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A Trauma-Informed Model for Addressing Workplace Mobbing

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Abstract

Workplace mobbing is a severe occupational hazard that can result in profound psychological, physical, financial, and professional harm to targets (Balsak et al., 2025; Leymann, 1990). While much research has documented the outcomes of workplace mobbing (Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Groeblinghoff & Becker, 1996; Hamre et al., 2020; Leymann, 1996), many organizational systems continue to misclassify early warning signs as interpersonal conflict, performance concerns, or communication breakdowns. This misclassification often leads to inappropriate responses and escalation of harm (Gregersen, 2016; Grotto-de-Souza et al., 2022). We present a practice-informed conceptual model designed to strengthen prevention, early intervention, and recovery pathways in workplaces impacted by mobbing and related forms of psychological harassment. The paper draws from extensive practice-based and trauma-informed expertise in workplace psychological safety. The conceptual model presented is derived from repeated patterns observed across complex workplace cases, including multi-party conflict dynamics, organizational process failures, and the predictable progression of psychological injury when early warning signs are missed or minimized. The purpose of the model is to translate practice-based knowledge into structured, evidence-aligned approaches to address workplace mobbing. The model includes operational indicators that can be observed in workplace processes and behaviors and highlights predictable harm pathways when organizational containment strategies fail to prioritize worker safety and procedural integrity. Practical implications are provided for employers, investigators, and policymakers, emphasizing trauma-informed procedural safeguards, accountability mechanisms, and systemic reforms to reduce disability trajectories, improve psychological safety, and restore trust within workplaces.

***Keywords**: workplace mobbing; workplace bullying; psychological injury; trauma-informed practice; institutional betrayal; psychological safety; occupational health.*

Introduction

Workplace mobbing was first introduced in organizational research by Swedish psychologist Heinz Leymann, who described it as “harassing, ganging-up on someone, or psychologically terrorizing

others at work" (Leymann, 1996, p. 165). Borrowed from research on school bullying, the term mobbing has been used in workplace contexts to denote persistent mistreatment, often involving power imbalance, progressive escalation, and social exclusion (Einarsen et al., 2020). The terms mobbing and bullying are often used interchangeably in the literature where both constructs describe patterned and intentional mistreatment that unfolds over time (Badenhorst and Botha; 2022). A key distinguishing feature emphasized in recent mobbing scholarship is its collective or systemic dimension, whereby multiple actors participate actively or passively in the marginalization of the target (Meng, 2025). We adopt the term target rather than victim, consistent with contemporary research that argues the term target more accurately reflects the role of the individual experiencing workplace mobbing, without implying the passivity or inherent helplessness that the label victim can imply (Leonard & McDaniel, 2025).

Research on workplace bullying indicates that the harm does not occur only from the interpersonal aggression, but also from organizational responses that intensify the bullying through delay, minimization, misclassification, confidentiality breaches, procedural inconsistency, and retaliation or reprisal (Neall et al., 2021). Although this evidence is drawn primarily from bullying contexts, the same organizational failures are likely to yield comparable and potentially more severe consequences in instances of workplace mobbing, given the involvement of multiple perpetrators, and the compounding nature of coordinated harassment. Indeed, research demonstrates that adverse outcomes intensify as the number of perpetrators increases (Glambek et al., 2020). As a result, empirical findings from bullying research can often be applied to mobbing contexts without explicit differentiation, despite empirical research examining these mechanisms specifically in relation to workplace mobbing, remaining limited. There is a need, however, for practice-based models that can guide organizational responses to workplace mobbing, a need that this paper confronts.

Despite growing research on workplace mobbing and its outcomes, workplaces frequently lack practical, operational models that can help leaders, investigators, and decision-makers recognize early warning signs, differentiate mobbing from ordinary conflict, and respond in ways that prevent escalation and psychological injury. Too often, workplace bullying and mobbing are handled as if they were ordinary interpersonal conflicts such as communication breakdowns, performance issues, or both sides disputes, despite bullying and mobbing being conceptually different from typical conflict (Baillien et al., 2017; Notelaers et al., 2018). When organizations treat bullying and mobbing as mutual conflict, they tend to default to misguided interventions such as reconciliation-style approaches or procedural performance management. This can shift the burden onto the harmed worker - e.g., "be more resilient," "communicate better," "manage your reactions" - instead of addressing power asymmetries and institutional drivers, and is a pattern widely noted in reviews of organizational/HR responses and research on HR's perceived complicity or ineffectiveness (Branch et al., 2013; Boddy & Boulter, 2025). In contrast, a trauma-informed approach recognizes that bullying and mobbing cause harm. Such an approach recognizes the potential effects of trauma on an individual's actions and performance, identifies signs and symptoms of trauma, fosters safety and support in the organizational responses, and ensures that

re-traumatization is avoided by eliminating policies or actions that may trigger or replicate the trauma (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], n.d.). Therefore, instead of employing a traditional conflict resolution framework, the trauma-informed approach presented in this paper prioritizes the psychological safety of all parties involved and uses a holistic lens that accounts for the complicated layers of each case and their systemic processes. When organizations default to only conflict-framing responses, this can contribute to what has been described in the literature as institutional betrayal, where the worker experiences additional harm through the action or inaction of the institutional systems expected to provide safety and protection (Christl et al., 2024; Smith & Freyd, 2014).

This paper addresses these problems by presenting a practice-informed conceptual model designed to support prevention, early intervention, and post-incident repair. The Psychological Injury Containment Failure Model (PICFM) proposed is a three-phase model of (1) Prepare, Train, and Prevent, (2) Assess and Intervene, and (3) Repair, Reform, and Rebuild.[1] This model is extended in this paper by introducing the concept of a Containment-Failure Window (CFW) to describe the critical timeline in which organizational decisions can either contain harm and restore safety or accelerate injury and systemic breakdown.[2] This paper adds an operational, systems-level contribution to the mobbing literature by not only specifying the CIWBR and introducing the CFW, but also by operationalizing early indicators and predictable harm pathways that can be observed in organizational processes, and by explicitly naming process harm (secondary organizational injury) as a mechanism by which institutions can compound injury after disclosure. The aim of this paper is to create a structured, actionable roadmap that makes these contributions applicable for employers, investigators, and policymakers in real-world decision-making, while advocating for empirical testing across various sectors.

Conceptualizing Workplace Mobbing

Workplace mobbing is widely conceptualized as a severe and cumulative form of psychological aggression in which one person is targeted through patterned hostility, social exclusion, reputational damage, and coordinated undermining (D'Cruz & Noronha, 2021; Duffy & Sperry, 2012; Einarsen, 2000; Leymann, 1990, 1996; Notelaers et al., 2018). It is not just an incident but a complex and ongoing process. This process involves various participants such as managers, HR representatives, peers, investigators, administrators, and leadership, who can come and go throughout the dynamic. These shifting alliances can increase the potential for harm (Einarsen et al., 2020; Leymann, 1996).

