

## MOBBING IN HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT TAKING INTO ACCOUNT POST-PANDEMIC CONDITIONS

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**Purpose:** The main aim of the article is to illustrate the impact of mobbing on the functioning of enterprises, taking into account the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on companies and society.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The research approach used in this work included descriptive-qualitative analysis, comparative analysis, non-participant observation and survey techniques based on literature research, internet domains and own research results.

**Findings:** The study concluded that mobbing may negatively impact work organization, atmosphere and human resources management, and the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the intensification of this phenomenon and its occurrence in new forms.

**Research limitations/implications:** The research limitations presented in the paper result mainly from the limited scope of the research – the research was conducted in two companies belonging to the same owner, which may limit the possibility of generalizing the results; moreover, the results are based on the subjective opinions of employees, which may affect their objectivity.

**Practical implications:** It is possible to use the research results to develop effective anti-mobbing measures and improve human resources management in enterprises, especially in crisis situations such as a pandemic.

**Originality/value:** The scientific value of the article is based on combining the analysis of the mobbing phenomenon with the context of changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and showing its impact not only on individuals, but also on the human resources management system in enterprises.

**Keywords:** human resource management, pandemic, mobbing.

**Category of the paper:** Research paper.

### Introduction

The main aim of the article is to illustrate the impact of mobbing on the functioning of enterprises, taking into account the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on companies and society. The paper seeks to highlight the multidimensional nature of the phenomenon, showing

how psychological harassment affects both employees' well-being and the effectiveness of human resource management systems during crisis situations.

The research approach used in this work included descriptive-qualitative analysis, comparative analysis, non-participant observation, and survey techniques based on literature research, internet domains, and the author's own research results. The combination of theoretical and empirical methods made it possible to obtain a comprehensive view of mobbing as both an organizational and social problem.

The study concluded that mobbing may negatively impact work organization, atmosphere, and human resources management, and that the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the intensification of this phenomenon and its occurrence in new forms. The results are intended to show how remote work, potentially inappropriate supervisory oversight and possible communication barriers influence the emergence of the risk of psychological violence in the workplace.

The research limitations presented in the paper result mainly from the limited scope of the research – the study was conducted in two companies belonging to the same owner, which may restrict the generalization of the results. Moreover, the conclusions are based on the subjective opinions of employees, which may affect their objectivity and require further research on a larger, more diverse sample.

It is possible to use the research results to develop effective anti-mobbing measures and improve human resources management in enterprises, especially in crisis situations such as a pandemic. The findings may also support HR professionals and organizational leaders in designing preventive strategies, training programs, and internal communication policies aimed at reducing mobbing risks.

The scientific value of the article is based on combining the analysis of the mobbing phenomenon with the context of changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and showing its impact not only on individuals, but also on the human resources management system in enterprises. The paper contributes to the discussion on post-pandemic management by emphasizing the importance of ethics, empathy, and communication in building healthy organizational cultures.

## **Human Resource Management**

Human resource management (HRM) is described as a strategic and comprehensive approach to managing people within an organization (Armstrong, 2023). The term has been used in English literature since the 1960s, but its widespread use began only in the 1980s. A key characteristic of HRM is that this type of management treats employees as a key resource for the organization's success, rather than as a cost (Oleksyn, 2011).

HRM encompasses processes such as recruitment, employee development, motivation systems, interpersonal relations, organizational culture, and human resource planning (Pocztowski, 2008). The essence of HRM is the alignment of HR activities with the company's strategic goals and the perception of people as value-adding assets.

HRM has four basic functions: planning, organizing, motivating, and controlling (Griffin, 2017). Motivating means consciously influencing employee behavior to increase performance. It can be positive (rewards, vision) or negative (pressure, manipulation). Motivation must be based on clear principles, an understanding of goals, and an ethical approach on the part of management.

Human resources planning is based on competency analysis and workforce optimization. Hiring versatile individuals can provide greater flexibility, but it comes at a higher cost. Therefore, planning must be tailored to the needs and capabilities of the organization.

The onboarding of new employees and their adaptation to the work environment is crucial for their subsequent engagement and identification with the company. This process begins with recruitment and can determine motivation levels and employee turnover.

