

Assessment of Mobbing Behaviors Exposed by the Academic Personnel Working in a University, in Turkey

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Abstract

Objective: To determine psychological violence behaviors (mobbing) exposed by academic personnel working in Erciyes University, Turkey.

Methods: A questionnaire-based cross sectional study was performed in June 2010 in Erciyes University. No sampling methods were used, questionnaires were delivered by mail to all academicians and 450 of 850 (53.0%) questionnaires were returned. We used the Mobbing Perception Scale (MPS) for data collection.

Results: A total of 58.2% of the academicians experienced recurrent physiological violence at least once a week in the workplace and 16.6% stated that they were directly exposed to mobbing behavior every day (>1 point) in the past year, 44.7% reported "assault to their professional status", 42.8% reported "assault to personality", 39.9 % reported "isolation from work", 13.0% reported "direct negative behavior". The most commonly (30.4%) experienced behavior was; "groundless talk about the person in question". Mobbing was not associated with demographic and professional variables. The main source of mobbing was the managers. Also 68.0% of the victims resorted to passive defense strategies, and only 2.5% took legal action.

Conclusion: Workplace mobbing is a critical problem for academicians in our university. The level of directly mobbing behavior was substantially high. The most common threatening behavior was "assault to professional status". The primary mobbers were the managers. A great of majority academicians had not been received professional help and they internalized the mobbing. The findings indicated that levels of awareness of mobbing have increased among academicians.

Keywords: Psychological violence (Mobbing); Academicians; Workplace

Introduction

Mobbing is a kind of psychological violence, commonly encountered in disorganized work places, and usually targets bright, successful, and creative people. It is the most serious and destructive kind of violence and affects the whole of society, irrespective of age, race, language, educational level, or title [1]. Nowadays mobbing has become an important part of daily life; it has also become a potential health and occupational risk factor in both public and private sectors. Mobbing is a continuous systematic and intentional intimidating behavior, through psychological methods, exerted by a group or someone who has authority over others, within a hierarchically structured group, in a lower status [2,3]. The determinants of mobbing behavior are consistency and frequency. In order to specify a behavior as mobbing, it has to be repeated at least once a week and for at least 6 months [4]. There are some important aspects regarding mobbing;

these include communication, social relationships, social status, the quality of private and professional life, assaults targeting health, the effects of the assaults upon the victim, the amount of damage to the victim, and persistence in the behavior [1,5].

Apart from the losses the victim endures regarding social prestige, self-confidence, and self-respect, there are also consequences such as secondary long term severe damages to institutional structure and environment. Another social aspect of mobbing is the increased economical cost due to work and safety loss, workdays lost, decrease in productivity and performance, decrease in work quality, unemployment, early retirement, and loss of institutional respect [6]. Mobbing can be vertical and horizontal [6,7]. Vertical mobbing is the psychological violence within an institution, inflicted from the top executives on people below them or vice versa. Usually the person inflicting mobbing is professionally above the victim. These people usually use mobbing as a guarantee to continue their own profession within competitive environment [8]. Horizontal mobbing is the mobbing between colleagues at the same level. The person inflicting the mobbing and the victim can be work friends, in similar positions,

with the same opportunities [9]. In mobbing from below upwards, the person inflicting mobbing is in a lower professional position to the victim [10]. Studies regarding mobbing started in 1990 in America and Europe, and the most remarkable and important development was the foundation of a mobbing clinic in 1992 in Germany, with the help of Leymann [11]. Westhues wrote a book about intimidation at universities [12]. On the other hand, in Turkey, this topic was only opened to discussion with its differing dimensions and at a cognitive level around the year 2000, and the number of empirical studies have substantially increased in the past years [4,13].

