

Workplace Mobbing vs. Workplace Bullying: Understanding the Distinction

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Abstract

Targeted victims of workplace mobbing experience severe harm to their professional reputations and undergo traumatic personal sufferings. However, few people, including targeted victims, know what workplace mobbing is. This paper seeks to address the gaps in public awareness and U.S. legislation regarding workplace mobbing, using examples from academia. The paper adopts a structural approach to identify ten distinctive patterns that differentiate workplace mobbing from workplace bullying. These patterns include deliberate intent, procedure, duration, consequences, covert tactics used, unanimity among perpetrators, characteristics of targets and the perpetrators, and various violence patterns and white-collar crime elements. The paper recognizes mobbing targets as potential victims of violence and white-collar crime. The paper encourages the institutionalization of mobbing research and invites further exploration in the field. Furthermore, leaders are called on to urgently respond by reforming policies and establishing anti-mobbing legislation.

Keywords: *Mobbing, Bullying, Mobbing Patterns, Violence, White-collar Crime, Anti-mobbing Legislation.*

Introduction

In the workplace, many people encounter long-lasting mobbing situations where they find themselves in a Kafkaesque, surreal environment. Everything that used to be under their control, from their daily routines and established patterns, to their carefully laid-out plans and their typical behavior, suddenly unravels. They do not understand what is happening. They start to fight in the hope to have their normal life back. After investing their time and energy and employing every resource at their disposal, they realize the more they fight, the further their life is off-track. Despite their best efforts, they ultimately find themselves powerless in the face of overwhelming and intricate forces that are at play. After years of relentless struggle, in the end, they lose nearly everything, with their dignity taking the hardest blow, leaving them feeling as though their very soul has been violated. They stand exposed, stripped bare in the unforgiving public eye. Desperate to find an escape, they realize there's no way out except through further humiliation. The harder they fight,

the deeper they sink into the quagmire, until they eventually vanish from public view. Spiritually, they find they are deserted on a remote isolated island. They know who has caused all of this, but there is no evidence to bring justice back. They are left with no options, and only find themselves solace in the darkness, weeping in the hidden corners of the world. Certainly, they recognize they're being bullied, but this goes beyond mere bullying.

This phenomenon is commonly referred to as workplace mobbing, and sometimes labeled as psycho-terror (Leymann, 1993). It is often discussed using the bullying and mobbing terms interchangeably, as recommended by certain researchers (e.g., Namie & Namie, 2003). However, it is important to note that there are distinguishing features that set workplace mobbing apart from the better-known phenomenon of workplace bullying. Many people remain unaware of the term workplace mobbing, but it exists in every workplace sector, especially perhaps in the health and higher education sectors. Workplace mobbing is soul-crushing. It is a violation of one's very essence. Mobbing torment persists for years, even decades. While many have endured this ordeal, only a few are cognizant that this phenomenon has already been named and defined. It is essential to name the devil in order to confront it. This study seeks to define the devil named workplace mobbing.

Comprehensively defining workplace mobbing poses significant challenges. The primary argument of this paper is that there is a clear distinction between mobbing and bullying, and it is crucial not to conflate these terms or to use them interchangeably. While bullying is a more commonly-used term, this study argues that mobbing better captures the collective nature, the process, the structural dynamics, the enduring nature of the process inflicted on the target, and the individual, institutional and society consequences involved. Mobbing goes much further than the actions of individual bullies.

Conceptual Confusion

In the realm of psychological and sociological studies on workplace conflict, researchers have introduced two distinct yet interconnected labels: mobbing and bullying. The workplace mobbing phenomenon is at times discussed interchangeably with workplace bullying (Beckman et al., 2013; Duffy, 2009; Einarsen et al., 2009; Friedenberg, 2008; Glendinning, 2001; Hodgins & McNamara, 2017; Keashly & Neuman, 2010; Lutgen-Sandvik & Tracy, 2011; Meiyun et al., 2014; Metzger et al., 2015; Namie, 2017; Namie & Namie, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2011; Parker, 2014; Pheko, 2018a, 2018b; Prevost & Hunt, 2018; Scott, 2018; Sepler, 2015; Twale & De Luca, 2008; Vega & Comer, 2005; Young, 2017). Some authors use the terms interchangeably for consistency and simplicity when researching these topics (McDonald, Begic, & Landrum, 2020). This interchangeability has raised concerns about potential semantic and conceptual confusion, and this issue has been touched upon by various scholars when studying unwelcoming workplace behaviors (Crawford, 2020; Davenport et al., 1999; Duffy & Sperry, 2007; Khoo, 2010; Leymann, 1990; Pompili et al., 2008; Westhues, 1998, 2002, 2004, 2006; Westhues & Jansen, 1999; Yildirim and Yildirim, 2006; Zapf et al., 1996).

Mobbing is commonly used interchangeably with bullying (Friedenberg, 2008; Prevost and Hunt, 2018) in the study of psychology, sociology, education, higher education, consulting psychology,

social psychology, applied psychology, psychiatry, psychiatric care, psychosomatic research, mental health, healthcare ethics, occupational health, clinical nursing, counseling, vocational behavior, administrative theory and practice, management, communication, human resources, human behavior, social work, employee responsibilities and rights, college and university law, workplace homicide, violence and victims, etc. Studies examining unwelcome behavior in the workplace often absorb mobbing and harassment into the single concept of bullying (Fevre, et al. 2010). There is hence semantic and constructive confusion between mobbing and bullying.

Many scholars express concern about the terminology (Martin, 2000; Westhues, 2006; Keashly & Jagatic, 2003; Bultena & Whatcott; Westhues, 2007). More attention is needed to address this semantic confusion issue since “Until evil is named, it cannot be addressed” (Davenport, Schwartz & Elliott, 1999). The lack of in-depth and insightful understanding hinders our ability to fully grasp the intricate dynamics of the mobbing phenomenon. By emphasizing the importance of a clear conceptual definition, we underscore the significance of rigorous measurement in scientific research. According to Westhues (2005, 2006), and also as described by Duffy (2009), the term bullying often evokes a stereotypical image of a two-person conflict, such as a playground fight. In contrast, mobbing involves multiple perpetrators and signifies a more complex problem that necessitates a nuanced solution beyond solely punishing an individual perpetrator. Furthermore, mobbing is often facilitated by a toxic organizational climate.

Mobbing should not be considered as a singular activity; instead, it consists of a range of actions. We can acknowledge that bullying can be viewed as a constituent element within the broader mobbing process. However, it is crucial to note that while bullying can be understood in a one-dimensional manner, mobbing encompasses process-oriented, multiple dimensions. The conceptualization of bullying already presents challenges (Fevre, et al. 2010), and the conceptualization of mobbing is even more complex and intricate. Other less interchangeably used terms include harassment, incivility, hazing, swarming, workplace mayhem (Maguire 1999; Davenport, Schwartz & Elliott, 1999) and ganging-up (Westhues, 2003).

