

# 1: Introduction to Mobbing in the Workplace and an Overview of Adult Bullying

## Workplace Bullying

### *Clinical and Organizational Perspectives*

In the early 1980s, German industrial psychologist Heinz Leymann began work in Sweden, conducting studies of workers who had experienced violence on the job. Leymann's research originally consisted of longitudinal studies of subway drivers who had accidentally run over people with their trains and of banking employees who had been robbed on the job. In the course of his research, Leymann discovered a surprising syndrome in a group that had the most severe symptoms of acute stress disorder (ASD), workers whose colleagues had ganged up on them in the workplace (Gravois, 2006). Investigating this further, Leymann studied workers in one of the major Swedish iron and steel plants. From this early work, Leymann used the term "mobbing" to refer to emotional abuse at work by one or more others. Earlier theorists such as Austrian ethnologist Konrad Lorenz and Swedish physician Peter-Paul Heinemann used the term before Leymann, but Leymann received the most recognition for it. Lorenz used "mobbing" to describe animal group behavior, such as attacks by a group of smaller animals on a single larger animal (Lorenz, 1991, in Zapf & Leymann, 1996). Heinemann borrowed this term and used it to describe the destructive behavior of children, often in a group, against a single child.

This text uses the terms "mobbing" and "bullying" interchangeably; however, mobbing more often refers to bullying by more than one person and can be more subtle. Bullying more often focuses on the actions of a single person. Although differences are subtle, sometimes, but not always, mobbing can refer to an institutional or systemic process in which many of those in administrative authority are involved in trying to force an employee out of the workplace via overdirection and overdocumentation. In such instances, administration even supports the original perpetrator because that support serves a function for the organization. Leymann's definition described *mobbing* as "hostile and unethical communication directed in a systematic way, by one or more people toward another person or group, occurring often (almost daily) over a long period of time, generally at least six months" (Leymann, 1990, p. 120). This early description of the syndrome suggested that mobbing behavior involves ganging up on a targeted employee and subjecting that person to severe, emotionally damaging harassment. Leymann's definition specifically *excluded* temporary or transient conflicts and focuses on the area in which a psychosocial situation begins to result in a psychiatric or psychosomatic illness. Bullying behaviors may include insulting comments about a person's private life or background, humiliating or intimidating behaviors, rumors or false allegations, and exclusion from customary workplace socialization (Salin, 2003b).

Building upon his body of data, Leymann wrote in the late 1980s and early 1990s that a significant problem of emotional abuse of workers by coworkers had been documented in Sweden and in other countries. These abusive attacks, according to Leymann, could have severe occupational and psychological consequences for the injured worker (Leymann, 1990). Although mobbing is not a new phenomenon, much research has been conducted in the past two decades to provide understanding of the causes and effects. By the time of this writing in 2015, mobbing and bullying have been identified and studied in most developed countries around the globe and in many emerging countries as well.

This volume explores the history of the understanding of the symptoms of mobbing, the personality traits of people who are mobbed and those of their persecutors, organizational practices related to mobbing and its prevention, social work's role in treating symptoms resulting

from mobbing and in addressing this workplace malady, and, finally, larger public policy issues and human rights concerns. To establish the breadth and scope of the problem from a global perspective, citations include research from countries or cultures where a literature source originated. In addition, to separate academic literature from mainstream conversations, general Internet sources, or "blogging," references will be made to the academic institutions from which they originate where appropriate.

## History and Conceptualization of Mobbing in the Workplace

Bullying in schools has been examined in research and social psychology literature for decades. Data suggest that school bullying is a universal occurrence in developed countries (Rayner & Cooper, 1997). Beyond the relatively rare case of school shootings, bullying at school can result in many negative mental health consequences for the victim and target, including anxiety and depression (Chapell et al., 2006).

Until Leymann's work, bullying in the adult work world had received no attention, but recent studies have suggested that the same patterns identified when children bully other children can carry over into the adult workplace. Unfortunately, mobbing victims are often portrayed as being at fault for the treatment they receive from others (Davenport et al., 2002). Theorists today are challenged with producing evidence and analysis of the long-term effects of the victim's experience.

Mobbing includes hostile and unethical communication directed in a systematic way by one or a number of people, usually toward one targeted individual. These behaviors occur often, even daily, and persist over a long period of time (Leymann, 1990). Prior to Leymann's work, bullying of adults had been discussed only from the perspective of social structure and the ways in which victims risk expulsion from the workplace. Since Leymann's findings, however, attention has been given to victims' symptoms and resulting disabilities (Leymann, 1990, in Davenport et al., 2002).

A distinguishing feature of mobbing or bullying is that it is a *process*, rather than an *event or act*. Bullying is *not* normal conflict and is not the same as more general workplace incivility. Bullying involves repeated and persistent negative acts toward another in which a perceived power imbalance exists, creating a hostile work environment. Not all acts are necessarily perceived as bullying in each situation: The *severity*, *duration*, and *intent* of the threats are important in defining and identifying specific behaviors such as mobbing or bullying (Salin, 2003a). Individual acts may seem inconsequential when viewed in isolation but may have negative consequences when used in a systematic way over a period of time and can result in dire outcomes. Critical events in the process from bullying to mobbing to expulsion from work go through four critical-incident phases (Leymann, 1990).

The first critical-incident phase occurs when a triggering situation or enabling environment is perceived as a conflict (usually over work). This usually lasts a fairly short time. Analyses of organizational practices and policies have shed light on the notion of an *enabling environment*. These will be examined in depth in chapter 7. The original critical-incident phase ends when the targeted person's coworkers and management begin what become stigmatizing actions.

The second critical-incident phase is the actual process of bullying and stigmatizing. While many of the actions might occur in normal, everyday work life, when they occur within the frame of harassment they produce injury. The actions have in common the objective to "get the person," or to inflict punishment. This second critical-incident phase includes behaviors such as rumormongering and ridiculing the victim, withholding communication from the victim, isolating

the victim, assigning meaningless or humiliating tasks to the victim, and violence or threatening violence (Leymann, 1990).

The third critical-incident phase involves intervention by management, usually via human resources (HR). By this point, the victim has become a "case" for HR, and ironically those around the target often assume that the victim is the problem. Because the victim is typically under extreme duress and work performance may have become impaired, he or she may be receiving disciplinary action, warnings, write-ups, and constant scrutiny.

Finally, the fourth critical-incident phase is commonly known as *expulsion*. Expulsion can take on many forms, ranging from the victim's illness and long-term medical leave to relocation, degrading work tasks, and psychiatric treatment. In some instances, the person may be fired or resigns, with or without another career plan in place.

As with sexual harassment and stress, a consensus on the resulting effects of mobbing has not been reached. Like other forms of aggression and abuse, outcomes data about the impact of workplace bullying are sparse. Because definitions of workplace mobbing or bullying are mixed, theorists have borrowed from various sources in attempts to quantify the rates and severity of mobbing at work. Three sources exist in this effort: (1) definitions that deal with people who have severe clinical (psychiatric or other medical) outcomes from being bullied at work, (2) definitions that explore the concept within the general population of workers or employees, and (3) incidence studies that ask whether a person has ever been bullied (Rayner, Sheehan, & Barker, 1999).

An important feature of bullying is that it involves an injury, not an illness. Symptoms of this injurious syndrome do not develop in isolation but evolve as a result of behavior inflicted on a person by others over time. Symptoms may range from mild to extreme, but they are almost always significantly disruptive to the victim's life inside and outside of the workplace. The symptoms often lead at least to voluntary resignation or involuntary dismissal. Leymann (1990) also estimated that 10 to 15 percent of suicides committed annually in Sweden have bullying as a background or precipitating factor.

