

PAUL SCHERRER INSTITUT



**Prevention**

**Mobbing and  
Sexual Harassment  
in the Workplace**



## Dear Colleagues

Mobbing and sexual harassment encroach on the dignity of men and women and can have far-reaching consequences for the victims, as well as for the Institute. No organisation, not even PSI, can be completely sure that mobbing and sexual harassment will not occur on its premises.

PSI takes care to safeguard the personality of each of its employees. Everyone has the right to have his or her personal integrity protected at the workplace. It is our aim to approach our equals, subordinates and superiors with respect and esteem, to take everyone seriously, regardless of their strengths and weaknesses, and to respect their personality and dignity.

Basically, the best form of prevention is to have a congenial working environment. This includes having a good team spirit, trust and a motivating corporate culture. An open and fair communications policy and a conflict management and resolution programme are also key elements. Everyone, therefore, is required to make his or her contribution, and managers, in particular, have to face up to the challenge.

The PSI Directorate does everything in its power to ensure that mobbing and sexual harassment are prevented at the Institute. Whoever has the feeling that he or she is a victim of mobbing or sexual harassment will find support, and anyone found to be a perpetrator of acts of this nature will be sanctioned accordingly.

This brochure gives you information about this topic. All line managers and employees are encouraged to do everything within their power to resolve any conflicts that emerge, as quickly and competently as they can, in order that mobbing and sexual harassment can, as far as possible, be avoided.

We are convinced that, in the spirit of our guiding principles and management philosophy, you will act along ethical lines and create a working environment that supports our striving for scientific excellence.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support and active co-operation.

Prof. Dr. Joël Mesot  
Director

Ursula Schmid  
Head of Human Resources

## What is mobbing?

Mobbing basically means molesting or exhibiting hostile behaviour towards a person, or undermining their self-esteem.

By mobbing, we consider such behaviour as when a particular employee is systematically and repeatedly harassed over a long time span, victimised, or excluded and socially isolated by one or more persons. In general, mobbing activities can be divided into four categories:

1. Attacks on the victim's possibilities to communicate;
2. Assaults on the victim's reputation (e.g. gossiping about, or ridiculing, the victim);
3. Attacks on the victim's performance (e.g. permanent criticism of the quality of work);
4. Assaults on the victim's health (e.g. emotional and physical abuse).

**The following examples show typical behaviour which, if applied systematically, amounts to mobbing:**

- Refusing contact with, isolating or ignoring a person
- Withholding information
- Refusing to enter into discussion
- Showing aggressive or impolite behaviour
- Making uncalled-for personal criticism
- Discriminating against or not inviting to group events
- Spreading detrimental, negative rumours
- Compromising, making fun of, unnerving or upsetting, or humiliating
- Libelling or slandering, harassing or threatening
- Attacking a person's nationality, or political or religious beliefs
- Encroaching on personal privacy
- Making innuendoes



In specific cases, mobbing can initially appear insignificant, since it often starts off harmlessly, before gradually taking on more serious dimensions. As a rule, mobbing commences with a simple, but badly managed, dispute at the workplace. The consequences of attacks and sneering remarks over a long period of time, however, subjects the victim to considerable stress and is damaging to his or her integrity. In such a situation, the victim very often makes professional misjudgements. As long as mobbing continues, it has consequences upon the physical and psychological well-being of the person under attack, as well as on his or her social and professional environment.

## What is not mobbing?

There is a danger that all unpleasant experiences might be classed as "mobbing". Mobbing, therefore, is not:

- Demanding better performance
- Levying justified criticism
- Vehemently expressing a different opinion
- Unintentionally issuing badly formulated instructions
- Now and again having a bad mood
- Uttering a single, angry word
- A loud argument or disagreement
- An emotional outburst

## What is sexual harassment?

Sexual harassment at the workplace is inappropriate behaviour of a sexual nature, which the person affected considers to be insulting and degrading. Article 4 of the Swiss legislation governing equal rights considers any harassing behaviour of a sexual nature, or any other conduct based on gender that interferes with the dignity of a man or woman, to be discriminatory.

Sexual harassment at the workplace is detrimental to the right to privacy as well as to the psychological and physical integrity of the person being targeted. Sexual harassment is not necessarily only directed towards an individual, it can also be targeted against an entire group.

