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## A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF MOBING

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### **Abstract**

The aim of this research is to examine the mobbing concept which we learn more and more about its destructions every day from a different perspective and contribute to the literature. 42 people who said they were victims of mobbing were interviewed. However, considering the issues required to be considered mobbing in the literature, only 14 of these individuals were able to participate in the analysis, and in-depth interviews were conducted using the phenomenology pattern, which is one of the qualitative research methods, and some conclusions were reached on the premises and results of the case. In the framework of the research results, it is revealed that managerial factors are a very important factor. In the literature, mostly individual factors are examined and in this study, administrative factors are highlighted. It is thought that the results of the research will contribute to both the scales developed about mobbing and the research models to be developed on the subject.

**Keywords:** Mobbing, Victim, Bullying, Intimidation, Psychological Harresment.

### **Introduction**

Mobbing is a psychological violence that creates an unfavorable climate within the organization, affects the psychological health of employees, and includes unpleasant behaviors. It is systematically applied by an individual or individuals in order to move a person or people mostly from the workplace. The phenomenon of mobbing, which has the potential to produce difficult-to-compensate results for the individual, organization and society, has become more and more important. The fact that its importance has increased in practice has led researchers to investigate the phenomenon of mobbing further.

In the literature, both quantitative and qualitative researches have been carried out and continue to be made. Although it has been handled by many researchers, the concept of mobbing remains unknown in some ways. We are confronted with new information every day in the name of the premises and results of the mobbing phenomenon. In this regard, it is of great importance that qualitative research continues to be carried out on the subject. It is for this reason that in this study, people who have been victims of mobbing at

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a certain period of their lives have been discussed in depth and a new perspective has been tried to be brought to the subject.

### ***Theoretical Framework***

Heinz Leymann is the first researcher introduced the concept of mobbing to the industrial and organizational psychology literature (Zapf, 1999). Leymann is the researcher who created the first inventory related to the concept of mobbing. The inventory of LIPT (Leymann Inventory of Psychological Terrorization) created by Leyman in 1989 evaluates whether certain behaviors and attitudes are mobbing and the severity of mobbing (Leymann, 1996).

The etymological origin of the word mobbing is quite interesting. The word mob means irregular crowd who engage in illegal violence and comes from the words "mobile vulgus" in Latin, meaning "unstable crowd", "violence oriented community" (Davenport, Schwartz, Elliott, 2003). The word of mob is defined in English as "a large and disorderly crowd of people" (Merriem Webster Dictionary, 2020). It was used by the scientist Konrad Lorenz in 1960's, who studied animal behavior, to mean that small groups of animals would attack a stronger and lonely animal, collectively. The concept of mobbing was also used by Konrad Lorenz to describe the exclusion of the weakest bird from the group among birds (Westhues, 2002; Tınaz, 2011: 11).

Leymann (1996) made the generally accepted definition of the concept of mobbing used in business life. According to Leymann, mobbing is psychological terrorism that is systematically, hostile and immoral to another person by one or more people. While it is examined within the scope of this definition, there are three main elements within the framework of mobbing phenomenon: The person who applies mobbing, namely the bully, the victim who is exposed to mobbing, and the subject of mobbing.

In the field of Business and Organizational Behavior, there are some concepts that are confused with the concept of mobbing and used in place and in conjunction with mobbing. These concepts (WHO, 2003):

- Psychological Terror
- Bullying
- Employee Abuse
- Work Abuse
- The Victimization
- The Intimidation
- Mistreatment

Among the above concepts in business literature, bullying is the most used instead of mobbing. Leymann made an important statement on this subject. According to Leymann (1996), the concept of bullying should be used to describe hostile and systematic behaviors in relation to children and young people, and mobbing should be used for hostile and systematic behaviors in business life.

While scanning the definitions of mobbing in the literature, in order for a behavior to be considered as mobbing:

- It should be applied systematically (at least 6 months and at least once a week)
- Must be purposeful (The aim is usually to cause the person to leave work)
- Should be causing psychological harm.