Mobbing behaviors themselves are many and varied. Einarsen (1999) delineated five major categories that constitute workplace bullying strategies:

1. Changing the work tasks of a worker in some negative way or making the tasks difficult to perform
2. Social isolation by noncommunication or exclusion
3. Personal attacks or ridiculing or insulting remarks
4. Verbal threats through criticism or public humiliation
5. Spreading rumors

Bullying acts can be divided into seven groups: calling out, scapegoating, harassment by someone in greater power, unreasonable relocation of workspace, unreasonable increases in workload, isolating or ignoring the target, and physical abuse (Harvey, Heames, Richey, & Leonard, 2006).

These acts may be committed voluntarily or unconsciously, but all cause humiliation, offense, and distress. They all interfere with work performance and cause unpleasant work environments (Harvey et al., 2006).

Other theorists identified the 10 most common forms of workplace aggression as gossip, interrupting others while they talk or work, flaunting status or authority, belittling another's opinions, failing to return phone calls or memos, giving another the "silent treatment," yelling

insults or shouting, using verbal forms of sexual harassment, staring or giving dirty looks, and intentionally “damning with faint praise” (Koonin & Green, 2004).

Any of these behaviors can be perpetrated by one person or by several people against a single target. The direction of emotional abuse can be lateral (peer to peer), downward (superior to subordinate), or upward (subordinate to supervisor or manager). While downward abuse is perhaps the most common, lateral and upward abuses also occur with some frequency.

Leymann’s original typology included 45 mobbing behaviors (Davenport et al., 2002). These are organized into five categories of varying degrees:

1. **Self-Expression and Communication.** This includes behaviors that affect self-expression and the way communication happens, including restricting opportunities for employees to speak, constantly interrupting the person when he or she is speaking, restricting opportunities for self-expression, yelling at or scolding the victim in the presence of others, constantly criticizing the victim’s work performance, making threats, and denying the target contact with others.
2. **Social Relationships.** This comprises attacks that include not speaking to the victim, prohibiting the victim from speaking to others, locating the victim’s workspace to somewhere far isolated from others, forbidding colleagues from talking to the victim, and acting like the victim is invisible.
3. **Attacks on Reputation.** These offenses include unfounded rumors, ridicule, treating the victim as mentally ill, forcing the victim to undergo psychiatric examinations, mockingly imitating the gestures and voice of the victim, ridiculing the victim’s private life or nationality, forcing the victim to do a job that affects the person’s self-esteem, constantly questioning the person’s decisions, calling the victim demeaning names, and sexual innuendoes.
4. **Attacks on Quality of Work Life.** These attacks include failure to assign any specific job duties, taking away the person’s work assignments, giving the person meaningless jobs, giving the person tasks well below his or her qualifications, overloading the person with new tasks far above the individual’s qualification (thus inviting failure), and causing damage that creates financial costs for the person.
5. **Attacks on Health.** Finally, mobbing behaviors may include direct attacks on the person’s health with harmful practices, such as forcing the target to do strenuous work beyond his or her physical capacity, threatening violence, using light violence as a threat of greater violence to follow, and physical abuse.

Leymann’s structural definition of bullying addresses the scope, severity, variety, and degree of emotional assaults in a comprehensive manner. It seems to be the most inclusive and best suited to describe the problems addressed in this text. Leymann’s scheme includes conceptualizing mobbing as a process, not just an event, and describes the environmental conditions experienced by the victim during the injuring process.

In most European countries, workplace bullying has been made illegal. In the United States, however, organizations and legislators are only recently becoming aware of the types of workplace incivilities that can be considered mobbing. Considering the harm that bullying can cause to the targets, one could easily label these acts as unethical and unwelcome in organizations, workplaces, and academia.

However, these behaviors do exist and can create serious, lasting damage to individual workers, workplace morale, productivity, and organizational goals (Bandow & Hunter, 2007). Consensus from general clinical experience among professionals working in occupational health settings is that immediate and grave psychosomatic effects are observed in other victims.

Among the social consequences, expulsion rates are high among targets. Prior to leaving a bullying workplace, targets can have many periods of illness with high use of sick leave. They may be forced to undergo psychiatric examinations and diagnoses (Leymann, 1990). Regardless of whether the person leaves the abusive workplace, the effects are often long lasting. In addition to clinical outcomes, the person is affected socially by being isolated and stigmatized and may elect voluntary unemployment rather than continuing to endure ongoing daily injury. Subjective experiences can include feelings of desperation, hopelessness, anxiety, and great rage about the lack of legal options. Psychological symptoms may include depression, acute stress, anxiety, psychosomatic illness, and suicide. Suspicions also hint that the experiences can produce a compromised immune system, so targets may be vulnerable to diseases (Leymann, 1990). These concerns will be addressed more fully in chapters 5 and 6.

### **Previous Efforts at Explaining Workplace Bullying**

Previous authors, such as Geffner, Braverman, Galasso, and Marsh (2004), addressed workplace emotional abuse from an organizational behavior perspective. Others identified workplace stressors and precipitating events by pointing to organizational structure and practices as primary conditions for workplace bullying. Some authors, such as Namie and Namie (2003) and Davenport et al. (2002), focused on supporting victims from a self-help perspective. Some theorists demonized perpetrators for their cruelty, while others pointed to the target person's pathology as the cause of their vulnerability. Still others suggest that workplace mobbing is a multifaceted, multidimensional problem requiring multidisciplinary solutions (Rayner, Hoel, & Cooper, 2002).

A systemic, multifaceted, multidimensional explanation and a multidisciplinary approach to the topic seem to be the most rational and inclusive strategy. It would allow for broad interpretations and offer the most options for prevention and redress. Rayner et al. (1999), for example, stressed the need to avoid fragmentation into discipline-specific definitions and solutions. The process of mobbing or bullying might be metaphorically described as a game or a battle. Participant narratives compiled via focus groups by Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik, and Alberts (2006) identified phrases such as "strategic attacks," "playing the game," and "I had no rights" as common themes. The narratives were saturated with metaphors of beating, physical abuse, and death. Respondents cited feeling "abused," "ripped," "broken," "scarred," and "eviscerated." Another used the term "nightmare" to describe her experience. One respondent said she felt as if she was "going crazy" or "being tortured." Mobbing can have social, emotional, physical, and psychological effects on targets. Almost all of the effects are painful. Some effects can cause short-term or even long-term disability.

Options for targets of emotional abuse can seem limited. Victims must understand that what they are experiencing is workplace bullying and that it is not normal or acceptable. After this first step of naming the condition, targets have choices. Victims who seek assistance are advised by employee-assistance professionals (EAPs) to explore all options and to take control of their situations. This may be difficult for any number of reasons. A worker may have very real barriers that prevent leaving. Alternative employment may be difficult to secure. They might lose accrued benefits. Job markets remain tight for mid- and late-career professionals. An injured worker may be too anxious, depressed, or debilitated to make changes or may not believe that change is possible (Davenport et al., 2002).

Targets of bullying often need professional therapeutic intervention. With help, victims may identify a recourse they might not yet have tried or considered. Victims can explore all other options, including short-term, intermediate, and long-term planning, but often first need to feel safe before they can take any action or do any planning.

The most extreme type of workplace bullying is actual physical violence. Physical violence may be either a one-off event or the final result of an escalating pattern of bullying. According to the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), workplace violence is a leading cause of occupational injury and death. NIOSH includes threatening behavior, verbal or written threats, harassment, verbal abuse, physical attacks, and bullying as examples of workplace violence (NIOSH, 1996).

The U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has estimated that nearly 2 million American workers report having been victims of workplace violence each year. Unfortunately, many more cases go unreported (U.S. Department of Labor, 2002). While determining the extent to which any of these incidents are related to bullying is impossible, logic would suggest that there is a relationship.

Organizations often invest time and resources into workplace communications training, but estimates are that less than 5 percent of training courses for the workplace deal with verbal abuse (Brennan, 2003). However, verbal abuse can make up to 90 percent of all reports of violence at work! Brennan proposed categorizing verbally abusive statements at work into five groups: (1) inappropriate language, (2) general statements criticizing the organization but not the person, (3) communications that are patronizing, (4) threatening or offensive statements, and (5) statements about a person that are not true.

