

# ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' AWARENESS OF LOBBING AND THEIR EXPERIENCE FROM THE ENVIRONMENT OF CZECH SCHOOLS

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**Abstract:** *This report focuses on the problems of mobbing (bullying at workplace) and it presents partial results of extensive research investigation in Czech elementary schools, concretely the findings about teachers' awareness about this negative phenomena and experience of pedagogues at schools.*

**Keywords:** *School, school social climate, interpersonal relationships, mobbing, bossing, non-awareness, experience*

## The initial conditions of the problem

Together with the society development and the pressure on carrier growth, asserion of an individual on the work market the issue of mobbing is more frequently discussed. It can be expected that similar problems can appear in school environment and they can naturally reflect in the total climate and operation of schools. According to the accessible sources more extensive researches in the school environment have never been implemented in Czech conditions, and that is why this issue is concerned in the current centre of professional and research interest of the author.

Mobbing as a professional term has been gradually entrenched in Czech terminology as there is not such an apt name. The term bullying, which is the closest in terms of the meaning, does not cover the basis of mobbing and they cannot be confused. Bullying appears in primitive societies as for instance school or army environment, it presents more simple forms of aggression, in most cases it includes physical attacks. In mobbing, on the contrary, we talk about a psychological form of attack, with especially psychological and psychosomatic detriment. It concerns more cunning, insidious and long-term psychoterror, which is, in many cases, very inconspicuous and contrary to the physical violence and it is difficult to be proven (Kantor, 2009, pg 37). To help the public understand well, a possible Czech equivalent used for this term is bullying at work. In more narrow conception mobbing is also used for physical violence among people in the same work line. Within a work group there is then another

form of mobbing called bossing, where the initiator is a leading authority. Bossing must be perceived as a dangerous form of psychoterror at work as the duty of the leading authority is, in first place, to create pleasant work conditions. Further on the leaders have, due to their position, some certain power that is, in this case, negatively used, which is totally inadmissible for such position (Beño, 2003, pg 10, 126). One of other less frequent ways of mobbing, which can be seen in professional literature, is staffing. In case of staffing the attacks come from subordinates with the aim of utter discrediting or destruction of the leading workers or the leadership, or the whole personnel policy (Kraft, 2005, pg 16).

We have penetrated the basic principles of mobbing and next comes a question, what spreading of this phenomenon in workplace, in any form, brings for the work climate, interpersonal relations and work efficiency of individual workers. If we transfer such considerations into the school environment, the significance of the problem reaches deeper intensity – if we consider the fact that school is a place where we try to form maturing generations, which cannot be ensured in a socially deprived environment. As Havlínová and team state (1994, pg 29–30), the quality of the environment that is applied to school is formed by four elements:

- Ecological school environment, where the material of physical and esthetical quality of school are included, as the environment that we live and work in for people and groups that act here,
- Social school environment – quality and authority of the people and groups that the organization is formed of (pupils, teachers, parents, school leadership, local council and others),
- Social school system – the way of communication and cooperation, relationships and behaviour within and among the groups,
- Culture of the school – the system of belief, value priorities, recognition and evaluating approaches and public opinions that exist, dominate or are required at schools.

It is obvious that mobbing, in any form, has a negative influence in all these elements of school environment and it has an effect on the whole school climate, which we comprehend in analogy of Spilková (2003, pg 342) as a complex quality of interpersonal relationships and social processes in the relevant school, including the social partners of the school, on long-term social-emotional level and relatively stable ways of dealing, which are based on implicit or explicit values and rules of life at school.

It brings a few fundamental questions. What is the reality at Czech schools? Is this phenomenon present there? If yes, in what extend? If we expect pedagogues to have certain personal qualities, where would tendencies to mobbing be clearly absent? Do actually pedagogues know that psychological attacks are professionally named and that they can be prosecuted? We (together with D. Kantorem) tried to find answers to these and many other questions during the extensive research that was carried out in school terms 2008/2009 among the teacher of elementary schools in Czech Republic. Quantitative strategy was chosen in order to implement this research. The research tool used was a questionnaire that was, due to the representativeness, verified and triangulated few times by independent specialists and presented on the Internet in an

electronic form. Through the database of Czech elementary schools, which included 4194 schools, we gained contacts of teachers and in this way we directly addressed them to participate in the research. This less standard procedure was chosen due to requirements of reaching ordinary teachers directly so that there would be no restrictions from the school leadership. The total number of teachers participating in the research was 1135. After the evaluation of results the sample was formed by 1103 respondents.

In more extensive outcomes, where some are still in the process of evaluation, we present the results mapping the awareness of the phenomenon mobbing, respectively bossing, among the teachers and primary indicators of its occurrence in the environment of Czech elementary schools.