While the term mobbing was initially introduced by Leymann to describe a prevalent yet often subtle form of workplace turmoil, there remains significant confusion and overlap between the terms mobbing and bullying. These two terms, despite some overlapping characteristics, hold distinct meanings. The analysis of the semantic confusion between mobbing and bullying provides a more nuanced understanding of these phenomena. However, providing comprehensive definitions for both workplace bullying and mobbing presents challenges, because bullying is inherently intertwined with the concept of mobbing. There is interconnectedness and interchangeability in this twin terminology. While distinguishing between mobbing and bullying can offer a more nuanced understanding of these phenomena, it is important to recognize that bullying is also inherently connected to mobbing. Consequently, conducting systematic and scientific research on workplace mobbing becomes exceedingly difficult, exacerbated by the challenges of measurement. Those who have experienced mobbing normally do not realize they are being mobbed rather than bullied. They

feel the torment, but since they have never heard of workplace mobbing, they do not know how to reveal their experience to others. This poses a challenge to mobbing scholars to get access to a large sample size.

The Importance of Clear Definitions

To conduct rigorous and valid scientific investigations, it is imperative to define the concept under study with the utmost clarity, particularly when considering the essential need for measurement in scientific research. The relationship between mobbing and bullying, as well as their differentiation from other related terms, often becomes blurred and unclear. A precise definition can enable researchers to develop accurate measurement tools and techniques that align with the conceptual boundaries of the phenomenon being explored. By establishing clear measurement criteria, researchers can collect data that accurately captures the relevant aspects of the concept, ensuring the reliability and validity of their findings. Unwelcome workplace behavior measurement plays a pivotal role in determining the validity and reliability of any research study, particularly in workplace bullying studies (Fevre, et al. 2010). Therefore, a valid measurement stands as a primary requirement for scientific research on workplace mobbing. The insightful work of Westhues (2005, 2006) sheds light on the intricate nature of mobbing and underscores the importance of adopting comprehensive approaches to address this problem. Additionally, autoethnographic approaches such as case studies also contribute to our understanding of workplace mobbing. It is important to note that such case studies are rooted in firsthand experiences of workplace mobbing.

Adding to the complexity of measuring workplace mobbing, defining workplace bullying also presents a challenge, as it has yet to be accurately encapsulated by a precise definition (Bartlett and Bartlett, 2011; Scott, 2018). A clear concept definition enables researchers to establish a common understanding within the scientific community, facilitating effective communication, collaboration, and replication of research outcomes. The absence of a precise and unambiguous definition for a concept leads to flawed and invalid conclusions, particularly when it comes to distinguishing between bullying and mobbing. The International Labor Organization (ILO) proposes an identifiable alarming rise in mobbing as a significant issue within workplaces (Karavardar, 2009). Studies suggest that 18%- 70% of the US workforce experienced bullying behaviors (Keashly, et al. 2004, Cortina, et al. 2001). In a study amongst university employees, Keashly & Neuman (2010) found that 63.4% of colleagues were deemed to be labeled as bullies by faculty, whereas 52.9% of superiors were seen as bullies by their staff. From these statistics, we can see that inferences vary a great deal as different research utilizes different measurement schemes. When a concept lacks a precise and unambiguous definition, the absence of clear measurement parameters leads to flawed and invalid inferences. Prospective codes or laws aimed at prohibiting such behaviors also necessitate the establishment of unequivocal definitions and the recognition of pertinent distinctions.

The Origins and Development of Workplace Mobbing Studies

To gain a deeper understanding and definition of workplace mobbing, it is essential to explore the concept's origins and its evolving definitions. The term workplace mobbing was initially coined by

the late Swedish psychologist Heinz Leymann who conducted extensive research and documentation of mobbing incidents among adults, sometimes within highly professional and regulated work environments. He combined research on mobbing with treating mobbing victims for post-traumatic syndrome disorder (PTSD) (Leymann, 1996, 2000). Thus began the idea that bullying and mobbing should be considered as distinct phenomena. The term mobbing had until then been used almost exclusively in zoology, characterizing the behavior of small birds aggressively ganging up on a larger, predator bird. Leymann derived the term mobbing from the work of ethologist Konrad Lorenz, who had previously studied this phenomenon of ganging-up observed among birds (Davenport, et al., 1999; Westhues, 2003).

In 1984, Leymann recognized a distinct form of workplace malaise and introduced the term mobbing to describe this human behavior. Leymann characterized mobbing behavior as a form of psychological violence or "psycho-terror," carried out by multiple individuals against another person, demonstrating systematic, hostile, and unethical communication and ganging-up (cited in Westhues, 2004, p. 99; Davenport, Schwartz, & Elliott, 2003, pp. 4-5). This is directed in a systematic way towards one individual who, due to the mobbing, is pushed into a helpless and defenseless position (Leymann, 1996, p. 168; see also 1990). Leymann's conceptualization of workplace mobbing goes beyond individual acts and emphasizes an impassioned, collective campaign by co-workers aimed at excluding, punishing, and humiliating a targeted worker (Leymann, 1990, 1996).

This collective nature sets workplace mobbing apart from other forms of mistreatment in the workplace. Leymann's contribution was to document and study this mistreatment among adults, sometimes in highly professionalized, rule-bound, ostensibly civilized workplaces. According to Friedenberg (2008), Leymann's work sparked a strong interest in mobbing in Europe, leading to the enactment of anti-mobbing legislation in several countries (SEIN, 2004; Cox, 2004; Ferrari, 2004; ITW, 2004; Kvinnoforum, 2004). International researchers have approached the subject from various angles. The European Commission took an active role by supporting multiple studies on workplace mobbing in countries such as Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, the UK, Belgium, and Sweden. These studies explored the prevalence, characteristics, costs, and legislation related to mobbing, often with a specific emphasis on female victims (Meschkatat, Stackelbeck, & Langenhoff, 2002; Rajda, 2006; SEIN, 2004; Cox, 2004; Ferrari, 2004; ITW, 2004; Kvinnoforum, 2004). Research primarily consisted of descriptive self-help literature, incorporating case studies and surveys. They were often authored by individuals who have personally experienced or witnessed mobbing, workplace bullying, or abuse (Martin, 2000). During the 1990s, ten significant books on workplace mobbing and bullying were published, with seven of them originating in North America (Martin, 2000).