Australian researchers Hartig and Frosch (2006) described mobbing as a "silent and unseen" occupational hazard. They posited that, since bullying is more frequent, it is a more serious safety and health issue than any other workplace risk but cite a lack of clear state and federal legislation as a serious deficit.

A number of factors can be associated with the likelihood of the onset and continuation of mobbing. Some of these can include workplace politics and corporate culture, unclear management expectations, dishonesty, withholding information from employees, discouraging responses, high tolerance for poor performance, and employees feeling taken for granted. These environmental symptoms can increase the likelihood of workplace emotional abuse of employees and will be discussed later in this book.

"Power distance" is a term used to describe the way people with different degrees of organizational power relate to each other at work (Breckler, Olson, & Wiggins, 2005). The term refers to relationships between people with unequal status. Data suggest that the greater the power distance, the more likely an organization's hierarchy will accept workplace inequalities and authoritarian values. Organizations with larger power differences are more autocratic, a relevant factor because workers in the United States tend to be somewhat more tolerant of autocratic bosses than workers in other developed countries (Vega & Comer, 2005). Differences in the data on workplace may reflect these somewhat different value systems, because bullying in the United States is most often perpetuated more by managers or supervisors toward subordinates, while emotional abuse in places such as Scandinavia tends to occur more between peers. That is, less downward bullying occurs in Scandinavia, perhaps because Scandinavian countries tend to be typified by work environments with less power differential and more egalitarian status between workers and their supervisors. This is also a statement about supervisory relationships in the American workplace!

### **Legal Dilemmas and Emerging Policy**

Debate continues about whether discharge resulting from a supervisor's environmental harassment is a tangible employment action. Although legal options are discussed more fully in chapter 6, it should be noted here that for any legal action to be levied, one of the first questions to consider is whether the complainant is able to establish specific "intent" by the perpetrator

(Gray, 2004). A second question in determining the relevance of legal action is whether the employer can be found liable for workplace harassment. In both cases, the burden of proof is on the *employee* to establish both intent and employer liability. Circuit courts in the United States have not been consistent in rulings with regard to this type of litigation (Gray, 2004).

Since the 1960s, most citizens of the United States have come to rely as employees on some protection of the country's civil rights laws. The specific intent of these laws is not always clear or consistent. With Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, it became unlawful for an employer to discharge an employee or otherwise discriminate against an individual with respect to his or her compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment based on the individual's race, color, religion, gender, or national origin (Davenport et al., 2002). Later legislation included the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. These acts protected workers around issues regarding age, pregnancy, and disability. Legislation has only recently begun to address sexual orientation, although many states do provide protection in their employment discrimination statutes. The Civil Rights Act of 1991 implemented major changes that expanded existing federal antidiscrimination laws and overruled previous court decisions that had limited employees' rights to legal recourse (Davenport et al., 2002). A specific mobbing complaint may or may not fall under one of these categories because of a person's protected status. The Supreme Court of the United States has found that Title VII is *not* limited to economic or tangible discrimination but is also intended to protect people from a hostile or abusive environment at work. The court has ruled that Title VII is violated when a workplace is typified by ridicule, intimidation, threats, and insults that can alter the conditions of a person's employment. The claim of "hostile environment" has been used in cases of sexual harassment and other Title VII cases, but in bullying cases a hostile employment environment is generally based on general behavior—that is, nonracial and nonsexual types of harassment. In cases decided at the Supreme Court level, the court has identified factors such as frequency and severity of conduct, the actual threat or humiliation, and whether the offensive behaviors interfered with a worker's ability to perform job duties (Davenport et al., 2002).

While federal and state laws address what may look like bullying, bullying itself is often not illegal. In some instances the laws do not apply, or the legal options make cases too difficult to build. Harassment, if unrelated to gender, race, age, or any of the other Title VII-protected class categories, may be invisible (Namie & Namie, 2003). The presence of a law simply gives an individual or a group of individuals the right to sue but does not guarantee a favorable outcome for a plaintiff. Even when a settlement or award is paid, the award seldom justifies or rectifies the agony experienced during the mobbing process and after (Namie & Namie, 2003). Although injured workers have the right to seek redress through the legal system, those who file civil suits may undergo additional financial and emotional expense attempting to recover damages, and the results can be disappointing. These issues will be discussed again in chapter 5.

Unlike a generation ago, legal precedents today clearly provide protection for workers against sexual harassment. As Associate Justice Sandra Day O'Connor ruled in *Harris v. Forklift Systems* (1993),

whether an environment is "hostile" or "abusive" can be determined only by looking at all the circumstances. These may include the frequencies of the discriminatory conduct; its severity; whether it is physically threatening or humiliating, or a mere offensive utterance; and whether it unreasonably interferes with an employee's work performance. (Vega & Comer, 2005, p. 105)

The Supreme Court in the *Harris* case determined that psychological harm was not necessary to prove that a workplace is hostile. Instead, a plaintiff need only provide evidence that a *reasonable* person would find the behavior offensive if that person were in the victim's position (Vega & Comer, 2005). In two similar cases, *Burlington Industries v. Ellerth* and *Faragher v. City*

of *Boca Raton*, the Supreme Court ruled that employers are responsible for taking preventative action and remedying sexual harassment (Vega & Comer, 2005).

Most citizens of the United States do not yet enjoy safeguards protecting them from emotional harassment at work that are similar to the legal protections, now more clearly defined, prohibiting sexual harassment. In fact, workplace bullying itself is not yet illegal in many states (Vega & Comer, 2005). Unfortunately, the United States has lagged far behind other industrialized countries in creating an awareness of workplace bullying. By some estimates, the United States is at least 20 years behind its Scandinavian and Western European counterparts (Namie & Namie, 2003), based on the recentness of legislation, the paucity of precedent-setting cases that have been tried in courts, and the reluctance of states to pass legislation prohibiting workplace bullying. For example, the National Board of Occupational Safety and Health (NBOSH) in Stockholm, Sweden, has been publishing and distributing Leymann's educational materials since 1989. The first measures against victimization at work came into law in Sweden in early 1994. Australia passed its Public Sector Ethics Act in 1994, identifying respect for persons as one of the five ethical obligations required in the workplace. In Germany, the KLIMA Association was founded in 1998 to help victims of mobbing in business, in the government, and in society. In the United Kingdom, public service unions began to survey their workforces as early as 1996 (Namie & Namie, 2003). Vega and Comer (2005) suggested that the lack of attention, until recently, to the concept of dignity in the workplace organizations in the United States has supported, and perhaps even encouraged, both mild and more serious types of emotional harassment that American workplace laws do not fully cover. Others surmise that because workers in the United States are marginally more comfortable with more autocratic management styles than workers in other countries, they may have been historically more willing to accept management's more arbitrary directives and actions (Vega & Comer, 2005).

Social conditions become social problems when interest groups raise public awareness about the existence of the conditions. The term *claims-making* describes the activities of interest groups (claims-makers) whose grievances about a social condition are brought to public awareness (Hewitt, 2007). When a claims-maker's cause becomes widely recognized by a society, the social condition becomes known as a *social problem*. The process from initial claims-making to widespread social recognition of the concern as a social problem takes time—often years or decades. The social problem of abusive work environments has undergone such a claims-making process. It began Western Europe and Scandinavia, migrated to the United Kingdom and Australia, and is finally gaining recognition in the United States. The relatively slow claims-making process for identifying and defining social problems may account for the marked lag in data collection and analysis in the United States as compared to other developed nations in the West.

### **Prevalence of Mobbing in the American Workplace**

No single social institution or group has been able to measure accurately the degree to which individuals are emotionally harmed at work by colleagues, superiors, or subordinates. The diversity of approaches has resulted in a knowledge base that is fractured at best, and data are conflicting. Because most clinical disciplines, including social work, clinical psychology, psychiatry, and family counseling, have been somewhat delayed in addressing workplace mobbing, more data have been collected by scholars in HR, business administration, risk management, and organizational psychology. Scholars within individual professional disciplines such as medicine, nursing, and higher education have also contributed to the existing knowledge base of mobbing by studying workplace abuse within their own fields.