Usually, the mobbing behavior exerted is aimed at qualified people and does not show any distinction in place, time or profession [1,3]. All the same, it is a known fact that it is experienced more frequently in institutions involved in the service sector, in universities and in the health sector, which usually adopt a more authoritarian management style [1,14,15]. The factors that enhance the spread of mobbing among the academicians can be listed as follows: The general academic hierarchical manners in universities, precarious work situation, conflicts in professional life due to limited academic positions, competition experienced to make progress in one's career, unjust success evaluation, stress experienced during the process of fulfilling academic advancement criteria while under difficult working conditions, difficulty in attaining tenure in associate professor and professor positions and the absolute authority granted to managers by the law [1,16]. The severe power imbalance between managers and subordinates results in the acceptance by the victim of his/her role within the play, the rules of which are established by the perpetrators [3]. Therefore, those academicians that suffocate under this authority and/or the high academic expectations of the managers in the university, either become submissive, or they helplessly internalize this mobbing, and start to see it as a natural, inevitable part of their profession. Those that cannot adopt this attitude are the ones upon which mobbing is inflicted [17,18]. According to Einersan [16], in academic environments with highly educated workers, the workers start to compete with each other in order to gain more status and to attain the academic superior's sympathy and approval, aiming to increase their chances of progressing in their careers, and finally, in this competitive environment, they start to exert psychological violence on each other. In many countries mobbing is the most frequently encountered type of violence. It was reported that 53% of workers in the U.K, and 18% of those in Denmark were exposed to psychological violence [6,13]. Lewis stated that 18% of academicians in the U.K have been exposed to direct mobbing behavior [19]. Psychological violence is seen more intensely among health sector workers. The prevalence rates of verbal violence reported from the U.K, Hong Kong, and China were between 43-73%. In the 'Work Place Violence in Health Institutions' 2002 reports of the WHO, ILO and ICN, the rates of exposure to verbal violence were between 27-67% [20,21].

In Turkey, there are various studies about mobbing in which the issue of mobbing is more analyzed in industrial workplaces rather than in universities. So there is no sufficient information about academic mobbing in Turkish literature. The rates of mobbing reported in studies from Turkey are similar to those in international studies. These studies show that the rate of mobbing was 42.0% in Turkey, and 70.0% of these victims never mentioned the problem to anyone [2]. On the other hand, in limited studies performed in universities, it has been established that 17-29% of the academicians are victims of direct mobbing [1,19,20,22]. We believe this paper could be one of the important studies that might fill out lack of data about academic

mobbing in our country. The critical points in the struggle against mobbing and its social, personal and institutional consequences are to improve workplace standards, and prevent social exclusion. In order to establish and guarantee an honorable and qualified academic life, all personnel should be informed about the culture and standards of the institution, and about the nature of mobbing, thus enhancing self and institutional awareness. In addition, active defense strategies should be put into action and, in evaluating academic advancement criteria, ethical principles and worthiness should be prioritized, and the knowledge and skills of the managers regarding conflicts and communication should be increased [17,23]. The aim of this study is to determine prevalence of mobbing behavior exposed by the academics in their workplace, if there is any relationship between demographic and professional characteristics and being victimized, and who perpetrators are.

Material and Methods

Subjects

This cross-sectional study was carried out in Erciyes University between May-June 2010. No sampling method was used, questionnaires were delivered by department secretaries to all academicians and 450 out of 850 (53.0%) questionnaires were returned. Thirty six questionnaires were excluded due to the missing data. The statistical evaluation was performed upon the data of 414 questionnaires. Ninety nine of the participants (23.9%) were working in the social sciences faculties (economy, fine arts, education, communication, law school), 147 (35.5%) were in the health sciences schools such as medicine, dentistry, veterinary, pharmaceuticals, and 168 (40.6%) were in the technical sciences schools such as engineering faculties and graduate school in economy and administration fields of the academicians 84(20.3%) were professor, 78 (20.2%) were associate professors, 114 (27.6%) were assistant professors, and 138 (33.3%) were lecturers.

Questionnaires

The data were collected by a questionnaire comprising three parts. The first part was related to socio-demographic and professional characteristics (age, gender, marital status, number of children, academic degree, the duration of working in the profession, course load per week, administrative position); in the second part included Mobbing Perception Scale (MPS) to assess mobbing behaviors. The Turkish adaptation of the reliability and validity study was done by Yildirim et al. [24]. MPS is a six fold Likert type-including 33 items classified into 4 dimensions. The 11 items (17-20, 22-26, 30,31) refer to "Isolation from work", the 9 items (5,10-14,16,21,29) refer to "assault to professional status", the 9 items (1-4,6-9,15) refer to "assault to personality", and the 4 items (27,28,32,33) refer to "direct negative behaviors". The answers to the scale were scored as follows; 0=never or scarcely ever, 1=once, 2=a few times, 3=sometimes, 4=often, 5=always. All the items in the scale are positive and none are reverse scored. The participants were asked to state the frequency of exposure to the mobbing behavior in the scale within the past 12 months, and to define the people who inflicted the mobbing behavior. The answers between "at least once" and "always" were united and classified as "people who were exposed to mobbing" but the subject who selected "never" were classified as "people who were not exposed to mobbing". The total scale score was calculated by the sum of the points from the individual items. The Cronbach's α coefficient for final scale was 0.97,

sub scales for “personal isolation from work” was 0.92, for “assault to professional status” was 0.91, for “assault to personality” 0.91 and for “direct negative behaviors” was 0.70 in the present study. The total score obtained from the scale is divided the number of items, and if the result is >1 point, it is presumed that the person is exposed to directly

psychological violent behavior at work. The third part of the questionnaire contained questions on the perpetrators of mobbing, the defense strategies used by the victims until now when exposed to mobbing behaviors.

