The Content and Development of Mobbing at Work

Heinz Leymann

University of Umeå, Sweden

In this article the concept of mobbing is introduced. Mobbing means harassing, ganging up on someone, or psychologically terrorizing others at work. Although mobbing is a very old phenomenon, it was not described and systematically researched until the early 1980s. The article begins with a case example, some historical notes, and a definition of mobbing, and then regards mobbing in the context of medical and psychological stress research. Several stages in the development of mobbing are described, based on about 800 case studies. Some epidemiological findings from a representative sample of the Swedish work population are reported. Causes and consequences of mobbing are discussed, and conclusions for prevention and intervention are drawn.

INTRODUCTION

Through their national work environmental legislation, Sweden, Finland, and Norway support the rights of workers to remain both physically and mentally healthy at work. Yet, in recent years, a workplace-related psychological problem has been discovered, the existence and extent of which was not known earlier. This phenomenon has been referred to as "mobbing", "ganging up on someone", "bullying", or "psychological terror". In this type of conflict, the victim is subjected to a systematic, stigmatizing process and encroachment of his or her civil rights. If it lasts for years, it may ultimately lead to expulsion from the labour market when the individual in question is unable to find employment due to the psychological damage incurred.

In this article, I will introduce this phenomenon, which certainly is very old, and is well known in every culture. Nevertheless, it was not systematically described until our research in 1982, which led to a small scientific report written in the autumn of 1983 and published in early 1984 by the National Board of Occupational Safety and Health in Stockholm, Sweden (Leymann & Gustavsson, 1984). The present article begins with a case description, followed by some historical notes, a definition of this workplace-related

Requests for reprints should be addressed to H. Leymann, Bastionsgatan 23, S-371 32 Karlskrona, Sweden.

problem, its aetiology and epidemiology. A further section will focus on both the consequences and sources of this destructive communicative behaviour. After this is a discussion of the different measures that are required during the disastrous course of the process. The article ends with some references to ongoing research around the world.

A CASE EXAMPLE

The case of Eve: A canteen supervisor at a large prison retired and a successor was needed. The employer and the personnel department were of the same opinion, that the opportunity should be used to bring about certain changes. The canteen needed to economize and at the same time offer healthier food. An individual with suitable training was found. She was employed and assigned to the kitchen where six female cooks—who all knew how to prepare a thick cream sauce but knew nothing about the impending changes—were standing in front of their ovens.

An inevitable conflict soon broke out. How was the new manager in the kitchen going to pursue the desired changes without the support of her employer? Nobody had informed the cooks of any planned change. The new methods for preparing food were totally alien to them. The idea of making provision for a relevant training course had never dawned on the employer. The cooks believed that all these new ideas came personally from Eve, their new supervisor. This caused them to turn against her. They started to gossip and counteract her instructions. Even the fact that she had a mentally handicapped child was held against her, as if her own character were responsible for this. There were continuous heated discussions. The cooks did not listen to Eve and ignored her delegation of tasks, regularly doing things that led to differences of opinion. It was maintained that Eve went far beyond the scope of her responsibility, which in fact was not true.

On a number of occasions, Eve tried to obtain descriptions of her responsibilities from the prison authorities. Top management refused her requests. Her continual requests were interpreted as insubordination. Here we should bear in mind that such job descriptions are in fact a method through which top management can express its leadership at all levels; by defining institutional hierarchy at a central level, and defining various areas of competence, an employer is provided with an indispensable control mechanism through which the various areas of responsibility can be effected. In Eve's case, the only thing that happened was that top management felt attacked by her requests and defended themselves. This legitimized the cooks' harassment of Eve as they interpreted the situation as if the top management were "on their side". The harassment continued and developed into a mobbing process, through which Eve eventually lost her authority completely. Harsh arguments took place on a daily basis. One of the top managers who acci-

dentally overheard such an argument summoned Eve for a report. She noticed, as she entered the meeting room, that she was standing in front of some kind of court, she was given no chance to explain the situation but was heavily criticized. Top management ordered (!!) her to take sick leave, which the prison's own physician validated (!!). After having been on sick leave for more than two years (!!), Eve eventually lost her job. She never found another job again.

Analyses of this case will be given following a more formal presentation of the mobbing phenomenon.

HISTORICAL RESEARCH AND THE TERM "MOBBING"

Mobbing is a word not previously used in this context in the English language. It was used by the late Konrad Lorenz, an ethologist, in describing animal group behaviour. He called the attacks from a group of smaller animals threatening a single larger animal "mobbing" (Lorenz, 1991). Later, a Swedish physician who happened to become interested in what children could do to each other between their class hours, borrowed this terminology from Lorenz and called the very destructive behaviour of small groups of children directed against (most often) a single child, "mobbing" (Heinemann, 1972). The present research on this type of child behaviour has been carried out over the past 20 years, one of the most prominent researchers being the Norwegian Dan Olweus (e.g. 1993).

Following this tradition, I borrowed the word mobbing in the early 1980s, when I found a similar kind of behaviour in work places. I deliberately did not choose the English term "bullying", used by English and Australian researchers (in the USA, the term "mobbing" is also used), as very much of this disastrous communication certainly does not have the characteristics of "bullying", but quite often is done in a very sensitive manner, though still with highly stigmatizing effects. The connotation of "bullying" is physical aggression and threat. In fact, bullying at school is strongly characterized by such physically aggressive acts. In contrast, physical violence is very seldom found in mobbing behaviour at work. Rather, mobbing is characterized by much more sophisticated behaviours such as, for example, socially isolating the victim. I suggest keeping the word "bullying" for activities between children and teenagers at school and reserving the word mobbing for adult behaviour. Other expressions found in the literature are "harassment" or "psychological terror".