Undoubtedly, as in all cases, there are a number of individual and managerial factors that trigger the emergence of mobbing. The main fires that cause mobbing at work are as follows (Shallcross, 2003, 7; Tınaz, 2011, 123):

- Cruel competition between employees
- Incorrect staff selection
- Minimizing human resources costs
- High hierarchical structure
- Inadequate leadership
- Closed door policies
- Communication channels are not sufficient
- No team work
- Sense of finding a scapegoat

Mobbing can be prevented in an organizational context with the steps to be taken and the arrangements to be made within the framework of the above factors.



Managerial factors are effective on mobbing behavior, as well as a number of individual factors. Managerial factors interact with individual factors and effect employee behaviors (Mantell and Albrecht, 1994). In the related literature, there are some important individual factors belong to victim and perpetrator. According to Namie (2003), all bullies (ones who apply mobbing) exhibit narcissistic features. In terms of the study carried out by Einarsen et al. (2003), bullies define themselves as so aggressive, and it was found that these individuals' social anxiety is so high. The self-confidence of the person suffering from mobbing is an important factor in the mobbing process. The more aggressive the individual is aware of the victim's lack of self-confidence, the more disturbing he / she will be. There is no personality structure candidate for mobbing in the mobbing process, but the profiles listed below have the potential to be victims of mobbing (Ravisy, 2000; Tınaz, 2011:104):

- A lonely person
- A Strange Person
- A Successful Person
- New Arrival

Mobbing increases stress and psychological and physical complaints on individuals. In this context, individuals who are faced with this condition may have symptoms such as (Girardi et al., 2007):

- headache,
- tachycardia,
- stomach problems,
- high blood pressure,
- sleep problems,
- physical complaints,
- concentration disorder,
- anxiety,
- difficulty starting an activity (inertia),
- social isolation, etc...

Mobbing has destructive effects on the organization as well as on the individual. The organizational effects of mobbing are primarily of an economic nature. New staffing and training costs increase due to experienced employees leaving the job. It is observed that sick leave is frequently obtained in the enterprise. Due to the applied mobbing, sick leave accepted as escape from the workplace increases costs; in turn lowers efficiency. On the other hand, this situation will cause a negative climate in the workplace and it will be very difficult to do team work.

### **1. Method**

Phenomenology, one of the qualitative research patterns, was used in the research. The phenomenology pattern focuses on the cases we are aware of but do not have an in-depth and detailed understanding. Phenomenology is an appropriate research method to investigate cases that are not entirely foreign to us, but whose meaning we cannot fully understand. In case science researches, data sources are individuals or groups that experience the subject of research or can express it (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2018). However, qualitative research takes into account the difficulty of working with large samples and the difficulty of measuring relationships between variables. The participants were informed about that the information obtained in terms of the study would be used for scientific purposes and that no information that would reveal the person would be shared.

In terms of the study, preliminary interview was made with 32 people who claimed to be victims of mabbing. However, there are a number of conditions required to mention the phenomenon of mobbing:

- Systematic implementation of the action (at least once a week and for 6 months and longer)
- Creating psychological damage
- Purposeful (such as trying to get fired)

It was determined that there were only 13 people who met the above conditions, and 13 people were interviewed. Interviews took an average of 20 minutes. After giving information about the featured themes, some of the texts of the interviewed participants were shared in order to set an example in the findings section. All of the participants are Turkish. Interviews were conducted in Turkish, but the sample sections transferred to the article were translated into English.



The research sample is composed of blue collar personnel working in the retail sector in Istanbul. In this study, semi-structured interview form will be used as data collection technique. Before preparing the interview questions, a strong conceptual framework was created by searching related literature related to the research subject in order to increase the internal validity (credibility) of the research. After the subject was designed, the items to be included in the form were determined. In order to evaluate the items in terms of the purpose, meaning and scope, the field specialist was interviewed with two faculty members, and the confirmation of the participants was received. The form was finalized by making use of the information obtained after these stages, and the questions created were directed to the participants.

As mentioned above, in-depth interviews were made with 13 mobbing victims. Therefore, the following questions as showed below were asked to the participants and additional questions were asked based on the responses of the participants in order to clarify the issue.