The concept of organizational culture is directly linked to human resources management. Organizational culture is a set of norms, values, and beliefs that dominate a company. It directly influences employee behavior and their identification with the organization's goals. Ethics, in turn, establishes moral boundaries for both individual and collective actions (Griffin, 2017).

In the context of HRM, the balance between individual freedom and the need to comply with organizational goals is also crucial (Kostera, 2005). Constraints must be rational and acceptable, and their implementation should be based on understanding and dialogue (Obłój, Koźmiński, 1998).

Human resource management is associated with management responsibility – poor decisions in this area can lead not only to financial losses but also to the destabilization of the entire organization (Król, Ludwiczynski, 2006).

## **Definition and introduction to the concept of mobbing**

Mobbing, also known as psychological harassment, refers to persistent, long-term, and repetitive actions intended to humiliate, exclude, or dominate the victim (Mościcka-Tecke, Potocka, 2010; Jachnis, 2019). In an organizational context, this phenomenon negatively impacts employee morale, work quality, and team spirit.

The term "mobbing" was adapted to industrial relations by Heinz Leymann in the 1980s. He defined mobbing as psychological terror in a professional environment that can last for months and lead to profound psychological trauma (Marciniak, 2015). Mobbing often takes

subtle forms: ignoring, malicious comments, attribution for mistakes, exclusion from team communication, and excessive control.

According to the Labor Code, mobbing is defined as persistent harassment of an employee, resulting in humiliation, reduced professional self-esteem, or exclusion from the team. Actions that can be clearly defined as mobbing must meet the following criteria: duration (they must be long-term), repetition (they must occur frequently), and negative intent (the perpetrator's ill will) (Monks, Coyne, 2015). They can be divided into several categories, depending on the effects they have on the victim:

**Table 1.**  
*Criteria for behaviors that qualify as mobbing*

Category	Behavior
First	Depriving victims of the ability to communicate with others, disrupting the social perception of the victim and discrediting them in their environment by ridiculing, insulting and humiliating them.
Second	Excessive criticism, control, obstructing social contacts leading to isolation of the person, use of gossip and slander, negative commenting on every behavior and every decision.
Third	Creating myths about the victim's professional, private and intimate life.
Fourth	Influencing the quality of life by changing professional tasks in such a way that they become a punishment, omitting promotions, violating a person's physical and mental integrity, and having a harmful effect on health.
Fifth	Violation of the secrecy of correspondence, theft of documents, threats.
Sixth	Excessive criticism, controlling, negative commenting on every action and every decision.
Seventh	Treating any attempt by an employee to defend themselves against attacks as unlawful rebellion.

Source: Monks, Coyne, 2015, p. 175.

Mobbing can be active (destructive and dominating actions) or passive (ignoring, avoiding, lacking support). Individual traits – such as neuroticism, low assertiveness, or strong empathy – may predispose individuals to the victim role, but this does not mean the victim is guilty (Field, 2001). Mobbing perpetrators, on the other hand, often exhibit narcissistic traits, low empathy, a lack of social skills, or a desire for power. Mobbing can take the form of individual-group conflict or internal political infighting within an organization (Gamian-Wilk, 2010).

Mobbing is a process and can occur in four phases (Leymann, 1996):

1. Initial phase – first signs of hostility (e.g. reluctance, minor spite).
2. Escalation phase – open exclusion, ridicule, questioning competence.
3. Advanced phase – the victim experiences isolation and becomes a scapegoat.
4. Apogee – physical violence, harassment or breaking the law may occur.

There are several tactics used by bullies (Zapf, 1999):

1. Isolation – exclusion from communication and social relationships.
2. Obstructing work – concealing information, overloading with responsibilities, disorganization.
3. Humiliation – public ridicule, questioning the employee's value.
4. Intimidation – threats, forced overtime, salary manipulation.

The consequences of bullying are profound and encompass both individual and organizational aspects. For the victim, this means, among other things (Nielsen, Einarsen, 2012; Agervold, Mikkelsen, 2004):

1. chronic stress, depression, psychosomatic disorders,
2. decreased self-esteem, feelings of shame, exclusion and loneliness,
3. post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and in extreme cases – suicide attempts.