Regarding mobbing at places of work, a publication in 1976 referred to "the harassed worker" (Brodsky, 1976). In that book, for the first time, typical cases of mobbing can be studied. Nevertheless, Brodsky was not directly interested in analysing these cases, as they were presented alongside

cases of workplace accidents, physiological stress, and exhaustion caused by long work hours, monotonous work tasks, etc. This book focused on the hard life of the simple worker and his situation, nowadays investigated by stress research.

Because of its socio-medical involvement and a poor discrimination between different stress situations at work, the book, written under the influence of the social and political climate of the late 1960s and early 1970s, hardly had any influence. The Swedish research in the early 1980s came about without knowledge of Brodsky's work. The reason was instead a new work environment law in Sweden in 1976, and a national research fund offering great possibilities to enter into new research areas regarding work psychology.

DEFINITION OF MOBBING IN THE WORK PLACE

An Operational Definition

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 towards one individual who, due to mobbing, is pushed into a helpless and defenceless 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 long duration of hostile behaviour, 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 psycho-somatically 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. This also underlines the fact that basic research carried out in Sweden (Leymann, 1990b, 1992a, 1992b; Leymann & Tallgren, 1989) has medical research concepts to lean on. Basically, it is a line of research focusing on somatic or psychological stress: how intense does mobbing have to be in order to result in psycho-logical or psychosomatic illness? The research has mainly focused on the psychological and physical stress. The reader must keep in mind that the present article does not deal with psychological behavioural research but rather with research concerning psychological conditions, and resulting sick leaves. The scientific definition meant by the term "mobbing" thus refers to a social interaction through which one individual (seldom more) is attacked by one or more (seldom more than four) individuals almost on a daily basis and for periods of many months, bringing the person into an almost helpless position with potentially high risk of expulsion.

The Relationship of Mobbing to Stress

In regard to German psychologically oriented stress research in particular, it may be argued that mobbing can be seen as a certain extensive and dangerous kind of social stress (Knorz & Zapf, 1996; Zapf, Knorz, & Kulla, this issue). The different use of terminology in different countries is a theoretical problem. Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian research has more intensively focused on the biological character of the stress phenomenon (e.g. Karasek & Theorell, 1990) due to the fact that this research was mainly carried out in the field of stress medicine in the USA and Sweden. Stress research in Germany was often carried out by focusing on, in part, different stress items. Still another direction in the use of the term "stress" can be observed in Australia, where the term is influenced by its clinical usage as a medical diagnosis (e.g. Toohey, 1991). These circumstances cause some confusion when comparing the results from stress research within these different research areas. Thus, discussions can arise concerning the difference between stress and mobbing (Leymann, 1993c) as the confusion about the content of the terminology does not make it clear whether mobbing is the source of stress or the result of it. We must await further results to determine what should be understood as "stress". In Scandinavian research, as in the present article, mobbing is seen as an extreme social phenomenon, triggered by extreme social stressors, causing a range of negative effects, e.g. biological and psychological stress reactions. Thus, my use of the terminology implies that stress is the term always used for the reaction to a stimulus, referred to as a stressor. The reaction is seen as always being of biological nature with psychological effects which may be responsible for changes in behaviour (how situations are appraised, how they are dealt with, etc.; see also Lazarus, 1996). Within this theory, the logical conclusion is that, for example, very poor psychosocial conditions at workplaces may result in biological stress reactions, measurable by the adrenaline production in the body. This in turn can stimulate feelings of frustration. Through psychological processes (especially if employees lack knowledge of how to analyse social stressors at work), frustrated persons can, instead, blame each other, thus becoming each other's social stressors, and triggering a mobbing situation for a single person. Mobbing is thus an extreme social stressor, bringing about stress reactions, which in their turn can become social stressors for others.

The Relationship of Mobbing to Conflict

As originally understood in the Swedish research carried out since 1982, mobbing should be viewed as an exaggerated conflict. Mobbing evolves from a conflict after a certain time, sometimes very quickly, sometimes after weeks or months, leading to the described characteristics. In social psychology, research on aggression and conflict is voluminous. Nevertheless, this

phenomenon has not been detected, the reason probably being that the social context in which it develops and is carried out changes (see the section on the course of mobbing). Another probable reason is that conflict researchers have investigated many things but have never focused on the health outcomes of the persons involved in the conflict. Therefore, experiences from "conflict solving" may not necessarily be helpful (Zapf et al., this issue).

IDENTIFICATION OF MOBBING ACTIVITIES

Identification of hostile activity variables resulted in the possibility of understanding the structure of the mobbing process. It then became apparent that these activities, although they were negatively used in such cases, in themselves did not always have a purely negative character. They consisted to a great extent of quite normal interactive behaviours. However, used highly frequently and over a long period of time in order to harass, their content and meaning changed, consequently turning into dangerous, communicative weapons (see for example case studies in Leymann, 1992b and 1993b). Their systematic use in this type of interaction triggers the development of the very stereotypical course of the mobbing process.