[1] The model adapts established systems-failure theory to workplace complaint-response dynamics. The model's containment failure logic is based on Reason's (2000) layered defenses and latent conditions approach, as well as Perrow's (1984) normal accident theory. This framework examines how system complexity and tight coupling can result in early warnings being detected but still bypassing organizational barriers. The model has been developed by the Canadian Institute of Workplace Bullying Resources (CIWBR), a national organization focused on research, prevention, and response to workplace bullying and mobbing.

[2]This concept is derived from systems-failure principles and describes a time-sensitive period in which trauma-informed containment can prevent escalation.

The terms workplace mobbing and workplace bullying are often used interchangeably in the literature, and their usage varies based on regional preferences, such as German-speaking countries preferring the term mobbing while English-speaking countries use the term bullying to describe similar processes (Badenhorst and Botha; 2022). However recent scholarship suggests that mobbing is distinct from bullying due to its collective and systemic nature and its other features, such as toxic organizational climates, persistence, covertness, premeditation, intentionality, and coordination among groups in power to cause harm (Meng, 2025). Mobbing also differs from ordinary conflict as it is repeated over time, and often involves multiple perpetrators (Leymann, 1990; 1996). Despite some conceptual overlaps, there is a broad consensus that mobbing constitutes a form of psychological violence (Leymann, 1990). It represents a serious occupational hazard that can result in significant and long-lasting harm to workers, teams, and organizations (Balsak et al., 2025; Leymann, 1990). Research has consistently demonstrated that targets of mobbing may experience progressive deterioration in psychological safety (Groeblinghoff & Becker, 1996; Leymann, 1996; Tatar & Yüksel, 2019), professional identity (Tong et al., 2025), confidence (Leymann, 1996), health (Balsak et al., 2025; Grotto-de-Souza et al., 2022; Romero Starke et al., 2020), and functional capacity (Rincon-Hoyos et al., 2025; Tatar & Yüksel, 2019), particularly when the workplace organization fails to respond with timely, competent, and protective interventions.

The literature proposes that bullying and mobbing are conceptually distinct, primarily because mobbing is collective and coordinated (Meng, 2025). However, targets of workplace bullying may also experience the secondary and compounding harms associated with mobbing when systemic organizational failures are present, including exposure to psychological abuse such as gaslighting and other coercive control tactics (Sweet, 2019; Stark, 2007). When severe and sustained, such failures overlap with frameworks used to describe psychological torture as well as institutional betrayal when organizations minimize, deny, or enable the harm (Freyd, 1996; Smith & Freyd, 2013, 2014). Moreover, workplace bullying, like mobbing, constitutes psychological violence, even when perpetrated by a single individual, particularly where gaslighting and organizational betrayal are present. Nevertheless, in mobbing contexts, the cumulative impact of repetitive insults may be amplified by the involvement of multiple perpetrators, potentially occurring more frequently than in single-perpetrator bullying, and thereby intensifying harm.

Existing Mobbing Models

Existing models of workplace mobbing focus mainly on conflict escalation, characterizing the nature of mobbing and describing its exposure, outcomes, and negative impacts such as decreased well-being, psychosomatic symptoms, and intentions to leave the workplace (D'Cruz & Noronha, 2021; Duffy & Sperry, 2012; Einarsen, 2000; Glasl, 1982; Leymann, 1990, 1996; Notelaers et al., 2018). Unfortunately, these models are often characterized by interchangeable, synonymous, or subsumed use of the terms mobbing and bullying, and systematically linking the stages of mobbing to actionable organizational responses continues to remain a gap in the literature. For example, early foundational models emphasize conflict escalation as central to mobbing, with Leymann

(1996) defining mobbing as a gradual, multi-stage process where poorly managed conflicts escalate into ongoing psychological harassment. This often leads to organizational intervention that misattributes blame and ultimately results in the expulsion of the victim. Leymann highlights several organizational factors that contribute to mobbing, including weak leadership, ineffective conflict management, and inadequate work design. Similarly, the conflict escalation model of Glasl (1980) describes conflict escalation in gradual stages where interpersonal disputes intensify into chronic and destructive workplace bullying through three phases and nine stages. However, unlike Leymann, Glasl offers de-escalation strategies for each phase. In Glasl's model, conflict shifts from rational disagreement in phase 1 to deteriorating relationships and exclusion in phase 2. Mediation is considered a viable strategy in phase 1 while professional or organizational intervention is recommended for phase 2. If left unaddressed, conflict becomes overt aggression in phase 3, where parties prioritize harm. Here, authoritative power intervention becomes necessary (Glasl 1980, pp. 123-131). A subsequent model proposed by Einarsen et al. (2004) retains these core elements of escalation in the Glasl model while broadening the scope of the model to include behavioral types. These latter authors propose a multicausal, multilevel model in which personality traits, perceptions, power differentials, and interpersonal dynamics shape bullying at the individual and dyadic levels, while scapegoating represents group-level bullying, or mobbing.

While these models are influential in articulating workplace mobbing as an escalating process, they are mostly descriptive in nature with, other than in Glasl's model, limited attention to early intervention or prevention strategies. The de-escalation strategies in all the models are largely reactive and assume the willingness of parties to engage in resolution. These strategies are limited as they primarily address conflict after escalation happens, offering no guidance on early organizational prevention or detection before behavioral deterioration. In all these models, there is no guidance on early detection, prevention or decision-making when mobbing occurs, and they all fall short in offering any integrated practice-oriented prevention and intervention strategies. This highlights the need for the practice-informed model of this paper that supports prevention, timely response, recovery, and trauma-informed safeguards.

A growing body of research suggests that harm associated with workplace mobbing is often compounded by organizational response failures (Boddy & Boulter, 2025; D'Cruz & Noronha, 2021; Smith & Freyd, 2014, 2017). Many organizations still respond as if the problem is a simple dispute (Gregersen, 2016). They typically route complaints into HR workflows designed for minor conduct concerns but not high-risk psychological hazards. HR practitioners prioritize managerial relationships and hesitate to label cases as bullying or mobbing when managers are implicated (Boddy & Boulter, 2025; Harrington et al., 2012). In its practice-based work that informs this paper, CIWBR has observed cases where HR personnel are not only process gatekeepers but are active participants in the mobbing group, for example, by amplifying negative narratives, restricting protective options, or shaping processes in ways that increase vulnerability after disclosure. Research supports the concern that bullying complaints involving managers can be difficult for HR to hold neutrally, with evidence that HR practitioners prioritize relationships with managers and rarely label scenarios as bullying or mobbing when managers are accused (Harrington et al., 2012).

