mental destabilisation of the victim, by a sense of injustice and bewilderment as well as by experiencing strong psychological stress."* (p. 463)

This definition is in agreement with the Polish legal definition (cf., Polish Labour Code art. 94<sup>3</sup>, § 2). However, the basic definitional mobbing criteria should be discussed first to address some of the issues, which appear in scientific discourse. To begin with, it must be highlighted that aggressive behaviours which sometimes appear in the workplace can be called mobbing only if they are persistent, reoccurring and long-lasting. It means that a singular or isolated incident of negative social interaction cannot qualify as mobbing. Leymann (1996) arbitrarily set very strict mobbing frequency and duration criteria, stating that at least one negative behaviour must appear for no less than once a week for at least half a year. The statistical approach of measuring and diagnosing mobbing with the use of Leymann's "operational criterion", despite its vast popularity and numerous applications (e.g., Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Einarsen et al., 2003; Vartia, 1996), has been criticized by some researchers (cf., Durniat, 2020; Durniat & Kulczycka, 2006; Hirigoyen, 2001; Kulczycka & Durniat, 2004; Nielsen et al., 2011) for being poorly related with the empirical mobbing evidence and not reflecting mobbing dynamics and complexity. Next, it should be explained that the criterion of the imbalance of power between the main actors of mobbing does not have to reflect the formal power structure. However, research proved (Björkqvist, Österman, & Hjelt-Bäck, 1994; Durniat, 2010, 2015a; Zapf et al., 2011) that in most cases employees are mobbed by those who are higher in the organizational structure. Nevertheless, mobbing may be executed by any

employee: a superior, a colleague or even an inferior. The perpetrator's source of power may be informal, for example based on knowledge, experience, seniority, social support, connections, etc. or strictly psychological (cf., Durniat, 2015a, 2015b; Einarsen et al., 2011; Nield, 1996).

Mobbers show incredible skills in hitting targets' soft spots. One of the characteristic features of mobbers' attacks is directing them at victims' weaknesses or imperfections, so that the targets very quickly lose faith in themselves. Moreover, the aggressors frequently use false accusations and manipulation; their attacks are global, aimed at diminishing the persons' general worth. Moreover, the oppressor likes to use isolation, which proves to be one of the most successful strategies of weakening targets' social and psychological position. At the same time, mobbers strengthen their own social position by building a coalition, seducing others and setting the most submissive group members against the target. All these mechanisms strengthen the imbalance of power between mobbers and their targets and are pushing mobbing victims into defenceless positions (cf., Durniat, 2015b; Hirigoyen, 2001). In addition to that, the behaviours that constitute mobbing are very often covered, vague, indirect or highly contextual, making the whole process extremely difficult to be observed externally via objective assessment (Durniat, 2012, 2015b; Durniat & Kulczycka, 2006). Hirigoyen (1998) stated that "Clinical research is hampered by the fact that every word, intonation or allusion are of paramount importance. All these details seem meaningless when recorded separately, but accumulated and combined they result in a destructive process" (p. 14, own translation).

Furthermore, numerous psychological (cognitive and emotional) as well as social group mechanisms are induced in the process of mobbing (cf., Durniat, 2014a) and they make the mobbing witnesses very reluctant to interfere and support their colleagues who become mobbing targets. Though partially explainable by the power of cognitive and social mechanisms, this kind of co-worker attitudes and conduct should be assessed as cowardly, unethical and lacking in solidarity. Moreover, research findings indicate (Durniat, 2010, 2014a) that mobbing is often directed towards employees who do not know, support or follow shared organizational goals and practices. Thus, mobbing may be perceived as a form of social exclusion, which is a very powerful group mechanism and leads to a painful social sanction reserved for those who refuse to be aligned and become the outcasts (Durniat, 2014a).

## Mobbing measurement methods

The implementation of proper methodology and validated psychometric tools is crucial for both academics and practitioners. Sound methodology is the basis of reliable research results and accurate mobbing diagnosis. An overview of the existing mobbing measurement methods (Nielsen et al., 2011) reveals that, so far, the phenomenon has been measured in three possible ways: (a) with the use of so called self-labelling methods (b) through the implementation of behavioural experience methods, and (c) combining the above mentioned two methods in one study.