By coining the term workplace mobbing and providing a comprehensive description, Leymann laid the foundation for understanding and exploring this phenomenon within academic and research contexts. Leymann's conceptualization shaped the early study of workplace mobbing (Davenport et

al., 1999) and academic mobbing (Ginsberg, 2011; MacDonald et al., 2018; Westhues, 1998, 2004, 2006) in the social sciences. Research on mobbing has continued to evolve since Leymann's passing in 1999 (Westhues, 1998, 2002; Friedenberg, 1998; Davenport, 1999). Davenport et al. (1999) made notable contributions to the study of workplace mobbing, drawing from their own firsthand experiences with workplace mobbing. Their studies provide valuable insights into the phenomenon of mobbing in corporate contexts. Scholars from diverse fields, many of whom may have been victims or witnesses of mobbing, have begun to address this issue within their respective domains (Friedenberg, 1998).

In North America, Sociologist Kenneth Westhues has conducted extensive longitudinal academic mobbing research based on the analysis of over 150 academic mobbing cases. His utilization of Leymann's model demonstrates the enduring influence of Leymann's work and its significance in exploring and understanding workplace mobbing, particularly in the context of academia (Westhues, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2006). This work has contributed significantly to the study of academic mobbing. Westhues has published many academic mobbing case studies with Edwin Mellen Press, a world-leading academic publisher in the field of mobbing (1998, 2004, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2008). These publications include several volumes that delve into case studies, profiles, and personal accounts. Some of these publications include in-depth analyses, drawing comparisons, and identifying patterns. The Edwin Mellen Press covers mobbing in various disciplines, with a particular emphasis on its occurrence in higher education. For example, an important academic mobbing case study conducted by Westhues (2002, 2003, 2006) analyzed an incident at Medaille College in 2002, utilizing Leymann workplace mobbing model and revealing that the dynamics observed closely adhered to the framework first outlined by Leymann in his workplace mobbing model.

Mobbing is a form of bullying rather than a mere synonym for it (Westhues, 2004). Westhues (2005; 2006) emphasizes the significance of differentiating between these terms. His work sheds light on the importance of understanding the nuances and distinctions between bullying and mobbing. According to Westhues, workplace mobbing is "the collective expression of the eliminative impulse in formal organizations. It is a conspiracy of employees, sometimes acknowledged but more often not, to humiliate, degrade, and get rid of a fellow employee, when rules prevent achievement of these ends.... It is a shared outpouring of irrationality upon the mundane, bureaucratic landscape of modern work" (2003, p.42). The tactics can differ. Workplace mobbing is normally carried out politely and nonviolently. "The participants are so convinced of the rightness of their exclusionary campaign that they usually leave ample written records, proudly signing their names to extreme deprecations and defamations, without noticing how thin or nonexistent the supporting evidence is. The object of the process is the same as among chickens or teenagers: crushing the target's identity and eliminating him or her totally from respectable company" (Westhues, 2004, p.99).

Influenced by Leymann and Westhues, research on mobbing continues to evolve (Crawford, 2020; Duffy & Sperry, 2007; Friedenberg, 2008; Harper, 2013a, 2013b, 2020; Seguin, 2016). Duffy (2009) describes mobbing as: "The nonsexual harassment of a coworker by a group of other workers or

other members of an organization designed to secure the removal from the organization of the one who is targeted. Mobbing results in the humiliation, devaluation, discrediting, degradation, loss of professional reputation, and, usually, the removal of the target of the organization with all the concomitant financial, career, health, and psychological implications that one might expect from a protracted traumatizing experience.” (Duffy, 2009, p.245). Mobbing has also been characterized as “a sophisticated form of ganging-up behavior observed among academicians” (Khoo, 2010, p. 61), “a pernicious and hazardous workplace affliction” and “a calculated process in which the individual psychologies of both aggressors and victims offer no insight into comprehending the phenomenon” (Segal, 2010, p.1). These studies provide valuable insights into the phenomenon of mobbing in various contexts, as they acknowledge common elements of workplace mobbing, identify patterns of mobbing behavior, address the detrimental effects it has on individuals, and develop preventive interventions. Namie & Namie (2010) agree that the reports from the Grievance Committee in the cases of Warden and Watson in Medaille College case study (Westhues, 2002, 2003, 2006) shed light on a crucial defining attribute of workplace mobbing, differentiating it from the related pathology of bullying. These reports highlight specific characteristics that set workplace mobbing apart, emphasizing its distinct nature within the broader spectrum of workplace mistreatment.

Distinctions between Mobbing and Bullying

Based largely on Westhues’ paradigm and this author’s research, this study proposes uni-dimensional bullying and multi-dimensional mobbing paradigms, as well as differing bullying and mobbing process models. Scholars have highlighted notable commonalities shared by both phenomena, and it is admittedly impossible to discuss the mobbing process without analyzing the presence of bullying within it. These commonalities encompass various components, including harassment, threats, belittling opinions, public humiliation, name-calling insults, intentional withholding of information or praise, undue pressure at work, setting impossible deadlines, assigning meaningless tasks, reprisals, and instances of racism (Namie and Namie, 2001). These shared elements serve as illustrative examples that underline the harmful dynamics present in both bullying and mobbing scenarios. They contribute to a broader understanding of the damaging impact these behaviors can have on individuals within the workplace. While these examples capture some key aspects, it is important to recognize that workplace bullying and workplace mobbing can manifest in diverse ways and may involve additional factors beyond those mentioned.

In essence, the mobbing process represents a process of elimination, in part consisting of a series of sequential bullying actions. This mobbing-bullying connection is one of the primary reasons why scholarly literature often utilizes the terms bullying and mobbing interchangeably, treating them as general synonyms or twin terms. By acknowledging the interconnectedness of mobbing and bullying, researchers are able to delve into a comprehensive examination of the mobbing phenomenon. This approach enables a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play, facilitating the development of effective strategies for prevention and intervention in the workplace. By recognizing the multi-dimensionality of mobbing and its detrimental effects, we can take more

comprehensive measures to address this workplace cancer and create healthier and more supportive organizational environments.

The multi-dimensional nature of the mobbing process in part arises from the aggregation of numerous bullying actions. These actions represent an accumulation of repeated individual, unidimensional bullying acts. However, Leymann (1994) acknowledged the multifaceted nature of mobbing behavior but also emphasized its process-oriented aspect. To provide a clearer understanding of the concept, Leymann (1994) compiled an extensive list of 45 indicators of mobbing. This catalog of mobbing indicators serves as a remarkable inventory of bureaucratic mistreatment, encompassing examples such as constant interruption, isolation in a separate room, restricted communication imposed by management, assignment of meaningless or hazardous tasks, and being subjected to treatment suggesting mental illness. These indicators shed light on the diverse manifestations of mobbing within the workplace.