Data capturing the incidence and prevalence of emotional abuse at work are difficult to gather for a number of reasons. Self-reports by victims tend to underrepresent emotional abuse and violence at work because victims are often reluctant to report such activity (LaVan & Martin, 2008). Studies examining specific work environments can be helpful by allowing for inferential

estimates of the prevalence of mobbing in the United States and providing an idea of the frequency of emotional violence, but they do not address qualitative differences in mobbing experiences, nor can they identify precipitating events or outcomes.

Some of the best estimates of the prevalence of mobbing in the American workplace originally came from the Wayne State University researcher Loreleigh Keashly (Namie & Namie, 2003). Keashly presented the evidence, based on a 2000 survey of 1,335 Michigan residents, to what was then the Campaign Against Workplace Bullying (it is now known as the Workplace Bullying Institute [WBI]). Data were collected through voluntary, anonymous online surveys. Women constituted 50 percent of the bullies. Bullying was more prevalent than actual illegal discrimination; in 77 percent of instances neither the bully nor the target was identified as a member of a protected status group (that is, a group protected by civil rights legislation). Nearly all the bullies were bosses (81 percent) with the power to terminate targets at will (Namie & Namie, 2003). Results reported at the Workplace Bullying 2000 Conference in the United States provided convincing evidence of workplace mistreatment in 17 percent of its Michigan respondents via a self-selected, online sample. If that figure is extrapolated to the nation, one in six Americans may be bullied each year. Other estimates are that American workers have a 25 to 30 percent lifetime risk of being bullied at work, and at any one moment in time 10 percent of the U.S. workforce is experiencing some degree of bullying (Tracy et al., 2006).

Sexual harassment and general workplace harassment among 1,500 university employees were compared by University of Chicago researchers Rospenda, Richman, Ehmke, and Zlatoper (2005). They found similar characteristics between the two phenomena. Findings suggest that traditional measures of both job stress and workplace harassment are related to physical health symptoms and injuries, including workplace accidents. These findings also suggest that negative outcomes associated with workplace harassment tend to persist over time. Many injured workers have physical and psychological symptoms that persist long after the bullying situation is no longer part of their lives. The authors also found that some effects are lifelong.

Bullying at work can be more crippling and devastating than all other work-related stress put together. Einarsen (1999, in Harvey et al., 2006) asserted that bullying activities in the American workplace are escalating and have increasingly negative impacts on workers. According to the 2006 study, women tend to bully other women, men tend to bully other men, and the bully is usually the target's supervisor. Targets of bullying have stress-related health symptoms and generally feel unsupported. Rarely are bullies punished or held accountable. Targets often lose their jobs due to voluntary or involuntary termination. Finally, feelings of safety in the workplace have dropped dramatically since 1990 (Harvey et al., 2006). Up to 90 percent of American workers will experience workplace abuse at some time in their lives, according to P. R. Johnson and Indvik (2006), suggesting that verbal abuse is the great secret of the American workplace and that it is more pervasive than most realize. Projections are that between 70 and 90 percent of abusive communication is perpetrated by superiors upon subordinates (P. R. Johnson & Indvik, 2006). An opinion survey of 1,300 workers conducted by the Opinion Research Corporation found that 42 percent of respondents experienced being the targets of yelling and verbal abuse, and 20 percent admitted to yelling at coworkers. Overwork, stress, and lack of job security were all cited as precipitating stressors. Two out of every three people who tried to defend themselves against demeaning behavior found that rather than helping them toward problem resolution, their defense triggered retaliation (P. R. Johnson & Indvik, 2006).

A sample of 4,832 university employees participated in a 2004 cross-sectional survey studied by Rospenda and Richman. Using an instrument called the Generalized Workplace Harassment Questionnaire (GWHQ), 2,416 men and 2,416 women responded to questions about having experienced bullying in the work setting. The GWHQ is a 29-question instrument asking respondents to indicate on a three-point scale (1 = never, 2 = once, 3 = more than once) if they have experienced any of the listed bullying behaviors at work. Researchers sorted workplace aggression into three types: subtle and covert, overt, and severe. Findings showed that subtle,

covert forms of workplace aggression are more frequent than overt types. Subtle, covert forms of aggression included verbal hostility and manipulative behaviors (Rospenda & Richman, 2004). Overt forms of aggression, including humiliation, negative comments, yelling, gesturing, and talking down to someone, are also more frequent than more severe forms of aggression. Severe forms include behaviors such as threatening, hitting, pushing/shoving, throwing something, or making jokes about the person (Rospenda & Richman, 2004).

Data from an American study indicated that 14 percent of university students employed in entry-level positions in a variety of professions had experienced several types of abusive behaviors. The most common abuses were intellectual degradation, being publicly demeaned, being addressed sarcastically, being targets of temper tantrums, and being subjected to unreasonable work demands. Most respondents chose to deal with negative behaviors indirectly, by avoiding or ignoring the harasser. However, some 13 percent chose to leave their work prematurely (Keashly, Trott, & MacLean, 1994).

Unfortunately, some recent trends in the American workplace focusing on excellence and quality have increased pressure on employees, lead workers, supervisors, and managers, creating environments at high risk for bullying. Institutionalized bullying can result when an organization values high performance and high efficiency over human identity. When production demands threaten employment security, bullying is reinforced (Koonin & Green, 2004). OSHA identifies environmental conditions and triggers that correlate with increases in workplace assaults of all types as of 2004. Although policies and procedures have fallen within the purview of individual states and individual employers, organizations need to inventory the emotional climates of their work environments and take actions to prevent abuse before it occurs (Koonin & Green, 2004). Chapter 7 will include training guidelines from OSHA for preventing workplace violence. Where appropriate, these guidelines can be specifically applied to preventing and remediating bullying at work.

Social work research has relied on international data collected for estimates of the incidence, prevalence, and severity of workplace mobbing. Despite the prevalence of workplace emotional abuse in the United States and the implications for clients who are targets, limited information exists addressing how social workers and other clinicians can address this growing concern. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 will address clinical interventions and the role of social work. If clinicians in the United States are to be equipped to address the psychological damage created by workplace emotional abuse, they need comprehensive information about the nature, causes, and effects of the condition to identify treatment goals and measure effectiveness. If HR professionals and attorneys are to raise their awareness of the risks, liabilities, and responsibilities for prevention and remediation, the role of employers needs to be clarified through legislation and regulation.

### **2014 Data from the Workplace Bullying Institute**

As with family violence and sexual assault, good data about workplace bullying remain difficult to collect because of underreporting by victims and misunderstanding by the general public. The most reliable data to date have been collected by the WBI, founded by Gary and Ruth Namie. For over a decade, the WBI has conducted annual data-collection efforts via self-report surveys. The following data are cited from the 2014 Workplace Bullying Institute U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey. In January 2014, 1,000 American adults responded to this online survey administered by Zogby Analytics, commissioned by the WBI (Namie, Christensen, & Phillips, 2014). Extrapolating to the American population, highlights of the results are summarized as follows: 27 percent of Americans have suffered abusive conduct at work, another 21 percent have witnessed it, and 72 percent are aware that workplace bullying happens, while only 28 percent are unaware of any workplace bullying. These estimates of bullying in the American workforce are alarming. Based on current workforce population data, more than 36 million American workers have been bullied in the past year or at some point in their work histories. More than 28 million workers have witnessed another being bullied. Only 75,000 perpetrators of workers would have admitted to

histories of bullying others, and more than 26 million have not witnessed bullying directly but believe that it does occur.