The costs of bullying to organizations are significant – not only direct (absenteeism, staff turnover, decreased productivity) but also indirect: deterioration of the organizational climate, reputational damage, and legal and financial risks. It is estimated that a single incident of bullying can cost a company between \$30,000 and \$100,000, depending on the duration and scale of the problem (Namie, Namie, 2009).

Bystanders also suffer from stress, a loss of trust, and the desire to quit. Perpetrators can also experience isolation, anxiety, and psychological distress, especially when formal legal action is taken (Rayner, Hoel, Cooper, 2002).

According to the law, employers are liable for mobbing regardless of whether they were aware of its occurrence (Skiba, 2012). Victims can pursue claims for damages and compensation. However, legal proceedings are difficult and their effectiveness is limited (Sobczyk, 2016).

Counteracting mobbing should be systemic and multi-level. The most important actions include (Tomaszewska, 2009):

1. implementation of an anti-mobbing policy and its publication,
2. providing training for management and employees,
3. creating a safe system for reporting mobbing cases,
4. appointment of an ethics commissioner or mediation committee,
5. promoting a culture of respect and open communication.

Prevention also includes monitoring the workplace climate, responding quickly to conflicts, and building trust between employees. Leaders also play a crucial role – their social skills, empathy, and management style can largely prevent situations that foster psychological violence.

## **The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mobbing and human resources management**

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the functioning of social and economic systems worldwide. In response to the sudden crisis, countries have introduced numerous legal changes – both internationally and domestically. In Poland, these included regulations related to remote work, health safety, employment flexibility, and financial support for businesses (Ma, 2020).

The new regulations were intended to ensure business continuity, but in practice, they often created uncertainty and organizational chaos. The lack of clear procedures, frequent regulatory changes, and communication difficulties negatively impacted relationships between employees and management (Szumowski, Pfeffer, 2020). This situation fostered tensions and conflicts, which could escalate to mobbing.

Many Polish companies struggled with reduced productivity, job cuts, downtime, and the need to reorganize work. The implementation of remote work – in many cases without adequate technological and procedural preparation – resulted in a lack of supervision, hindered communication, and increased distrust (Komarzańska, 2024).

According to data from the Central Statistical Office, there was a significant increase in the number of businesses that suspended operations in March and April 2020. In March, there was an increase of 18,239 businesses, while in April there were 20,961 more, for a total of 510,669 suspended businesses. Detailed data is presented in Table 2 - the visible increase in the number of businesses suspending operations can be interpreted as a defensive response to the uncertain economic situation and restrictions introduced by the state.

**Table 2.**

*Changes in the number of business entities*

Month/year	The number of national economy entities included in the REGON register		
	Newly registered	Deregistered	Suspended
December 2019	23 789	44 225	448 330
January 2020	35 178	30 698	467 198
February 2020	29 770	17 515	471 469
March 2020	24 337	13 693	489 708
April 2020	14 026	8 060	510 669
May 2020	22 836	8 108	494 500
June 2020	30 683	12 010	478 122
July 2020	31 478	11 341	465 563
August 2020	27 870	10 029	464 330

Source: own study based on ZUS data.

The consequences of the phenomena described above were changes in the labor market, which were manifested, among other things, by a decline in the overall number of jobs. Table 3 presents the number of newly created and liquidated jobs. Analyzing the presented data, it can be observed that in the second quarter there was a negative balance of job growth, with the number of liquidated jobs exceeding the number of newly created jobs by 11,700. This may be evidence of the impact of the pandemic on the labor market. According to research by the Central Statistical Office, job losses due to the spread of COVID-19 occurred almost exclusively in the private sector.

**Table 3.***Changes in the number of jobs*

Positioning	Work [thousands]		
	Q4 2019	Q1 2020	Q2 2020
Newly created (A)	114.4	170.6	81.9
Liquidated (B)	61,3	119,9	93,6
Difference (A — B)	+ 53.1	+ 50.7	– 11.7

Source: own study based on ZUS data.

In a work environment that was previously hierarchical and based on face-to-face relationships, the introduction of isolation and remote work could lead to a loss of control over interpersonal processes. Individuals who were not adapted to the new conditions were more vulnerable to marginalization, lack of support, and increased pressure from superiors. These organizational conditions fostered bullying (Wojtczak-Stec, Czarniecka, Schwickert, 2025).