The bullying actions mentioned by the author correspond to Leymann's (1994) mobbing indicators. The process facet of the mobbing syndrome aligns with Leymann's (1994) Five Stages/Phases model. It is crucial to comprehend that mobbing extends beyond isolated acts or singular actions; instead, it is a multifaceted, intricate, and dynamic process that manifests through various bullying actions. According to Westhues (2004), bullying encompasses various combinations of parties and behaviors that contribute to an abusive work environment, while mobbing suggests either spontaneous or planned group action. In this current study, the author acknowledges that bullying is an integral part of the mobbing process, as mobbing represents, in part, an aggregation of bullying.

The Distinctive Patterns of the Mobbing Process

What distinguishes mobbing from bullying? Mobbing is sometimes disguised under the term of bullying, but bullying is only a small subset of mobbing. Mobbing is more intricate and encompasses more dimensions than bullying. This study draws from a comprehensive literature review, including the academic mobbing portal of Westhues,¹ intensive interviews, focus groups, and extensive analysis of thousands of pages of court documents from academic mobbing cases, to dissect the various dimensions of the mobbing process. An emphasis of this study is placed on highlighting the distinctions between mobbing and bullying and underscoring the reasons for not conflating these terms. Researchers employing mobbing terms concur on these defining features of the construct (Metzger et al., 2015; Prevost & Hunt, 2018; Twale & DeLuca, 2008).

Pattern One: Premeditated Elimination Intent

The fundamental distinction between mobbing and bullying is that mobbing is premeditated, driven by a clear intention of eliminating a person from an organization. While bullying may be sporadic and takes unique forms through specific actions, mobbing is consistently marked by careful

¹ Kenneth Westhues's Academic Mobbing Portal: <http://www.mobbingportal.com/westhuk.html>

planning. Bullying involves “persistent exposure to interpersonal aggression and mistreatment from colleagues, superiors, or subordinates” (Einarsen et al., 2009, p. 24). In contrast, mobbing implies planned group action, always accompanied by a clear intent of the pursuit of elimination (Westhues, 2004). Both contribute to an abusive, hostile and, with mobbing, toxic work environment. The data analysis findings underscore the consistency of this underlying pattern. The mobbing process signifies a calculated manipulation aimed at the elimination of a targeted victim, effectively constituting a conspiracy to remove fellow employees (Westhues, 2003). This entails malevolent consistent rudeness and the systematic display of immoral and hostile behavior by individuals and a group towards a vulnerable individual (Alderson & İz, 1990).

Bullying can be random and unplanned, with no obvious intent, but mobbing is always premeditated with a clear intent. The ultimate objective of workplace mobbing remains consistent: to crush the targeted individual's identity and completely eliminate them from reputable social circles. Westhues (2004) succinctly captures this aim, shedding light on the destructive nature of workplace mobbing and its impact on the target's sense of belonging and social standing. While each mobbing experience may vary in its specific details, the underlying elimination pattern remains consistent. This elimination can take different forms, either through physically forcing the target out of the workplace, leaving them with emotional trauma, or emotionally devastating the individual while they remain in their current position. The deliberate degradation of the target, accompanied by the imposition of the stigma of despicability upon their very being, serves as a defining characteristic of workplace mobbing (Westhues, 2002).

Pattern Two: Mobbing is a Process

The second distinctive pattern of workplace mobbing pertains to the process itself. Early scholars not only recognized the multifaceted nature of mobbing behavior but also underscored its process-oriented aspect (Leymann, 1996; Westhues, 1998). As previously discussed, it's imperative to grasp that mobbing transcends isolated acts or singular actions. It is the result of an escalated culmination of a series of workplace incidents. It constitutes a multifaceted, intricate, sustained, and dynamic process with the goal of elimination. While workplace bullying can be linked to individual acts as in dots on a page, mobbing forms more of a continuous wave of a comprehensive, intangible and abstract toxic work environment. The hostility that mobbing targeted victims encounter often revolves in part around individual acts of bullying, but it is the amalgamation of these bullying activities within the overall process that collectively gives rise to the mobbing syndrome.

These seemingly independent but highly coordinated acts of bullying combine to a considerable extent. This combination occurs over escalating phases in the mobbing process, eventually culminating in a complex and interconnected mobbing pattern. This intricate and interconnected mobbing pattern is what very few people are aware of. To illustrate, bullying acts can be thought of as individual trees, and the mobbing process as the forest. The challenge lies in the fact that most individuals only perceive the trees, and it takes a concerted effort to have an overview of the forest. The mobbing process unfolds through distinct and evolving phases that intensify over time,

ultimately culminating in the achievement of the goal: the elimination of the target. Should the perpetrators fall short in their mission to eliminate the target, another round of mobbing is often triggered, characterized by even more escalated processes, which persist until the elimination objective is met. The mobbing process is also a process of deteriorating hostile-to-toxic work environments.

Leymann (1996) and Westhues (1998) introduced the *Five Phases of Mobbing* model as a way to break down the mobbing process. The model was subsequently adopted by other scholars (Harper, 2013a; Khoo, 2010; Seguin, 2016; Staub, 2015). These phases include one, *ostracism*, which involves isolating the victim from influence and support. Examples include relocating the victim's parking space to the outer reaches of the lot, giving cold shoulder, or isolating them in a separate office location. Two, *administrative harassment*, which includes frequent interruption, restricted communication imposed by management, assignment of meaningless or hazardous tasks, or being subjected to treatment that implies mental illness. The victim may be forced to undergo a fitness-for-duty examination, experience repeated delays or misplacement of administrative requests, and have their classes or meetings scheduled at inconvenient times. Three, *a critical incident*, which involves an action by the target that finally triggers formal retribution. Four, *various appeal procedures* are initiated, but all with the objective of five, *elimination* of the target.

Pattern Three: Persistence

The third distinguishing pattern of workplace mobbing pertains to its long-lasting duration. To classify specific behaviors as mobbing, it's generally required that the attacking behaviors be repeated at least once a week for a minimum of six months (Leymann, 1996). Mobbing attacks are often a daily occurrence with a form of consistent trivial bullying; however, the spectrum of the mobbing process duration is quite broad, ranging from approximately six months (Housker & Saiz, 2006) to as long as eighteen months, and sometimes extending over even many years (Seguin, 2016; Staub, 2015). This duration is contingent upon the resources at the disposal of the target, including time, financial means, energy, and their overall health. These resources are decisive factors on how long the targeted victim persists in resisting and fighting, at what juncture the target opts to escape, or if they elect to battle until they've exhausted all available resources. Throughout their protracted battle, mobbing targeted victims endeavor to keep their case actively under administrative scrutiny. They exhaust all available internal resources, pursue arbitration, petition various boards of governors, initiate court actions, and may even seek publicity to rectify what they perceive as a miscarriage of justice. The longer the targeted victim resists submission and avoids fleeing, the more pronounced the abuse becomes. The longer the duration, the greater it is that other colleagues will be sucked into the situation, involuntarily or voluntarily. As the targeted victim persists in resisting, allegations and humiliations accumulate, accompanied by concerted efforts to terminate the target. Mobbing targeted victims are subject to enduring, soul-crushing ordeals spanning years or even decades.

