

# MOBBING OF TEACHERS: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

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## Abstract

The study aimed to investigate mobbing of teachers, its causes and consequences. The study used a descriptive analytical methodology. The research sample consisted of 200 schools in the city of Prayagraj (India). A self-administrative questionnaire was distributed and a qualitative study was carried out. The results indicated that mobbing of teachers exists in all schools regardless of whether they are governmental or private ones. The study also concluded that mobbing of teachers affects the physical, mental, psychological, emotional and professional well-being of teachers.

Keywords: mobbing, teachers, causes, consequences

## Introduction

As far as this researcher is aware, research on mobbing of teachers in India has never been a subject of study. This study aims at opening a new chapter in this field to enable researchers to delve even deeper into “Mobbing”, a malpractice that affects the mental and physical health of victims and attempts to present the most important aspects related to mobbing and to describe its causes and consequences faced by the teaching fraternity in India. The study also suggests ways to at least reduce, if not eliminate this workplace syndrome.

Mobbing is cruelty that plagues the workplace, can occur within all levels of an organisation and has a detrimental effect on performance. Many people are not familiar with the term, even though it is as old as human society. Mobbing, sometimes known as “group bullying” (Petersen, 2019), in the workplace is a silent epidemic (Namie and Namie 2009). It involves groups of people targeting a coworker. It precipitates strain and trauma.

Mobbing is a phenomenon identified in the early 1990s, and is a subject for scientific and legal study in educational institutions. A toxic work culture in the guise of mobbing has been prevalent in workplaces for many years but within a short span of time, this relatively new field of research has recently mushroomed and has been recognised as a significant problem. In the work world, below the mantle lies the burning cinders of “mobbing” or “psychological terror” (Leymann H, 1990). German psychiatrist and founder of the international anti-bullying movement, Heinz Leymann, (Namie G.,2003) in the 1980s, adopted the term mobbing for workplace bullying.

According to Maureen Duffy and Len Sperry (2012), mobbing involves individual, group, and organisational dynamics. Mental injury is inflicted on the individual by vindictive, cruel, malicious or humiliating tactics to cripple an individual or groups of employees. Persistent negative attacks on personal and professional performance is unfair. Research over three decades indicates that the abuse of position by the perpetrator can cause chronic stress and anxiety, resulting in the employees gradually losing belief in themselves, leading to physical ill-health and mental distress.

Various terms focussing on the same concept have also evolved in international literature. The term mobbing has been used interchangeably with a host of other terms like workplace bullying, psychological terror or aggression, hostile behaviours at work, workplace trauma, incivility or emotional violence. Differences in languages and cultural understandings, has made it difficult to arrive at a global consensus of what the best term to describe workplace torture could be.

### **Mobbing: historical roots**

Mobbing connotes a “ganging up” (Namie and Namie, 2009). The word "mobbing" is derived from the Latin term "mobile vulgus" meaning "undecided crowd" and the original work on workplace mobbing was done by Heinz Leyman, a Swedish scholar, psychiatrist and industrial psychologist who conducted his research in Sweden in the 1980s and 1990s, and who purposely used the term mobbing to describe abusive workplace behaviour. Leymann, adopted the term mobbing from the study of animal behaviour, in particular from Lorenz, an Austrian zoologist and founder of modern ethology. Leymann took the ‘Mobbing’ label from animal studies *describing groups of weaker animals ganging up on a more competent animal*.

He popularised the term “Mobbing of Adults”, referring to psychological terror in the workplace. According to Leymann (1996), Mobbing refers to “harassing”, “ganging up on someone”, or “psychologically terrorizing” others at work. This "mobbing" behaviour results in severe psychological and occupational consequences for the victim. (Leymann, 1990). The term Workplace mobbing is also described as “*psychological terrorism*” (Duffy, M., & Sperry, L., 2012), because like political terrorism, the victim knows that another wave of terror will hit but is unaware of the angle and time of explosion. According to Tammy L.Shelton ( 2011), the International Labor Office (ILO), in 1998, while citing Davenport (2002), categorized mobbing in the same category as homicide, rape, or robbery. Workplace mobbing is a more extreme form of bullying. This bullying comprises the intentional efforts of a person or persons to ostracise a top performing employee with the goal of forcing them out of the workplace.