A number of studies have indicated that up to 60 percent of victims are women and up to 69 percent of perpetrators are men. However, when women are the bullies, they are most likely to bully other women. Data also suggest that 77 percent of bullying cases are same-gender incidents, making sexual discrimination cases difficult to substantiate. Slight differences in gender and job loss data suggest that although 82 percent of targets lose their jobs, only 18 percent of perpetrators lose theirs. Female targets are the more likely candidates for job loss. Discrimination exists in how organizations respond to female perpetrators. In 30 percent of the instances, a female who bullies a male will lose her job, as compared to only 11 percent of females who bully other women. It appears that it is more acceptable for a woman to bully another woman than it is for a woman to bully a man (Namie et al., 2014).

Regarding race and bullying, 2014 data suggest that nonwhite groups are much more vulnerable to bullying, with Hispanics as targets 33 percent of the time and African Americans targeted 32 percent of the time, followed by Asians as targets 19 percent of the time. By definition, bullying complicates, increases, and aggravates any mistreatment created by racial or sexual discrimination. Because employers are obliged to comply with federal and state laws prohibiting discrimination, nonwhite workers represent a legally protected status group, but actual discrimination is sometimes difficult to prove.

Perpetrators apparently act alone in 77 percent of cases, with mobbing—abuse by multiple perpetrators—occurring 23 percent of the time. Data about the rank of perpetrators in relation to those bullied continue to reflect a tendency for bullying to be top-down, or inflicted by someone of higher rank than the target. More than 56 percent of bullies are the bosses of the victim, 33 percent are coworkers, and 11 percent are subordinates. According to the 2014 data, bullying is created by a combination of bosses, peers, and subordinates 14 percent of the time. Unfortunately, even as recently as 2014, employers tend not to be sympathetic or responsive to worker complaints of bullying. WBI data from 2014 indicate that 72 percent of the reactions of employers condone or sustain bullying.

With an absence of state or federal laws to prohibit bullying and promote civility in the workplace, employers have little risk exposure for bullying incidents or outcomes. Although a wise and proactive employer would take precautions to prevent or redress bullying when it occurs, 2014 WBI data suggested that in 66 percent of the instances, employer reactions were to deny, discount, defend, or rationalize bullying behavior, leaving the bully or bullies unchecked. In only 28 percent of instances did employers acknowledge and show concern, take steps to remediate, or exercise a zero-tolerance policy for bullying. This leaves American workers and workplace environments at very high risk for abuses.

What about observers? WBI data from 2014 showed that others did nothing 38 percent of the time or participated in isolating the victim or siding with the perpetrator (11 percent). Only 29 percent of observers or witnesses openly provided assistance to targets or made an attempt to intervene.

Outcomes for victims are grim. In 61 percent of cases, targets left the workplace voluntarily, were forced to quit because conditions worsened, or were terminated by the employer. Perpetrators, on the other hand, were punished, terminated, or left voluntarily only 21 percent of the time. These data sadly suggest that the victim, not the bully, is asked to make sacrifices or accommodations when targeted, because six times out of 10 the former lose their jobs when they bring the issue to light.

Regarding ownership of responsibility, the 2014 survey data suggested that most respondents were unlikely to blame the victim for the situation. Only 20 percent of respondents attributed the target's skill deficiency or personality flaw as the reason for the abuse. Skill deficiencies or personality problems of bullies were deemed responsible by 41 percent of respondents. Twenty-eight percent of respondents blamed the employer for failure to address or prevent abuses, and 10 percent cited a society that supports abuse and aggression as the cause. Contrary to some popular myths, victims tended to be viewed by respondents as compassionate, kind, cooperative, and agreeable. Targets were viewed as aggressive or abusive by only 21 percent of respondents (Namie et al., 2014).

Although no state has yet passed the HWB (discussed later), the data from Namie et al. (2014) suggest that 93 percent of the American public are aware of bullying and want laws to address it. The question asked in the survey: "Do you support or oppose enactment of a new law that would protect all workers from repeated abusive mistreatment in addition to protections against illegal discrimination and harassment?" Almost two-thirds (63 percent) of respondents answered that they strongly supported such legislation, and another 30 percent said they would somewhat support such laws.

In summary, respondents believe that bullying exists, generally see it as more top-down, state that women and nonwhite workers are more likely targets, view the loss of employment as much more likely for victims than for perpetrators, and find targets to be generally pleasant colleagues with adequate work skills but bullies to be less pleasant and with greater skill deficits. Most admit that organizations do little to prevent or remediate bullying and would welcome legislation to prevent or redress workplace emotional abuse.

### **Prevalence of Mobbing in the International Community**

Most industrialized countries, including much of Europe (including Scandinavia and the United Kingdom) and Australia, have regarded bullying at work as a social problem far longer than has the United States. Studies have been conducted for decades, and more data exist in industrialized nations *other* than the United States. Swedish psychologist Heinz Leymann's groundbreaking work in 1990 marked the beginning of what would become an explosion of international interest and data collection on the mobbing syndrome (Leymann, 1990). Coining the term "mobbing," Leymann emphasized that these hurtful behaviors occur daily or almost daily and persist for a long period of time. Because of the severity and frequency, the actions result in psychological and social misery, as well as physical symptoms. Early estimates based on observations by industrial health physicians indicate that grave psychosomatic effects of mobbing could be observed in targets of abuse and that 10 to 15 percent of the suicides in Sweden each year could be attributed to mobbing (Leymann, 1990).

In the United Kingdom, labor unions have taken the lead in studying mobbing and in educating the public about it through national awareness campaigns. Researchers have worked in collaboration with unions to design and analyze surveys of workers and work environments (Namie & Namie, 2003). One such study was conducted in 1996 by UNISON, a union for public service organizations. It found that 66 percent of all respondents had experienced or witnessed mobbing. Of those who admitted having been bullied themselves, 74 percent said that management knew about the bullying and did nothing. Eighty-three percent of bullies were managers, and 94 percent of respondents said that they thought bullies would not receive any consequences. More than 75 percent of those who said they had been bullied reported some negative effects on their physical or emotional health, including stress, depression, and reduced self-confidence (Namie & Namie, 2003).

In another study in 2000, 1,100 workers in the National Health Service of southeastern England were surveyed about their mobbing experiences. Of those who responded, 38 percent reported

having been emotionally bullied in the past year, and 42 percent reported having witnessed another being bullied. Staff who had been bullied reported lower levels of job satisfaction and higher levels of job-induced stress, depression, and anxiety. Affected workers were also more likely to leave their jobs (Cusack, 2000).

Workplace bullying in the National Health Service is such an important issue that it has been examined by other researchers as well. One theory has been that the nature of health-care organizations themselves may actually foster or sustain organizational bullying. Factors such as high stress levels, inadequate training, rapid organizational change, pressure from management, and unrealistic performance goals may all contribute to workplace bullying by creating a climate of tension and uncertainty (Randle, Stevenson, Grayling, & Walker, 2007).

In the United Kingdom, researchers identified a sample of 4,500 employees, about 800 of whom were clerical/secretarial support staff. A combination of surveys to identify those who had been bullied in the previous two years was administered and then followed by semistructured interviews with a sample of respondents who had reported having been bullied. All interviewees felt that being bullied had harmed their health in some way. All reported having lost confidence and self-esteem during the bullying experience; 8 out of ten complained of stress. One interviewee mentioned an increase in the use of analgesics and alcohol. One complained about being in a constant state of anxiety. Most complained of more frequent illnesses, such as headaches, colds, and flu. All said that the experience had affected their work performance (M. Thomas, 2005). Other researchers estimated the social costs of mobbing in the United Kingdom to exceed £680 million in 2007 and reported that there are increases in the number of cases reported annually (Whittaker, 2009).

A national survey of the workforce in Ireland surveyed 4,425 workers by mail about their experiences with mobbing. Results concluded that of those who responded (1,057, or 23 percent), 6 percent admitted having been bullied frequently in the preceding 12 months, and 17 percent admitted having been bullied occasionally in the previous year. Of those who had been bullied, 67 percent described the leadership style of their organizations as *laissez-faire*, and only 18 percent described it as democratic. Of those bullied, over 70 percent cited poor management styles as a significant factor contributing to their bullying experiences. Limited prospects for promotion, lack of recognition for accomplishments, and lack of control over work or workload were the most frequent areas of job dissatisfaction for bullied employees (O'Moore & Lynch, 2007).