### Ways in which sexual harassment can be expressed:

- Suggestive and embarrassing remarks
- Remarks concerning physical attributes or weaknesses
- Obtrusive and persistent gazes ('undressing with the eyes')
- Sexist comments and jokes
- Displaying, hanging up or showing sexist material
- Suggestive incitements or invitations
- Undesired physical contact
- Making advances which are coupled with the promise of privilege or the threat of reprisals
- Insinuating or harassing electronic messages
- Forcing sexual relationships
- Sexual and physical infringement

## What is not sexual harassment?

Eroticism and sexuality are a part of life. A flirt can be uplifting, and many relationships and marriages have begun at the workplace. It is not a question of suppressing nature. However, when eroticism and sexuality are used to exercise power and degrade, when people are socially excluded and debased, then it is time to say 'No!', and fight back – not only for yourself but also for others.



## What is PSI's stance?

As an employer, PSI disapproves of every form of mobbing and sexual harassment at the workplace, and is duty bound to do everything in its power to protect each employee from this type of behaviour. Everyone has the right to have his or her personal integrity safeguarded at the workplace, and so PSI is informing its staff about these issues and promoting awareness of them. It ensures that the privacy rights of all employees are protected and will sanction any employee or manager who practices mobbing or sexual harassment.

## What are the responsibilities of line managers?

Line managers must do everything in their power to ensure that mobbing and sexual harassment are seen to be unacceptable forms of behaviour. As role models, their behaviour contributes towards creating a working environment in which the personal integrity and self-esteem of all staff are respected. They should inform all of their staff about the principles of good conduct and, if necessary, intervene to correct any unacceptable behaviour of which they are aware. They are responsible for ensuring that any information regarding mobbing or sexual harassment in their domain is taken seriously, and for making sure that incidents are tackled without delay. Line managers who fail to take systematic action against sexual harassment and mobbing are to be made aware of their responsibilities.

Managers should try to identify conflicts whilst they are still in their infancy, and take an active role in finding a solution. When an acute and entrenched mobbing situation comes to light, it is important to limit the amount of damage caused, work out a fair solution for the victim, and eliminate the causes so that there is no chance of a recurrence. Line managers must, in all cases, inform the Human Resources Department.

## What should employees do?

All staff must respect the dignity and personal boundaries of their colleagues, and play their part in creating a congenial working atmosphere as well as promoting constructive teamwork.

Employees who have the feeling that they are being mobbed or sexually harassed must tell the perpetrator in a clear way that this type of behaviour will not be tolerated. Clear signals concerning the effects and the rejection of this harassment are necessary. Precise borders are to be drawn up and a demand made to stop the harassment. If necessary, the Human Resources Department, or a person who can be trusted, can be asked to participate in any discussion.

Employees who become aware of incidents of this nature are required to offer support to the victim and to inform the perpetrator that this type of behaviour is unacceptable. At the latest when the perpetrator acts a second time, the line manager is to be informed. Employees who report any misconduct on the part of their colleagues have nothing to fear by way of reprisal.



## Sanctions

Persons responsible for mobbing and sexual harassment must reckon with serious consequences that can vary from a written reprimand to dismissal. The specific consequences will depend upon the seriousness of the mobbing or harassment. Any decision on what action is to be taken lies with the Head of Department, in conjunction with the Human Resources Department.

The various degrees of sanctions are detailed as follows:

- A written reprimand with the threat of dismissal
- A warning with the threat of (summary) dismissal
- Regular dismissal
- Summary (immediate) dismissal



Whoever, in spite of knowing the contrary, accuses an innocent person of mobbing or harassment must reckon with the same sanctions.

An accused person who feels that he or she is innocent, or is not aware of any wrong conduct, can turn to a person of trust in order to have the accusation investigated and, if necessary, demand that the facts be clarified.

## Contacts

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(member of committee for equal opportunities)
- Loertscher Yves, Tel. 2350  
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- Line managers
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(external consultancy)

## Additional Information

Visit the PSI Human Resources intranet link "Mobbing and Sexual Harassment" to view the legal regulations, the ETH Council Policy Statement, a fact-sheet and the process about formal and informal conduct, as well as a list of relevant literature.

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