

# Meta-analysis on the Studies about Strains of Victims Severe Mobbing at Workplace

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**Abstract**— Mobbing, harassment, victimization, bullying and other terms are really similar when talking about effects they produce in workers. Even though these terms share some similarities, scholars have made a differentiation between them; yet all are related to the negatives effects on workers. Hence, this paper reviewed eighteen (18) research papers from different authors from the past three years, which included meta-analysis, quantitative and qualitative papers. The purpose of this paper is to present the similarities and differences found during the chosen period in the profile of the victims and of the perpetrator, and the effects on the victims and organizations. Additionally, within this paper comparisons between the findings and discussions are made. The study provides future researchers recent highlights about mobbing and a scope of the level of effects that it is causing.

**Keywords**—bullying, effects, organizations, workplace.

## I. INTRODUCTION

GLOBALIZATION is the main reason why organizations are operating across the world, and consequently organizations are modifying the way they operate internally. Organizations are hiring more qualified workforce, which now has the opportunity to choose where to work. Therefore, organizations are facing additional managerial operations such as increasing foreign assignments, work with different cultures, and oversee movement of jobs to countries with low-cost labor [1]. As a result, organizational culture has been changing within each organization carrying with it issues such as behavioral, productivity and performance problems, and among others.

Reference [2] expresses that bullying, also called “mobbing”, is a critical problem that had been studied for the last 30 years in different areas such as schools, prisons and the workplace; and researches, politicians, employers and practitioners are taking it with high seriousness.

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Bullying at work is affecting psychologically or physically to 48% of all workers [3], and also is affecting organizations in diverse ways such as performance, costs, turnovers, and others, and in order to contribute to minimize its impact on people or to eradicate it authors had taken it as their field of study. In the United Kingdom it has been estimated that the 53% of the employee have been bullied at least one time in their working life [4]. On the other hand, the organizations in total have lost 19 million working days and £2 billion in revenue each year [5], [6].

Reference [7] agreed that these issues affect the life of the employees by even presenting to have a negative impact in their private life as well as their social life. Therefore, everyone within the company (CEO, managers, supervisors, and employees themselves) has the responsibility of reducing physical and psychological risks to employees. It has been implied by many authors that those negative effects are not only directly related to the employee, but also to the coworkers and organizations.

The purpose of this study is to explore the most recent findings about bullying at workplace, and compare the definitions, findings, and discussions of several papers in the last three years. The study will describe the current situation of bullying at workplace, how bullying at workplace is affecting people and organizations, how organization and practitioners are dealing with it, and how to recognize victims and perpetrators. As a result of this study, it provided future researchers recent highlights about mobbing and a scope of the level of effects that it is causing.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Definition of Bullying and its Elements

During all these years there have been many scholars defining the word bullying, and so other terms that are closely related to it have come up, such as incivility, victimization, social undermining, and abusive supervision [8]. However, the differentiation between the terms does not make a variation on the effects caused to the organizations and the employees. In Table I, is presented the most common definitions used by scholars during the past years.

TABLE I  
DEFINITIONS ACROSS THE YEARS OF WORKPLACE BULLYING AND RELATED TERMS

Year	Author of the Definition	Definition	Source
1990, 1996	Hanz Leymann	“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.”	[9], [10]
1999	Einarsen et al.	“the repeated actions and practices that are directed to one or more worker, which are unwanted by the victim, which may be done deliberately or unconsciously, but clearly cause humiliation, offense and distress, and that may interfere with job performance and/or cause an unpleasant working environment.”	[11]
2000	Lobnikar et al.	“A form of deviant or antisocial behavior, which can be understood as voluntary behavior of groups of individuals, harmful to organizations and employees. Such behavior is conscious, of different intensities, and always presents the opposite of pro-social and ethical behavior.”	[11]
2004	Rospenda & Richman	Workplace harassment is “any negative workplace interpersonal interaction that affects the terms, conditions, or employment decisions related to an individual’s job, or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment but is not based on any legally protected characteristic.”	[8]
2005	Einarsen	Situations in which “one or more individuals persistently over a period of time perceived themselves to be on the receiving end of negatives actions from one or several persons, in a situation where the target (employee) of bullying has difficult defending him or herself against these actions.”	[12]
2009	Aquino & Thau	Workplace victimization is defined as “acts of aggression perpetrated by one or more members of an organization that cause psychological, emotional, or physical harm to the intended target.”	[13]
2013	Devonish	“Situations where a person repeatedly and over a period of time is exposed to negatives acts on the part of coworkers, supervisors, or subordinates”.	[14]
2013	Cooper-Thomas, Gardner,	“Persistent exposure to negative and aggressive behaviors, which may be psychological, verbal, physical, and	[15]