English health-care employees experienced what they considered to be harassment, according to Quine (1999). In a sample of 1,580 individuals who admitted to having been bullied and harassed, most had high stress levels and a strong desire to leave their jobs. Most felt less job satisfaction than their peers. The study concluded that workplace harassment results in severe psychological distress for victims.

The Second European Survey on Working Conditions, based on face-to-face interviews with 16,000 workers throughout the European Union, identified 8 percent of all European workers as being bullied each year. An expanded projection indicated a 5 to 10 percent annual rate of emotional abuse at work. These estimates exceeded those of people reporting workplace sexual harassment, which was identified as 2 percent (Steensma & van Dijke, 2006).

Australian theorist Kelly blamed the increase in workplace bullying on the increase of competitive pressures, the diminished commitment to fairness or social justice, and a predominance of business values over human values (Kelly, 2007). Australia has made some institutional commitments to identify, penalize, and reduce the incidence of bullying, through occupational health and safety legislation in some states. Unfortunately Australia's Workplace Relations Amendment (Work Choice) Act of 2005 has the capacity to counter or weaken such measures.

This law has made it more difficult for workers to file suit and less likely to receive judgments in their favor. An opinion by the Supreme Court of New South Wales stated that only 10 percent of instances of workplace bullying are actually reported. Differences in estimates seem to be in the ways that survey questions are asked. If a person is simply asked, "Have you ever been bullied?" respondents tend to report affirmatively only 8 or 9 percent of the time, but if respondents are provided a list of 23 predefined negative acts and then asked which they have experienced, 24 percent or more report having been victimized in some way (Kelly, 2007).

A 2004 Australian study examined 800 workers in tertiary education, health care, and long-distance hauling (Mayhew et al., 2004). Its authors concluded that emotional abuse at work is increasing and that covert forms of occupational violence over time, such as bullying, can be equal in traumatic impact to the harm caused from actually physical assault. Citing Leymann and Gustafson (1996), who addressed psychological disability by measuring the health effects of bullying at work, the researchers found extremely degraded health profiles for the 62 patients/victims of mobbing selected for their study. Citing Einarsen and Mikkelsen (2003), Mayhew et al. (2004) examined health status of 64 victims of mobbing and found high incidence of generalized anxiety disorder and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Spanish public university system employees served as the subjects for studies of three campuses in 2006 where administrative and services personnel, along with educational and investigative personnel, were queried about the problem of psychological harassment within the university system. A total of 7,432 people responded anonymously via a mail-in survey. Although 54 percent of respondents claimed they had never experienced or witnessed emotional abuse at work, the remaining 46 percent said they had experienced or witnessed abuse at some time in their lives. Of these, 23 percent said they had witnessed or experienced workplace bullying in the year prior to the survey. The most frequent types of psychological harassment cited by respondents were lack of information to do their jobs well, excessive criticism, public undervaluation, and restricted promotional opportunities (Lopez Cabarcos & Vasquez Rodriguez, 2006).

Turkish white-collar workers were studied in 2006 via a 20-item inventory of bullying. A good response rate of 79 percent (944) of 1,200 people surveyed indicated that 55 percent had been bullied at work in the past year. The most frequently reported types of bullying reported were overwork (70 percent), destabilization (55 percent), threats to professional status (42 percent), and threats to personal standing (32 percent). The destabilization category included acts such as persistent attempts to demoralize the person, removing areas of responsibility without consulting the person, undervaluing the worker's efforts, and shifting goals without informing the worker (Bilgel, Aytac, & Bayram, 2006).

An Australian study of 500 nurses in the metropolitan area health services of New South Wales (Hutchinson, Wilkes, Vickers, & Jackson, 2008) queried professionals employed mostly in clinical nursing positions and management. An exploratory factor analysis identified the most prevalent abusive behaviors nurses had experienced in the previous six months. Following the initial definition of bullying, respondents were asked to answer 23 seven-point scale items measuring their experiences (ranging from "never" to "constantly") of bullying acts in the 12 months preceding the survey. Results suggested that in the professional context, an attack upon a person's reputation might be used as a strategy to render a person more deserving of more overt forms of bullying to follow. Slanderous gossip, then, may make one more vulnerable to other forms of abuse.

Industrializing parts of the world, such as India, have identified and examined workplace emotional abuse. A cross-sectional survey was conducted among 174 physicians in a government medical college in the state of Tamil Nadu. Of the respondents, 115 were postgraduates, and 59 were junior doctors. Although bullying was common in junior medical doctors (nearly half

reported having been bullied), survey results suggest that 90 percent of bullying incidents go unreported (Bairy et al., 2007).

China has studied bullying as well. A study of 142 high school teachers there measured the impact of bullying on affective (or emotional) commitment to the job. Perhaps not surprisingly, findings suggested that workplace bullying had a significant negative correlation with affective commitment to work, while satisfaction with coworkers and supervisors had a significant positive correlation with affective commitment to work (McCormack, Casimir, Djurkovic, & Yang, 2006).

Workplace mobbing seems to be universal, although rates vary across types of settings. The literature sources surveyed in this section are by no means exhaustive but share many features in common. Bullying causes misery when it occurs. Victims are likely to terminate employment early to escape. Up to 20 percent of a workforce may be bullied at any one time. Mobbing tends to go unreported or underreported.

Other writers have suggested that rather than gather quantitative data about incidence, prevalence, severity, and duration, researchers should focus attention on the subjective experiences of targets of bullying to measure the breadth and scope of this malady (Liefoghe & Davey, 2002). Problems may exist with definitions and lack of consensus about what constitutes abuse. Poor management practices seem to be at least one source of the malady. Later sections of this book will explore practices and policies that may place organizations at risk. These are relevant to a discussion of mobbing because many high-risk organizational factors might be identified and remedied by analysis and intervention.

### **Economic Consequences of Workplace Emotional Abuse**

Significant economic consequences for unchecked emotional abuses at work include wasted wages for paying a worker who does not have an actual job description or tasks to perform after the worker's duties have been stripped away as part of a mobbing process, extensive use of sick leave by targets of abuse, significant drops in production rates in organizations where mobbing is prevalent, costs of interventions by human resource officers, and costs associated with personnel and external consulting fees. Estimates of economic impact can be staggering. Studies suggest that individual cases of mobbing can last as long as 10 years (Leymann, 1990).

Long-term financial consequences for abused workers and their families can be dire, according to data from the nursing industry in the United Kingdom. Victims may be coerced to resign, or they may accept early retirement due to ill health. Those who leave their jobs because of bullying often develop alcohol-related problems, eating disorders, panic attacks, and nightmares, all of which can prohibit successful future employability. In addition to effects on victims, their families and friends can be affected as well (Randle et al., 2007).

Loss of productivity suggests that emotional abuse at work creates a financial burden for the health-care system in the United States. At one hospital alone, costs for losses of productivity due to incivility at work may have exceeded \$1.2 million annually (Hutton & Gates, 2008). These researchers identified the financial costs of workplace violence at millions of dollars each year. They posited that early diagnosis of a hostile work environment and interventions to change the milieu can be cost-saving measures.

Direct costs such as disability and workers' compensation claims, medical costs, and legal expenses for wrongful dismissal lawsuits contribute to the high price employers pay for unchecked emotional abuse of workers in the United States (Tracy et al., 2006). Indirect costs are difficult to calculate but may include low-quality work, high absenteeism, reduced productivity, and damage to public image. Davenport et al. (2002) cited increased employee turnover, increased use of sick leave, increases in unemployment claims, increases in workers'

compensation claims, and high litigation costs as the real and potential costs employers incur for failure to address abusive conditions in the workplace.