Characteristics	Exposure to mobbing*						Statistical assessment
	Presence		Absence		Total		
	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Gender							
Female	155	60.8	100	39.2	255	61.6	X ² =1.594, p=0.220
Male	86	54.1	73	45.9	159	38.4	
Age groups (year)							
22-31	36	60	24	40	60	14.5	X ² =2.953, p=0.405
32-41	103	57.5	76	42.5	179	43.2	
42-51	75	62.5	45	37.5	120	29	
52-67	27	49.1	28	50.9	55	13.3	
Age in years (mean ± SD)	40.22 ± 9.10			41.22 ± 9.26			t=1.086, p=0.282
Marital status							
Single/widowed-divorced	49	62	30	38	79	19.1	X ² =0.657, p=0.449
Married	192	57.3	143	42.7	335	80.9	
Academic degree							
Professor	47	56	37	44	84	20.3	X ² =0.323, p=0.959
Associate Professor	48	61.5	30	38.5	78	18.8	
Assistant Professor	66	57.9	48	42.1	114	27.6	
Lecturer	80	58	58	42	138	33.3	
Place of work							
Health Sciences Faculties	93	63.3	54	36.7	147	35.5	X ² =1.993, p=0.371
Social Sciences Faculties	55	55.6	44	44.4	99	23.9	
Technical Sciences Faculties	93	55.4	75	44.6	168	40.6	
Administrative position							
Presence	90	65.2	48	34.8	138	33.3	X ² =3.648, p=0.058
Absence	151	54.7	125	45.3	276	66.7	
Duration of work in profession(years) (mean ± SD)	15.64 ± 9.02			16.73 ± 9.49			t=1.177, p=0.240
Service period in current instituon (years) (mean ± SD)	11.56 ± 8.38			11.80 ± 8.46			t=0.282, p=0.778
Course load per week (mean ± SD)	18.85 ± 9.69			19.89 ± 8.95			t=1.122, p=0.262

Table1: Exposure to mobbing from the mobbing scale according to personal and professional characteristics, *Exposure to mobbing: Presence: scores of MPS=1.0-159 points, Absence: Scores of MPS= 0 point.

Mobbing Behaviors	Victims	Non-victims	MPS scores
	n (%)	n (%)	Mean ± SD
Personal Isolation from Work	165 (39.9)	68.5 (60.1)	6.84 ± 10.18
Not being given an opportunity to prove oneself	81 (19.6)	333 (80.4)	0.93 ± 1.56
Criticised and rejected because of the decisions and recommendations of others	92 (22.2)	322 (77.8)	0.90 ± 1.39
Having their duties been taken from them and given to subordinates	49 (11.8)	365 (88.2)	0.48 ± 1.16
Being inspected by others in lower positions	47 (11.4)	367 (88.6)	0.48 ± 1.19
Not being informed about social meetings that are organized	70 (16.9)	344 (83.1)	0.67 ± 1.27
Not being able to get an answer to a request for a meeting	49 (11.8)	365 (88.2)	0.53 ± 1.24
Being treated in the workplace as if they are invisible and don't exist	69 (16.7)	345 (83.3)	0.83 ± 1.47
Frequently being interrupted while speaking	66 (15.9)	348 (84.1)	0.64 ± 1.24
Not receiving an answer to an e-mail and/or telephone calls	41 (9.9)	373(90.1)	0.41±1.09
Being pressured to leave the job or change workplace	37 (8.9)	377 (91.1)	0.08 ± 0.28
Having information, documents, and material needed for work hidden from them	48 (19.9)	366 (88.4)	0.50 ± 1.21
Assault to Professional Status	185 (44.7)	229 (55.3)	6.04 ± 8.45
Always having errors found in their work and work results	63 (15.2)	351 (84.8)	0.64 ± 1.29
Being held responsible for work above capacity	34 (8.2)	380 (91.8)	0.32 ± 0.94
Being held responsible for bad results in work done with others	61 (14.7)	353 (85.3)	0.53 ± 1.15
Being blamed for things they are not responsible for	83 (20.0)	331 (80.0)	0.69 ± 1.20
Constant questioning of professional adequacy after each work completed	47 (11.4)	367 (88.6)	0.45 ± 1.09
Considering the work they have done as not valuable and unimportant	88 (21.3)	326 (78.7)	0.96 ± 1.51
Constant negative evaluation of their performance	60 (14.5)	354 (85.5)	0.62 ± 1.29
Having them feel they themselves or their work are being controlled	113 (27.3)	301 (72.7)	1.19 ± 1.57
Being forced to do a job that will negatively affect their self-confidence	60 (14.5)	354 (85.3)	0.59±1.23
Assault to Personality	177 (42.8)	73.4(57.2)	5.58 ± 7.91
Facing behavior such as slamming fist on a table	38 (9.2)	376 (90.8)	0.28 ± 0.80
Having untrue things said about them	126 (30.4)	288 (69.6)	1.19 ± 1.42
Being verbally threatened	61(14.7)	353 (85.3)	0.51 ± 1.11
Having someone speak about you in a belittling and demeaning manner in the presence of others	91 (22.0)	323 (78.0)	0.81 ± 1.27
Having someone behave in a demeaning manner (using body language) to them in the presence of others	87 (21.0)	327 (79.0)	0.85 ± 1.35
Having false rumors said about their private life	51 (12.3)	363 (87.7)	0.44 ± 1.05
Having someone suggest that they are not psychologically well	33 (8.0)	381(92.0)	0.31 ± 0.93
Having their honesty and reliability questioned	71(17.1)	343 (82.9)	0.70 ± 1.33
Having unfair reports written about them	52 (12.5)	362 (87.4)	0.46 ± 1.11
Direct Negative Behaviors	54 (13.0)	360 (87.0)	1.04 ± 2.62