O'Driscoll, Catley, Bentele, & Trenberth. may be perpetrated by an individual or group (Einarsen et al., 2011; O'Moore et al., 1998); as they occur repeatedly and regularly and over a period of time (Einarsen et al, 2011). ”

2013 Harrington, Warren, & Rayner. “Persistent negative behaviors perpetrated by one or more individual on a less powerful target who is often unable to defend themselves.” Base on Einarsen et al. (2003) [16]

2013 Samnani et al. “Occurs when an employee is subjected to repeated and persistent negative social acts over a period of time through which the perpetrator intends to cause harm or negatively affect the targeted employee. Such behavior may be overt and apparent (e.g., physical aggression/violence) or calculated, manipulative and difficult to detect (e.g., bullying through excessive work demands or persistent criticism of work)... is intended to negatively affect the target, he/she may find this behaviour ambiguous and difficult to interpret. Therefore, workplace bullying does not require the target to recognize that she/he is being bullied.” [17]

After reviewing the definitions and analyzing them, it is clear that some of the elements within each definition are similar. “Often (almost every day)”, “long period (at least for six months)”, “repeated”, “always”, “persistently over a period of time”, “repeatedly and over a period of time”, “persistent exposure”, “repeated and persistent...over a period of time” are some of the terms that will describe the first two similar terms within those definitions—time and frequency.

The next element is the negativity on the acts performed to others that affect individuals and organizations. The terms related to this element are: “hostile and unethical communication...hostile behavior”, “cause humiliation, offense and distress... and/or cause an unpleasant working environment”, “deviant or antisocial behavior... harmful to organization and employees... the opposite of pro-social and ethical behavior”, “any negative workplace interpersonal interaction”, “negative actions”, “acts of aggression”, “negatives acts”, “negative and aggressive behaviors”, “negative behaviors”, and “negative social acts... to cause harm or negatively affect”.

The third element is that those acts might be deliberately or unconsciously done, and have negative and harmful effects on the victims, causing them psychological, physical or emotional harm.

*B. Bully and Bullied Traits*

1. Bully Traits

Researchers have asked themselves who is the bully or which characteristics will define a bully. Over a long period of time those researchers have found some characteristics that will give us as human resource practitioners a clue to figure out who can be that perpetrator that might be affecting out

working environment. Reference [18] and [19] stated that one of the characteristics related to become a bully is the decision authority. Authority makes the person feel powerful to make any decision.

Other features found many years ago is that the bully has a genetic influence and previous childhood experience on performing bullying acts towards others [20], besides is encourage to control social environment, self-identity and reach the sense of justice by himself [21]. On the other hand, and of a high importance, those individuals do not realize about the possible damage they do or have done to others, and even deny their bully behaviors towards others [22].

Commonly managers, coworkers, subordinates or leaders are possible to behave in this manner [23]. Leaders, for example, perform these kinds of behaviors towards other because of the power that has been granted to them by the company. Seen with great respect and as a role model, sometimes subordinates follow the steps of leaders and follow their behavior by performing it or by rewarding [23]. Reference [24] found that human resource practitioners (HRPs), which should be impartial while dealing with bullying complaints, are acting passive while treating or resolving bullying cases.

## 2. Bullied Traits

Any person might be a victim of bullying. As mention in the introduction, in the UK one person has already experience at least one time being mobbed at work. However, across the reviewed papers there are many factors and/or characteristics that might make us become an easy target. The references [13], [25], [26] agreed that individuals psychologically vulnerable are the easiest target for a bully.

As globalization is demanding international workers and experience, companies gather people from a diverse variety of cultural backgrounds in one place. As for any matters, this helps companies to expand in the marketplace; nevertheless working in a multicultural environment not always results beneficial if the personnel of the company are not ready. Aspects as the age, ethnicity or culture, educational background might be another characteristic that might make them susceptible to be bully [8], [26], [27], [28]

### C. Summary of the Review

After the reviewing of the literature, the researcher can determine that bullying is any act (verbal or physical) that may affect or harm psychologically, physically or emotionally the inner state of an individual impeding her- or him-self being able to cooperate or perform her or his job at the organization. Additionally, those acts or behavior will affect the organizational culture by creating an uncomfortable environment, which might affect the harmony within the individuals and the organizational goals.

Those acts or behaviors might be performed by any individual working at the organization; however most of the time managers, supervisors, coworkers, and leaders are identified as the bullies within the company. Those bullies

might behave that way because of the status given to them by the organization, feeling with the power to bully others because of anger, hierarchy, jealousy, among other situations that they find the opportunity to behave like that.