## **The perpetrators are unscrupulous, insecure and weak**

Mobbing is a cruel act and “all cruelty springs from weakness” (Seneca, 4BC-AD65). The perpetrators are weaklings; victims of inner turmoil, unrest and instability. Their cowardly acts are driven by fear, insecurity, the desire to be in charge, a feeling of jealousy, hatred, and the unwillingness to accept that there is always someone better. The perpetrators lack confidence and are terrified by skill, competency and creativity. They, thus, resort to mobbing tactics that drive their victims to a state of physical, emotional, mental and professional breakdown (Leymann H.1990). Mobbing takes place when the least competent and most aggressive employees project their incompetence on to the least aggressive and most competent employee and win (Tim Field 1999). No one has the right to crush a person’s self-confidence and self-esteem because he/she is unable to digest that the person is more skilled, talented, dedicated and hardworking; willing to go that extra mile to enhance productivity.

It is sad that most institutions consider student performance as the most important predictor of a good teacher. Teachers are continuously put under the administrative, social and political scanner irrespective of not only the continuous professional struggle with quality, quantity and equity but also an overbearing toxic workplace, where they get drained dealing with unethical activities. Targets are often chosen from the vulnerable, the best and the brightest.

Effective teaching calls for a conducive school environment to achieve educational goals. Teachers across the globe are overtaxed with the workload. They are busy dispensing knowledge, organising curricular and co-curricular activities, planning the syllabus, chalking out time frames and preparing study material, keeping student records, setting question papers, evaluating and much more. This is a never ending process throughout the academic session. Work does not walk out with the formal sign off at the end of duty hours but lingers on till nature draws the line. This requires peace of mind and mental stability. Let us not forget that teachers have their own families and personal lives too, which add to their baggage of responsibilities.

Research on mobbing has mushroomed since the dawn of the twenty-first century, yet studies seem to be concentrated in a few countries with negligible research on teachers.

Mobbing in educational institutions is a problem. This study on mobbing of teachers is the first of its kind that has been carried out in India.

The study addresses the types of mistreatment targets were subjected to by the perpetrators.

With time, this evil has rapidly amplified, injecting a great deal of negativity into the portals of educational institutions, sadly defiling these “Temples of Learning”. Gossip, slander, ill feelings, backbiting and backlash amongst the teachers not only affect the co-workers but also the students, who are silent observers.

Mobbing gives rise to a lethal culture and if it is not nipped in the bud, it will further embolden mobbing activities in teachers and employers, who villainously rebuke co-workers, diligently engaged in innovative instructional strategies to promote professional efficacy (Hickerson, H. R. 2019) and enhance a joyful teaching-learning environment. The workplace presents opportunities for a wide range of crafty and unscrupulous mobbing tactics, driving the target to consume valuable time in coping with circumstances, networking for support, ultimately leading to a drop in motivational levels, stress and sick leave (Fisher, J., 2008). The consequences of inaction against mobbing activities are enormous for everyone, but the real losers in the academy are the students (Khoo, S., 2010).

In India, mobbing of school teachers has so far not been investigated. The intent behind this study is to open up a new chapter in this area, and hence, to enlighten the schools and stakeholders on a negative work culture that is rampant in most of them. It also discloses how the perpetrators get away because of weak laws and the target’s handicap to fight a legal battle for lack of financial resources and evidence, and more strongly, the fear of losing their jobs.

Studies carried out on over 200 teachers clearly indicate that mobbing activities are widespread in educational institutions but much is hidden under the bushel, resulting in the perpetrators going scot free while the traumatised target not only faces a reputational breakdown but also reels in a world messed up professionally, physically psychologically, emotionally, socially and mentally. Horrific stories of victims entail how mobbing maims them. Apart from the losses the victim endures, there are secondary long term consequences causing severe damages to institutional structure and environment. Leymaan's research work had initially concentrated on the conceptualization of the phenomenon and its localization in society, something that proved to be extremely difficult since it was well hidden (Leymann, H.,1990). This researcher, too, despite assuring the participants of confidentiality, that the data collected would be used solely for research purposes and their identity would be preserved, yet they preferred to keep away from the study, making it extremely difficult to collect data on this heinous crime, widespread in educational institutions.

#### **Some reasons that the teachers gave are listed below:**

- They were scared of their employers getting to know of them participating in the research.
- They were unwilling, citing that their jobs would be at stake.
- Some even told the researcher that they were already facing enough and did not want anything adding to their misery.

#### **The employers posed a greater problem. The reasons are listed below:**

- The employers were unwilling to entertain the researcher after going through the questionnaire on mobbing.
- Almost all were unwilling to accept that there was any such problem in their institution.
- Some gave a bag full of excuses, citing paucity of time among many others.