## Teachers' awareness of mobbing

To map the awareness of mobbing we were inspired by the fact that, as it is for children, if they do not gain enough information in terms of specific primary prevention concerning bullying, then even many adults do not know that there is a phenomenon of bullying present at work, which has its natural relations, progress that can be defined and that can be avoided and defended against.

We were convinced that this condition was correct, which the following table 1 reveals.

	awareness of mobbing			awareness of bossing		
	absolute frequency	relative frequency	cumulative frequency	absolute frequency	relative frequency	kumulative frequency
yes, I know what problem it is	484	43,9	43,9	472	42,8	42,8
probably yes, but I'm not sure	325	29,4	73,3	320	29,0	71,8
no	292	26,5	99,8	305	27,7	99,5
did not answer	2	0,2	100,0	6	0,5	100,0
total	1103	100,0		1103	100,0	

Table 1: Awareness of mobbing and bossing (without introducing the phenomenon)

Based on it 43.9 % (respectively 42.8 concerning bossing) of respondents is confident in their awareness of mobbing, not having this phenomenon introduced in advance, in contrast to the number of respondents (26.5 %, concerning bossing 27.7 %) that was not able to define this phenomenon. The awareness was a bit higher in case of male respondents (they formed 18.6 % from the total number of respondents), that is 48.8 %, and 42.7 concerning women.

An interesting indication is awareness of mobbing in terms of the age of respondents, which, in both cases, had a rising tendencies with advance age. That confirms the fact that naturally higher awareness comes with age and practice (see chart 1).

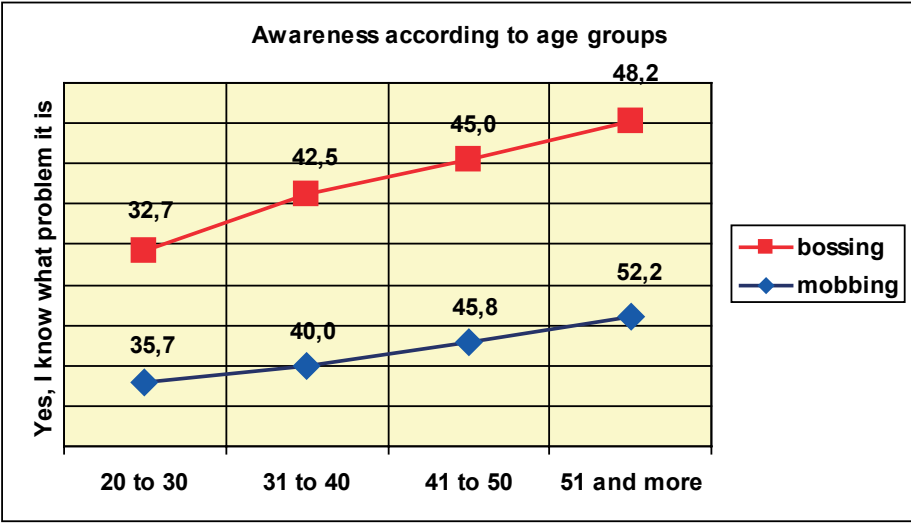


Chart 1: Awareness of mobbing and bossing according to age groups

On another stage of the research the respondents were introduced to defining the phenomenon mobbing, respectively bossing, in order to enable them to work clearly with the questionnaire to avoid misunderstanding. After the introduction it was worth to question them to find out whether information about mobbing was clear.

	awareness of mobbing after introducing the topic			awareness of bossing after introducing the topic		
	absolute frequency	relative frequency	comulative frequency	absolute frequency	relative frequency	comulative frequency
yes, I knew it	492	44,6	44,6	504	45,7	45,7
I thought so, but I wasn't sure	307	27,8	72,4	297	26,9	72,6
I presumed, but now I learn something different	45	4,1	76,5	30	2,7	75,3
no, I didn't know it	254	23,0	99,5	267	24,2	99,5
I didn't answer	5	0,5	100,0	5	0,5	100,0
total	1103	100,0		1103	100,0	

Table 2: Awareness of mobbing and bossing after the subject was introduced

Based on the table 2 it is obvious that is case of some respondents the phenomenon was clarified, especially then the one concerning bossing. The tendencies taking age and sex in terms did not change.

Other results that are worth are the ones focusing on the level of awareness of mobbing in relation to features, causes, respectively possibilities of protection against negative behaviour (see chart 2).