Other work similarly reports that bullied workers perceive HR as unwilling to deal effectively with bullying or mobbing managers, including perceptions of complacency, complicity, and outcomes that worsen harm (Boddy & Boulter, 2025). The predictable result is a string of processes that look "reasonable" on paper, but function as procedural gaslighting in real life, where the worker's reality is minimized, their physiological stress response is misread as instability, and organizational delays are reframed as "due process," (Harrington et al., 2012). This is how primary mobbing injury becomes secondary organizational injury, with harm caused or amplified by the institution after it has been put on notice. These patterns are not accidental. Like administrative burden, where the level of burden ultimately aligns with the goals of policy-makers (Moynihan et al., 2015), workplace mobbing can often function to serve organizational interests by providing a mechanism to expel workers who are seen as inconvenient, costly, or disruptive, to ignore or neutralize reports of discrimination, harassment, or other unlawful behaviors, and to signal to the broader workforce the consequences of filing complaints or otherwise challenging managerial or institutional authority. As Rebecca Sposita observes, "When organizations treat red flag reports as threats to their reputation and finances rather than opportunities to take swift action, people are hurt – sometimes irrevocably" (Sposita, 2025, p. 26). Concerns about procedural fairness and timeliness in complaint handling are also raised in organizational justice research on workplace bullying investigations (Cowan et al., 2021).

In the intervention literature, workplace bullying and mobbing are mostly examined as conceptually overlapping phenomena, and interventions are not stage-responsive or repair-oriented. For example, a systematic review of interventions in the nursing population found that strategies such as cognitive rehearsal programs may reduce workplace bullying, but stage-responsive comprehensive interventions are not adequately addressed (Jang et al., 2022). Similarly, research into organizational responses to workplace bullying (Mattsson & Jordan, 2022) emphasizes that bullying interventions should focus on organizational-level solutions rather than on finding fault with victims and perpetrators. Early management action, clear role definitions, conflict-resolution training, and fostering a transparent, inclusive work climate are key preventive measures (Einarsen et al., 2020; Hamre et al., 2021; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). Investigations should assess risks, address unethical communication, implement workplace improvements, and be followed by re-evaluation to ensure lasting resolution, with judicial procedures, if harm persists, only as a last resort.

The above review of the existing literature highlights a need for mobbing-specific models, models that integrate prevention, intervention and recovery; and models that embed trauma-informed procedural safeguards into organizational responses. There is a need for a practice-informed mobbing model that provides actionable guidelines for organizations, such as the one proposed in this paper.

The Psychological Injury Containment-Failure Model (PICFM)

We present a practice-informed systems model that aligns with the established workplace mobbing and bullying literature. The model proposes observable early warning indicators and plausible escalation mechanisms, while falling short of course in establishing causal proof. It is designed to support prevention infrastructure, encourage timely intervention, and facilitate meaningful repair, while also calling for empirical testing across different sectors, for validation or not as the case may be. Central to the model is the introduction of the concept of the Containment-Failure Window (CFW), the critical initial period following credible warning signs during which timely, trauma-informed containment can still prevent escalation, even before the term mobbing is ever invoked. However, when the CFW is missed, the domino effect of harm is predictable: cumulative stress loads the nervous system, symptoms intensify, work performance degrades under threat, credibility is questioned, and the organization pivots to discipline instead of protection. This model conceptualizes the resultant injury as complex and accumulating over time rather than occurring overnight. The model is grounded in practice-based synthesis and is aligned with established scholarship on workplace mobbing and bullying, psychological safety, institutional betrayal, trauma-informed response principles, and bystander intervention (Borthakur et al., 2026; Edmondson, 1999; Leymann, 1996; Smith & Freyd, 2014; SAMHSA, 2014). The following sections outline the three conceptual foundations that support the model, describe the practice-based synthesis approach used to identify the phases and indicators, operationalize the model through diagrams and an implementation table, and conclude with the implications for employers, researchers, and policymakers.

Conceptual Foundation 1: Mobbing as a Systemic Psychological Hazard

Workplace mobbing is best understood as a patterned, escalating form of psychological aggression that becomes systemic when organizations fail to interrupt early indicators and power-imbalanced dynamics. Classic mobbing research emphasizes progression over time, role-based isolation, and the participation (active or passive) of multiple actors as conditions that amplify harm (Leymann, 1996). Contemporary scholarship frames bullying and mobbing as occupational psychosocial hazards that are embedded in work design, leadership practices, and organizational culture, leading to predictable negative effects on health and work participation (Einarsen et al., 2020; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). In our practice-based observations, the targeted worker is often a high-performing, ethical, dependable “go-to” employee, somewhat politically naive, empathic, and inclined to override their own needs. At the same time, the organizational environment contains enabling conditions for mobbing such as unclear role authority, weak accountability, and an appetite to preserve reputational optics over worker safety. This pattern is consistent with research examining target characteristics and helps explain why mobbing can persist even in organizations that outwardly value respect and inclusion, particularly when bullying dynamics undermine inclusive excellence (Coyne et al., 2000; Dzurec Cox et al., 2017).

Conceptual Foundation 2: Psychological Safety and Why People Stay Silent

Psychological safety, the shared belief that speaking up will not lead to punishment, humiliation, or exclusion, is a prerequisite for early reporting and constructive learning in work teams (Edmondson, 1999). In mobbing contexts, silence is often rational. Witnesses and targets may anticipate retaliation, credibility attacks, or procedural misuse once concerns are raised. Trauma-informed principles highlight that fear and withdrawal frequently reflect adaptive responses to perceived threat, especially when systems feel unpredictable or unsafe (SAMHSA, 2014). Bystander scholarship similarly notes that institutional support and clear intervention pathways increase the likelihood of bystander action when bullying occurs (Borthakur et al., 2026). Psychological safety is a shared belief that people can speak up, raise concerns, and report harm without fear of negative consequences (Edmondson, 1999). In mobbing conditions, that belief collapses quickly, not only for the targeted worker, but for witnesses (Mulder et al., 2014). Bystanders often stay silent for survival reasons. They have seen the process fail for others, fear becoming the next target, are overwhelmed, have no idea how to intervene safely, and no longer trust that the organization will protect them if they speak up (Paull et al., 2020). Silence is not apathy; it is a rational response to perceived threat. Moreover, in mobbing ecosystems, joining the mobbers is a defensive move to avoid isolation and protect one's job. Others who manage to stay out of the mob experience guilt, confusion, and remorse, but still don't intervene because the workplace has not built credible channels that protect people who speak up (Jönsson & Muhonen, 2022).

Conceptual Foundation 3: Institutional Betrayal and Compounded Injury

Institutional betrayal describes harm that occurs when individuals reasonably expect protection from a system, but the system responds with inaction, minimization, misdirection, or retaliation, valuing the reputation of the institution over the wellbeing of its workers, thereby amplifying injury and undermining trust (Smith & Freyd, 2014). In workplace mobbing cases, institutional betrayal commonly emerges through flawed triage, confidentiality breaches, performance reframing, and delayed or non-responsive processes. Institutional betrayal helps explain why many cases worsen after a report is made. The institution that should protect the worker instead harms them through omission, minimization, or retaliatory process (Smith & Freyd, 2014). In mobbing, institutional betrayal often shows up as confidentiality failures, investigations that are procedurally narrow and biased, delayed responses framed as neutrality, shifting goalposts, and performance management used as an end-run around safety obligations (Boddy & Boulter, 2025; D'Cruz & Noronha, 2010; Harrington et al., 2012; Smith & Freyd, 2014). These actions increase fear, isolate witnesses, and load additional trauma onto the injured target, undermining recovery and trust (Smith & Freyd, 2014).