The self-labelling methods are the most subjective and methodologically weak, as they just measure the respondent's overall feeling of experiencing victimization via workplace mobbing (with or without providing the respondents with the given mobbing definition). The behavioural experience methods, like the most recognizable Leymann Inventory of Psychological Terror (LIPT) (Leymann, 1990a, 1990b) or Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ) and its revised version (NAQ-R), developed by Einarsen and colleagues (Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaers, 2009; Einarsen & Raknes, 1997) measure the respondents' perceptions of being exposed to a range of mobbing behaviours. However, in Poland, there exists a psychometric tool called SDM Questionnaire (cf., Durniat, 2020) which goes beyond self-labelling methods and behavioural mobbing indicators (cf., Durniat, 2014b). This tool can be classified as an interactional method. It offers a new approach to measuring mobbing, as it consists of both behavioural as well as cognitive and emotional indicators (Durniat, 2014a, 2020). The interactional method developed in Poland measures not only the respondents' perceptions of exposure to typical mobbing behaviours but it also measures targets' typical cognitive interpretations and emotional reactions, which are the symptoms of anxiety and depression. Actually, in a recently released methodological paper on assessing mobbing (Notelaers & Einarsen, 2013) it is recommended that mobbing should be measured and diagnosed not only on the basis of behavioural scales (like NAQ-R), but through combining the results of these type of scales with the results of other (external) scales measuring anxiety and depression symptoms. Interestingly, these two types of scales constitute the SDM Questionnaire, which was developed in Poland as early as 2006 (cf., Durniat, 2020).

Some researchers claim (Keashly & Harvey, 2005) that the methodological issues connected with the mobbing assessment instruments and methods, despite being crucial, have not been treated attentively and rigorously enough. Unfortunately, until now we do not have a good choice of validated and reliable instruments for diagnosing mobbing in

the workplace. Thus, researchers, practitioners and organizations should be very cautious what kind of methods are implemented in the studies, as it has a huge impact on the obtained results and their credibility. A meta-analysis of the impact of methodological moderators on the mobbing prevalence rates (Nielsen et al., 2010) indicates that the results obtained by different researchers vary a lot, depending on their methodological approach and the instruments used. Generally, self-labelling methods combined with a mobbing definition provided to participants resulted in the lowest mobbing rates; higher mobbing rates were found when the behavioural experience scales were used, and the highest mobbing rates were reported when self-labelling estimates without definitions were used. Nielsen et al. (2011) emphasized that the knowledge of the differences of the various measurement methods and their impact on the mobbing prevalence rates indicates a danger of possible abuse and manipulation.

It should be added that even the most recognizable behavioural methods (like LIPT or NAQ/NAQ-R) implement an arbitrary set of operational criteria to distinguish mobbing targets from non-targets. In most of the international mobbing studies (e.g., Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Einarsen et al., 2003; Vartia, 1996) Leymann's operational criteria (which were explained earlier in the paper) were implemented. Moreover, some researchers employed different versions of these criteria, for example, stating that the person must experience at least two negative acts per week for a period of six months (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001) to be called a mobbing victim, or even that three or four acts per week must occur (Agervold, 2007) to qualify that experience as mobbing. Unfortunately, the implementation of arbitrary criteria leads to dubious decisions and diagnosis, which are not much rooted in empirical data and do not reflect the complexity of the mobbing phenomenon (Nielsen et al., 2011). For this reason, the measuring devices should follow a comprehensive and uniform set of criteria in order to obtain comparable results.

Mobbing has some cultural bias (Durniat, 2012; Durniat & Kulczycka, 2006; Durniat & Mañas, 2017) which seems to be underestimated and ignored by most of the researchers. Most of them treat mobbing as a universal phenomenon, which can be cross-culturally researched by implementing the same, universal mobbing tools. Nevertheless, the comparison of mobbing study results, for instance, obtained by Leymann (1996) in Sweden with the results of the Polish pioneering mobbing study by Delikowska (2003), both using the same methodology, indicates the existence of huge differences between mobbing prevalence rates (3.5% for the Swedish sample and 76.6% for the Polish sample). Undoubtedly, such pronounced result discrepancies should draw researchers'

