

Letter to Editor



# The difference between mobbing and bullying in healthcare settings

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## Dear Editor,

The phenomenon of bullying and mobbing (bullying at work) has long existed. Despite decades of research efforts to understand bullying and mobbing, there are considerable variations in how these two terms are defined and characterized, although they have been used synonymously in many health studies and sometimes even interchangeably. But while the two terms have many similarities, they also have significant differences.<sup>1</sup> Before going in-depth and analyzing the differences between them, it is necessary to define each term individually.

The most commonly accepted definition of bullying in research highlights three main definitional principles, defining bullying as aggressive behaviors that (a) are intended to harm, (b) are repeated over time, and (c) reflect an imbalance of power between the bully and victim.<sup>2</sup> Mobbing is a special type of aggressive behavior or psychological violence in the form of collective harassment that is used in the workplace to isolate a colleague through rejection. Thus, the two types of harassment have significant differences in terms of time, place, form, and direction, which are discussed in detail below.

1. The first key difference to note is that bullying happens more often in an educational environment and occurs in schools, institutions, and even universities. This is generally a situation in which one or more bullies harass a victim inside a classroom or in annexes such as a schoolyard. Meanwhile, mobbing is a type of harassment that generally occurs in the context of a professional environment and workplace wherein colleagues, subordinates, or superiors inflict psychological abuse on a target person. This type of harassment can happen both at work and outside the workplace.<sup>3</sup>
2. Bullying victims are generally viewed as weak, either because they are functionally diverse, very introverted, belong to a minority, are lonely, or because they have unusual tastes. They are perceived as “easy prey”.

In most cases, the profile of the victim is usually the opposite in mobbing. Workplace harassment is often experienced specifically by the best employees, those who are hardworking and talented. They end up being the focus of jealousy and are perceived as threats. Thus other coworkers harass them at work to force them to leave their jobs or to conform to the majority.<sup>4</sup>

3. Bullying happens between peers, whether they are from the same grade level or another grade. Bullying occurs within a hierarchical range among students and is generally horizontal. In the case of mobbing, the situation is different. Although it may occur between colleagues (horizontal mobbing), it can also occur between different hierarchical ranks. Thus mobbing has different directions, including upward vertical mobbing (subordinates psychologically attacking superiors) and downward vertical mobbing (an individual harassing his subordinates).<sup>5</sup>
4. Bullying (apart from cyberbullying) generally happens inside educational centers, both in classrooms and in other educational environments. But these annoying behaviors do not continue outside of the school environment, whereas mobbing continues after hours, with toxic attitudes such as indifference, not being invited to meetings, harassment outside of work, etc.
5. The prevalence of bullying is higher than mobbing. Although both forms of harassment are alarmingly frequent, statistics show that bullying is more common than mobbing. It is estimated that 1 in 3 students will experience bullying during their school life, while 1 in 10 employees will experience mobbing.<sup>6</sup>
6. Different types of bullying include physical, psychological, verbal, relational, emotional, and cyberbullying. However, mobbing is mostly psychological and emotional abuse and rarely involves physical violence. In mobbing, people attack

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the dignity, honesty, reputation, and professional abilities of others with a coordinated movement, and victims confront rejection, social isolation, and injustice.<sup>7</sup>

These distinctions cannot, of course, cover all the dynamics related to bullying and mobbing. However, considering the differences presented for these two psychological constructs, it is expected that health and hygiene researchers should be extremely careful in their application and proper use of the two terms.

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#### **Ethical Approval**

Not applicable.

#### **Competing Interests**

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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