Pattern Four: Consequences

The fourth pattern of workplace mobbing can be characterized as its "low incidence, severe consequences" nature. Some scholars neglect to distinguish between mobbing and bullying and propose that they both can lead to similar consequences. To name but a few, Pheko (2018a) suggests that both forms of mistreatment can result in outcomes such as a loss of dignity, decreased self-confidence and productivity, and an excessive amount of non-work-related stress, along with various related health issues. Mobbing consequences can encompass all of the bullying consequences, and what differentiates a mobbing case from a bullying case, other than its lower incidence, is the final elimination. However, empirical studies demonstrate significant differences in the consequences of bullying and mobbing (Davenport et al., 1999; Westhues, 2006). Mobbing, in particular, exerts consequences at both individual and institutional levels. At the individual level, mobbing consequences extend far beyond the mere termination of employment. Its gravest impact lies in the allegations and accusations directed at the targeted individuals, tarnishing their personal identity.

Mobbing inflicts humiliation, devaluation, discrediting, degradation, mental exhaustion, loss of professional reputation, entanglement in prolonged legal battles, permanent unemployment or underemployment (Segal, 2010), associated financial loss, career ruin, debilitating health conditions, and psychological consequences that entail protracted traumatizing experiences (Duffy, 2009; Duffy & Sperry, 2007). Mobbing targeted victims are branded as shameful, wicked individuals, compelling them to take extreme measures to escape the emotional torment. The enduring impact of mobbing resonates throughout the targeted victim's sense of belonging and social standing, resulting in lasting emotional trauma and psychological terror that can lead to profound personal and professional wounds, debilitating health conditions, and suicide. All of these go beyond mere personality clashes. Research reveals a significantly elevated suicide rate among mobbing targeted victim (Pompili et al., 2008). It is estimated that approximately 12 percent of professors subjected to mobbing ultimately commit suicide (Leymann, 1987; Seguin, 2016). A poignant example is the tragic case of Justine Sergeant, a neurologist at McGill University, who, along with her husband, took her own life in 1994 (Westhues, 2004).

For mobbing targeted victims who manage to endure the attacks and retain their positions, they find themselves completely isolated from reputable social circles. The perpetrators succeed in permanently diminishing the targeted victims, leaving them with lowered self-esteem, reduced productivity, and enduring feelings of self-doubt, shame, worthlessness, humiliation, unhappiness, and desperation. This emotional turmoil is often accompanied by stress-related physical health issues (Khoo, 2010). Leymann, who combined research on mobbing with treating mobbing targeted victims for PTSD (Leymann, 2000; Leymann & Gustafsson, 1996), highlights that only a few targeted victims can extricate themselves from the relentless and insidious schemes devised by their tormentors. All the while, the perpetrators evade punishment and remain empowered to select new targets (Faria et al., 2012; Khoo, 2010; McDonald et al., 2018).

Mobbing's consequences also extend beyond the targeted victims. Mobbing results in multiple victims, including the perpetrators themselves, either directly or indirectly. It's essential to recognize that mobbing can trigger a boomerang effect (June, 2009; Westhues, 2004). Perpetrators should be aware that their actions may incite a substantial counterattack from their targets. Consequently, the mobbing targeted victim may, at times, transform into a mobbing perpetrator. The insidious and detrimental impact of mobbing permeates. It undermines the well-being and functionality within a social or professional setting.

Pattern Five: Unanimity

The fifth distinctive pattern of workplace mobbing revolves around the peculiarly devastating appearance of unanimity, where the prevailing belief is that everyone of significance deems the targeted victims unworthy and desires their removal. A comprehensive analysis of multiple cases reveals adversarial recommendations supported by unanimous agreement at various levels of perpetrators and that the recommendations are offered with the unanimous approval of the committee members (Westhues, 2003). For a profound understanding of workplace mobbing, a Talmudic principle often cited by the late French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas is particularly proper: "If everyone is in agreement to condemn someone accused, release him, for he must be innocent" (Westhues, 2004, quoted in Girard 2001, p. 118). In a specific case study, the tenure and promotion committee displayed unanimous opposition, with none of the committee members supporting the targeted victim's tenure. The department head, the dean, the provost, the president, and all members of the Board of Regents committee voted against the targeted victim's tenure. The sole decision in favor of this target's tenure came from an external arbitrator. In the same case, the targeted victim was falsely accused of research misconduct, and an external inquiry committee's voting was also unanimous.

Pattern Six: Covertiness

The sixth distinctive pattern of workplace mobbing is characterized by the often covert nature that permeates all stages of the mobbing process. In contrast to bullying, which often involves overt and easily identifiable behaviors, workplace mobbing typically unfolds in a discreet and sometimes falsely polite manner (Westhues, 2003). It employs insinuating tactics (Alderson & İz, 1990) and is shrouded in deception, making it hidden to most onlookers and challenging to prove without resorting to external legal procedures. Understanding this covert pattern is crucial because individuals may not realize they are being mobbed unless they progress through all stages of the mobbing process. The covert aspect is perhaps the most distressing part. While there are recognizable symptoms and empirical indicators that suggest an exclusionary process has crossed the boundaries of rationality and civility, the largely invisible nature of the mobbing process makes it exceedingly difficult to ascertain whether elimination is genuinely occurring.

Targeted victims attempt to help themselves by working through what are presumably trustworthy systems for appeal, seeking help from human resource departments and/or faculty unions, but ultimately find themselves trapped in what can be described as a Kafkaesque situation, a situation

that turns nightmarish and offers no escape from suffering. Hidden by the bureaucratic machinery of the institution, the acts against them are complex, bizarre, or illogical and can become apparent suddenly and overwhelmingly. The covert nature of the mobbing process can result in a sudden about-face experience for the targeted victims. Everything seems fine and fair until they've gotten so far into the process that they're utterly lost. There is no opportunity to see it coming and the victim gets ambushed. In one case study, the targeted victim received five years of positive pre-tenure evaluations only to face a last-minute denial of tenure accompanied by a 26-page tenure and promotion evaluation letter (far longer than the standard 5-page letter), unfounded allegations of research misconduct, false accusations of suicidal tendency, forced fitness-for-duty examinations, and threats to the targeted victim's classroom responsibilities despite clearance by a psychologist. Targeted victims in general, being highly vulnerable, find it nearly impossible to fend off such concerted efforts. However, if the targeted victim chooses to flee, as in the above-mentioned case, the targeted victim will never be exonerated from research misconduct allegations nor receive a favorable arbitrator's decision. This mobbing case will remain unrecognized forever and the targeted victim will have to live in the lifetime shadow of the research misconduct accusation.