Due to this conceptualization, a typology of activities could be developed and subdivided into five categories depending on the effects they have on the victim. The following results are from informal interviews and heuristic analyses:

1. Effects on the victims' possibilities to communicate adequately (management gives you no possibility to communicate; you are silenced; verbal attack against you regarding work tasks; verbal threats; verbal activities in order to reject you; etc.).
2. Effects on the victims' possibilities to maintain social contacts (colleagues do not talk with you any longer or you are even forbidden to do so by management; you are isolated in a room far away from others; you are "sent to Coventry"; etc.).
3. Effects on the victims' possibilities to maintain their personal reputation (gossiping about you; others ridicule you; others make fun about your handicap, your ethnical heritage, or the way you move or talk; etc.).
4. Effects on the victims' occupational situation (you are not given any work tasks at all; you are given meaningless work tasks; etc.).
5. Effects on the victims' physical health (you are given dangerous work tasks; others threaten you physically or you are attacked physically; you are sexually harassed in an active way; etc.).

In all, 45 different activities used during a mobbing process were identified (see the item lists in Leymann, 1992b and 1993b). The item list has been

statistically analysed using factor analyses (Niedl, 1995; Zapf et al., this issue) leading to similar categories. It must, nevertheless, be emphasized that these activities mainly describe hostile interactions as carried out in northern European countries (Leymann, 1992a). Studies carried out in Austria (Niedl, 1995) support an earlier hypothesis that further behaviours may be used in other cultures, while some of these from the northern European culture may not be used at all. Knorz and Zapf (1996) published a number of other behaviours found in the southern part of Germany using qualitative interviews.

Eventually a questionnaire was developed and tested (LIPT-questionnaire: Leymann Inventory of Psychological Terror; Leymann, 1990a). It has been employed in all studies mentioned previously, with the exception of the Norwegian studies which used a different investigative method.

STEREOTYPIC COURSE OVER TIME

The course of mobbing changes its character over time as the social setting changes. Scandinavian, Austrian, and Finnish research thus far reveals very stereotypical courses (Leymann, e.g. 1990b).

1. *Critical incidents.* The triggering situation is most often a conflict. Mobbing can, therefore, be seen as an escalated conflict. Not much is known about what leads the development of a conflict into a mobbing situation. Hypothetically, the first mobbing phase (which, to be exact, is not yet mobbing!) may be very short, while the next phase reveals stigmatizing actions by colleagues or shop-floor management.

2. *Mobbing and stigmatizing.* Mobbing activities may contain quite a number of behaviours which, in normal interaction, are not necessarily indicative of aggression or expulsion. However, being subjected to these behaviours almost on a daily basis and for a very long time can change their context and they may be used in stigmatizing the person in question. In fact, all of the observed behaviours, regardless of their normal meaning in normal daily communication, have the common denominator of being based on the intent to "get at a person" or punish him or her. Thus, aggressive manipulation is the main characteristic of these events.

3. *Personnel management.* When management steps in, the case becomes officially "a case". Due to previous stigmatization, it is very easy to misjudge the situation as being the fault of the subjected person. Management tends to accept and take over the prejudices produced during the previous stages. This very often seems to bring about the desire to do something in order to "get rid of the evil", i.e. the victim. This most often results in serious violations of rights, as personnel management is governed by work legislation. In this phase, the victim ultimately becomes marked/stigmatized

(Jones, 1984). Because of fundamental attribution errors, colleagues and management tend to create explanations based on personal characteristics rather than on environmental factors (Jones, 1984). This may be the case particularly when management is responsible for the psychological work environment and may refuse to accept responsibility for the situation.

4. *Expulsion.* As far as the mobbing scenario at the workplace is concerned, the social effects of expelling people from working life long before retirement are well known. This situation is probably responsible for the development of serious illnesses (Groeblinghoff & Becker, this issue; Leymann, 1995c, Leymann & Gustavsson, this issue) that cause the victim to seek medical or psychological help. However, as has been argued, the victim very easily can be incorrectly diagnosed by professionals, whether by disbelief of the person's story or by not bothering to look into the triggering social events. The most incorrect diagnoses so far are paranoia, manic depression, or character disturbance.

Comments on Eve's Case

The case clearly shows the course of a mobbing process: (1) Initially, conflicts arise, which management, despite its responsibility, does not manage to resolve. (2) As the conflict extends over time and no solution is offered, the process develops, and the harassed person is almost daily forced to experience hostilities. (3) Eventually (and this may take many months or even years), management is forced to take action. At this point, management very often accepts the gossip and the complaints from (very often just a few) colleagues without questioning their truthfulness, thus condemning the harassed person to some kind of administrative punishment. Comparing case after case, this course of events is very stereotypical. (4) Due to administrative activities, individuals in question develop such a poor reputation that it is extremely difficult to remain in the labour market; if they do so, then it is only at the loss of their earlier status as they receive only very poor work tasks in the future (Leymann, 1986, 1992b).

It must be emphasized here that it is futile to discuss *who* caused the conflict or *who* is right, even if this is of practical interest. However, there is another point at stake: We are discussing a type of social and psychological assault at the workplace, which can lead to profound legal, social, economic, and psychological consequences for the individual. These consequences are so grave and out of balance that it should be made very clear that this phenomenon, despite any other areas of interest, should be seen mainly as an encroachment of civil rights. These cases show tragic fates, including loss of civil rights, that were long ago forbidden in most societies. In the highly industrialized western world, the workplace is the only remaining "battle field" where people can "kill" each other without running the risk of being

taken to court. In Sweden, it has been found that approximately 10–20% of annual suicides have mobbing processes at work in the background (Leymann, 1987).