The responses the researcher received by the employers and employees are proof enough that, "*Mobbing in educational institutions is a problem*". The reasons given by the teachers and employers clearly indicate that most institutions prefer to switch to denial mode as they fear image assassination. Hence, these negative acts continue to destroy talent, hard work, honesty and health. Teachers from several schools in the city of Prayagraj were interviewed over a period of two years and not one denied the fact that they were either victims or witnesses of mobbing. This researcher through the informal interviews concluded that the major reasons why teachers were being targeted were that they were considered a threat to their colleagues and the perpetrators clearly felt threatened by their presence in the institution.

Mobbing is a negative attitude, exhibited by superior(s), subordinate(s), or equal(s) to the victim(s) in a workplace. This cruel act is extensive in schools yet employers and managers knowing the malicious intentions of the perpetrators overlook their villainy because they feel that the targeted employee will deliver better results under pressure. Also, because the perpetrator is someone who is skilled at manipulating and controlling and they do not want to get into the bad books of those who have a tendency of creating trouble. Tacit as well as obvious support between the head of the institution and the bully could be discerned by the target who approached for help (D'Cruz, P., Noronha, E. 2010). The primary purposes of this kind of action are to passivate, frustrate, and finally send the victim away from the workplace (Ercan Erdis, Olcay Genç & Serkan Aydın, 2019). Colleagues and co-workers induce terror onto a targeted employee. They recruit others to conduct ostracizing acts to mentally torture their victims. They even force those who do not participate in the mobbing to keep away from their target and to not socialise with the individual, causing undue stress driving the victim to step out of the organisation. Destabilising the targets, casting them in negative light and creating suspicion about their worthiness as members of the organisation (Maureen Duffy and Len Sperry (2012), is the cruel intent behind mobbing. The systematisation of literary sources indicate that gossip is a common and the most malicious tool used to distort personal information that has nothing to do with the victim's professional competence. (Mujtaba, B. G., Senathip, T., 2020).

**Mobbing may be:**

- Top down - the leader in charge is the instigator
- Horizontal - colleagues target one another
- Upwards bullying - tactics are manipulated and applied against “the boss”.

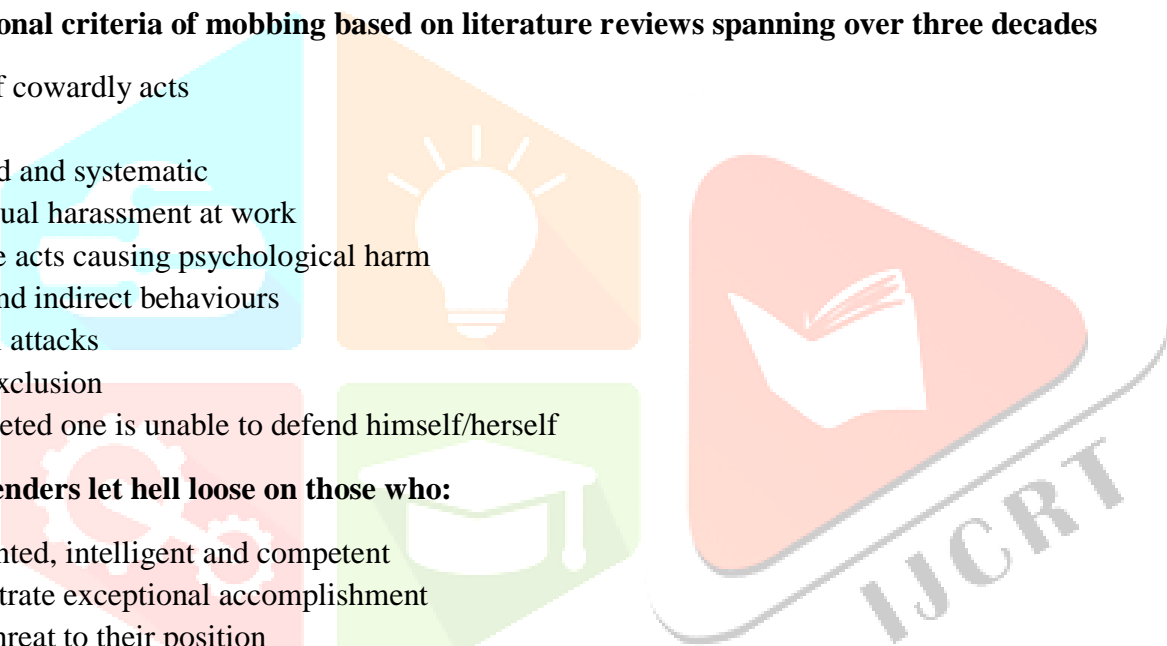
Research shows that almost 75 percent of people surveyed mentioned that they had been impacted by workplace mobbing (Comaford, 2016). This research is an attempt to bring to the fore this problem that starts as a single cell and spreads like a malignant cancer making prestigious institutions hollow from within. Research through three decades has revealed that the victim is so traumatised that he/she ultimately gives up the fight and resigns, leaving the arena with more power to the perpetrator/s to continue with his/her mobbing tactics. The act of mobbing affects not only the target but also the organisation and the society to which the individual belongs (Bayram DEMİR 2021). The institution, thus, loses a dedicated teacher, who only meant good for the institution and the students. *It is a great loss* not only for the students and the institution but for the nation as well.