The following questions are included in the prepared questionnaire.

1. Could you briefly mention the process you have been through in Mobbing? When did it happen, how often and in what period?
2. Who was/were mobbing?
3. What were the goals of mobber(s)?
4. What do you think caused your mobbing? Could there be some reasons arising from yourself?
5. Can there be a number of factors that lay the groundwork for mobbing, except for you or the person who practices mobbing? Your manager is like the structure of the company.
6. How did you feel after being exposed to mobbing? What did you do?

## 2. Findings

In Table 3.1, there is socio-demographic information about the participants in the research.

**Table 3.1. Descriptive Statistics of Participants**

Participant	Age	Gender	Education
P1	31	Female	High School
P2	28	Female	Associate Degree
P3	30	Female	High School
P4	22	Male	Universtiy Student
P5	36	Male	High School
P6	20	Female	University Student
P7	44	Male	High School
P8	25	Male	University
P9	22	Female	University Student
P10	51	Female	Primary School
P11	28	Female	University School (Distance Education Faculty)
P12	26	Male	Associte Degree
P13	30	Female	University

Within the framework of the information in Table 3.1, the number of university graduates is a minority since the research is conducted with blue collar personnel. In the research, it is seen that 8 women and 5 men are present, and women are in the majority.

In the next sections of the study, each of the themes that stand out in the frame of questions and answers will be examined. Mobbing victims stated briefly about who had been subjected to mobbing after the incident. The information of the persons concerned has been kept confidential and three categories of positions of mobbing practitioners have emerged. Frequency information of the related categories are shown in Table 3.2.



**Table 3.2. Positions of Bullies**

Position	Frequency
Manager	7
Colleagus (Same Level)	6
Collagaus (Lower Level)	2

When the table above is analyzed, it is understood that the managers are the group that applies more mobbing. It is understood that some employees have been subjected to psychological harassment by people from more than one position.

Participant 4 (P4) and P12 mentioned that they encountered with psychologiam terror implemented by both their friends and employees from the lower levei in the workplace. P8 and P13 mentioned that they were mobbing by their managers and colleagues at the same level.

When asked what are the main issues that cause mobbing employees to mobbing, extremely interesting answers were encountered. While 10 of the 13 participants said that they faced this kind of unkind behavior in order to quit, only one participant (P6) said that the manager liked psychological harassment for some unpleasant reasons. In line with the information received from the participants, the thoughts of the participants about the goals of the mobbers are categorized and given in Table 3.3.

**Table 3.3. Targets of Bullies**

TheTarget of Bullies	Frequency
Get him/her fired	10
Fear of losing his/her position	7
Jealousy	5
Enjoying	2

Dismissing the victim is the main target of the mobing process within the terms of the results. Already in the related literature, it has been accepted by many researchers that mobbing process is intended and that this intention is to ensure that the victim leaves the job. In this study, it was determined that the second main reason was the theme of fear of losing position. P2, P4, P6, P8, P9, P11 and P13 explained the reason of mobbing as bullies' fear to lose their position, moreover, these bullies perceive victims as a competitor. In fact, P4 and P8 did not mention this reason at first, but they stated that the main reason for mobbing is to lose their positions after the in-depth interview. It was found interesting to arrive at the distinction of this reason during the interview and it was thought to be one of the findings that should be emphasized.

**P4:** "The fact that I was studying Business Administration at Marmara University was the most important reason why I was hired. I was selling well in the store, I was very hard working, but I could not please my manager Nuran. She was always catching a mistake and hitting my face. He graduated from a two-year college. When our district official said that he would be very pleased to see me work there as a manager in the future, nut Nuran said that the level of education is not important. After that day, she started to behave harder towards me. I see now, she's jealous.

When the participants were asked what they felt and what they did after exposure, it was understood that the common emotion was stress. They said that all of the victims suffering from mobing had increased stress levels. In addition, as a result of in-depth interviews, some of the participants showed signs of depression. Expression causes an increase in or decreasing appetite in the individual, sleep disturbance, irritability, feeling unworthy, hopelessness, unhappiness, guilt, low energy for activities, suicidal thoughts and even attempts (Bertone-Johnson, 2009). Within the framework of this information, it was understood that some participants had a depression experience. Information on the themes in the related subject is presented in Table 3.4.