Unfortunately, many existing workplace responses frame bullying and mobbing as interpersonal issues to be addressed through coaching, mediation, or informal conversation. This approach becomes inadequate in moderate to chronic bullying and mobbing conditions because it

misclassifies a safety hazard as a relational dispute and disregards the power asymmetries, coordinated group dynamics, and cumulative psychological and physiological injury trajectories associated with prolonged exposure. Mobbing is a psychological hazard with high potential for serious psychological and physiological injury (conceptual foundation 1). In the absence of bystander intervention (conceptual foundation 2) it requires containment protocols, role clarity, and an independent, trauma-informed process. When organizations prioritize speed, optics, or managerial comfort over stabilization and safety, they convert a preventable hazard into a cascading injury pathway (conceptual foundation 3).

What Trauma-Informed Organizational Responses Would Look Like

A trauma-informed approach would recognize the widespread impact of trauma on individuals and consider multiple pathways to recovery when developing responses to potentially traumatic events. It emphasizes the importance of avoiding re-traumatization and integrating knowledge about recovery, safety, and support into organizational policies and practices. Trauma-informed organizational responses include peer support and collaboration, trust building, providing hope, and promoting healing informed by lived experiences. Organizations implementing trauma-informed approaches strive for transparency in policies and decision-making processes and ensure that those affected are empowered through voice, choice, and participation in the decisions that affect them (SAMHSA, n.d.). In the workplace context, trauma-informed practice would steer away from viewing conflict as an individual coping problem and focus on understanding how power structures and response failures in an organization contribute to psychological harm. Steps would be taken to ensure that organizational response is informed by this understanding and further harm is minimized during investigations and decision-making (Harris and Fallot, 2001; SAMHSA, 2014). A trauma-informed approach is different from traditional approaches as it does not frame workplace conflict as interpersonal dissent between equal parties (Einarsen et al., 2020). A trauma-informed approach recognizes that workplace bullying and mobbing scenarios are characterized by power imbalance, reputational sabotage, and coordinated cumulative aggression. Hence, traditional conflict resolution assumptions and approaches do not hold true in these scenarios and if implemented, become psychological safety hazards leading to further re-traumatization (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2010). Hence, a trauma-informed approach goes beyond traditional mechanisms such as mediation, restoring working relationships, education and training, or collaborative communication repair. Instead, it prioritizes recognizing and preventing harm, ensuring psychological safety, and addressing organizational conditions that enable harm. This is done by early detection and containment, protecting complainants and witnesses, fostering transparency, impartiality and predictability in investigation processes, and shifting focus away from repairing relationships to recognizing the need for support, empowerment, systemic accountability, and avoiding re-traumatization (SAMHSA, 2014; n.d.).

Expert Observations from Typical Practice

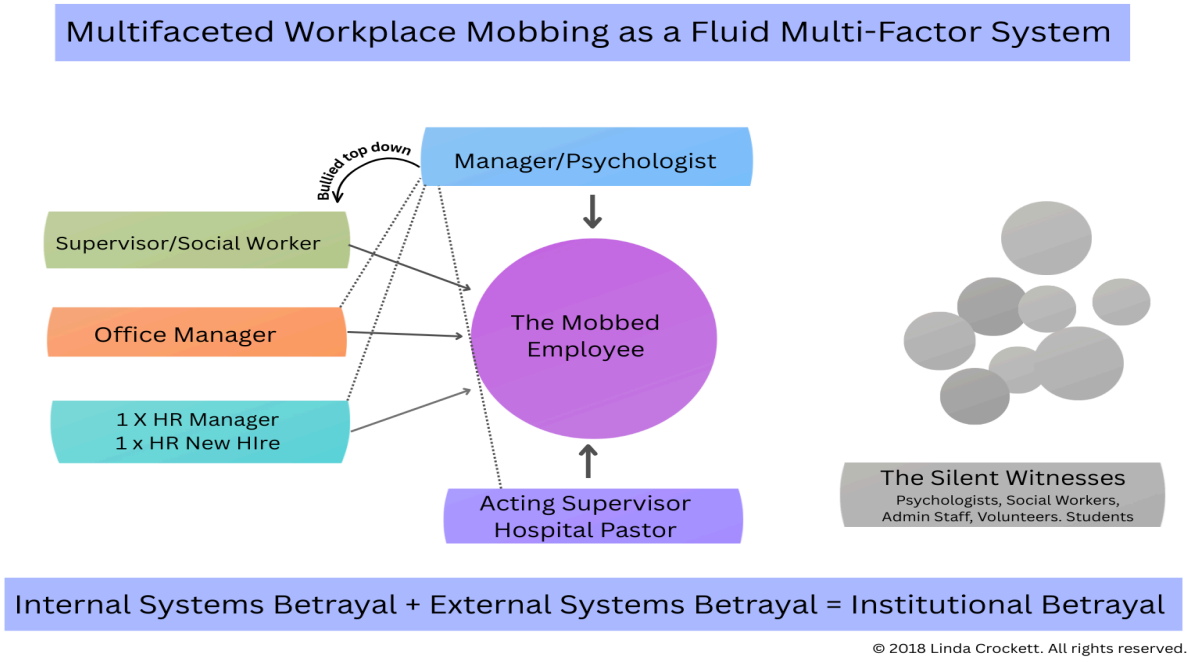
Across cases, the same preventable organizational errors recur; premature conflict labeling that equalizes parties and erases power; untrained internal investigators applying a narrow misconduct lens; confidentiality leakage that isolates the target and recruits additional aggressors; adding new meeting attendees without notice, increasing threat and dysregulation; delaying action until the target is visibly symptomatic, then using symptoms as evidence of incompetence; ignoring or selectively applying medical recommendations and accommodations; relying on mediation when the environment is unsafe; and closing files without repair, which sets the stage for recurrence with new targets. These errors are not rare exceptions; they are the pattern when organizations, especially HR, lack trauma-informed competence and clear containment protocols.