attention and encourage more in-depth studies and critical analysis (cf., Durniat & Kulczycka, 2006). It is noteworthy that in the example quoted above the original LIPT questionnaire, which was used in both studies, was simply translated into Polish and implemented by the researcher, without prior cultural adaptation. Unfortunately, the direct transfer of a method rooted in one culture to another has limitations. For instance, some findings show (Durniat & Mañas, 2017) that behaviour which is perceived as neutral and acceptable in one country, or organization, may be perceived as threatening and unacceptable in another country or organization. Thus, mobbing research should always be conducted with the awareness of the national and organizational cultural context, as the understanding and perception of the phenomena is strongly related to and shaped by cultural norms and patterns of behaviour (Durniat, 2012, 2014a; Durniat & Mañas, 2017). Thus, scholars should not only be very cautious while implementing mobbing tools rooted in one country in another but they should also be vigilant while diagnosing mobbing within the same country, but in a specific organizational setting. It is recommended (Durniat, 2012, 2020; Durniat & Mañas, 2017) that mobbing studies conducted in a specific organizational setting should be preceded by a thorough study of its organizational culture, to be able to understand the meaning of particular patterns of behaviour.

Furthermore, practitioners should be aware that it is hardly possible to diagnose such a complicated phenomenon as mobbing with the implementation of just one method, such as a self-reporting questionnaire. Thus, mobbing studies conducted with the use of self-reporting methods should be supported by accounts from the perspective of mobbing witnesses, managers, HR specialists, as well as the alleged mobber. Each reported mobbing case should be treated seriously, examined immediately and thoroughly, as both the underestimation of the problem as well as false accusations and misdiagnosis can lead to damaged health, tarnished reputations and ruined careers. Moreover, every unresolved case of mobbing casts a shadow over the organizational image.

## **Workplace mobbing from a legal perspective in Poland**

Before 2004 the victims of mobbing in Poland could assert their rights only by referring to the civil code (which does not refer directly to mobbing) and by seeking support from trade unions, the Polish Labour Inspectorate or national anti-mobbing associations. Undoubtedly, the introduction of anti-mobbing law into the Polish Labour Code in 2004 made employers and business circles start to appreciate the topicality of the issue.

According to the Polish Labour Code (Polish Labour Code art. 94<sup>3</sup>, § 1), the employer is obliged to counteract mobbing. The anti-mobbing act and its regulations were a milestone in the social awareness campaign and struggle against mobbing in Poland. In 2008, 22 cases were ruled positively, out of 691 lawsuits filed on the grounds of mobbing in Poland (Rakowska-Boroń, 2009). These numbers as well as statistics from the following years indicate that Polish anti-mobbing regulations are hindered by numerous limitations, leaving Polish employees not very well protected against workplace mobbing (cf., Durniat, 2011, 2012, 2019).

First of all, under Polish law, anti-mobbing legislation covers only parties which have signed a contract of employment. Other parties are not covered by Labour Law and can file claims only in civil courts, which do not investigate mobbing cases. According to the Polish anti-mobbing law, an employee who has suffered health problems as a result of mobbing (which must be well documented and proven) is eligible to seek financial compensation. However, the biggest challenge that mobbing victims are facing while seeking justice and claiming damages under the anti-mobbing law is to prove the case in court. According to the provisions of the Polish Labour Code, the alleged victims of mobbing are required to collect evidence of the prolonged mobbing experience, which is extraordinarily difficult and should be done on the advice of a lawyer or counsellor from an anti-mobbing association. However, these professionals are usually contacted by the victims when the harassment is already at an advanced rather than at an initial stage. Another difficulty in preparing evidence is to call witnesses. Unfortunately, in many cases, mobbing is underestimated (especially at the beginning of the process) or tacitly accepted within an organization. Moreover, the employees tend to perceive the act of testimony to support the victims of mobbing as disloyalty to the employer. This is because, formally, the case is always against an employer, no matter who the mobber was.

