

Mobbing in the Academe: The Case of Albanian Universities

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Abstract: *Mobbing is a new concept studied in the organizations, yet it is believed to have existed long before they gave it a name. Leymann (1996) introduced it for the first time, and since then the studies over the phenomenon have expanded. The present study deals with the mobbing in the workplace, in Albania. The study aims at establishing a prevalence of this phenomenon in academia, with no distinction whether it is a public or private institution. Other international studies have stated that universities and are the main ground where mobbing especially flourishes. To the researcher's knowledge there are no studies to estimate the prevalence of mobbing in Albania. Moreover, it was looked into a correlational relation between mobbing and various consequences, such as turnover intentions, as well as psycho-somatic consequences. Based on other researchers' experiences, it was chosen to use self report questionnaires. 100 questionnaires were distributed to full time lecturers in various universities around Albania. The Negative Act Questionnaire was the instrument to measure mobbing and there were questions about different symptoms experienced and the medical expenditures. The percentages were calculated based on Leymann's definition about mobbing (at least once a week, for six months or more). The consequences of this phenomenon as expressed in physical, psychological symptoms are calculated and discussed.*

Keywords: *mobbing, academia, physical symptoms, psychological consequences.*

The verb "to mob" was firstly used by Lorenz Konrad (1991), an ethomologist who introduce this word to explain the behavior of small animals attacking a single large animal (recall the classical example of small chicks attacking a snake and killing it by pecking). Later on, a social researcher in Sweden, Heinemman used this verb to study the behavior of kindergarten children during their break time. However, it wasn't until 1996, when Heinz Leymann introduced this verb and brought it to as a phenomenon to the industrial and organizational level. From 1996 and on there have been many studies in various countries to study and explain this phenomenon.

Bullying or mobbing

One of the most discussed issues in the field is whether mobbing is a new concept, or it is just a reuse of bullying. The advocates of mobbing have detected some differences, such as: bullying involves certain amount of physical confrontation, whereas in mobbing it is almost impossible to witness it; bullying is viewed as more juvenile behaviors and occurs in school settings, but mobbing is more "mature" and can be seen only in organizations; bullying is more explicit, and generally it is easier to identify the aggressor and the bullied child, on the other hand, mobbing is more subtle and it is almost impossible to determine who mobbed

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whom, and why. However, the researchers use the expression “bullying in the workplace”, therefore overcoming all the above mentioned differences. In the end, it appears that the real difference between mobbing and bullying in the workplace is the geographical location: mobbing is mostly used in Europe (Leymann, 1996; Zapf, Knorz, & Kulla, 1996; Efe & Ayaz, 2010; etc.), and in Australia (Shallcross, Sheehan, & Ramsay, 2008, etc.); whereas bullying in the workplace is a term mostly used in USA (Lewis, 2004; Cartwright & Cooper, 2007; etc.).

Definition of Mobbing

There have been a lot of mobbing definitions according to the place where the study was conducted and the researchers. Some of the definitions used by different researchers are given below:

Leymann, 1996

Psychological terror or mobbing in working life involves hostile and unethical communication, which is directed in a systematic way by one or a few individuals mainly toward one individual who, due to mobbing is pushed in a helpless and defenseless position, being held there by means of continuing mobbing activities. These actions occur on a very frequent basis (statistical definition: at least once a week) and over a long period of time (statistical definition: at least six months of duration). Because of the high frequency and the long duration of the hostile behavior, this maltreatment results in considerable psychological, psychosomatic, and social misery. The definition excludes temporary conflicts and focuses on a point in time where the psychosocial situation begins to result in psychiatrically or psychosomatically pathologic conditions. In other words, the distinction between “conflict” and “mobbing” does not focus on what is done, or how it is done, but on the frequency and duration of what is done.

Davenport, Schwartz, and Elliot, 2005

[Workplace bullying] is an emotional assault. It begins when an individual becomes the target of disrespectful and harmful behavior. Through innuendo, rumors, and public discrediting, a hostile environment is created in which one individual gathers others to willingly, or unwillingly, participate in continuous malevolent actions to force a person out of the workplace.

Hoel, 2005

We define bullying as a situation where one or several individuals persistently over a period of time perceive themselves to be on the receiving end of negative actions from one or several persons, in a situation where the target of bullying has difficulty in defending him or herself against these actions. We will not refer to a one-off incident as bullying.

Workplace Bullying Institute, online

Repeated, health-harming mistreatment of one or more persons (the targets) by one or more perpetrators that takes one or more of the following forms: verbal abuse; or offensive conduct/behaviors (including nonverbal) which are threatening, humiliating, or intimidating; or work interference—sabotage—which prevents work from getting done.

In this study, the definition is taken from Leymann’s study. It is very detailed and operationally defines most of the issues and factors while this phenomenon occurs.

Method

Participants

150 questionnaires were distributed to full time lecturers in 4 different universities in Albania. In total 105 completed questionnaires were returned, with a return rate of 70%. Of the respondents, 68% were female and 32% were male. The age mean was 38.4 years old (SD=8.3), with an average tenure of 14.7 years (SD=5.9).