There is a further question of exceeding importance: Should conflicts at work be allowed to get out of control and escalate into a mobbing process? Such a process should be evaluated the same way as events that lead to physical injuries. After all, these are *psychological occupational injuries* with profound consequences which can lead to life-long damage. Moreover, they are also extremely expensive for the employer.

CONSEQUENCES OF MOBBING

Effects on Society

Toohey (1991) calculated some of the costs for these and other cases of stress-related illness. Australia's costs for leave due to employees being maltreated at work are dramatic. Toohey's main criticism is focused on the fact that these employees, following long periods of being subjected to very poor psychosocial work environments, eventually consulted their physicians who diagnosed "stress" (as this is usually used in this country). Toohey's criticism is that the "health industry", by using this procedure, produces a focus on "being ill', "not being well", or "not being able to take the strain of working life", instead of forcing management, as Toohey claims should be done, to carry out enquiries into the working environments which produced the illnesses. As Toohey points out, the result of this type of policy does not give management any incentive to reorganize the working procedures of their companies.

Such highly abused employees also show a tendency towards early retirement, as has been shown by Swedish public statistics. The figures for 1992 show that as much as approximately 25% of the workforce over the age of 55 retired early. Estimates made by the Social Insurance Office reached high numbers in respect to the proportion of individuals having developed illnesses from poor psychological working environments, e.g. mobbing experiences. They varied between 20% and 40% of the yearly number of early retirements caused by poor psychosocial environments. In other words, approximately every third to fifth early retiree in this age group had suffered from extensive mobbing (personal discussions with officials from the Swedish National Board of Social Insurance, 1993).

It is not surprising that the Swedish government wanted to protect their national budget from these heavy financial burdens. At the turn of the year 1993/94, the Vocational Rehabilitation Act came into effect. This law states that employers are obligated to present a vocational rehabilitation plan to the Social Insurance Office as soon as an employee has been on sick leave

for one month, or six times within a 12-month period. The purpose of this enactment is to transfer costs for rehabilitation to the origin: where poor environmental conditions trigger costly consequences (AFS, 1994).

Effects on the Organization

Johanson (1987), a Swedish business economist, developed item lists in order to calculate company costs for repetitive or long-term sick leave. He found methods to compute different kinds of costs for the company and their large sums. He could also demonstrate that it was less costly for a company to offer these employees an expensive, professional vocational rehabilitation and to reorganize working environments than to deal with employees in the way that Eve was.

Extended conflicts of this kind cause further negative development, worsening the psychosocial workplace environment. As the concept of mobbing is new, research results on these effects are not yet available. Hypothetically one can imagine its consequences in the form of higher production costs, higher personnel turnover, lack of personnel motivation, and so on.

Effects on the Victim

For the individual, mobbing is highly destructive. A common question is why does the person not leave the organization. However, as a person becomes older, his or her ability to find a new job diminishes. This is probably responsible for another fact, namely that those who have developed PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) because of mobbing are rarely younger than 40 years of age (Leymann, 1995c; Leymann & Gustafsson, this issue). The risk that the victim's occupational position will stagnate or even worsen is elevated (this is well demonstrated in the study of Knorz & Zapf, 1996). Expulsion from employment may easily turn into a situation in which the individual in question is unable to find any job at all, which means that he or she is essentially expelled from the labour market (e.g. Grund, 1995). Seen from these perspectives, further negative effects will most likely be detected in future research.

EPIDEMIOLOGICAL FINDINGS

Thus far, the most extensive research project on mobbing has been carried out in Sweden. As results of this study have not been published in English until now, I will very shortly describe the study and present some of the important findings. A sample of about 2400 employees, representing the entire Swedish working population, were interviewed (Leymann, 1992a, 1992c, 1992d).

Frequencies

The epidemiological statistics revealed that 3.5% ($\pm$0.7%; $P < 0.5$) of the collective fit into the definition of mobbing as stated previously. This prevalence means that 154,000 of the working population of 4.4 million male and female employees were subjected to mobbing. An epidemiological calculation based on this study revealed an incidence rate of 120,000 individuals as "newcomers" per year. Presuming a mean duration of 30 years in the labour market, the individual risk of being subjected to mobbing is 25%, i.e. one out of every four employees entering the labour market will risk being subjected to at least one period of mobbing of at least half a year duration during his or her working career.

Gender

Men (45%) and women (55%) are subjected in roughly equal proportions, the difference not being significant. As to the question "who is mobbing whom?", the study shows that 76% of the subjected men got mobbed by other men, whereas only 3% were attacked by women; 21% of the men were subjected by both sexes. On the other hand, 40% of the subjected women were mobbed by other women, 30% were attacked by men, and another 30% by both. This should not be interpreted according to gender. The explanation as to why men mainly get mobbed by other men and women by other women should be interpreted as a structural consequence of work life, at least in Sweden, which is still divided: men mostly work together with men and women with women. Of interest is, of course, the fact that there is quite a difference in the proportion of mobbing between the sexes. Even results of other studies confirm this tendency. It could be reasoned that men do attack women in a smaller proportion, but that the males who mobbed women are those women's superiors (both men and women more often still have a male as their superior).

Age

The observed differences are not significant. The age groups 21–30 years and 31–40 years are over-represented, compared to the three groups 41–50, 51–60, and more than 60. Niedl (1995) found other proportions in an Austrian collective.

