

# The Responsibility of Bystanders to Mobbing in the Perspective of Christian Morality and Personal Dignity

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## Introduction

In cases of mobbing, the victim's persecution usually takes place with co-workers silently watching. The fear of being attacked or losing one's job promotes passive behaviour, which leads to the question what moral responsibility falls on silent bystanders. On the one hand, research shows that organizations emphasizing moral values in their activities acquire a strong tool to help cope with harassment, since poor moral standards are considered one of the most important reasons for workplace mobbing (Einarsen, 2000). On the other hand, even when realizing the connections of poor morality with the existence of the phenomenon in organizations (Glusker et al., 2022; Kendrick, 2017) and treating it as an offense against the person's dignity (Batsi & Karamanis, 2019), modern organizations face a sensitive problem of the person's own understanding of moral responsibility and dignity.

Although it is believed that universal norms of business ethics can protect the employee dignity, moral relativism that has taken hold in the postmodern society tends to question any universal moral norms. A Christian approach emerges as an alternative, addressing the problem of a psychologised understanding of personal dignity (Vveinhardt, 2022). However, scientific literature lacks a clear theological definition of the phenomenon of mobbing in the aspects of protection of morality and personal dignity, which would help to more clearly define the moral responsibility of persons involved in the mobbing process. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to discuss the responsibility of bystanders to mobbing in the perspective of Christian morality and personal dignity.

## Methods

Methods of structural analysis and synthesis of scientific literature were applied.

## Results

Mobbing is defined as a long-term persecution of one person, accompanied by systematic repeated verbal and non-verbal attacks by a group of persons (see more in Leymann, 1996; Pheko, 2018; Zukauskas & Vveinhardt, 2009). Usually, persecutors aim not only to hurt the victim but also to remove it from the work group or organization (Duffy, Sperry, 2007; Pheko, 2018). In this process, active bystanders directly participate in the process and support it, while passive bystanders are not directly involved but they do not support the victim (Maran et al., 2018).

According to Samier (2008), bystanders' indifference to the victim's pain is referred to as passive evil; therefore, a bigger problem than the evildoers in the organization is individuals who tolerate or obey the authorities who do evil. In this context, according to Arbuckle (2004), no Christian or moral person can remain an indifferent bystander to bullying or the abuse of power because, like Jesus, he must reveal the truth. Meanwhile, The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (CSDC) considers moral life as a testimony to the person's dignity (The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 2005, 134). It follows that mobbing actions contradicting to moral norms violate the dignity of all participants of the mobbing process (victims, persecutors and bystanders) and any Christian is obliged to feel responsible for the evil happening in his environment.

However, the roles of the persecutor and bystander are not equal. In moral theology, cooperation in performing a bad deed is investigated in cases where the acting agents are not tantamount participants in the instigation and execution of the morally unacceptable activities (Kaveny, 2000). A distinction is usually made between formal and material cooperation, the division of which can be traced back to Aristotle (Flannery, 2013). In the first case, it is an intentional act that contributes to the main actor's goal (such cooperation is always prohibited). In the second case, the cooperating person contributes but does not seek the main actor's goal (does not want it), while the permissibility of cooperation is determined depending on circumstances (Capps, 2017; Flannery, 2013; Kaveny, 2000). Therefore, immediate and mediate cooperation are distinguished. In the case of immediate cooperation, the person directly participates in morally wrong actions, even though he does not approve of them. Meanwhile, in case of mediate cooperation, the individual's contribution is indirect or non-essential (Di Camillo, 2013), for example, by providing means that are used for an evil purpose without the individual's knowledge. Although, unlike immediate cooperation, which becomes similar to formal cooperation, mediate cooperation can sometimes be justified; according to Di Camillo (2013), the Christian has a duty to prevent, remove or correct evil.

Formal (morally unjustifiable) cooperation takes place among active supporters of the persecutor, who participate in attacks, approve of them, support and promote them. If the person participates in persecution internally disapproving of what is happening (for example, by signing a petition for the employer to dismiss a colleague), such person becomes a material and immediate co-operator. However, the role of passive participants can be assessed not unambiguously. For example, due to the occupied position, the employee must report a mistake made by a mobbing target to the manager, who uses this information to deal with him. Although such cooperation is material and mediate, the employee who performed the duty neither approved of the persecutor's goals nor sought to contribute; therefore, the action can be morally justifiable (such cooperation is also called remote). And, on the contrary, by sharing personal information that can be used to compromise the victim or by passively observing abuse, the person creates conditions for a morally wrong act.

## Conclusion

The Christian perspective enables to define moral responsibility not only of active participants of the mobbing process but also of bystanders. On the one hand, mobbing emerges as evil that violates the dignity not only of the harasser and the victim but also of bystanders. On the other hand, the understanding of the bystander's passivity is changing, encouraging to rethink the roles of the participants of the process. The category of cooperation in performing a morally unjustifiable act obliges Christians to undertake moral responsibility for their active or passive actions/inaction contributing to or creating conditions for the victim's persecution.

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