In some industries, this pressure stemmed from excessive expectations placed on employees (e.g., availability outside standard working hours, rapid adaptation to new tools). In others, it stemmed from fear of job loss, which fueled competition and conflict.

The pandemic has highlighted new forms of mobbing – primarily in the virtual space (Kowalska, 2021). Phenomena such as:

1. ignoring emails and online messages,
2. deliberate omission in videoconferencing,
3. imposing too many responsibilities without consultation,
4. lack of technical and organizational support.

The lack of direct contact hindered the identification of mobbing incidents and the effective response from HR departments. In many cases, employees did not know who to report the problem to or feared their complaints would go unanswered.

On the other hand, the pandemic also contributed to a greater awareness of mental health issues in the workplace. There has been increased interest in well-being, emotional support, and burnout prevention. Some companies have taken preventative measures, for example, organizing webinars with psychologists, implementing satisfaction surveys, or creating anonymous communication channels (Juchnowicz, 2020).

RM in the pandemic era has had to undergo a transformation – from traditional, procedural activities to flexible, responsive management in times of uncertainty. Key challenges included (Ulrich, Brockbank, 2020):

1. reorganization of work (including the implementation of remote work),
2. maintaining employee engagement in isolation conditions,
3. ensuring mental and physical safety,
4. dealing with the increasing number of complaints and interpersonal conflicts.

The pandemic has challenged traditional approaches to HRM, forcing companies to seek more empathetic and personalized management methods. Soft skills, communication skills, and crisis management skills have become particularly important.

Lessons learned during this period suggest that effective human resources management in the future requires not only knowledge of procedures but, above all, flexibility, trust, and the ability to create a culture based on respect and collaboration.

## **Research part – analysis of the impact of mobbing in two enterprises**

The aim of the empirical part was to examine the scale and nature of workplace bullying in two companies operating in the same industry, both owned by the same owner. One company employed up to 50 people (retail), while the other employed up to 250 employees (manufacturing). The research also aimed to determine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on work organization and the incidence of workplace bullying. An anonymous survey was conducted among 50 employees of both companies, using descriptive and comparative analysis, as well as non-participant observation.

The research questions focused on:

1. the scale of mobbing in the opinion of employees,
2. the types of most frequently reported mobbing behaviors,
3. understanding of the sources of mobbing by the study participants,
4. the impact of mobbing on the atmosphere and work efficiency in the organization.

The majority of respondents were employees with several years of experience (3-10 years) and a diverse range of education (secondary and higher). The survey included both rank-and-file employees and those in specialist and managerial positions. This selection of respondents allowed for a diverse picture of the problem.

The question structure consists of three main sections:

1. Respondent details – questions about gender, education, position, length of service, number of employees at the company, and salary levels.
2. Core questions – supplementary questions about the workplace, manifestations of discrimination, knowledge of the concept of mobbing, its forms, frequency, perpetrators, and effects.
3. The section on considering and addressing management issues – questions about the occurrence of mobbing towards oneself or others, the possibility of failure, the use of collaborative human resources management, and its occurrence in the organization.

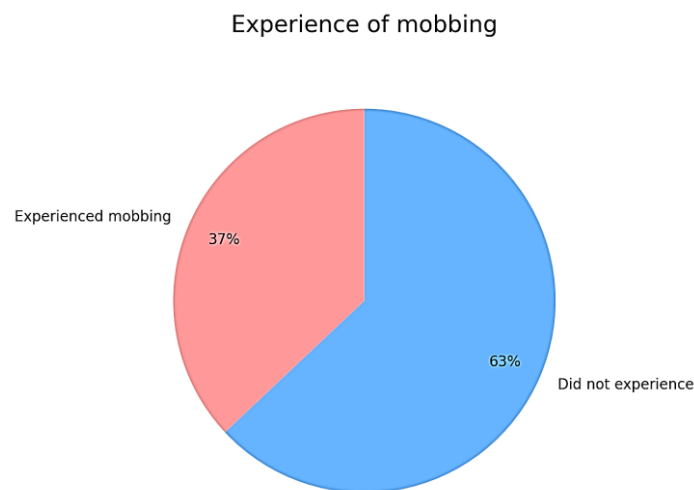
The questionnaire contained both closed-ended, single-choice questions (e.g., "How do you assess the atmosphere at work?" – a five-point scale from "hostile" to "very friendly") and multiple-choice questions (e.g., "What manifestations of mobbing occur in the workplace?"). Some questions were semi-open-ended, allowing for the addition of a personal response (e.g., "Other, what?"). Some questions used a frequency scale (e.g., "never", "rarely", "often", "very often", "every day") to assess the recurrence of negative behaviors.