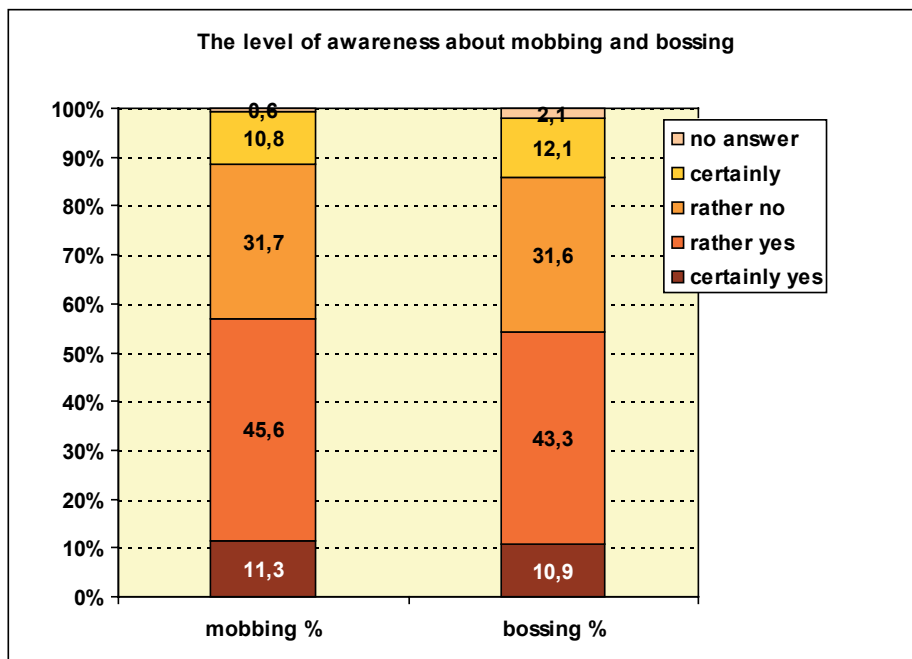


Chart 2: The level of awareness of mobbing and bossing

In this chart we can see that even though a large number of teachers has a relatively enough information about mobbing (56 %, respectively 54.2 concerning bossing), they would be able to indentify it, describe it, they would know (at least theoretically) what to do in order to protect themselves against it, there is still a large group of pedagogues at elementary schools that do not have enough information and therefore can be affected by victimity, that means they become a risk group in the relation to a possible psychical violence at school and for their personality.

### Elementary school teachers as a victim of mobbing

What is the current situation in Czech basic schools? Is the phenomenon of mobbing present there, to what extend? The following chart presents the fact concerning how many pedagogues have been exposed to the aggression of a mobber during their carrier, from both colleagues and the leadership.

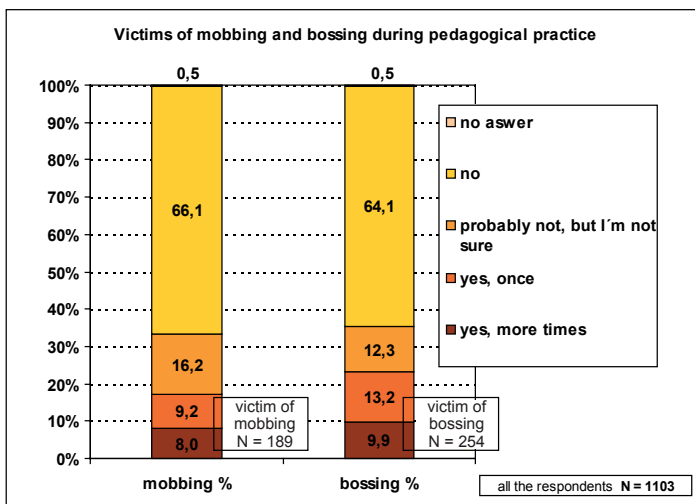


Chart 3: Victims of mobbing and bossing during pedagogical practice

As we can see, 17.2 % of the respondents have become victims of mobbing during their pedagogical activities (8 % repeatedly) and 23.1 has been exposed to psychological pressure coming from their leaders (9.9 % repeatedly).

Out of these groups, which were exposed to mobbing at school, the largest one was formed by teachers who were bullied for more than one year – 33.9 % pedagogues concerning mobbing and 43.3 % bossing! Chart 4 displays that.