Workplace bullying can damage an organization's productivity and public image, all of which will eventually affect that organization's bottom line. Ultimately the costs for these problems are passed along to the consumer, who is generally forced to absorb the expense increases in costs for goods and services (Ambrosino, Heffernan, Shuttlesworth, & Ambrosino, 2005). The potential for public-sector financial risk and liability increases as workers become unable to return to meaningful employment. Long-term unemployment or permanent disability can force a previous wage earner onto public-assistance rosters for health care and financial support. At a macro level, lack of individual employment can ultimately affect the business sector as well when a displaced worker has a reduced capacity for participating in the marketplace for the purchasing of goods and services. All of these effects point to the need for further analysis of the causes of bullying, the maintenance factors in the bullying syndrome, any preventative measures for organizations, and the most effective treatments for employees when injury has occurred. If work environments are to be lower in risk for emotional abuse, the conditions at all levels are relevant to the discussion.

Additional costs to workplaces where emotional abuse is pervasive can include expenses for overtime wages, reduced morale, low productivity, increased error rates, higher health-care costs (medical and psychiatric), administrative costs for investigating complaints, and damage to public image and trust (Koonin & Green, 2004). Vega and Comer (2005) proposed that organizational costs can have a domino effect, creating additional negative impact on organizations. Nontargets can be drawn into the abuse and suffer personal distress that affects their productivity as well. Perhaps the greatest cost to organizations is the loss of qualified professionals, a loss triggering lengthy and expensive recruitment, hiring, and training in a high-turnover organization (Vega & Comer, 2005).

Often the brightest, most talented, and most dedicated employees are at risk for leaving because of bullying (Namie & Namie, 2011). Good people generally will not remain in an abusive environment. They may also be targets precisely because they excel in their roles. Turnover rates are always costly, and costs for exposure to litigation vary, but in a few well known cases, such as the 2001 *Doescher v. Raess* case, plaintiffs were awarded large sums. The judgment in another case, a 2005 lawsuit filed against the City University of New York by former employees Salerno and Aleandri, awarded the plaintiffs a combined settlement of \$1.4 million (Namie & Namie, 2011). Additional costs cited by Namie and Namie include those for disability claims, absenteeism, and worker apathy. Court decisions in 2000 awarded damages of \$740,000 for a case involving workplace bullying, and another case awarded \$325,000 to a bullied plaintiff (Pfaffenback, 2000, in Fox & Stallworth, 2009). Direct costs to employers include time, labor, overhead, litigation settlements, costs for replacing employees, workers' compensation claims, health care, and costs for security. Indirect costs cited include defects in the quality of products and services, loss of productivity, lost revenue, increases in workers' compensation insurance premiums, and excess capacity (Cascio, 2000, in Fox & Stallworth, 2009).

Abuse is costly to organizations. It destroys networks of communication and increases the likelihood of early departure of both targets and nontargets (Tracy et al., 2006). Victimized workers have frequent absenteeism and may develop permanent disabilities with corresponding decreased earning capacity. Workplaces where abuse occurs incur costs for legal expenses, consulting fees, recruitment and retention expenses, and high use of medical benefits. Problems with recruitment and retention, employee health effects, reduced productivity, and legal countermeasures by employees are all potential hidden costs of workplace emotional abuse (Glendinning, 2001).

The impacts of bullying and emotional abuse on an organization can be significant. Intangible costs include reduced productivity, loss of creativity and low innovation (Vega & Comer, 2005).

Efficiency declines when work environments become toxic. Although direct financial costs to organizations can be devastating for such expenses as legal defense, workers' compensation claims, consultants, and reduced output, the greatest losses are those of qualified personnel, requiring extensive hiring and training. The importance of people as resources cannot be overstated.

### **Workplace Environment and Workplace Health Consequences of Bullying**

Catastrophic drops in production rates, frequent personnel consultations, more union involvement in case-dispute resolution, and a general lowering of job commitment have been found to be common in emotionally abusive work environments. Leymann's original work cited a cost between \$30,000 and \$100,000 per year for an employee exposed to mobbing (Leymann, 1990; Sheehan & Barker, 1999, in Vega & Comer, 2005).

Estimates are that mental illness in the United States causes lost productivity of about \$17 billion each year. A Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) study in 1995 found that untreated depression, a common but serious mental illness, costs \$23.8 billion annually in lost productivity and absenteeism, with direct treatment and rehabilitation costing some \$12.4 billion annually. In addition, lost earnings because of depression-related suicides cost over \$7.5 billion each year (Ambrosino et al., 2005). Each year some 85 percent of industrial accidents and 32 percent of worker-related accidents and heart attacks are attributed to employee stress. According to most leading theorists, mobbing is among the most severe forms of workplace stress.

Rospenda et al. (2005) suggested that some lack of control over job tasks may be inherent in certain types of work, especially if that work is dangerous. Wide variability exists in the extent to which workers lack control over their jobs and the extent to which this lack of control results in stress. Nonetheless, conclusions suggest that interpersonal relationships at work that are characterized by abuse or harassment are unnecessarily very stressful to victims. Conclusions also highlight that the stress created by workplace harassment is more serious than mere task-related or role-related workplace stress. In addition, workplace emotional abuse results in more symptoms of mental illness than any other type of work-related stress.

A study in the early 2000s by the University of Manchester Institute for Science and Technology in the United Kingdom found a modest but notable correlation between absenteeism and four groups of people who differed in their experience of bullying. More than 5,300 participants from 70 organizations responded to a four-part Likert-type scale about the effects of bullying on targets. From 27 to 33 percent of respondents felt that bullying had negatively affected their places of work. Respondents were divided into four groups: those who had not been bullied or witnessed bullying, those who had witnessed bullying, those who had been bullied within the previous five years, and those who were currently being bullied (Rayner et al., 2002). Respondents who were currently bullied used the highest number of sick days, followed by those who had been bullied in the past and those who had only witnessed bullying. Respondents who had not been bullied and who had not witnessed bullying took the fewest days off. On average, respondents who were currently bullied had taken off three and a half days more in the past six months than those who were neither bullied nor had witnessed bullying (Rayner et al., 2002).

A 2006 study by Hartig and Frosch suggested loss of productivity in the workplace as a consequence of unchecked bullying. A survey conducted by the South Australian Working Women's Centre in 1997 (New South Wales Department of Commerce, cited in Hartig & Frosch, 2006) identified that 70 percent of the respondents reported taking time off as a result of being bullied at work. That survey also noted that 75 percent of workers used sick leave, while the remaining used workers' compensation.

A study of verbal abuse within the nursing profession suggests that the impact on the workplace decreases the quality of patient care, produces job insecurity, fosters low morale, and reduces job satisfaction. A meta-analysis of a previous study that had surveyed 500 nurses in a local county medical community confirmed that verbal abuse was the most frequent (64 percent) form of mistreatment of nurses by physicians. Although not as frequent, sexual abuse (35 percent), threats (23 percent), and physical abuse (10 percent) were also notable (Diaz & McMillan, cited in Keashly et al., 1994).

Other data also suggested that targets can spend great amounts of time (more than 50 percent of their time) at work defending themselves, preparing grievance reports, or building up support networks (Canada Safety Council, 2005, in Hartig & Frosch, 2006). In a report by the Victoria's State Services Authority from a survey of over 14,000 workers, more than one in five (over 20 percent) had been bullied or harassed by colleagues or managers. Another 40 percent had witnessed someone else being abused (Tomazin, 2006, in Hartig & Frosch, 2006).

Harvey et al. (2006) identified major negative impacts of bullying on organizational functioning. These include impairment of employees' task-specific abilities, creation of a climate in which high-achieving employees no longer exert extra effort to do well, and creation of "strategic myopia" in the organization, which lessens organizational flexibility and responsiveness to change. In these ways, bullying can act as a type of "organizational cancer," killing the organization.

Davenport et al. (2002) suggested that mobbing affects not only individual victims but also team functioning. The quality and quantity of work produced can suffer. Communications and teamwork can break down. Employees can become split or factionalized. An organization's reputation can suffer. Relationships can suffer, and energies begin to revolve around the bullying process, diverting attention from the organization's actual mission and goals.