Being exposed to physical violence	13 (3.1)	401 (96.9)	0.08 ± 0.47
Harmful behavior to personal belongings	19 (4.6)	395 (95.4)	0.20 ± 0.83
People leaving intentionally the area they happen to enter	29 (12.0)	385 (93.0)	0.29 ± 0.95
Preventing or forbidding co-workers from talking with you	37 (8.9)	377 (91.1)	0.42 ± 1.19
Overall Mobbing	241 (58.2)	173 (41.8)	19.51 ± 26.92

Table 2: The frequency of exposure to mobbing behavior reported by the academicians (n: 414)

Data Collection

Data were collected between May-June 2010. After the official permission approved by the university administration, all of the academic units were first called and requested to give appointment. After the appointments were arranged, the departments were visited by the researchers on the given dates of appointment. First, the questionnaire forms were delivered to the department secretaries considering numbers of the staff working at those departments. The secretaries then delivered the forms to the academicians. While presenting the forms to the departments, two envelopes with different sizes were used, the bigger one containing the smaller one and the form. Both of which had been closed and sealed. The name, title, affiliation and work place of the academician were previously written on the front face of the outer envelope. The front face of the inner one was left blank. The forms filled out by the academicians within a safe environment and in privacy. They were returned within blank, closed and sealed envelopes to the department secretaries. These closed and sealed envelopes containing the filled questionnaire forms were collected by the researchers from the secretaries a week later. For the forms not submitted, the departments were revisited in the third and fourth weeks. Out of the 850 distributed questionnaires, 450 were answered. Due to the fact that there might be some effects (e.g. the Hawthorne effect) upon the questionnaire related to the awareness of the academicians of the study being performed in the instruction part of the questionnaire forms, they were asked not to write their names on the forms and the envelope at all, and they were clearly informed that the study was utterly on a voluntary-basis-participation and the results would not be used in their professional evaluation.

Statistical Analysis

The data were analyzed by the Statistical Package for Social Sciences 18.0 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA) programme. Priority the normality plots with (Shapiro-Wilk) test was performed to test the suitability of the variables for normal distribution. It showed that the data did not fit in a standard distribution curve ($p > 0.001$). Fisher's exact Chi-square (χ^2) test was used to analyze the frequency exposure to mobbing behavior according to age, gender, marital status, job title, place of work and administrative position. Chi-square test was used also to show relation between mobbing behaviors and those who perpetrators. Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation) were calculated for quantitative variables. Independent samples t-test was carried out with to determine whether or not there was a difference exposure to mobbing according to age in years, duration of working in profession, service period in current institute, course load per week. A p value < 0.05 was accepted as significant.