The Number of Mobbers

About one-third of the victims were attacked by only one other person. Slightly more than 40% were subjected to attacks by two to four persons. That a whole work team should harass a single person is very rare. Future research should focus on those persons who are very well aware of the

ongoing mobbing but who choose not to intervene. These persons may be seen as those who hypothetically could stop the process. The results of the Swedish study shows that there may be quite a number of "bystanders".

Occupations

Even here, the results are not significant due to the fact that the number of 2400 was still not large enough for studies of subgroups. Nevertheless, tendencies show that some branches may be over-represented (in the following, the proportion of the entire workforce in a given branch is shown in brackets): 14.1% (6.5%) of the subjected persons in the study work in schools, universities, and other educational settings. A study of patients in the Swedish so-called "mobbing clinic" (Leymann, 1995c) shows an over-proportion of patients who worked in schools, universities, hospitals, child care centres, and religious organizations. About three-quarters of the patients at this hospital were women. Also these findings should not be interpreted genderwise. The explanation may be that just these work places have larger shortcomings regarding organization, work task content, and management. The reason for this, in its turn, may be organizational difficulties as these work places are controlled by more than one hierarchy, e.g. by politically chosen groups and so on. So far, this has not been studied in detail. The overproportion of women in the patient group may be caused by the fact that these work places employ women in a larger proportion than men.

Long-term Effects

A greater proportion of these subjected employees (the study points roughly towards 10–20%) seem to contract serious illnesses or commit suicide. Leyman (1987) points out that about every sixth to 15th officially noted suicide in the Swedish statistics (in all about 1800 every year) may be caused by this kind of workplace problem.

Early International Comparisons

Direct comparisons can not, so far, be done as studies from different countries are still so few. Nevertheless, a number of studies carried out at different kinds of workplace show minor differences in regard to countries and branches (Leymann, 1992e, 1992f; Leymann & Lindroth, 1993; Niedl, 1995; Paanen & Vartia, 1991). In Sweden, companies within the private sector show a slightly lower mobbing frequency compared with public service organizations where the frequency is higher. In Finland and Austria, the general frequency was higher than in Sweden. Studies pertaining to the prevalence of mobbing at Norwegian workplaces are impossible to compare due to the fact that quite a different study method was used.

WHY DOES MOBBING TAKE PLACE?

The question is, then, why mobbing processes develop in the first place. Widely spread prejudices maintain that the problem arises once an employee with character difficulties enters the workforce. The research thus far has not been able in any way to validate this hypothesis, neither with respect to mobbed employees at workplaces, nor mobbed children at schools (see the literature mentioned earlier in this article). What then does research, so far, show as its probable causes?

The Work Organization as a Factor

Analyses of approximately 800 case studies show an almost stereotypic pattern (Becker, 1995; Kihle, 1990; Leymann, 1992b; Niedl, 1995). In all these cases, extremely poorly organized production and/or working methods and an almost helpless or uninterested management were found. This is not surprising keeping in mind the mostly poor organizational conditions that Leymann (1992b, 1995c) found for mobbed employees from hospitals, schools, and religious organizations, which were over-represented in these studies.

Let us take the work organization at a hospital as observed in some of these cases as an example. Quite a few nurses whom we interviewed did not really know who their boss was. A hospital has at least two parallel hierarchies: one represented by doctors responsible for diagnosing and determining treatments, and one represented by a hierarchy of nurses responsible for carrying out the treatment. Both hierarchies have their management that gives orders and supplies bosses for the nurse, both kinds of boss have the authority to tell her what to do or what not to do. Commonly extensive workloads arise either because of a shortage in the workforce or due to poor work organization on a daily basis. Often, the unofficial institution of spontaneous leadership (marked as dangerous in the literature on management and organization) is a necessity to get things accomplished at all. This results in a situation where a nurse can occasionally take over the command within a group of nurses without having the authority to do so in order to accomplish the work. Clear-cut rules for this unofficial procedure, or knowledge of whether or not fellow colleagues will accept this, do not exist. All of these are in fact high-risk situations and can very easily result in conflicts. When this happens, whether the conflict will be prolonged or easily settled depends very often on the existing type of group dynamics and not on (as it should be) whether management has the training and motivation to solve conflicts. Especially in a working world where almost only women are employed, conflicts tend to become harsher as women are more dependent on social, supportive group dynamics (Björkqvist, Österman, & Hjelt-Bäck, 1994).

Poor Conflict Management as a Second Source

The situation gets far more dangerous if the manager of one of these hier-
archies wants to be part of the social setting. If the supervisor, instead of
sorting out the problem, is actively taking part, group dynamically, in the
harassment, he or she also has to choose sides. As we have seen in very
many cases, this stirs up the situation and makes it worse (Leymann, 1992b).
In addition to this management reaction, it has been found to a high degree
that when a manager simply neglects the "quarrel", the conflict is thereby
given time to deepen and escalate. Poor managerial performance thus
entails either (1) getting involved in the group dynamics on an equal basis
and thereby heating it up further (which we have seen more often with
female managers) or (2) denying that a conflict exists (which we have seen
more often with male managers). Both types of behaviour are quite
dangerous and are, together with poor work organization, the main causes
for the development of a mobbing process at the workplace (Adams, 1992;
Kihle, 1990).