**Table 3.4. Emotions of Victims**

Emotion	Frequency
Stress	13
Angry	10
Shame	7
Fear	7
Disgust	5

**P12:** " I was so angry ... They were constantly gossiping about me, I wanted something, they brought it from the trainee employees, too late. My colleagues never spoke to me. When I went home, I could not sleep from the pain of my head. I went to a psychiatrist for a while and used antidepressants. I was holding myself hard not to strangle them".

**P9:** " The store manager suddenly started shouting in everyone, there were customers in front of us. It wasn't a huge mistake I made. I couldn't understand what it was. I was very embarrassed. He also shouted in front of the staff at the store closing. He said you are incompetent, you cannot use initiative on your own. At that moment I wanted so much that I was extremely frustrated to slam the door."

When the participants described the mobbing behaviors they were exposed to, some themes emerged. It was understood that the behavior that the participants were exposed to the most was insult. Some behaviors such as attack on personality, embarrassment, and swearing were subheadings of this theme. The mobbing behavior that comes after the insult is not to talk to the victim, to isolate it. Information on other themes is presented in Table 3.5.

**Table 3.5. Mobbing Behaviors**

Behavior	Frequency
Insult	10
Social Isolation	9
Gossip and Rumor	8
Rebuke	7
Regiment (Verbal)	5
Regiment (joking, by hand etc..)	2

**P2:** " There was a friend named Aslı who worked in the same department as me. He would always make fun of me and cut me off. He used to joke hand in between. I was silent, it turned out that I made a huge mistake by not reacting. They had a group among themselves. They were constantly looking at me and laughing among them. They were not taking me in any way. He went out while eating. We were in the same department, but they wouldn't let me know".

The participants were asked whether they left the job after being exposed to mobbing and how this situation affected them. 7 out of 13 participants decided to quit after being exposed to mobbing. The participants were asked whether they left the job after being exposed to mobbing and how this situation affected them. 7 out of 13 participants decided to quit after being exposed to mobbing. Other prominent themes are shown in Table 3.6.

**Table 3.6. Main Results of Mobbing**

Theme	Frequency
Loss of Trust in People	9
Quitting Job	7
Decrease in Self-Confidence	7
Psychological Problems	6
Unfair world belief	3
Increase in Self-Confidence	2
The strengthening of religious belief	1



**P10:** “ They thought they could put pressure on me. But I warned them harshly. While doing this, I did not make myself guilty. Yes, I can say that my self-confidence has increased. My faith in Allah increased, I started to pray more.

Some of the prominent themes belowed in Table 3.6.were found quite surprising. Although the lack of self-confidence is the most common result, the self-confidence of people who can effectively deal with mobbing has increased, and a participant's religious belief has been strengthened.

Finally, in Table 3.7, the main factors that prepare the ground for mobbing from the perspective of the participants are shown.

**Table 3.7. Antecedents of Mobbing**

Antecedents	Frequency
Managerial Issues	12
Factors Belong to Bullies	10
Factors Belong to Victims	7

**P10:** “ Yes, it was my manager's rudeness, but it was the company that gave him this authority. There is no place in the company to complain about him. Whatever decision he decides about me, they will confirm. In fact, I think the company has more mistakes, now I realized when I think about it.”

Perhaps the most important result of the research is that victims of mobbing report that the main reason that led to mobbing is managerial issues. Some of the participants stated that the individual factors were at the forefront, but after the in-depth interviews, these participants stated that the managerial factors were the main reasons. Some individuals who could not effectively cope with mobbing, in particular, said that the main reason was the people who applied mobbing, but the reasons arising from them also played an important role as the interview deepened. For these people, especially self-confidence and trying to avoid conflict are the main sub-themes

### 3. Conclusion

Studies on mobbing in the literature mentioned that many factors involved in the emergence of mobbing. However, it is understood that these studies mostly focus on individual factors. In this study, it was concluded that organizational factors are as important as individual factors and should be taken into consideration. Some of the participants stated that the individual factors were at the forefront, but after the in-depth interviews, these participants stated that the managerial factors were the main reasons. Some individuals who could not effectively cope with mobbing, in particular, said that the main reason was the people who applied mobbing, but the reasons arising from them also played an important role as the interview deepened.