**Definitional criteria of mobbing based on literature reviews spanning over three decades**

- Series of cowardly acts
- Severe
- Repeated and systematic
- Non-sexual harassment at work
- Negative acts causing psychological harm
- Direct and indirect behaviours
- Personal attacks
- Social exclusion
- The targeted one is unable to defend himself/herself

**The offenders let hell loose on those who:**

- Are talented, intelligent and competent
- Demonstrate exceptional accomplishment
- Pose a threat to their position
- Work conscientiously
- Work happily beyond formal hours when required
- Suggest and implement new ways to help better the system
- Question unfair policies and practices in the institution
- Call black, black and white, white
- Are acknowledged by the institution for valuable and timely contributions
- Challenge the status quo



**A study of research literature spanning since the late 1990s has brought to the fore various mobbing tactics directed towards a target to achieve mean ends.**

<b>MOBBING TACTICS</b>
Ignoring Excluding from conversation Isolating Staring Spying Stalking even on social media Encouraging others to turn against another Spreading rumours Gossiping Insulting Demeaning Undermining Discounting thoughts/ideas Excessive/harsh criticism Verbal put-downs Degrading names Blaming Personal life targeted Publicising mistakes Excluding from committees/activities Denying/excluding professional development Excluding from information Excessive/unreasonable workload

**According to Einarsen, S., et.al (2003) Leymann, (1993), asserted that four factors are prominent in eliciting bullying behaviours at work:**

(1) deficiencies in work-design (2) deficiencies in leadership behaviour (3) the victim's socially exposed position and (4) low departmental morale

**Fear is the major reason, employees choose to remain silent on mistreatment. They fear:**

- they will have to bear the consequences of opening their mouths.
- losing their jobs.
- they won't be taken seriously.
- being labelled as someone who cannot get along with others .
- they will be blamed instead.
- being further abused.
- being held responsible for the mistreatment meted out to them.
- being belittled, ridiculed and humiliated
- that their life will be made a hell in the workplace.

- reputational breakdown.
- their professional competencies will be questioned.

### Consequences of mobbing on the victim

Unremitting exposure to mobbing adversely affects the target. It is destructive and abusive behaviour. “Just as for the child, terrified of going to school to be taunted all over again, adults being bullied in the workplace are reduced to the state of frightened children”(Andrea Adams, 1994). According to Adams, the manifestations of this form of abuse “are widely dismissed”(David C. Yamada, Maureen Duffy, and Peggy Ann Berry, 2017). With a rapid increase in mobbing, it becomes imperative to highlight the destructive effects it has on the victims.

- It persistently provokes, pressurises, frightens, intimidates or otherwise discomforts.
- It disempowers and discredits the target. (Kitt, J.M. 2009).
- It results in considerable psychic, psychosomatic and social misery (Leymann, H., 1990).
- Abuse of position can cause chronic stress and anxiety and the employees gradually lose faith in themselves resulting in physical ill-health and mental distress (David C. Yamada, Maureen Duffy, and Peggy Ann Berry, 2009).
- Self-esteem is shattered and confidence crumbles. The victims believe that they are no longer good at anything.
- Sleeplessness, anxiety, migraine, skin disorders, back pains, stomach problems, panic attacks, but most particularly, depression. Often, non-smokers become heavy smokers due to stress (Andrea Adams, 1994).
- Gastrointestinal symptoms and tachycardia were identifiable in all the subjects under study(Pompili M, et al., 2008).
- The needs of partners and children are often sidelined (Andrea Adams, 1994).
- A sense of depersonalisation
- Burnout
- Persistent crying and emotional numbness
- Professional ability of the victims are threatened.
- People exposed to mobbing are often found to have DSM-IV(Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder) adjustment disorder, experiencing feelings of depression, anxiety or both (Pompili M, et al., 2008).
- PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) subsequent to mobbing can occur frequently (Kreiner B, Sulyok C, Rothenhäusler HB., 2008).
- A study conducted (Pompili M, et al.,2008) revealed that 52% of the subjects who claimed exposure to mobbing had some risk of suicide.
- D’Cruz and Noronha’s (2010) study highlights emotional strain resulting in decreasing positive feelings about work and people, often leading to withdrawal and quitting the workplace, considered the best or only solution.
- Increased sick leave, absenteeism, low productivity

Apart from the losses the victim endures there are as secondary long term consequences causing severe damages to institutional structure and environment.