   Again, it must be underlined that research concerning causes of mobbing
behaviour is so far still in its infancy, and in particular the difference in
behaviour between male and female management is still poorly understood.
Research in this area has been carried out in Finland, demonstrating that
women choose mobbing activities that affect the victim more indirectly
(gossip, slander, activating other individuals to carry out mobbing activities,
etc.). Björkqvist, Lagerspetz, and Kaukianinen (1992) state that female
aggressiveness has been widely overlooked in earlier research as variables
in data collecting were oriented mainly towards male standards. According
to this, Björkqvist et al. argue that this might be the reason behind the false
impression that women score milder on questionnaires measuring aggres-
siveness. Even here, future research will eventually focus on more causes
in detail.

What About the Personality of the Victim?

As mentioned earlier, research so far has not revealed any importance of
personality traits either with respect to adults at workplaces or children at
school. We regard statements about character problems of single individuals
by logic, as a false statement. It must not be forgotten, that the workplace
should not be confused with other situations in life. A workplace is always
regulated by behavioural rules. One of these rules deals with effective co-
operation, controlled by the supervisor. Conflicts can always arise, but
must, according to these behavioural rules, be settled. One of the super-
visor's obligations is to manage this kind of situation. By neglecting this
obligation (and supervisors as well as top management often do so as a
consequence of shortcomings in conflict management), a supervisor pro-

motes the escalation of the conflict in the direction of a mobbing process. Mobbing, in its early stages, is most often a sign that a conflict around the organization of work tasks has taken on a private touch. When a conflict is "privatized" or, in other words, if the power behind its further development begins to become grounded in a deeper dislike between two individuals, then the conflict concerning work tasks has become a situation that an employer has the obligation to stop. Once a conflict has reached this stage in its escalation, it is meaningless to blame someone's "personality" for it—even if (which is quite unlikely) future research should reveal personality as a source of conflicts of this kind. If a conflict has developed into a mobbing process, the responsibility lies in the first instance with the management, either due to deficient conflict management in the single situation, or due to a lack of organizational policies about handling conflict situations (Leymann, 1993b).

A further argument against the view to look at an individual's personality as a cause of mobbing processes is that when a post-traumatic stress syndrome develops, the individual can develop major personality changes as a symptom of a major mental disorder due to the mobbing process. As the symptoms of this changed personality are quite typical and distinct, it is understandable, but still false, that even psychiatrists lacking modern knowledge about PTSD as a typical victim disorder misunderstand these symptoms as being what the individual brought into the company in the first place (Leymann & Gustafsson, this issue).

MEASURES

There are a number of measures, which have been shown to be effective in these situations on a practical level, although at present there are not yet any research results available confirming these scientifically. Nevertheless, practical experiences in Sweden are numerous. Due to the fact that the National Board of Occupational Safety and Health (NBOSH) in Stockholm has distributed pedagogical material since 1989 (video, overhead, manual, books, etc.; a German translation is Leymann, 1995a and 1995b), about 300 Swedish companies have used it, according to information from NBOSH in November 1995. In fact, the educational video and further material has been a bestseller since 1989. I have myself used this material in about 100 companies. The following information is based on these practical experiences and other verbal information from the educational staff (see also Leymann, 1993a).

When to comes to selecting a measure, it is essential to know that this must be carried out according to what phase in the mobbing process is present. There are different measures available directed toward preventing its development, stopping it, or rehabilitating a subjected individual.

Precautions

It should be in the employer's interest to establish a policy in preventing conflicts from escalating into dangerous states. It seems to be nearly sufficient if the employer states that dangerous escalation of conflicts are not in the organization's interest and that top management considers prevention *by supervisors and managers* as a rule. Education of management at all levels in the art of conflict management, and training in using the policy of the company appropriately is one preventive measure. In addition, policy rules about how to act if a conflict has reached a state where conflict management becomes very demanding should exist.

Early Management Interventions

In order to intervene early, a supervisor must be capable of reading the first signs of a developing mobbing process. Top management should also appoint one or more individuals in the organization to whom employees in danger can turn to for advice. For these officials, management has to delgate authority in order to allow them to become active in the single case. Case studies thus far (Leymann, 1992b) show very clearly that inactivity at these levels also involves the supervisor being very insecure in his or her organizational role in such a conflict. A company policy should also give clear information pertaining to this. One way of early prevention and intervention is to straighten out organizational matters in the company and shape organizational order and ethics in behaviour (see the pedagogical material from the National Board of Occupational Safety and Health in Stockholm, 1989 and its German translation, Leymann, 1995a, 1995b).

Vocational Rehabilitation

As a mobbing process develops, it should be the obligation of supervisors and managers to protect the individual in danger. Stigmatization of the individual must be prevented, and he or she must be able to keep up his or her previous reputation and abilities. Should the person be urged to take sick leave, vocational rehabilitation should be offered. Present research in Sweden and Germany will reveal effective methods at a later date. However, letting an unhappy person go through a mobbing process and thereafter just dumping him or her should be classified as a major management failure.

Law

Three Scandinavian countries recognize the employee's right to remain physically *and mentally* healthy at work (Sweden, Finland, and Norway). The Swedish National Board of Occupational Safety and Health has, on top

of this legislation, submitted three ordinances in order to enforce this act, one of them especially regarding mobbing. One ordinance enforces the employer to internal control of the work environment on a regular basis in order to be able to take measures at an early stage (AFS, 1992). Another ordinance enforces direct interventions as mobbing occurs at the workplace (AFS, 1993). A third ordinance in this area enforces the employer's responsibility for vocational rehabilitation once an employee has been on sick leave very often during one year or has been on sick leave for at least one month (AFS, 1994).