There are no different results were obtained from the literature in terms of what individuals exposed to mobbing thought and felt. When the participants were asked what they felt and what they did after exposure, it was understood that the common emotion was stress. They said that all of the victims suffering from mobbing had increased stress levels. In addition, as a result of in-depth interviews, some of the participants showed signs of depression. Expression causes an increase in or decreasing appetite in the individual, sleep disturbance, irritability, feeling unworthy, hopelessness, unhappiness, guilt, low energy for activities, suicidal thoughts and even attempts (Bertone-Johnson, 2009). Within the framework of this information, it was understood that some participants had a depression experience.

The results of mobbing have a devastating effect not only for individuals but also for organizations. In today's business world, where human beings are more vital, losing employees is an important problem. The participants were asked whether they left the job after being exposed to mobbing and how this situation affected them. 7 out of 13 participants decided to quit after being exposed to mobbing. The participants were asked whether they left the job after being exposed to mobbing and how this situation affected them. 7 out of 13 participants decided to quit after being exposed to mobbing. This is a problematic situation for all organizations.



#### 4. Discussion and Recommendations

Mobbing is an issue that has been studied by many researchers in the literature. It has gained more importance especially in recent years. Mobbing, which has previously been uncovered, has been made more legally sanctioned in recent years. Of course, this does not change the fact that mobbing is difficult to detect.

Mobbing is a phenomenon that harms the individual, organization and society. In the literature, the psychological and social problems seen in individuals suffering from mobbing are widely mentioned. The victim of mobbing can face many negative situations such as depression, stress, distrust of people, reflecting this situation to the family and breaking from social environments.

It is evident that there will be a negative climate in the workplace as such situations increase. As mobbing events increase and employees at work will not trust each other, they will not be able to connect to work and teamwork will not be possible. The increase in such cases will undoubtedly harm the society as well, and the increase in the number of individuals experiencing psychological problems will also harm social peace and the economy.

For these reasons, mobbing should be emphasized more, employees should be informed individually, information should be given about how to deal with mobbing in an individual way, and legislators should take more precautions for mobbing victims within the law system.

In the research, phenomenology, one of the qualitative research patterns, was used. The purpose of using phenomenology is to understand what the experiences of individuals undergoing mobbing mean in their world of meaning and to obtain different information about the phenomenon.

Only two of the participants were able to effectively cope with mobbing. The other 11 participants could not cope with mobbing. In in-depth interviews with them, it was observed that when they experienced mobbing, their stress and anxiety levels were very high and they experienced physical and mental problems. Two participants who were able to cope with mobbing stated that there was an increase in the level of self-confidence after this event. This is one of the important results that shows that self-confidence will develop with great experience. It was understood that 7 of the 11 participants who could not cope with mobbing left the job, 4 of them based on their economic conditions and continued to work where they worked a bit by chance. Mobbing is a process that directly attacks the individual's psychological health. Therefore, the decline in self-confidence and self-efficacy is the main result of mobbing. Consequently, low self-esteem will decrease further after mobbing and the individual will enter into a vicious circle.

According to the results of the research, although the victims of mobbing talk about individual factors in the first place, it was understood that the main reason that laid the ground for mobbing was the managerial factors when the interviewer went over the subject and this was confirmed by the participant. During the interview processes, the participants were meticulously not to ask any guiding questions.

This result is an important contribution of the research to the literature. In the literature, individual factors are examined, and managerial factors are observed to be less examined. It is thought that the results of this research will contribute to future research and scale development studies.

It is not possible to generalize the results of the research as a qualitative research is conducted and the phenomenology pattern is used. In addition, 13 samples are another limitation of the research. Therefore, these results can only be generalized to the participants within the time frame of the research. However, important results were obtained in order to add a new perspective to the subject.

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