The covert nature of mobbing can be likened to the stealthy behavior of cancer cells. When targeted victims eventually realize they have been mobbed, it is often too late, and they may not fully comprehend what has transpired. In some cases, this awareness only dawns upon them after they have left the workplace, particularly since many targeted victims end up not fighting. For instance, in one case study, the gap between the initiation of mobbing and the targeted victim's realization of being mobbed was approximately 3 years, coinciding with the initiation of legal actions. Only at this point could speculative evidence be confirmed through a review of court documents, such as interviews of witnesses. In most situations, mobbing victims may never fully understand why they were targeted or even that they were subjected to mobbing. This lingering uncertainty may persist throughout the targeted victim's lives and lead to constant flashbacks. They cannot help wondering what is exactly going on. Another covert aspect is that mobbing cases are frequently concealed from public view. A major reason is the targets are forced to accept the settlements and agree to not discuss the events when the perpetrators realized they were wrong.

Pattern Seven: Violence

The seventh pattern of workplace mobbing is the violence pattern. Although workplace mobbing is typically executed in a seemingly polite manner, with an appearance and format that lacks overt physical violence, it's important to acknowledge that workplace mobbing is not truly non-violent. It is bloodless yet bloody. The mobbing term itself has its origins in violence and since the inception of the workplace mobbing term, it has been recognized as a form of psychological violence (Leymann, 1990). In fact, Leymann initially published his paper in a journal entitled *Violence and Victims*. As already noted, Leymann combined research and writing about mobbing with treating mobbing victims for PTSD (Leymann, 1996). However, it is worth noting that no recent articles on workplace mobbing have been published in victim and violence journals such as *Victimology*, among others.

Workplace mobbing involves a process that results in substantial emotional and psychological violence. These personal attacks are equivalent to animal behavior (Harper, 2013b, 2020). It is “workplace malaise” (Leymann, 1987), “lynching” (Alderson & İz, 1990), “lynchings and witch hunts,” (Westhues, 2004), “sucking your blood without breaking the skin” (Westhues, 1998), “institutionalization of cruelty, a vicious social elimination process” (Davenport et al., 1999). Compared to physical assault, the soul-crushing damaging impact of mobbing is primarily psychological, resulting in lasting mental harm that can ultimately lead to severe physical health issues. In mobbing cases, both the mental and physical effects are enduring, comparable to the dynamics of domestic violence (Scott, 2018). It revolves around issues of power and control, reflecting patterns of dominance and subordination concerning aggression against one’s own kind (Harper, 2013a, 2013b). The perpetrators relish their power, often targeting subordinates whom they perceive as legitimately inferior (Glendinning, 2001) and vulnerable. Perpetrators derive satisfaction from their actions, believing it enhances their power, and they will persist in their behavior until it is halted by effective external intervention.

It is important to note that addressing domestic violence required years of legislative efforts to develop comprehensive measures. Society should treat workplace mobbing as seriously as it treats domestic violence. By drawing parallels to domestic violence, we recognize the severity and long-lasting impact of workplace mobbing. It highlights the urgent need for legislative and organizational measures to address and prevent this form of psychological violence within the workplace. Understanding the historical context and parallels with domestic violence legislation can inform strategies to combat workplace mobbing effectively and promote a healthier and safer work environment. Given the profoundly distressing nature of this mental and psychological violence, it might be beneficial to introduce various degrees of mobbing, such as First-Degree Mobbing, Second-Degree Mobbing, and so forth, in parallel to Lutgen-Sandvik and Tracy’s (2004) categorizations of bullying degrees. These classifications could serve as a practical starting point for the formal recognition and legal response to workplace mobbing. By drawing an analogy to degrees of criminal offenses like rape or murder, mobbing can be likened to acts that cause severe emotional or psychological harm, essentially murdering the target’s soul, leaving mobbing targeted victims mentally disabled and emotionally dead.

Pattern Eight: Mobbing Victim Characteristics

The eighth pattern of workplace mobbing pertains to the characteristics of mobbing targeted victims. Unlike bullying victims, mobbing victims exhibit a unidimensional age distribution, primarily consisting of adults who share common attributes. In most instances, mobbing is directed at a single target, though there are instances of multiple mobbing targets within a single case, as exemplified by the mobbing case at Medaille College (Westhues, 2003).

Westhues identifies the common characteristics of mobbing victims. The targeted victims of academic mobbing typically share several distinctive characteristics. They often are high achievers, often recognized as experts or superiors within their field (Khoo, 2010; Tigrel & Kokalan, 2009;

Westhues, 2004). They are not only productive but also represent one of the institution's most valuable assets (Khoo, 2010; Westhues, 2004). They are furthermore successful and influential within the organization (Tigrel & Kokalan, 2009; Westhues, 2004). Additionally, many of the targeted victims are principled whistle-blowers, often exposing wrongdoing by influential figures within the workplace (Khoo, 2010; Martin & Beese, 2018; Tigrel & Kokalan, 2009; Westhues, 2004). A significant portion consists of tenured professors who publicly address administrative misconduct (Faria et al., 2012; Khoo, 2010; McDonald et al., 2018; Tigrel & Kokalan, 2009). These individuals are known for their cooperative, creative, dedicated, empathetic, experienced, fair, just, loyal, and organized attributes (Housker & Saiz, 2006; Tigrel & Kokalan, 2009; Westhues, 2004). Furthermore, they often belong to religious minority groups within the institution (Tigrel & Kokalan, 2009). Mobbing targeted victims have a propensity for promoting new ideas, posing a challenge and threat to established norms and practices (Housker & Saiz, 2006; Westhues, 2004). These targets are selected for their intelligence, innovation, high-achieving nature, integrity, and principled approach (Khoo, 2010; Westhues, 2004). Additionally, some have accents that make them stand out (Westhues, 2004).