A Case Vignette

A bachelor's degree social worker started a new role in a specialized clinical cancer program. The employer was aware that the worker's mother had a terminal cancer diagnosis and lived approximately 11 hours away. During the initial months, the worker used earned time to travel for caregiving and end-of-life visits, and early feedback from the team was described as positive and supportive. Approximately six months into employment, near the end of probation and two days prior to the mother's death, the worker reported an abrupt shift in workplace dynamics. The reported pattern included criticism, gossip, false allegations, ostracism, reputational damage, micro-management, gaslighting, public embarrassment, and coordinated undermining. The worker described the process as fluid, with the mix of aggressors and tactics varying day-to-day and occurring without warning, contributing to hypervigilance and a progressive loss of psychological safety. The reported aggressors spanned multiple organizational roles, including a direct manager, a supervisor, an administrative office manager, two HR staff, and a spiritual care provider acting in a supervisory capacity. The worker reported that peers observed elements of the targeting but did not intervene. Following disclosure attempts, the worker described having no reliable pathway for stabilization and safety and reported internal process failures consistent with systems betrayal, including procedural mishandling and an absence of meaningful protection. The worker also reported external response failures, including union representation experienced as ineffective and, at times, as contributing to increased vulnerability. The worker further reported that mediation was pursued despite a clear power differential, an absence of trauma-informed process safeguards, and the presence of chronic psychological injury, including a diagnosis of PTSD. Taken together, these internal and external failures were experienced as compounded institutional betrayal. Over time, the worker reported escalating psychological and physical injury and functional impairment. Reported outcomes included gastrointestinal injury (ulcers and GERD), significant weight loss, hair loss, anxiety and panic attacks, and a diagnosis of PTSD related to workplace bullying confirmed by treating clinicians. The worker also reported persistent suicidal ideation during the exposure period and marked occupational identity disruption at resignation.

This vignette illustrates the CIWBR model constructs as follows. First, early warning indicators were present but were not contained within the CFW, allowing escalation. Second, the absence of credible protective pathways and the reported procedural mishandling contributed to secondary organizational injury, compounding the primary mobbing exposure. Third, the interaction of multi-actor targeting with internal and external response failures aligns with the paper's institutional betrayal pathway and explains why harm progression continued after disclosure rather than stabilizing. The vignette illustrates how workplace mobbing can escalate through a fluid multi-actor pattern and how injury progression may be intensified when both internal and external systems fail to stabilize and protect the targeted worker (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Workplace Mobbing Escalation and Injury Progression



A Practice-Based Synthesis Model

This paper uses a practice-based synthesis approach, integrating applied professional observations with established research literature (Costley & Fulton, 2019), to develop a structured conceptual model for understanding how mobbing-related workplace psychological injury escalates when early warning signs are missed, minimized, or mishandled. Practice-based research methods are particularly appropriate when repeated real-world patterns can be reliably observed across cases, and when the goal is to translate practitioner insights into conceptual models that can inform prevention, intervention, and recovery strategies (Costley & Fulton, 2019; Hardoon et al., 2021; Van de Ven, 2007). The model is informed by three converging sources of knowledge. One, practice-based pattern recognition, repeated, observable trends across workplace psychological hazard cases involving harassment, bullying, discrimination, retaliation, procedural failures, and breakdowns in safety culture. Two, trauma-informed psychological safety principles, and concepts

aligned with trauma-informed care and psychological safety scholarship, particularly the importance of emotional safety, predictability, trust, voice, and protection from harm and retaliation. Three, peer-reviewed research literature, foundational and contemporary evidence related to workplace bullying and mobbing outcomes, bystander behavior, institutional betrayal, and injury trajectories. This triangulation strengthens the model by ensuring it is grounded in both lived workplace realities and established academic findings.

A three-phase model was derived through iterative synthesis of case-consistent patterns, mapped against the above-noted literature on escalation, harm progression, and organizational response failures. Across workplace contexts, harm typically follows a predictable sequence when early indicators are not recognized or when organizations respond with containment strategies that prioritize risk management over worker safety. The phases were defined according to the dominant system behavior occurring at each stage. Phase 1, Prepare, Train, and Prevent, defined by the presence or absence of protective infrastructure, including trauma-informed training, psychologically safe reporting pathways, early risk detection, and leadership competence in addressing psychological hazards. Phase 2: Assess and Intervene, defined by the quality, timeliness, and integrity of organizational response once harm is reported or visible, including triage, severity assessment, intervention selection, and protection from retaliation. Phase 3, Repair, Reform, and Rebuild, defined by whether the organization engages in meaningful repair, systemic accountability, and qualified recovery supports, or instead allows the injury to become chronic, legally entrenched, or personally devastating for the worker and broader workplace culture (see Table 1).

Table 1. A Three-Phase Workplace Psychological Safety Model; Purpose, Failure Modes, Early Indicators, and Predictable Harms

Phase (CIWBR model)	Purpose	Primary failure mode if mishandled	Early warning indicators and predictable harms
Phase 1: Prepare, Train, and Prevent	Prevent mobbing conditions; build readiness; shrink the CFW. (Einarsen et al., 2020; Edmondson, 1999).	Organizations treat psychological hazards as interpersonal drama or HR noise; lack psychologically safe reporting, training, and leader competence. (Leymann, 1996).	Indicators - rising incivility, exclusion, triangulation, rumor, role sabotage, bystander withdrawal. Harms - normalization of hostility, increased fear and silence, early stress symptoms, erosion of trust.

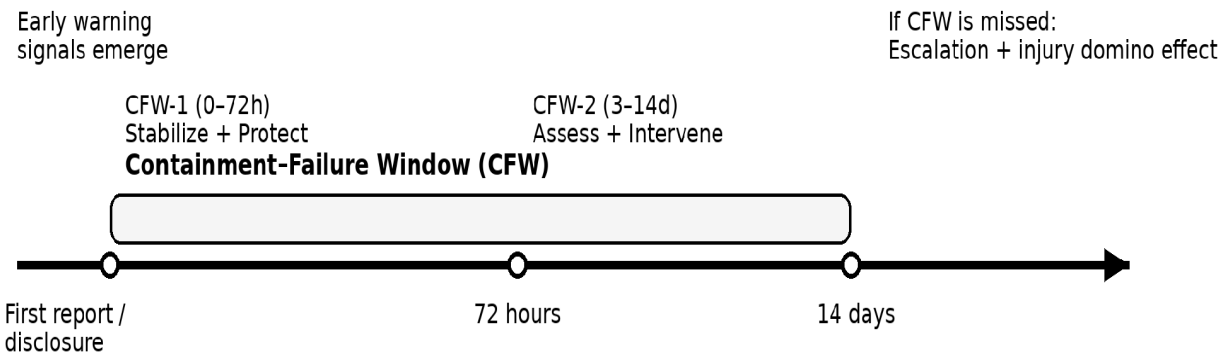
Phase (CIWBR model)	Purpose	Primary failure mode if mishandled	Early warning indicators and predictable harms
Phase 2: Assess and Intervene	Stabilize safety and injury risk; triage severity; stop escalation; protect against retaliation.	Misclassification as conflict/performance; procedural gaslighting; confidentiality breaches; delayed/biased investigations; retaliation. (Smith & Freyd, 2014).	Indicators - complaint minimization, shifting narratives, performance pivot after reporting, isolation, coordinated targeting. Harms - acute psychological injury, sleep/GI symptoms, panic/anxiety, work disability risk, widened CFW. (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012).
Phase 3: Repair, Reform, and Rebuild	Repair harm; restore safety and accountability; implement systemic reform and monitor recovery. (SAMHSA, 2014).	Superficial resolution, no accountability, ongoing exposure, failure to support recovery; institutional betrayal becomes chronic.	Indicators - unresolved safety plan, repeat incidents, lack of follow-up, continued ostracism. Harms - chronic PTSD symptoms, moral injury, prolonged disability, turnover, reputational and cultural damage. (Nielsen et al., 2015; Nielsen et al., 2020).