Gender plays a role. According to Employee Experience Survey Findings, HR Acuity(2021), men and women experience unethical behaviour almost equally – but issues raised by men are 26% more likely to be investigated.

## Operational definitions

(Leymann, 1990): Psychological terror or mobbing in working life means hostile and unethical communication which is directed in a systematic way by one or a number of persons mainly toward one individual. . . . These actions take place often (almost every day) and over a long period (at least for six months) and, because of this frequency and duration, result in considerable psychic, psychosomatic and social misery.

According to Dr. Carroll M. Brodsky in *The Harassed Worker*, workplace bullying refers to "repeated and persistent attempts by one person to torment, wear down, frustrate or get a reaction from another. It is treatment which persistently provokes, pressures, frightens, intimidates or otherwise discomforts another person."

In the work world, Davenport et al. (1999) describe mobbing as follows: A malicious attempt to force a person out of the workplace through unjustified accusations, humiliation, general harassment, emotional abuse, and/or terror. It is a "ganging up" by the leader(s)—organisation, superior, co-worker, or subordinate—who rallies others into systematic and frequent "mob-like" behaviour . . . The result is always injury—physical or mental distress or illness and social misery and, most often, expulsion from the workplace.

Mobbing is extensive in schools yet employers and managers knowing the malicious intentions of the perpetrators overlook their villainy because they feel that the targeted employee will deliver better results under pressure.

### Leymann's Four Critical-incident Phases of Mobbing

Phase 1	The Original Incident (the trigger)
Phase 2	Mobbing and Stigmatising begins (series of targeting tactics-aggressive and psychological: the target- misrepresented professionally and mentally)
Phase 3	Personal Administration (the irony-the victim is further targeted)
Phase 4	Expulsion (the final damage-the victim is either fired or compelled to resign)

The irony is, the ones who preach values are the ones guilty of a breach of those very values that they so conscientiously instil in their students. It is indeed widely acknowledged that mobbing activities are rampant in educational institutions but much is hidden under the bushel, resulting in the perpetrators going scot free while the traumatised victim not only faces a reputational breakdown but also reels in a world messed up professionally, physically, emotionally, socially and mentally.

Job satisfaction comes with being valued, feeling fulfilled causing them to perform to higher standards of instruction (Hikerson, H., R, 2019). Hence, they ought to be treated with dignity and given a stress free environment, where every creative strain of the mind can strike a harmonious chord, enabling the teaching learning process to bear optimum results. Employees who feel disrespected tend to be less creative and some finally get fed up and leave. Fifty percent of the employees deliberately decrease their efficiency or lower their quality of work Porath C., Pearson C. (2013).



## Conclusion

Conway P., et.al (2018) affirms that workplace bullying/mobbing gives rise to “a powerful stressor” leading to a “severely traumatic experience” that may ruthlessly shatter a person’s self-confidence and his/her contribution to the surrounding world. Mobbing activities are directed at the target under a veil of lies (Khoo S.,2010), so that they are “hidden” and difficult to prove. The target falling short of the required proof suffers while the wicked continue to sing their malicious tunes, getting away each time knowing that the laws are by far too weak to pronounce them guilty. “The time has come to treat workplace bullying the same as sexual harassment or racial discrimination, to identify the perpetrators, establish rules of conduct and penalties, and even pass laws prohibiting and penalizing bullying” (Martin, Brian, 2000). Theoretical aspects need to be understood and an interdisciplinary approach needs to be applied.

Mobbing assaults the dignity and credibility of teachers. It is a problem and like cancer begins with a single malignant cell, killing not only the victim but also raises questions as to how much is being done to weed out the rotten eggs. Organisations that tolerate bullying/mobbing and negative workplace culture will eventually lose their best employees (Petersen, 2019). Oftimes, victims are breadwinners. Hence, the fear factor seeps in preventing them from standing up against the perpetrators, the individual/s or the organisation. Educational institutions need to accept that mobbing is rampant and it is a crime. Turning a deaf ear or a blind eye to the problem will neither nullify its existence nor impact. The targeted need to open their mouths and expose the offenders and bring them to book. If not, this culture will continue, killing the best teachers and in turn, depriving students of the best talent. If the employers are involved or decide to lie low, the victim must seek legal intervention. Employees need to understand that institutions are not doing them a favour by paying them. They are working hard and rendering their services. They need to be heard. Laws need to be strengthened so that a victim is not weighed down by further terror while seeking legal aid.

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