Instruments

Various studies have shown that the best way to measure mobbing in the workplace is self report ((Leymann, 1990); (Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaars, 2009)). Leymann proposed the Leymann's Inventory of Psychological Terror (LIPT), while Einarsen proposes the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ). In this study, the latter's revised form was used, because: it is used in the region Turkey (Efe & Ayaz, 2010); has shown excellent psychometric properties (Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaars, 2009) (Palaz, Ozkan, Sari, Goze, Sahin, & Akkurt, 2008); and the revised version was seen as more appropriate and understandable and close to the Albanian culture as per researchers' evaluation. The NAQ-R was translated in Albanian and back translated in English twice. It was piloted in 20 full time lecturers, who were not included in the final sample, and the scale showed a good reliability with Chronbach's $\alpha=0.89$.

Since there are different studies that have used single items measures for the turnover intention of the employees, it seems that this is the shortest and simplest way (Gerhart, 1990)). However, in this study a four-item scale was used. The response options ranged from 1-very unlikely to 4-highly likely. The responses were coded such that high scores reflect stronger intentions to leave the organization. Although, different studies have shown that single item scales work, a 4-item scale was considered to do better than one-item scale. The same scale was used by the researcher (Buka, 2005) and it was found to have a reliability $\alpha = 0.81$ and very good of fitness index, GFI = 0.97. In the present study, the Chronbach's α for turnover scale was 0.79.

Also in the questionnaire were included: questions about physiological and psychological symptoms that might have been experienced during the past six months.

Results

Prevalence of Mobbing

To the authors' knowledge there is no previous study in Albania that has tried to establish the prevalence of mobbing in the workplace. Taking into consideration only one mobbing behavior occurring at least once during the past six months, 91% of the participants stated that they have been mobbed. However, when restricting the criteria in once per week or more, then 7% of the participants resulted as mobbed during the past six months.

It was found that the victims of mobbing had a slightly higher intention to leave the job (37%) than the ones who were not (33.5%). But when t-test was conducted for these two groups no statically significant difference was found.

Moreover, the differences between the physiological and psychological symptoms experienced in the past six months were investigated among the mobbed victims and the other employees. There was a significant correlation between physiological and psychological symptoms with being or not a mobbing victim. For mobbing and physiological symptoms $r=0.32$, $p<0.05$, whereas for mobbing and psychological symptoms $r=0.38$, $p<0.05$. The most important psychological factors were found to be: low motivation, anxiety, and depression; while the most important physiological factors were found to be: sleeplessness, fatigue, and headache. Because the age varied considerably, the correlation coefficient were found by controlling for the age.

In order to determine whether it was really mobbing causing these symptoms, two logit regression analysis were conducted. The variables were dichotomized as follows: mobbed/not mobbed and experiencing or not experiencing the physiological/psychological symptoms. It was found that the regression for the psychological symptoms was statistically significant, $F=3.24$, $p<0.05$, suggesting that mobbing has its own impact on psychological symptoms. However, the regression analysis did not result statistically significant for the physiological symptoms ($F=1.32$, $p>0.05$). Such a result suggests that the physiological symptoms may have been caused by something else, but still are associated more with the mobbed victims.

Discussion

This study aimed at establishing a prevalence of mobbing phenomena in Albania, within the higher education institutions. According to the outcome from the NAQ-R, 7% of the participants resulted to be victims of mobbing behavior in their workplace. This finding is in line with other studies which suggest that the prevalence of mobbing varies from 6%-11% at any point in time ((Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004) (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001) (Palaz, Ozkan, Sari, Goze, Sahin, & Akkurt, 2008)).

Although it was expected that the mobbing victims would have significantly more intention to leave the current job, the study did not confirm this hypothesis. One explanation may be the actual socio-economic status of Albania. Due to high rate of unemployment 13.4% (Annual Report, 2011), the employees would rather stay in the current employment and put up with mobbing behaviors, than resign and be unemployed.

The correlation between the physiological and psychological symptoms and mobbing levels might be effected by the size of sample, by the desirability of answers that the participants might have given. Moreover, the regression did not result statistically significant for the physiological symptoms, which may suggest that mobbing is not related to physiological problems.

Other analysis showed that there was no difference with respect to age, gender and education levels. These findings suggest that, as Leymann (1996) has put it, that mobbing does not discriminate between man or woman, young or old, more educated or not. It simply picks someone, and goes on with its way of putting employees down, with no choice to recover.

Conclusions

The present study tried to bring some answers to mobbing in the workplace in higher education institutions in Albania. However, this study is still modest considering the severity of the issue. This study has only scratched the surface, therefore there is a serious need to further study the phenomenon of mobbing in the working place.

Moreover, standardizing the instruments for Albania would give more relevant and reliable results.

Another issue to be considered is the inclusion of other factors, such as: other working areas, distinction public private institutions, personality traits, gender, age, performance level, etc.

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