Early warning indicators were identified by examining the repeated precursors that appeared consistently before psychological injury intensified or became disabling. Indicators were selected based on three criteria. One, relevance; the indicator reliably preceded escalation, worsening harm, or system failure; two, observable evidence and actionability; the indicator could be recognized through workplace behaviors, documentation patterns, or procedural markers (e.g., delayed response, confidentiality breaches, shifting narratives), and three, actionability; the indicator could reasonably trigger preventative or corrective actions if recognized early.

Harm pathways were mapped by tracking how psychological injury evolves when early warning indicators are ignored or when organizational responses increase power imbalance, isolation, or institutional betrayal. The model emphasizes that psychological injury is rarely the result of a single incident; rather, it is compounded by prolonged exposure, procedural mishandling, and the absence of protective intervention. The model is presented as a conceptual framework intended to support earlier risk identification, improved decision-making, and trauma-informed prevention and response strategies. It is not presented as a prevalence study and does not claim causal proof through experimental design. Instead, it provides a structured, evidence-aligned interpretation of repeatable workplace patterns to inform practice, policy development, and future empirical testing.

This paper also introduces the Containment-Failure Window (CFW) to the three-phase model (see Figure 2). This is a practice-informed timeline to guide rapid triage and timely organizational response.

Figure 2. Containment-Failure Window (CFW)



Phase 1 of the model focuses on prevention infrastructure: leadership capability, psychologically safe reporting pathways, clear standards, and early risk detection. When these foundations are absent, mobbing dynamics can normalize and spread through roles and networks; when present, they enable early interruption before injury becomes entrenched (Einarsen et al., 2020; Edmondson, 1999). The purpose is to prevent mobbing conditions and shrink the CFW by building readiness before harm escalates. The primary failure mode if missed is that policies exist, but the system cannot recognize early mobbing signals or respond without causing harm. The measurable early-warning indicators are rising informal complaints about the same leader, repeated turnover in a unit, sick time spikes, and social exclusion patterns - "everyone knows but nobody reports." The predictable harms are normalization of hostility, witness silence, escalation into coordinated targeting, and increased injury severity.

Phase 2 represents the safety triage point. Organizations must assess severity, stop escalation, protect against retaliation, and select a response proportionate to risk. Misclassification (e.g., reframing as interpersonal conflict or performance) can function as procedural gaslighting and institutional betrayal, increasing harm and liability (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012; Smith & Freyd, 2014). The purpose is to treat reports as a safety and injury-stabilization problem, not as a reputational or HR workflow problem. Delayed, process-heavy responses intensify threats and create secondary organizational injury. The measurable early-warning indicators are confidentiality breaches, multiple interview retellings with no containment plan, sudden performance scrutiny after disclosure, and "no findings" paired with ongoing harm. The predictable harms are trauma-load accumulation, symptom amplification (sleep disruption, anxiety, cognitive fog), loss of trust, and exit from employment.

Workplace mobbing and bullying rarely cause sudden harm (Leymann, 1996; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). Instead, compounding and progressive strain on cognitive, emotional, psychological and

behavioral levels causes psychological injury (Verkuil et al., 2015). Our proposed model depicts psychological injury as a cumulative, compounding process that unfolds when repeated exposure to psychologically unsafe conditions accumulates over time, producing early strain, functional impairments, social isolation and exclusion, and severe psychological consequences. The early strain often involves sleep disruption (Bonde et al., 2016), exhaustion, rumination, and hypervigilance (Rosander & Nielsen, 2022). Empirical syntheses show that workplace bullying is associated with sleep problems, including insomnia-related symptoms and impaired sleep quality, which can further intensify stress reactivity and daytime functioning difficulties (Bonde et al., 2016. As mental load increases, individuals may experience impaired concentration and confusion (O'Moore et al., 1998), slowed thinking and cognitive impairment (Tuckey et al., 2024), memory lapses (Cooper et al., 2004), and errors (Hewett et al., 2018). This early strain heightens vulnerability and erodes confidence (Vartia, 2001). Functional impairments and social isolation follow. With persistent exposure, anxiety and panic symptoms may emerge, followed by withdrawal and isolation as individuals attempt to protect themselves and reduce further harm. Over time, isolation can deepen self-doubt, shame, and loss of psychological safety, reinforcing a cycle of threat-based coping and reduced capacity (Holmgren et al., 2022; Workplace Bullying Institute, 2025). Without timely intervention, the cascade may culminate in severe psychological outcomes such as depression (Bonde et al., 2016), suicidal ideation (Luo et al., 2023), or post-traumatic stress injury (Nielsen et al, 2017). Systematic reviews and meta-analyses indicate that exposure to workplace bullying and mobbing is associated with elevated risk of suicidal ideation and behavior (Conway et al., 2022; Luo et al., 2023), underscoring the high-stakes nature of early detection and containment. These severe outcomes illustrate how psychological injury unfolds as a compounding process.

Figure 3 illustrates a psychological injury domino effect, in which each domino represents a progressive stage of injury where each stage intensifies the next, while organizational inaction allows the domino effect to continue to cumulative harm. Early intervention can disrupt this sequence before severe consequences occur. Early, timely intervention, such as stopping escalation, providing support, and protecting confidentiality, can halt the domino before severe harm occurs (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Psychological Injury Domino Effect and Opportunities for Early Intervention

Note. Injury Domino Effect: a systems view of psychological injury escalation and compounding harm (adapted from practice-based models).

Phase 3 of the model addresses repair and systemic reform by restoring safety, accountability, and recovery support while correcting the structural drivers that enabled mobbing. Trauma-informed repair emphasizes safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, empowerment, and active resistance to re-traumatization. When these conditions are absent, recovery may be undermined, post-traumatic stress symptoms and functional impairment may persist, and risk for prolonged work impairment increases (SAMHSA, 2014; Nielsen et al., 2015; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). The purpose of phase 3 is to restore safety, accountability, and function at individual, team, and system levels. The primary failure mode is that the organization closes the file while injury, mistrust, and cultural damage persist. The practice-informed measurable early warning indicators are such things as retaliatory micro-actions following disclosure or leave, unresolved relational ruptures, repeat complaints emerging in the same unit or role, and the recurrence of similar dynamics with a new target. The practice-informed predictable harms when repair is absent or premature are persistent psychological injury, moral injury associated with unresolved betrayal and injustice, reputational and career harm, increased likelihood of prolonged disability leave or extended work absence, and organizational fragmentation.