RESEARCH AROUND THE WORLD

This article gave an overview of the concept of mobbing, reported some epidemiological findings, and summarized various measures against mobbing. Following the publication of a first research paper (Leymann & Gustavsson, 1984) and a first book (Leymann, 1986), the concept of mobbing has been picked up in a number of different countries for further scientific development. Research so far has been carried out in Norway (Einarsen & Raknes, 1991; Kihle, 1990; Matthiesen, Raknes, & Rökkum, 1989), Finland (Björkqvist et al., 1994; Paananen & Vartia, 1991), Germany (Becker, 1993; Halama, 1995; Knorz & Zapf, 1996; Zapf et al., this issue), Austria (Niedl, 1995), Hungary (Kaucsek & Simon, 1995), and Australia (McCarthy, Sheehan, & Kearns, 1995; Toohey, 1991). Mobbing research is also about to start in the Netherlands, the UK, France, and Italy. Although some progress can be reported in this issue, it is clear that there are more open questions than empirically founded answers. It is my hope that this issue will further stimulate research in this area and make scientists and practitioners aware of the harm and suffering caused by mobbing at work.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

REFERENCES

Adams, A. (1992). *Bullying at work*. London: Virago Press.
Arbetarskyddsstyrelsens Författnings Samling. (1992). *Internkontroll av arbetsmiljön [Internal control of work environment]* (Vol. 6). Stockholm: Arbetarskyddsstyrelsen.
Arbetarskyddsstyrelsens Författnings Samling. (1993). *Kränkande särbehandling i arbetslivet [Victimization at work]* (Vol. 17). Stockholm: Arbetarskyddsstyrelsen.
Arbetarskyddsstyrelsens Författnings Samling. (1994). *Arbetsanpassning och rehabilitering [Work assignment and vocational training]* (Vol. 1). Stockholm: Arbetarskyddsstyrelsen.

Becker, M. (1993). Mobbing—ein neues Syndrom [Mobbing—a new syndrome]. *Spektrum der Psychiatrie und Nervenheilkunde, 22,* 108–110.

Becker, M. (1995). Rückwege zum Selbstbewußtsein—Ein Beispiel für die Behandlung in der Mobbingklinik [Ways back to self-confidence—an example for the treatment in the mobbing clinic]. In H. Leymann (Ed.), *Der neue Mobbing Bericht. Erfahrungen und Initiativen—Auswege und Hilfsangebote* (pp. 124–144). Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt.

Björkqvist, K., Lagerspetz, K.M.J., & Kaukianinen, A. (1992). Do girls manipulate and boys fight? Developmental trends in regard to direct and indirect aggression. *Aggressive Behavior, 18,* 117–127.

Björkqvist, K., Österman, K., & Hjelt-Bäck, M. (1994). Aggression among university employees. *Aggressive Behavior, 20,* 173–184.

Brodsky, C.M. (1976). *The harassed worker.* Toronto: Lexington Books; DC Heath and Company.

Einarsen, S., & Raknes, B.I. (1991). *Mobbing i arbeidslivet. En undersökelse av forekomst ol helsemessige av mobbing på norske arbeidsplasser [Mobbing in worklife: A study on prevalence and health effects of mobbing in Norwegian workplaces].* Bergen: Forksnings-senter for arbeidsmiljö (FAHS).

Grund, U. (1955). Wenn die hemmschwellen sinken. Die Aufgabe der Gewerkschaft: Aufklärung und Prävention [When the thresold of scruples shrink: The task of the trade unions: Information and prevention). In H. Leymann (Ed.), *Der neue Mobbing-Bericht. Erfahrungen und Initiativen, Aufwege und Hilfsangebote* (pp. 93–107). Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt.

Halama, P. (1995). *Psychosozialer Streß durch Mobbing und Giftstoffe an Arbeitsplatz. [Psychosocial stress through mobbing and toxic substances at work places].* Unpublished manuscript. Hamburg.

Heinemann, P. (1972). *Mobbing—Gruppvåald bland barn och vuxna [Mobbing—group violence by children and adults].* Stockholm: Natur och Kultur.

Johanson, U. (1987). *Utveckla det mänskliga kapitalet [Developing the human capital].* Stockholm: SPF-Verlag.

Jones, E. (1984). *Social stigma—The psychology of marked relationships.* New York: W.H. Freeman.

Karasek, R., & Theorell, T. (1990). *Healthy work: Stress, productivity and the reconstruction of working life.* New York: Basic Books.

Kaucsek, G., & Simon, P. (1995, April). *Psychoterror and risk-management in Hungary.* Paper presented at the Seventh European Congress of Work and Organizational Psychology, Györ, Hungary.

Kihle, S. (1990). *Helsefarlige ledere og medarbeidere [When management is a health risk for subordinates].* Oslo: Hemmets bokförlag.

Knorz, C., & Zapf, D. (1996). Mobbing—eine extreme Form sozialer Stressoren am Arbeitsplatz [Mobbing—an extreme type of social stressors at the work place]. *Zeitschrift für Arbeits- & Organisationspsychologie, 40,* 12–21.

Lazarus, R.S. (1966). *Psychological stress and the coping process.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Leyman, H. (1986). Vuxenmobbning—om psykiskt våld i arbetslivet [Mobbing—psychological violence at work places]. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Leymann, H. (1987). Självmord till följd av förhållanden i arbetsmiljön [Suicide and conditions at the work place]. *Arbete, människa, miljö, 3,* 155–160.