On the other hand, bullied individuals might also be any individual within the organization. Notwithstanding that any characteristics could make them become an easier target for the bullies. Those characteristics are most related to the income, responsibilities that they acquire, or individual characteristics such as gender, culture, ethnicity, among others.

## III. RESEARCH DESIGN

### A. Research Method

This article presented a review of different paper developed in the last three years adopting a qualitative approach. A total of eighteen articles published in different journals from 2012 to 2014 on bullying at workplace were selected from different databases, such as ERIC, Emerald Insight, and university database. Those databases were selected because of its easy access to important journals within the Human Resource field. Each article selected was first review and analyzed individually and after a comparison was done. The comparisons of the findings and discussions of each article were treated; therefore the conclusions and recommendations were developed following the findings of the comparison. Therefore, the emphasis of these articles was the treatment and analysis of the findings and discussions done by other scholars.

### B. Data Collection

An assisted online search was used through robust databases which provide access to different important journals in different languages in order to find the most recent published articles related to bullying at workplace and the effects on victims and organizations. The databases used to find those articles were ERIC, Emerald Insight, and the database of the National Taiwan University (NTU). A really high number in each databases appeared; 311 in ERIC, 252 in Emerald Insight, and more than 1000 in NTU database. Hence, criteria to choose which study should be included were developed.

### C. Criteria for the Chosen Articles

The criteria for choosing the following articles was not deepen in its content, but because of the vast amount of papers related to the topic a selection of them should be done. Firstly, the period of publication was settled from January 2012 to December 2014. Since the number of papers did not significantly decrease significantly; a second criteria was applied excluding those talking about bullying in educational institutions, schools and universities. Because most of the articles were based in European countries an exception was made by choosing an academic study from Africa. There was no distinction regarding the kind: meta-analysis, quantitative or qualitative; since all of their content was used with the purpose of finding differences or similarities. In Table II is listed the papers used for the development of this study.

TABLE II

DEFINITIONS ACROSS THE YEARS OF WORKPLACE BULLYING AND RELATED TERMS

N	Title	Author(s)/Year	Source
1	A methodological review of research on the antecedents and consequences of workplace harassment.	Neall, A. M., & Tuckey, M. R. (2014)	[8]
2	Attitudes toward workplace mobbing in Slovenian research organisations.	Horvat, B. K., & Pagon, M. (2012)	[11]
3	An individual psychology approach to underlying factors of workplace bullying.	Astrauskaite, M., Kern, R. M., & Notelaers, G. (2014)	[12]
4	Workplace bullying, employee performance and behaviors.	Devonish, D. (2013)	[14]
5	Neutralizing workplace bullying: the buffering effects of contextual factors.	Cooper-Thomas, H., Gardner, D., O'Driscoll, M., Catley, B., Bentley, T., & Trenberth, L. (2013)	[15]
6	Human resource management practitioners' responses to workplace bullying: Cycles of symbolic violence.	Harrington, S., Warren, S., & Rayner, C. (2013)	[16]
7	Workplace bullying and employee performance: An attributional model.	Samnani, A., Singh, P., & Ezzedeen, S. (2013)	[17]
8	Understanding and managing workplace bullying.	Khan, A., & Khan, R. (2012)	[22]
9	Individual and situational antecedents of workplace victimization.	Mathisen, G. E., Ogaard, T., & Einarsen, S. (2012)	[23]
10	The impact of roles stressors on workplace bullying in both victims and perpetrators, controlling for personal vulnerability factors: A longitudinal analysis.	Balducci, C., Cecchin, M., & Fraccaroli, F. (2012)	[25]
11	Clarifying my world: Identify work in the context of workplace bullying.	D'Cruz, P., & Noronha, E. (2012)	[26]
12	Mobbing and workers' health: Empirical analysis for Spain.	Carnero, M. A., Martínez, B., & Sánchez-Mangas, R. (2012)	[27]
13	Workplace bullying and the challenge of pre-emptive management.	Beirne, M., & Hunter, P. (2013)	[28]
14	Testing the strain hypothesis of the demand control model to explain severe bullying at work.	Notelaers, G., Baillien, E., De Witte, H., Einarsen, S., & Vermunt, J.K. (2012)	[29]
15	Workplace bullying: Consequences, causes and controls (part one).	Appelbaum, S. H., Semerijan, G., & Mohan, K. (2012)	[30]
16	Educators' understanding of workplace bullying.	De Wet, C. (2014)	[31]
17	Confronting workplace bullying: Agency and structure in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.	McKay, R. (2014)	[32]
18	The bully at work: What social workers can do.	Pomeroy, E. (2013)	[33]

Note: Find the articles' source at the references.