The entire survey comprised approximately 25 questions, including both diagnostic and interpretative questions. The questionnaire's design was consistent with the study's objectives and enabled an analysis of the mobbing phenomenon in the context of companies' operations after the pandemic.

The study confirmed the existence of mobbing in both companies, with the scale and nature of the harassment varying depending on the organizational structure and type of business.

In a manufacturing company (more employees):

1. As many as 63% of employees declared that they had experienced behavior that could be considered mobbing,



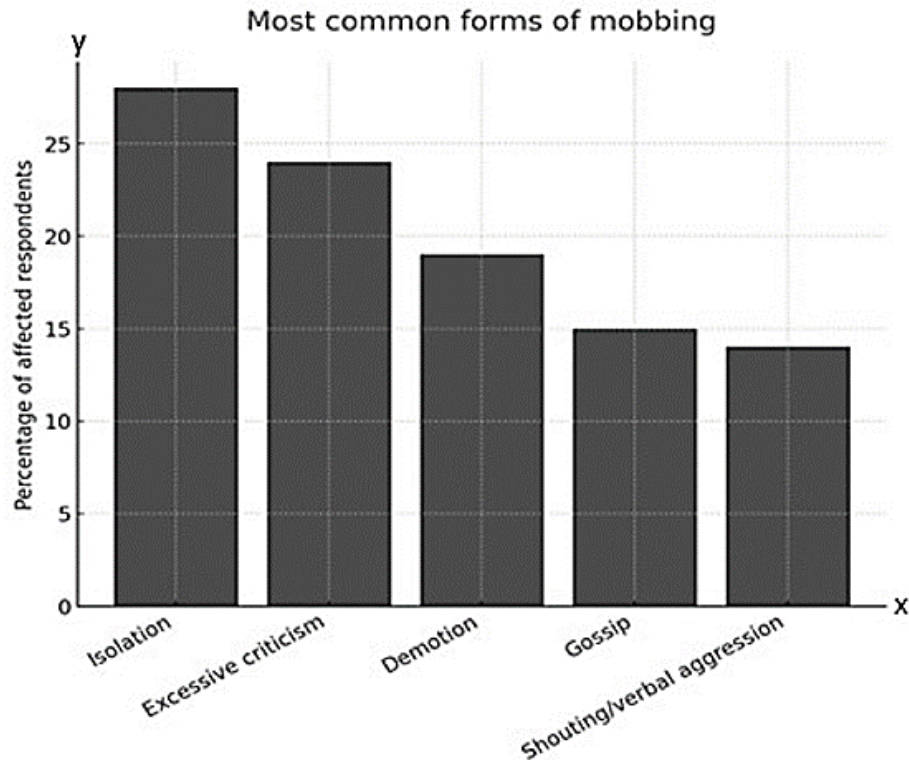
**Figure 1.** The scale of mobbing in the surveyed enterprises (expressed by the share of a specific group in the entire sample studied).

Source: own study.

2. Most frequently were mentioned: ignoring, excessive control, uneven distribution of responsibilities, omission in communication.