Leymann. H. (1990a). *Handbok för användning av LIPT-formuläret för kartläggning av risker för psykiskt våld i arbetsmiljön [The LIPT questionnaire—a manual].* Stockholm: Violen.

Leymann, H. (1990b). Mobbing and psychological terror at workplaces. *Violence and Victims, 5,* 119–126.

Leymann, H. (1992a). *Vuxenmobbning på svenska arbetsplatser. En rikstäckande under-sökning med 2.428 intervjuer [Mobbing at Swedish work places—a study of 2428 individuals: Frequencies]*. (Delrapport 1 om frekvenser.) Stockholm: Arbetarskyddsstyrelsen.

Leymann, H. (1992b). *Från mobbning till utslagning i arbetslivet [From mobbing to expulsion in work life]*. Stockholm: Publica.

Leymann, H. (1992c). *Manligt och kvinnligt vid vuxenmobbning. En rikstäckande under-sökning med 2428 intervjuer [Gender and mobbing—a study of 2428 individuals]*. (Del-rapport 2.) Stockholm: Arbetarskyddsstyrelsen.

Leymann, H. (1992d). *Psykiatriska hälsoproblem i samband med vuxenmobbning. En rikstäckande undersökning med 2428 intervjuer [Psychiatric problems after mobbing—a study of 2428 individuals]*. (Delrapport 3.) Stockholm: Arbetarskyddsstyrelsen.

Leymann, H. (1992e). *Oetisk kommunikation i partiarbetet [Unethical communication in political parties]*. Stockholm: Arbetarskyddsstyrelsen.

Leymann, H. (1992f). *En svag grupps psykosociala arbetsvillkor i Sverige [The psychosocial work condition of a group of handicapped workers in Sweden]*. Stockholm: Arbetarskyddsstyrelsen.

Leymann, H. (1993a). Marketing für qualifizierte Maßnahmen zum Abbau von psychischem Terror am Arbeitsplatz [Marketing of measurements against psychoterror at work places]. In H. Geißler (Ed.), *Bildungsmarketing. Band 4 Serie Betriebliche Bildung—Erfahrungen und Visionen*. Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang Verlag.

Leymann, H. (1993b). Mobbing. Psychoterror am Arbeitsplatz und wie man sich dagegen wehren kann [Mobbing—psychoterror at work places]. Reinbek: Rowohlt Verlag.

Leymann, H. (1993c). Ätiologie und Häufigkeit von Mobbing am Arbeitplatz—eine Übersicht über die bisherige Forschung [Etiology and frequency of mobbing at work—a research review]. *Zeitschrift für Personalforschung, 7*, 271–283.

Leymann, H. (1995a). *Mobbing und Psychoterror an Arbeitsplatz [Mobbing and psychoterror at work places]* (Videotape). Wien: Verlag des ÖGB.

Leymann, H. (1995b). *Begleitmaterial zum Mobbing-Video [Information material for the mobbing video]*. Wien: Verlag des ÖGB.

Leymann, H. (1995c). *Hur sjuk blir man av kränkande särbehandling i arbetslivet? Diagnos-statistik över posttraumatisk stress belastning (PTSD) från de första 64 patienterna hos Sveriges RehabCenter AB Violen [How ill does one become through mobbing at work?]*. Stockholm: Arbetarskyddsstyrelsen.

Leymann, H., & Gustavsson, B. (1984). *Psykiskt våld i arbetslivet. Två explorativa under-sökningar [Psychological violence at work places. Two explorative studies]*. (Under-sökningsrapport 42.) Stockholm: Arbetarskyddsstyrelsen.

Leymann, H., & Lindroth, S. (1993). *Vuxenmobbning mot manliga förskollärare [Mobbing of male teachers at kindergartens]*. Stockholm: Arbetarskyddsstyrelsen.

Leymann, H., & Tallgren, U. (1989). Undersökning av frekvensen vuxenmobbning inom SSAB [A study of mobbing frequencies at SSAB]. *Arbete, människa, miljö, 1*, 110–115.

Lorenz, K. (1991). *Hier bin ich—wo bist Du? Ethologie der grauganz [Here I am—where are you? The behaviour of geese]* (New edition). München: Piper.

Matthiesen, S.B., Raknes, B.I., & Rökkum, O. (1989). Mobbing på arbeidsplassen (Mobbing at work places]. *Tidskrift for Norsk Psykologforening, 26*, 761–774.

McCarthy, P., Sheehan, M., & Kearns, D. (1995). *Managerial styles and their effects on employees health and well-being*. Brisbane: School of Organisational Behaviour and Human Resource Management, Griffith University.

National Board of Occupational Safety and Health in Stockholm. (1989). *Mobbning och utslagning i arbetslivet [Mobbing and expulsion in working life]* [Video, manual, overhead transparencies, book, discussion material]. Stockholm: Author.

Niedl, K. (1995). *Mobbing/bullying an Arbeitsplatz [Mobbing/bullying at the work place]*. München: Rainer Hampp Verlag.

Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying at school: What we know and what we can do.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Paanen, T., & Vartia, M. (1991). *Mobbing at workplaces in state government* (in Finnish). Helsinki: Finnish Work Environment Fund.

Toohey, J. (1991). *Occupational stress: Managing a metaphor.* Sydney: Macquarie University.