Pattern Nine: Mobbing Perpetrator Characteristics

The ninth distinctive mobbing pattern is that mobbing perpetrators have certain characteristics. The term bullying often evokes a stereotypical image of a two-person conflict, such as a playground fight. Workplace mobbing goes beyond individual acts (Leymann, 1987). They group together in a “gang-up scenario” (Davenport et al., 1999; Khoo, 2010; Westhues, 2003). Mobbing involves multiple adult perpetrators from multiple layers in formal organizations, primarily, perhaps, in the health and education sectors, particularly in higher education institutions (Davenport et al., 2019; MacDonald et al., 2018). It is believed that the academic field is one that has a setting for this form of behavior due to tenure, which allows for faculty to develop long-term relationships with each other (Keashly & Neuman, 2010, (McKay et al., 2008). The multiple relational layers in a mobbing have vertical, lateral, and a mixture of both vertical and lateral components. It is a “collective campaign by co-workers aimed at excluding, punishing, and humiliating a targeted worker” (Leymann, 1996, p. 168). It is an adversarial antagonistic collective action. This collective nature sets workplace mobbing apart from other forms of mistreatment in the workplace. It signifies a more complex problem that necessitates a nuanced solution beyond solely punishing the individual perpetrators (Duffy, 2009; Westhues, 2005, 2006).

Despite the collective nature, in mobbing situations, a clear divide emerges. There is always a dominant figure, the chief eliminator, the active perpetrator, the “alpha” (Harper 2020), or the “Queen Bee,” (Ross & Sasso 2020) with everyone else from multiple levels in a particular institution aligning themselves on the side of the dominant figure. The dominant figures are mostly high-level administrators or those who have influence on high-level administration. They tend to be part of the old guard and among the less highly-performing, the ones who feel threatened by the high performance, integrity, and/or change-driving traits of the targets. They gang-up with a group of

others, the passive perpetrators, or “passive evil” (Samier, 2008), forming an opposing side. In academic mobbing, the passive perpetrators may include the dean, the department head, the provost, the president, ad hoc committee and other particular committee members, and other administrators, professors, trustees, secretaries, and students. Among these passive perpetrators, the unions should be called out specifically. Among almost all of the analyzed mobbing cases, the union abuses the power of their representation of the faculty as a weapon, either actively joining the chief eliminators, or taking side with the administrators, and against the targeted victims. Instead of representing all faculty, the unions end up being a unique impedance to actual justice.

The passive perpetrators either intentionally or unintentionally join the mobbing campaign, gossip behind the scenes or are bystanders indifferent to the campaign as it progresses. Those who choose not to support the targeted victims are afraid of retaliation even when they know something is going on (Faria et al., 2012; Khoo, 2010; McDonald et al., 2018) or just do not know what is going on and just follow what everyone is doing. Within the active perpetrators and passive perpetrators, a clear hierarchy is established. The dominant figures are the active perpetrators who poison against the targeted victims.

Pattern Ten: Criminality?

The tenth pattern of workplace mobbing is the neglect of this unique form of white-collar crime, particularly within academic settings, often described as “Crime in the Suite.” Workplace mobbing is characterized by offenses such as fraud, constructive fraud, and misrepresentation. These crimes occur within the realm of highly professionalized workplaces, with the perpetrators operating at three distinct levels: the individual level, the organizational level, and occasionally, even at the state level. In line with Black’s Law Dictionary, fraud is defined as:

“an intentional perversion of the truth, a false representation of a matter of fact, whether through words or conduct, involving false or misleading allegations, or the concealment of information that should have been disclosed, all with the intent to deceive another. It encompasses a calculated combination of bullying acts, the suppression of truth, direct falsehood, or innuendo, whether communicated through speech, silence, words, looks, or gestures, all with the goal of deception. It includes any actions, omissions, or concealments that breach a legal or equitable duty and lead to harm to another.”

Academic mobbing, as it relates to fraud, involves the manipulation of language, misrepresentation of facts, and procedural maneuvers to distort the targeted victim’s motivations, speech, or behavior (Faria et al., 2012; Khoo, 2010; McDonald et al., 2018). The chief eliminator employs constructive fraud prejudicial to public welfare. They make it look unconnected with any selfish or evil design. Once a false statement of fact, an inaccurate representation, or an untrue assertion is accepted, this constructive fraud distorts perceptions of the actual conditions.

People often disregard evidence that contradicts existing beliefs. When mobbing is mistakenly viewed as bullying, these issues will never be put into any administrator’s already busy agenda. These

daily human interactions are regarded and treated as a trivial issue which is assumed will fade away without substantial consequences. Administrators may wish to “not get involved in department politics”. As such, no substantial attention is paid. Without acknowledging the mobbing situations as inequivalent to bullying, the administration fails to predict possible adversarial outcomes. Thus, no effective interventions and precautionary measures are developed to terminate the problem in an early stage.

The root of mobbing is that administrators consistently diagnose the situation incorrectly, viewing any response from the targeted victims as further confirmation that the target is the root of the problem (Khoo, 2010). Evidently, the chief eliminator cannot make significant progress without the backing of the administration and the passive support of numerous perpetrators. They often align themselves with the majority, particularly the united front of those engaged in mobbing (Gravois, 2006). The mobbing unanimity pattern reinforces administrators' initial inclination to side with the unanimous majority. They would rather choose to rely on deceit, falsehoods, lies and the covering-up of the evidence, facts, and truth than realize that it's in their best interests to prevent this. They just want it to go away. As more and more perpetrators become involved, regardless of how passive their roles are, this collective action culminates in mobbing. In academia, the administration, a collective identity shared by chairs, deans, human resources staff, provosts, and other administrators, takes on a corporate role of responsibility for the overall workplace. These passive perpetrators make up the majority in such scenarios, unanimously ganging-up against the single target.

The chief eliminator's constructive fraud campaign, together with administrators' wrongful diagnosis, paves the way for a broader institutional constructive fraud, resulting in institutional betrayal. This sets the stage for a larger-scale constructive fraud, even though it may not have originated from any actual evil design. As already noted above, they are so resolute in their belief in the legitimacy of their exclusionary campaign that they frequently leave behind copious written evidence, openly associating their names with severe defamatory statements and accusations, often overlooking or deliberately disregarding the insubstantial or absent supporting evidence (Westhues, 2003). At the core of institutional betrayal is the refusal of the perpetrators to acknowledge their wrongdoing and their resistance to admitting error (Behr, 2010). Leymann's findings indicate that there is no record of an employer acknowledging fault and providing redress for the wrongs suffered by the employee (Leymann, 1990). When a college or university attaches a stigma of turpitude to a professor and expels them officially, it frequently exhibits extreme reluctance to reverse its decision and admit to making a mistake (Westhues, 2002).

During this stage, the unprincipled and corporate-minded senior administrators across the campus engage in a coordinated effort to cover up and suppress information and material evidence. They are consistently inconsistent. They present fabricated incidents of policy violations, alleging that the target has committed these violations, in a malicious attempt to eliminate the target. The chief eliminator receives unwavering support and applause from the administration. When they have to conduct internal investigations, the data collection and due diligence are, in reality, in favor of the

perpetrators. The decision-makers, despite being presented with blatant evidence to the contrary, never question the chief eliminator's perspective, no matter how biased and incomplete it may be.