Axe x – percentage of respondents affected by certain form of mobbing

Axe y – forms of mobbing affecting respondents



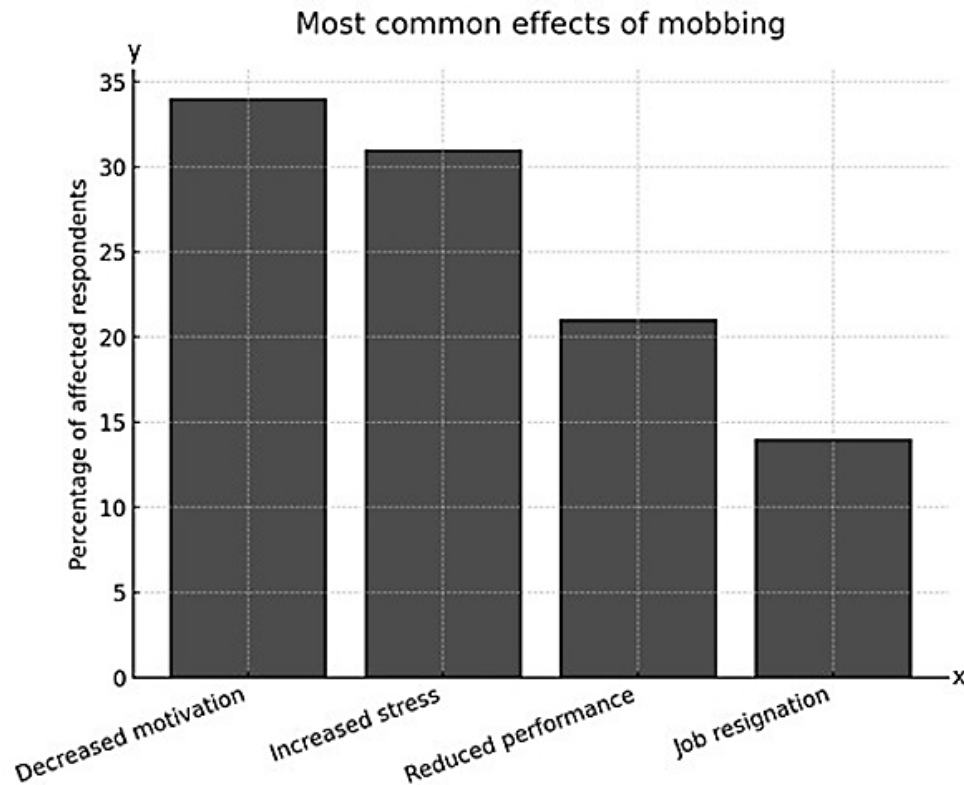
**Figure 2.** Forms of mobbing occurring in the surveyed enterprises.

Source: own study.

3. Mobbing was more often identified as a systemic phenomenon (e.g. related to organizational culture or management style).

Axe x – the effect of mobbing on the respondent

Axe y – percentage of respondents affected by a certain effect



**Figure 3.** The most common forms of mobbing occurring in the surveyed enterprises.

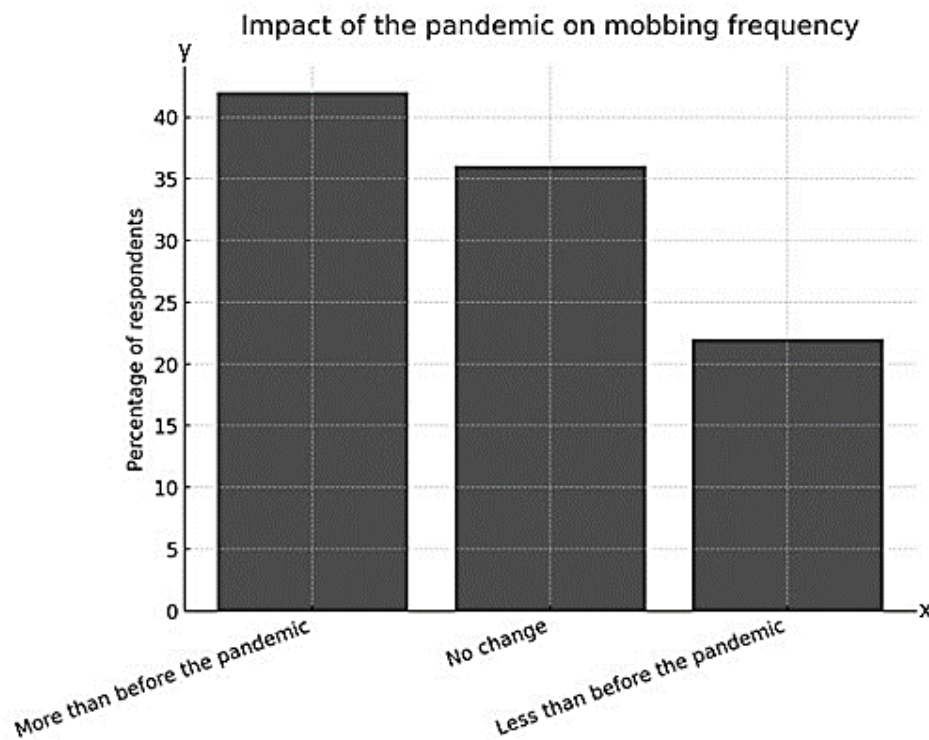
Source: own study.