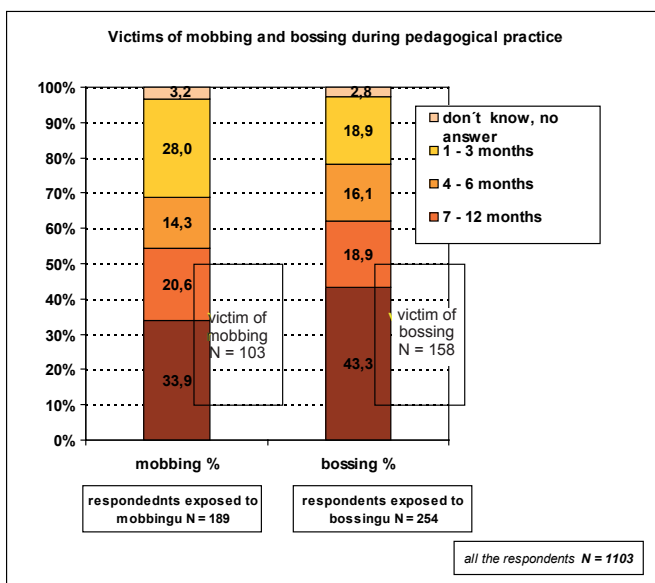


Chart 4: Victims of mobbing and bossing during pedagogical practice according to the time duration

During the last school year (2008/2009), as the chart 5 displays, out of the number of teachers that have ever experienced mobbing, 46 % were exposed to mobbing and 62.6 % to bossing. Within the whole context of teachers population presented in the research sample it therefore concerns 7.1 % of pedagogues (N=78) identically for mobbing and bossing who are currently a victim of psychoterror at school.

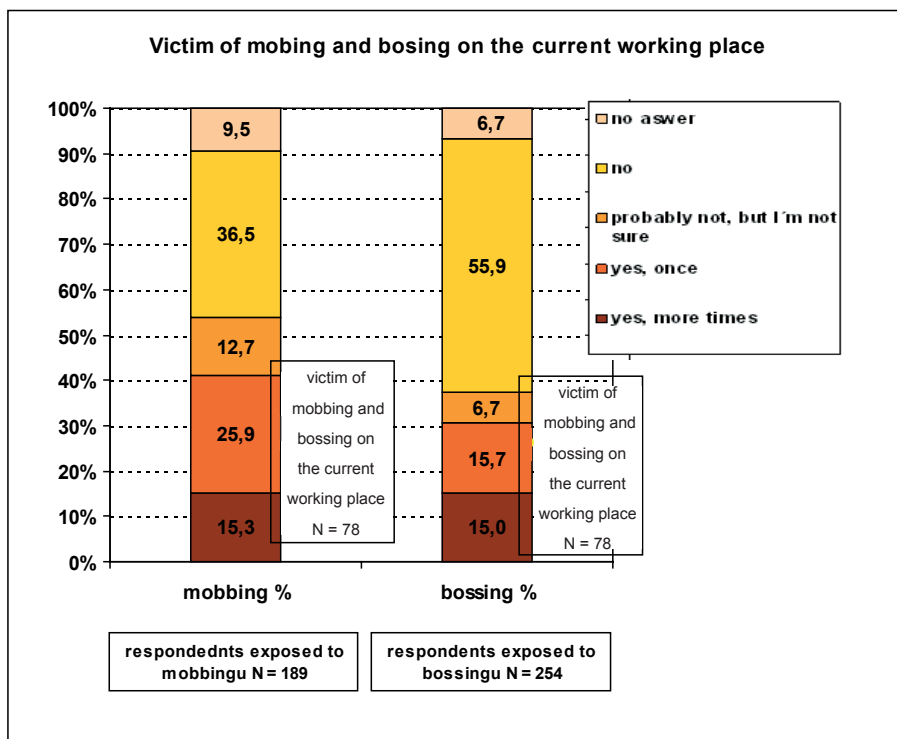


Chart 5: Victim of mobbing and bossing on the current working place

## Conclusion

The presented results are only a partial outcomes of an extensive research investigation concerning the occurrence of mobbing in Czech elementary schools. Especially the last charts present the alarming situation showing that at schools, where our children are educated, teachers do not have a pleasant atmosphere and they are exposed to various forms of psychological violence, in some cases repeatedly and in long terms. Therefore it is necessary and fundamental to eliminate the occurrence of this negative phenomenon in school environment, to work with teachers in terms of prevention so that they are able to recognize the unwanted behaviour in time and that they know what to do in order to protect themselves from such attacks.

Other findings of the research will be gradually presented at conferences and in professional periodicals.

# POVĚDOMÍ UČITELŮ ZÁKLADNÍCH ŠKOL O MOBBINGU A JEJICH ZKUŠENOSTI Z PROSTŘEDÍ ČESKÝCH ŠKOL

**Abstrakt:** Příspěvek se zabývá problematikou mobbingu (šikany na pracovišti) a prezentuje dílčí výsledky rozsáhlého výzkumného šetření v českých základních školách, konkrétně poznatky o informovanosti učitelů o tomto negativním fenoménu a zkušenosti pedagogů ze škol.

**Klíčová slova:** Škola, školní klima, mezilidské vztahy, mobbing, bossing, informovanost, zkušenosti