Voss, Floderus, and Diderichsen (2001) studied 3,470 employees from the Sweden Post (Sweden's postal service). The focus of the study was the use of sick leave by employees and the physical, psychosocial, and organizational factors that contributed to its use. Questionnaires were sent to respondents who completed and returned them anonymously. Response rates were high at 76 percent, with mild differences between male and female respondents. Most respondents reported working when ill, but, among other findings, 16 percent of the female respondents reported being bullied at work. This was linked to a doubled risk of the development of illness and the use of sick leave in women. For men, concerns about reorganization were correlated the most highly with self-reports of anxiety (Voss et al., 2001). The large sample size and the high rate of return lent strength to the study in spite of the limitations of self-report survey methods.

Studies of work environments using the GWHQ survey indicate a reduction in employee morale and a reduction in job satisfaction in work environments where emotional abuse is prevalent (Rospenda & Richman, 2004). When bullying occurs, it may trigger involvement by HR, EAPs, and unions. A work environment can develop a heightened emotional state, drawing energy and attention away from work tasks (Tracy et al., 2006).

Additional findings from using the GWHQ include high levels of workplace anxiety (Voss et al., 2001). Workers other than targets can experience emotional stress reactions, low self-confidence, and poor goal clarity about work tasks (Vartia, 2001). Absenteeism, decreased organizational commitment, decreased productivity, general lack of civility among workers, and poor communication are all byproducts of workplace mobbing (Hutton & Gates, 2008).

Mental and physical health needs were surveyed in a study by Hoel, Cooper, and Faragher (2001, in Rayner et al., 2002). Respondents were asked about bullying and health status. For

physical health concerns, 82 percent of those previously bullied and currently bullied complained of physical health concerns, and 34 percent of those who had witnessed bullying complained of health problems. Regarding mental health, 9 percent of those currently bullied and previously bullied reported mental health concerns, compared to only 3 percent of those who had only witnessed bullying. Although these findings implied a correlation between illness and bullying, it is not known if the health of participants with exposure to bullying would have been similarly compromised had they not experienced or witnessed bullying.

Finally, interpersonal reactions in the workplace are job stressors linked to increased risk of illness and injury. Rospenda et al. (2005) examined the cross-sectional and lagged effects of both sexual harassment (SH) and generalized workplace harassment (GWH). The sample in their study included faculty, graduate student workers, clerical/secretarial staff, and service/maintenance workers at a large Midwestern university who responded to a survey. This sequential type of study involved surveying respondents at four points in time from 1996 to 2002. The findings, reported earlier in this chapter, suggested that GWH was positively correlated with an increase in illness and injury.

Researchers caution against underestimating the effects of workplace emotional abuse on work team members who observe abuse, citing anxiety, dismay, powerlessness, and revenge as common occurrences in the witnesses of abuse. A particular admonition is that for workplaces where bullying has become operational or “normalized,” it can be difficult for victims or advocates to challenge it and effect any real change (Randle et al., 2007).

To the degree that workers are emotionally injured at work, one can expect increases in rates of expulsion, psychiatric illness, physical illness, suicide, and death. The economic consequences for organizations and society are also apparent:

We must assume that the economic consequences—like the psychosocial— are considerable. A person can be paid without having any real work to do for years. Long periods of sick leave, a catastrophic drop in production by the whole group, the necessity for frequent intervention by personnel officers, personnel consultants, managers of various grades, occupational health staff, external consultants, the company’s health centers, and so on. All this extra effort, combined with the loss of productive work can be costly. (Leymann, 1990)

### **Personal Consequences of Workplace Mobbing**

The experiences of targets will be examined in chapter 5. However, a few examples of personal consequences are included here. Performance-based destruction is described in recent work by Harvey et al. (2006). Grouping this destruction into four areas, the authors posited: (1) Bullying can affect daily task-specific abilities of employees, such as employee motivation, task learning, and team interdependence. (2) Employees who tend to be ambitious and who will go the extra mile for the organization may have their prosocial behavior discouraged. This second area of destruction can be found, then, in a decrease in *organizational citizenship*, or helping others and civic virtue at work. (3) Bullying creates myopia in the firm by controlling change agents and increasing levels of general control. (4) Tolerance for bullying can become so toxic that the organization suffers from cancerlike malignancies, creating a reputation that the organization is a bad place to work (Harvey et al., 2006). A bad reputation can have major implications for hiring but also for risk assessment, liability issues, public opinion, and financial viability.

While the relationship between bullying and health problems may seem obvious, it is not always straightforward. Longitudinal data collection has been very limited and difficult to obtain. Targets have reported such symptoms as anxiety, depression, sleep problems, appetite disturbance, and sadness. The most severe symptoms for some are cognitive effects, such as poor concentration, insecurity, lack of initiative, and irritability (Bjorkqvist et al., 1994, in Rayner et al., 2002). Work

performance almost always suffers for targets, along with a reduced commitment to remain in the job, loss of efficiency, diminished motivation, and serious compromises in job satisfaction (Rayner et al., 2002).

Workplace bullying can have severe outcomes for targets. Two hundred subjects responded to a Web survey in 2003 (Namie & Namie, 2003). Respondents included 154 targets and 46 witnesses of workplace emotional harassment. Of those who identified themselves as targets, 79 percent reported feeling stressed, 64 percent felt depressed, 64 percent reported chronic fatigue, 59 percent said they lacked confidence in themselves, 59 percent said they felt humiliated and guilty, 58 percent had obsessive thoughts and nightmares, 56 percent reported poor concentration, and 53 percent admitted difficulties with sleep. Targets were more likely than observers or witnesses to experience general stress and mental pressure, but both targets and witnesses reported greater stress than people who were not exposed to workplace abuse. Davenport et al. (2002) suggested that mobbing and bullying are mentioned in the same list as homicide, rape, and robbery as workplace crimes.

Tracy et al. (2006) used metaphors to describe the experience of being bullied, including feeling as though in a battle, undergoing water torture, torn apart, or in a nightmare. All authors concluded that being the target of bullying puts an employee at risk for injury, illness, and accidents. For a few, it can result in assault toward the perpetrator or others. In some isolated cases, an injured worker retaliates with violence, including murder and suicide, referred to in American popular culture as "going postal." Clearly, the costs for unchecked workplace emotional abuse are significant and substantial enough to warrant preventative strategies.

Damage to health from emotional abuse at work is real. A host of stress-related conditions can be attributed or exacerbated by a hostile work environment, such as compromised immunity, gastrointestinal disorders, hypertension, increased sensitivity to allergens, and headaches, to name only a few. In addition, targets experience very real psychosocial effects, such as damage to social relationships, economic damage, and loss of professional identity.

Although some unhappiness on the individual, organizational, and macro levels of work may be an inevitable part of life, many types of individual suffering, workplace devastation, and workplace economic costs could be avoided by recognizing and preventing emotional abuse at work. A later chapter will address organizational prevention and remediation. Chapter 2 will address theoretical explanations for the causes of mobbing and potential solutions for prevention and remediation.

## Summary

Although social work practice within the workplace has been a recognized domain for many decades, little has appeared in social work literature to address the identification, prevention, treatment, and remediation of actual workplace emotional abuse that is created and sustained by bullying in work organizations. Social work's ethical traditions advocate for understanding and intervening in the environment where problems occur (Woods & Hollis, 2000), but most non-social-work-oriented organizations do not have the benefit of social workers to address problems occurring within the workplace. Some might argue that "personality and environmental systems are inevitably intertwined" and that it is not often easy to differentiate between the two. The remaining chapters focus on answers to a number of questions about victims, perpetrators, risk environments, social work practice, and public policy.

This book provides for an integrated framework identifying organizational vulnerabilities, leadership strategies, survival tactics for victims, clinical assessment and treatment for targets of abuse, organizational prevention approaches, best practices for remediation, and the laws and public policies currently in place and in development. This work makes an argument for including

this social problem as one of the domains where social work scholars and practitioners should direct their attention and intervene to improve the lives of people in American society.