4. The pandemic has led to a deterioration of relations, increased tension and uncertainty. In a trading company (smaller scale of operations):
1. 38% of respondents experienced mobbing behavior,
  2. personal sources of conflict were indicated more often (e.g. individual people – superiors, co-workers),
  3. the impact of the pandemic was less visible, which can be attributed to more direct and flexible communication in smaller teams.

Both groups of respondents admitted that mobbing negatively impacts the work environment, worsens the quality of collaboration, reduces engagement, and increases staff turnover.

Axe x - the frequency of occurrence of mobbing in the entire study sample expressed in %

Axe y – percentage of respondents affected by mobbing



**Figure 4.** Impact of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic on the frequency of mobbing in the surveyed enterprises.

Source: own study

Comparing the two companies, it was noted that larger companies are characterized by greater bureaucracy and difficulties in managing interpersonal relationships, which can contribute to the occurrence of mobbing. In smaller organizations, mobbing is more personal than structural.

The COVID-19 pandemic has acted as a catalyst for negative phenomena, intensifying tensions and exposing shortcomings in communication and personnel management. At the same time, it has demonstrated the importance of building an organizational culture based on trust, empathy, and effective prevention.

Based on the results, several practical conclusions were drawn:

1. the need to develop clear anti-mobbing procedures,
2. the need for training for management staff in the field of communication and work ethics,
3. regular diagnosis of the organizational climate using anonymous surveys,
4. strengthening the role of HR as an active mediator and guardian of ethical values.

## Conclusion and findings

This article explores the complex impact of mobbing on organizational functioning and human resources management, taking into account the specific context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Theoretical analysis and empirical research confirm that mobbing is not only an individual problem but also a serious challenge for the entire organizational system.

The phenomenon of mobbing is defined in detail as a form of long-term psychological harassment that negatively impacts an employee's emotional state, health, and professional functioning. A classification of its manifestations, stages of development, and examples of behavior are presented. The psychological characteristics of victims and perpetrators, as well as the environmental conditions that contribute to its occurrence, are also discussed.

The empirical section demonstrates that mobbing affects both large and smaller organizations, although its nature and mechanisms vary depending on the size and organizational culture of the company. Employees of larger companies more often perceive mobbing as a structural element related to the atmosphere and management style, whereas in smaller teams, it is more often the result of interpersonal conflicts.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the dynamics of mobbing. Remote work, limited supervision, lack of support, and deteriorating communication have contributed to increased tensions and a sense of alienation among employees. The phenomenon of mobbing has taken on new, more elusive digital forms, indicating the need to redefine anti-mobbing procedures in the post-pandemic era.

To be effective, human resources management must consider ethical, communicative, and psychological aspects. Not only operational efficiency is crucial, but also an organizational climate, a culture of trust, and proactive counteracting dysfunctional employee relationships.

Based on the analysis carried out, the following practical conclusions were formulated:

1. Mobbing prevention should become an integral element of every organization's HR policy. This includes clear procedures, educational activities, and psychological support.
2. Managing during a crisis like a pandemic requires flexibility, empathy, and openness to employee feedback. Failure to do so can lead to increased disruption.
3. Organizational culture is fundamental – companies with a positive climate of relations, transparent rules and fair treatment are less susceptible to mobbing.
4. The role of HR should evolve towards active conflict management and building support systems, not limited only to administrative procedures.

In summary, mobbing is a destructive phenomenon that impacts not only individuals but also the effectiveness and stability of organizations. Effective human resources management should therefore also include preventative and intervention measures to address psychological violence in the workplace – especially in times of dynamic social and economic change.

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