Another problem is connected with the fact that mobbing is sometimes mistaken for discrimination, which may, but need not necessarily, co-occur. Real life and legal practice show that the borderline between the two is fuzzy. Nevertheless, employees may happen to purposefully sue the employer for discrimination rather than mobbing, just because it is easier to sue, prove and win such a case. According to the ruling of Polish labour law, certain features of molesting (which is one of the types of discrimination) and mobbing are alike (Polish Labour Code art. 18<sup>3a</sup>, § 5). However, in discrimination charges it is the defendant (employer) not the plaintiff (employee) who is required to produce evidence. Moreover, if the employer has violated the discrimination law, the employee has a right to hand in their notice on the grounds of gross negligence. No wonder, some

of the mobbing victims choose to sue the employer for discrimination rather than for mobbing. Unfortunately, the confusion caused by mixing these two distinctive workplace pathologies, unduly hinders the judges' work and obscures court proceedings. This is an undesirable effect, especially in the light of the fact that the judges seem to not fully comprehend the complex character of mobbing and, erring on side of caution, too often rule in favour of the employer or behave in such a way that the plaintiff (victim) feels re-victimised during the hearing. It seems that often the judges are neither able to grasp the vicious nature of mobbing, nor the amount of suffering and mental destabilization experienced by mobbing victims. Sometimes the judges seem to believe too easily that the plaintiff files a claim to take revenge on the superior or the employer. This motive is, in fact, very rare, although also possible and it needs to be examined thoroughly.

Nevertheless, later on, an employer can file a lawsuit against the mobber, provided that the organization was equipped with anti-mobbing codes, organizational laws and procedures which aim to protect the employees against mobbing (cf., Durniat, 2019). Although Polish employers have not received standardized guidelines regarding how to counteract mobbing in the workplace, according to the interpretation of Polish law (Kucharska, 2012): "Undertaking activities aimed at preventing mobbing in the company limits the employer's liability in the event of mobbing" (p. 21). Organizational life and practice indicates (Durniat, 2017, 2019) that the burden of responsibility for protecting employees against workplace mobbing and dealing with this problem is assigned to HR specialists. However, this important role of HR specialists and their perspective on the mobbing issue has rarely been researched (cf., Fox & Cowan, 2015; Hodgins, MacCurtain, & Mannix-McNamara, 2014; Salin et al., 2020). Polish findings indicate (Durniat, 2017; Durniat et al., 2016) that the level of organizational awareness of the mobbing issue and its gravity is quite high, although the picture of organizational anti-mobbing mechanisms and their implementation is diverse. Nevertheless, employers and managers should realize that mobbing not only ruins targets' health and lives but it also lowers employees' job commitment, engagement and trust, spoils group cooperation and organizational climate, as well as severely damages the reputation of an organization, which is very difficult to rebuild.

## Summary

Mobbing is a very complex and insidious (initially subtle, hidden and underappreciated, but imperceptibly evolving, building up strength and distractive power) social phenomenon, which is unwanted and harmful, though significantly prevalent in different

workplaces all over the world. Mobbing proves to be one of the most severe psycho-social stressors; mobbing targets experience a variety of negative psycho-somatic symptoms and psychiatric disorders, which adversely affects their well-being and functioning in the professional and private spheres. Moreover, mobbing negatively influences other employees and whole organizations; it lowers organizational commitment and productivity, as well as badly affects organizational image and reputation.

Unfortunately, the occurrence of mobbing, its escalation and endurance in workplaces is sustained by a number of psycho-social mechanisms. Thus, it is hardly possible for mobbing targets to cope with this pathology individually, while not being supported by the organization and professionals such as lawyers or counsellors from anti-mobbing associations. Consequently, socially responsible organizations and states should build and execute anti-mobbing laws and procedures that aim at protecting employees against mobbing in the workplace. Practice proves that fighting mobbing on the national level, i.e., mobbing lawsuits and cases in courts of law, is usually very hard, ineffective or even unsatisfactory. Actually, it is the organizational level on which anti-mobbing laws and mechanisms should be built and implemented.

Research shows that early and systematic mobbing prevention based on building awareness of the phenomenon combined with strong and visible anti-mobbing policy proves to be the most effective and least expensive way of avoiding that unwanted workplace pathology. Research demonstrates that mobbing can be successfully deterred by organizational standards, proper conduct, efficient communication and adherence to accepted moral norms, principles and code of practice. Undoubtedly, it is incomparably easier to develop proper policies and prevent mobbing in the workplace than to deal with complicated mobbing cases, which require professional and very careful interventions combined with complex, multi-stage mobbing diagnosis. Needless to say, all these activities engage a great deal of organizational resources and pose threats to organizational image and reputation.

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