## IV. FINDINGS

## A. Similarities between the Studies

Within the different studies, several similarities were found while making a comparison of each article. The first similarity is regarding the stressors that result from bullying. Role stressors, such as role conflict, role ambiguity, role and work overload, job insecurity, low job control, low job resources, bad working conditions, lack of skills, sudden work changes, lack of task-related feedback, among other stressors lead to constant bullying workplace environment [12], [13], [25], [29], [30].

According to references [8], [11], [12], [13], [14], [15], [17], [25], [31] and [32], those stressor factors will be present in a work environment that lacks from supervision, where hierarchy is more important [16], and where has a chaotic and poor work climate and culture is observed. Those factors also will create a work bullying cycle within the organization culture. This cycle will generate a discomfort between the workers and the goals of the organization.

In the majority of the articles analyzed the same effects of bullying at workplace caused to the victims and the organization. Effects resulted in the victims were psychologically and physically injure. Within the psychological effects the researcher found at the analyzed articles that the most frequents are: depressive and behavioral disorders [14], [25], [30], [33], struggle for existential continuity, stability and security [26], suicidal and homicidal tendencies; post-traumatic-stress-disorders [30], low self-esteem, high social anxiety and neuroticism [13], [14], [33], concentration difficulties, emotional extenuation, discouragement [27]. For the physical effects the researcher found: sleeping problems, overall fatigue [27], [33], loss of appetite, headaches, and panic attacks [22].

Those effects on the employees affect directly the organizations performance [32]. In addition many problems for the organization can be identified; such as serious financial consequences [30], low job control [29], role overload [25], ineffective communication system [22], poor management, negative organizational culture and weak moral principles [11], stressors [13], [25], [33], reduce job satisfaction, commitment to the organization and work motivation [15], presence of power [8], [16], [17], [31], [32], absenteeism, turnover, poor performance and productivity [15], [32].

## B. Differences between the Studies

The findings and conclusions of the reviewed articles were very similar, however the researcher also found differences. In some of the articles it was expressed a victims profile; however they differ one from another. According to the references [11], [25], and [27] gender, age and educational background had some impact on being a victim of bullying. But references [8], [26], and [28] suggested that culture, race and ethnicity had an impact on being bullied. On the other hand, reference [32] expressed that the victim does not have a profile, but there are some characteristics that might define

who can be a victim of bullying, such as “have a higher than average income, managerial responsibilities, is popular, efficient, ethical and honest, refuses to be subservient, dislikes office politics, and/or presents a threat to the bully.” Others authors considered that being a victim is because of his/her personal characteristics [13], [25].

Other difference in which they differ is the way to treat bullying cases within the organization. Some of the authors considered that training employees, managers and HRP's will be the solutions to decrease those bad acts within the organization [14], [16], [17], [22], [27]. Other authors suggested that the organization is the responsible to ensure a good working environment promoting respect, collaboration, complaint system, support by counseling programs, develop organizational values, develop policies and procedures, and promoting and activating social interest [11], [12], [14], [15], [17], [27]. However, references [28], [32] and [33] supported the idea that training is not the only solution to deal with bullying behaviors, but it is important and integration of organizational culture, organizational responsibility with its employees, counseling services, and the collaboration of the employees by supporting and helping others. Also reference [12] supported that equality within the organization will improve if everybody support others' needs; therefore bullying will decrease.

#### V. CONCLUSIONS

For several years, bullying at workplace has been studied by many scholars in order to contribute to different fields and assure a better working place environment to anyone within an organization. After reviewing the selected articles the researcher came to the conclusion that there is no specific profile to be a bullied; however there are some characteristics that may influence being a victim such as gender, age, race, culture, among others.

Also training is good solution for dealing with bullying; however the researcher considers and agrees that training is just one step. Several changes should be done within the organizational culture and climate, in order to prevent or eradicate bullying. The researcher contemplates counseling as a prevention and post helping programs to those that are or have suffered from bullying. For the organization and HRP's there should be any different treatments of the workers, and that all of them are to be provided the same opportunities, challenges and punishments to be an organization without preferences according to power or hierarchy, ergo the organization should develop appropriate policies and procedures concerning bullying; and HRP's should be able to hear and take actions to avoid and eradicate bullying.

Within this study, papers from Africa, Canada and India, and the majority come from European countries were analyzed. The subjects of studies in all the selected papers (gender, race, age, educational background) were very diverse, but generalizing about the findings to every culture or country can be considered a bias since each considers and defines

bullying acts differently. But what can be generalized are the effects that those acts caused to the different targets.

The researcher recommends future studies on bullying at workplaces related to culture in different countries to be written in English, with the purpose of give the field better understanding and involvement in unlike backgrounds, and he perception of bullying. This comparison will determinate the generalization of the findings of past studies.

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