This model is offered as an operational, trauma-informed synthesis intended to help organizations detect escalation earlier and respond in ways that reduce predictable harm. The phased structure aligns with established mobbing dynamics (Leymann, 1996) and with evidence that exposure to bullying and mobbing is associated with downstream health and occupational outcomes (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). It also foregrounds psychological safety and institutional trust as core mechanisms shaping whether concerns are voiced and whether systems respond protectively (Edmondson, 1999; Smith & Freyd, 2014). Implications for employers, investigators, and policy makers include: (a) treating mobbing as an occupational hazard with explicit standards and competency requirements; (b) establishing confidential, psychologically safe reporting and rapid safety triage; (c) implementing anti-retaliation controls and documentation integrity; and (d) adopting trauma-informed procedural safeguards that prevent harm through process itself (SAMHSA, 2014). Bystander pathway design, clear roles, protections, and escalation routes can increase intervention likelihood and reduce normalization of harm (Borthakur et al., 2026). This model differs from common models by explicitly naming secondary organizational injury and by operationalizing what “trauma-informed” must look like in workplace processes. It also integrates bystander realities, and the structural reasons people stay silent. Practically, it guides employers and investigators to treat mobbing as a psychological hazard that requires early containment and competent, independent processes, not improvisation.

Implications for Employer Organizations

Workplace mobbing and sustained psychological harassment require responses that are timely, competent, and anchored in worker safety. The three-phase model presented in this paper is designed to be operationalized within organizational systems, not merely as a conceptual model, but by translating warning signs, response failures, and predictable harm pathways into practical actions and safeguards. The implications below outline what organizations can implement

immediately and how these measures can reduce escalation, disability outcomes, turnover, and systemic mistrust. Employers carry a duty to protect workers from psychological harm and to respond to harassment and mobbing as occupational hazards rather than interpersonal drama. Immediate organizational actions should focus on prevention infrastructure and early containment practices that preserve safety, procedural integrity, and trust.

What should workplace organizations do? One, first recognize the concept of mobbing and treat mobbing as a psychological hazard with escalation risk. Organizations should explicitly recognize mobbing as a high-severity psychological hazard with predictable injury trajectories. This includes trauma-informed leadership training on distinguishing mobbing from conflict and understanding the power dynamics, coalition behaviors, and systemic patterns that drive escalation. Two, establish psychologically safe reporting pathways and rapid triage. Reporting processes must be designed to prevent retaliation, reduce fear, and avoid procedural harm. A trauma-informed complaints triage model would include prompt response, with clear timelines, communication expectations, and protective steps when risk indicators emerge (e.g. isolation, reputational attacks, group targeting, or sudden performance reframing). Throughout the process, organizations should empower complainants and injured workers through transparent communication, inclusive practices, and trauma-informed engagement, including clear explanations of process steps, options, and supports, which also strengthens perceptions of procedural fairness and trust (Cowan et al., 2021). Three, implement protective interim measures without penalizing the harmed worker. Temporary safety planning should be standard practice when harm is reported. Interim measures must not function as disguised discipline, forced leave, or coerced "informal resolution" that places the burden on the harmed party. Instead, they should reduce exposure to further harm while preserving dignity, role clarity, and workplace belonging. Lastly, prevent process-driven harm and institutional betrayal. Organizations must monitor system behaviors that amplify injury; confidentiality breaches, shifting narratives, delays, minimization, selective enforcement of policies, and procedural inconsistency. When these patterns occur, they should be treated as indicators of containment failure and a trigger for corrective action. Organizations should also plan for post-process stabilization, recognizing that workplace dynamics rarely revert to status quo following a formal process, regardless of whether allegations are substantiated; outcomes and impacts become established and require intentional repair.

When employers intervene early with structured safeguards, they reduce the likelihood of escalation into chronic injury, prolonged disability leave, and workforce attrition. They also reduce organizational risk by preventing the predictable downstream effects of unresolved mobbing such as culture deterioration, increased grievances, reputational damage, and escalating legal and health-related costs.

Implications for Investigators and Workplace Resolution Systems

Investigations and resolution processes can either contain harm or accelerate injury depending on how they are designed and executed. In mobbing contexts, investigative approaches that are overly

narrow, biased to managers, strictly incident-based, or disconnected from trauma-informed safeguards may fail to capture the pattern nature of the harm and may unintentionally contribute to further psychological injury. Accordingly, investigations should include transparent communication, inclusivity, and trauma-informed procedural safeguards from intake through outcome communication, while protecting both complainant and respondent from further harm or escalation until the investigation is completed with due diligence, impartiality, and integrity (Burr & Wyatt, 2021; Cowan et al., 2021).

Investigators should practice with integrity and recuse when bias, conflict, or dual-role risk exists. Investigator credibility depends on neutrality and the appearance of neutrality. Investigators should screen for actual, potential, and perceived conflicts, including prior involvement in underlying facts, dual HR roles (for example, performance management), chain-of-command pressures, or close alliances with any party. Where impartiality could be compromised, the investigator should decline or recuse, and the organization should appoint an alternative or independent investigator. As Gramigna (2016) notes, when an investigator "may be perceived to have alliances...it would be optimal...to recuse himself or herself from the investigation" (p. 14).

Investigators should use a pattern-based lens, not a single-incident lens. Mobbing is typically characterized by cumulative harm, coordinated behaviors, and progressive exclusion. Investigators should assess pattern indicators such as repeated undermining, coalition behavior, reputational damage, procedural manipulation, and workplace social isolation. They must also apply trauma-informed procedural safeguards. Trauma-informed practice is not about lowering standards of evidence; it is about preventing avoidable harm during the process. Safeguards include predictable timelines, transparent communication, respectful and flexible interviewing practices, accommodations for disabilities, neurodiversity, psychological injuries, minimizing unnecessary exposure to aggressors, and ensuring the harmed party understands the process, their options, and available supports. Trauma-informed guidance for workplace investigations emphasizes safety, rapport, and supporting interviewees' sense of control to improve information quality, accuracy, and organizational trust (Bar-Dayan, 2024). These safeguards should be applied in a balanced manner to ensure procedural fairness and psychological safety for both complainants and respondents while evidence is gathered and assessed.

Retaliation risk is often a central driver of silence and harm progression. Investigators should explicitly evaluate reprisal indicators and treat procedural mistreatment, such as confidentiality breaches, punitive reassignment, and coercive settlement pressure, as relevant harm mechanisms, not separate HR issues. Organizational justice research on bullying investigations highlights that perceived procedural fairness strongly shapes complainant experience and trust, and it is central to effective prevention and management (Cowan et al., 2021). Lastly, investigative findings should not only focus on policy violations but also identify potential risk factors and recommend actions to prevent future occurrences. This includes suggesting organizational reforms when systemic failures are apparent, such as repeated mishandling of issues, misuse of power by leadership, and ineffective reporting channels. Investigators should also clearly communicate the meaning and limits of

evidentiary outcomes. An "unsubstantiated" finding indicates that available evidence was insufficient to meet the applicable standard of proof, and it does not necessarily mean that no harmful conduct occurred (Burr & Wyatt, 2021; Soltes, 2020). Unsubstantiated outcomes may reflect evidentiary limitations, delays, or investigative skill gaps in identifying and preserving relevant evidence, and they may also be consistent with unfounded or malicious allegations (Soltes, 2020). Regardless of the finding, organizations should avoid reverting to "business as usual" and should implement proportionate stabilization, monitoring, and repair measures because the process and its outcome reshape workplace relationships and risk.