Constructive fraud gives rise to a toxic work environment, and mobbing is often perpetuated within such an environment, and sometimes with multiple victims as new employees join the organization. In a toxic academic setting, changing leadership alone does not suffice to remedy the situation. New staff and administrators, who were not part of the original witch hunt, often join in to defend the old errors and injustices. When mobbing becomes institutionalized, opportunities for institution-level prevention either go unnoticed or are intentionally avoided. In such cases, even when the active perpetrators leave campus, passive perpetrators and new perpetrators remain, and efforts tend to be superficial and narrowly focused rather than leading to effective systemic reforms.

Policy and Legislative Implications

As discussed above, due to the lack of workplace mobbing definitions and legislation, few effective legitimate external interventions are available. To formulate prospective codes or laws designed to prohibit workplace mobbing behavior, it is imperative to establish clear and specific conceptual and structural distinctions between mobbing and bullying. In recent U.S. legal analysis, there have been efforts to introduce legislation declaring workplace harassment and bullying as public health hazards (Coleman, 2004; Davenport et al., 1999; Yamada, 2004). However, despite these initiatives, no specific anti-mobbing legislation has been introduced into the legal agenda because this mobbing evil has not been properly named and, as a result, has never been adequately addressed.

Crime flourishes where disorderly behavior such as workplace mobbing goes unchecked. A primary objective of this study is to further raise public awareness and understanding of this pervasive human behavior, advocating for responses that incorporate comprehension, insight, effective leadership, training, robust organizational structures, and well-defined policies and laws, as suggested in earlier literature (Davenport et al., 1999). Without comprehensive anti-mobbing legislation, the situation favors universities and corporations, as the state legal system tends to align with their interests. In the absence of dedicated legal provisions, judicial interpretation leans towards the perpetrators, particularly in cases of academic mobbing. No matter what the chief eliminator's status is, the respondent in the legal process is always the university. In contrast, Europe has shown progress in addressing mobbing thanks to Leymann's work (1987, 1990, 1993, 1996, 2000), leading to the implementation of anti-mobbing legislation in several European countries (Friedenberg, 2008; Kvinnoforum, 2004).

Making mobbing a civil or criminal legal issue is a necessary step toward legislative action. Academic mobbing is an as yet unrecognized crime that shares similarities with domestic violence and cases of "spiritual" sexual harassment. It represents a novel form of criminal behavior that encompasses elements of both violent crimes and white-collar crimes. The process of introducing new legislation is often a lengthy one. It's important to note that domestic violence and sexual harassment were not criminalized until many decades after it was first advocated. The efforts to address domestic violence in the United States began more than a century ago but only gained significant attention and legal

acknowledgment in the late 20th century. Today, domestic violence is regarded as a matter of national importance, with substantial resources devoted to its prevention and elimination. A similar trajectory was observed in the recognition and legal response to sexual harassment in the United States, with significant legislative landmarks emerging over several decades.

The introduction of anti-mobbing legislation is likely to follow a similar trajectory. What is needed is a movement analogous to the Me Too campaign. There is a significant need to establish support programs for workplace mobbing victims, particularly in academic settings. The initiative of the creation of the World Association for Research on Workplace Mobbing (WARWM) in 2024, immediately after the inaugural Niagara Conference on Workplace Mobbing in July 2024, hosted by Niagara University, New York, is a promising first step. These efforts send a clear message to individuals who have experienced mobbing that they are not alone and that a community of support is available.

Conclusion and Suggestions for Further Study

While distinguishing between mobbing and bullying can offer a more nuanced understanding of these phenomena, it is important to recognize that the term bullying is inherently connected to the concept of mobbing. This process-oriented form of torment creates a disconnect among scholars, hindering a deeper understanding of the interconnection and interchangeability of these intertwined terminologies while also necessitating attention to the distinctions between them. Consequently, conducting systematic and scientific research on workplace mobbing becomes exceedingly difficult, exacerbated by the challenges of measurement.

Mobbing is an area of multidisciplinary research. There are workplace mobbing studies published in the literature of psychology, sociology, education, higher education, consulting psychology, social psychology, applied psychology, psychiatry, psychiatric care, psychosomatic research, mental health, healthcare ethics, occupational health, clinical nursing, counseling, vocational behavior, administrative theory and practice, management, communication, management communication, human resources, human behavior, social work, employee responsibilities and rights, college and university law, and workplace homicide. However, very few are published in the field of violence and victims, criminology, criminal justice, and victimology. The majority of existing studies in this field primarily consist of descriptive self-help literature, which incorporate case studies and surveys. These works are typically authored by individuals who have had personal experiences with or have witnessed mobbing, workplace bullying, or abuse, which lends them a unique perspective. Notably, the most influential and representative works in this area, such as those by Westhues (1998, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005) and Davenport et al. (1999), provide in-depth analyses, draw comparisons, and identify recurring patterns related to workplace mobbing. Additionally, they offer comprehensive and detailed examinations of the mobbing process in an academic context (Westhues, 1998, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005).

Workplace mobbing represents the institutionalization of cruelty, quantified through the accumulation of various intensified workplace bullying behaviors stemming from workplace conflicts and office politics but aggregating to much more. To effectively address this pervasive issue, it is imperative to institutionalize workplace mobbing research and recognize it as an important topic to be fielded for publication in peer-reviewed journals. This clarity would enable researchers to build a solid empirical foundation, enhancing the credibility and generalizability of their findings in addressing a multitude of critical research questions. The following are just a few areas in which more research is needed: How can one tell when elimination in its stronger, stricter, narrower sense is underway? Are there identifiable symptoms, empirical indicators that an exclusionary process has escaped the bounds of reason and civilization? Are there reliable signs that elimination in its savage sense is underway? What are the root causes of workplace mobbing? What characterizes the profile of a mobber? What are the repercussions for formal organizations? How do institutions suffer as a result of mobbing? Why do most mobbing targets opt for flight rather than confrontation? How does the union impede justice? What prevents mobbing targets from sharing their experiences with others?

It is essential for any research in this area to acknowledge and address the dark figure issue (that is, the number of instances that go unreported) in workplace mobbing research, particularly in the context of academic mobbing, where many individuals choose to remain silent about their experiences for various reasons. This is not merely an issue of underreporting but, rather, a pervasive problem of non-reporting since many targets of mobbing choose to leave their institutions either on agreement for separation packages or move on to find another job. The documented mobbing cases are merely the tip of the iceberg, typically limited to those that have either resulted in legal proceedings or ended tragically in suicide.

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