When investigative systems incorporate pattern recognition and trauma-informed safeguards, they increase the accuracy of findings, reduce procedural harm, improve participation and disclosure, strengthen trust in organizational accountability, prevent further harm, and support repair and recovery. Transparent communication, inclusive procedural design, and balanced interim protections for both complainant and respondent during due diligence further reduce escalation risk and strengthen perceptions of procedural fairness (Cowan et al., 2021; Burr & Wyatt, 2021). This improves both worker outcomes and organizational defensibility.

Implications for Policy and Systems Reform

Mobbing and psychological harassment are not only workplace issues; they are systemic occupational health and public health concerns. Workplace mobbing is a public health issue. This framing is consistent with occupational health objectives that explicitly include protecting workers' mental health and improving working conditions and organizational systems (World Health Organization, 2024). Workplace organizations must be safe, nurturing institutions for their workers, where everyone can thrive, and policy frameworks must address not only the harmful behaviors but also the organizational failures that permit escalation and produce predictable disability trajectories. Prospective and meta-analytic evidence links workplace bullying exposure to adverse mental health outcomes and sickness absence, supporting the need for system-level prevention and response standards (Nielsen et al., 2015; Bonde et al., 2016).

Policies should require training and competency standards for leaders, HR professionals, investigators, and decision-makers regarding psychological hazards, mobbing dynamics, retaliation risks, and trauma-informed procedural safeguards. Policies should strengthen enforceable anti-retaliation protections. Reporting must be protected through enforceable mechanisms, not solely policy language. Workers must have clear access to safe reporting, interim protections, and remedies when reprisal occurs. Training should emphasize consequences applied for acts of retaliation. These protections align with international labor standards recognizing the right to a world of work free from violence and harassment and emphasizing prevention and enforcement mechanisms (International Labor Organization, 2019). Policy should also include minimum standards for investigation integrity, including pattern-based assessment, timeliness, confidentiality safeguards, and requirements for corrective action and organizational learning. Standards should also require clear outcome communication, including plain-language explanation that

"unsubstantiated" refers to evidentiary thresholds and does not necessarily mean no harm occurred, and that post-process stabilization may be required regardless of outcome (Burr & Wyatt, 2021). And policy should integrate recovery and repair pathways into workplace systems. Mobbing frequently results in psychological injury requiring structured recovery support. Policies should support access to appropriate care pathways and recognize that recovery is not solely individual; it is also organizational and systemic. This is consistent with meta-analytic evidence linking workplace bullying to adverse mental health outcomes across both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, underscoring the need for recovery pathways alongside prevention (Verkuil et al., 2015).

A policy environment that enforces prevention standards, protects reporting, and ensures accountable response systems reduces prolonged exposure to psychological hazards and interrupts the injury domino effect before it becomes chronic. This improves retention, reduces disability claims and long-term health costs, and strengthens institutional trust. Meta-analytic evidence links workplace bullying with sickness absence and broader mental health outcomes, supporting the claim that prevention and early intervention can reduce downstream disability and workforce loss (Bonde et al., 2016; Nielsen et al., 2015).

Limitations and Future Research

We have introduced in this paper a conceptual model that is based on practice-oriented synthesis and aligns well-established literature on workplace mobbing, psychological safety, trauma-informed principles, institutional betrayal, and health-related outcomes. The model proposed facilitates knowledge translation and provides operational clarity for practical implementation. However, it is important to acknowledge several limitations associated with this approach. First, the model is not presented as an empirical prevalence study and does not claim causal proof through experimental or longitudinal design. Instead, it proposes mechanisms, warning indicators, and predictable harm pathways derived from repeated workplace patterns and evidence-aligned interpretation. As such, the model should be understood as a structured, practice-informed roadmap intended to guide prevention and response decision-making rather than a statistically-validated diagnostic instrument. Second, the model is designed to be broadly applicable across sectors; however, workplace contexts vary significantly in governance structures, reporting systems, union involvement, regulatory models, and organizational culture. These contextual factors may influence how mobbing emerges, how silence is maintained, and how containment failures occur. Future research should examine sector-specific differences and assess how the model performs across diverse workplace environments, including healthcare, education, government, emergency services, corporate settings, and Indigenous community contexts. Third, while the model emphasizes early warning indicators and system response failures, additional research is needed to develop measurable tools and standardized metrics that organizations and investigators can use to assess risk and track outcomes over time. Future studies should test the CFW concept empirically, including how timing of response, quality of interim measures, and procedural safeguards influence injury severity, disability duration, turnover, and restoration of workplace trust. This includes evaluating the effects of transparent communication, inclusive procedural design, and balanced interim

protection for both complainant and respondent on injury trajectories and organizational trust. Finally, future research should explore implementation science approaches to evaluate which organizational interventions most effectively reduce escalation, prevent retaliation, and support recovery. This includes evaluating training models, investigation standards, restorative and repair-based practices, and trauma-informed procedural safeguards that protect worker dignity and psychological safety while maintaining accountability and integrity. Future studies should also examine how investigative outcome communication (including interpretation of "unsubstantiated" findings) influences workplace dynamics, perceived justice, and risk of recurrence.

Conclusion

The model outlined in this paper highlights that workplace mobbing is not only a behavioral issue but also a systemic concern. Mobbing escalates when early warning signals are ignored and when organizational processes, intentionally or unintentionally, amplify harm through delays, misclassification, confidentiality breaches, procedural inconsistencies, and failures to protect workers and witnesses from retaliation. The greatest preventable damage often occurs after the organization is alerted, when the CFW is missed, and psychological hazard exposure is converted into a cascading injury pathway. A phased, trauma-informed, systems approach can enhance prevention, improve intervention quality, and facilitate meaningful repair. The model aims to promote safer workplaces by aligning practice-based indicators with the evidence on mobbing. It specifies actionable failure points across three phases to guide decision-makers toward earlier intervention, greater procedural integrity, and sustainable reform (Leymann, 1996; Einarsen et al., 2020). Effective prevention and response require organizations to recognize early warning indicators, act within the CFW, and implement trauma-informed safeguards that reduce escalation, protect dignity, and support repair and rebuild trust. This includes transparent communication, inclusive process design, and balanced procedural safeguards that protect both complainant and respondent during due diligence (Burr & Wyatt, 2021). This paper is grounded in practice-based evidence and aligned with established research; however, systematic evaluation across sectors is needed to quantify the effects of reducing the CFW on health outcomes, retention, disability duration, and litigation risk. Future work should test phase-specific indicators, develop sector-adapted metrics for early detection and stabilization, and evaluate which procedural safeguards most effectively prevent institutional betrayal while preserving accountability and investigative integrity. This involves analyzing how organizations interpret and respond to outcomes that have not yet been verified, as well as whether post-process stabilization and repair practices help reduce recurrence and mitigate downstream harm.

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