Results

Socio-demographic and professional characteristics

The response rate was 53.0%. The mean age was 40.64 ± 9.25 years, the majority of the academicians (43.2 %) were in the 31-42 years age group and 80.9% were married. Approximately half of the academicians had worked for 11-20 years and 33.3% of them had administrative positions. Table 1 shows the distribution of the academicians with respect to exposure to mobbing behavior according to socio-demographic and professional characteristics. The rate of exposure to mobbing were not associated with gender ($\chi^2=1.594$, $p=0.220$), age groups ($\chi^2=2.953$, $p=0.407$), marital status ($\chi^2=0.657$, $p=0.526$), academic degree ($\chi^2=0.323$, $p=0.910$), place of work ($\chi^2=1.993$, $p=0.302$) and administrative position ($\chi^2=3.648$, $p=0.058$). Similarly, the frequency of exposure to mobbing were not different according to mean duration of working in profession ($t=1.177$, $p=0.240$), service period in current institution ($t=0.282$, $p=0.778$) and course load per week ($t=1.122$, $p=0.262$).

Mobbing perception among academicians

Our findings based on own-declaration revealed out that 58.2% of 414 academicians were exposed to at least one of the 33 types of mobbing behavior defined in the MPS. The distribution of the mobbing behaviors in respect of type and percentage was as follows: "assault to professional status", 44.7%; "assault to personality", 42.8 %; "isolation of individual from work", 39.9% and "direct negative behavior", 13.0%. The mean total MPS score was 19.51 ± 26.92 (min:1, max:159) (Table 2).

Degree of mobbing	Number	%
Never (0-0.25 point)	114	47.3
Once (0.26 - 0.49 point)	58	24.1
Sometimes (0.50- 0.75 point)	16	6.6
Frequently (0.76 - 1.0 point)	13	5.4
Constantly (>1.0 point)	40	16.6
Total	241	100.0

Table 3: The frequency of exposure to mobbing according to mobbing perception scale (n:241), Mean: 2.22 ± 1.48 , Median 2.00 (min: 1.00, max:5.00)

In our study, the most common mobbing behaviors were “groundless talk about the person in question”(30.4 %), “feeling as if the person or their work is being controlled” (27.3 %) and “criticizing and rejecting the person’s decisions and suggestions” (22.2%). However, the least common (3.1%)mobbing behavior was “being exposed to physical violence”; 58.7% of academicians stated that the most common behavior came from co-workers, the second and third common behaviors did from their administrators(67.0% and 50.5% respectively) (Tables 2 and 4).

Considering the level of directly mobbing behavior; a total of 47.3% of the academicians had not been exposed or almost not exposed to mobbing behavior (mean score: 0-0.25 points) while 16.6% of them had been exposed to continuous directly (mean score>1 points) mobbing behavior in the previous year. The mean mobbing severity score was 2.22 ± 1.48 (Table 3).

Perpetrators of mobbing

In our study vertical mobbing was more frequent: the managers were the ones inflicting psychological violence on subordinates in 23 types of behavior, within the 4 subscales. Among these behaviors, the first three were ‘control of the person or their work without the knowledge of the person (67.0%)’, ‘no response to the requests for talking and meeting (63.3%)’, and ‘preventing the co-workers from talking with the academician (62.2%)’. On the other hand, in 8 types of the behavior, horizontal mobbing was more frequent among colleagues at the same level (53.8%)’, ‘belittling behavior towards the academician in front of other people (48.8%)’, ‘not notifying the social meetings (45.7%)’, ‘insinuating that the academician’s mental health is deranged (45.5%)’, ‘constantly finding faults/mistakes in the work done or the results (43.3%)’, ‘intentionally leaving the environment as soon as the academician arrives (41.4%)’.The mobbing behavior inflicted by subordinates on the academicians were ‘controlling the academician that is in a higher position (10.6%)’, ‘hiding any material, documents, and knowledge needed for work (10.4%)’, and ‘blaming the academician for things he/she is not responsible for(9.8%)’ (Table4).

Defense strategies; what did you do to escape from mobbing?

It was seen that 37.3% of the academicians chose to talk with family and friends as a mechanism to deal with mobbing, 30.7% just tried to

ignore it, 15.8% informed the management in the hope of getting some help, and 2.5% referred to legal help. Result was that 9.5 % tried other defense strategies, such as, warning the perpetrator, and resorting to violence etc (Table 5).

Discussion

It has been stated that in career-based academic working environments such as universities, mobbing is seen more prevalent; and academic staff is one of the groups of professionals who is at risk of workplace violence [4]. This study indicated that more than half of the academicians reported that they encountered verbal mobbing behaviors one or more times in the previous year and that majority of these behaviors were from their managers. On the other hand one out of seven academicians (16.6%) stated that they were directly exposed to psychological violence behaviors. Some recent studies conducted in universities [17,19,22], in accordance with our results, revealed out that the frequency of directly mobbing may reach to 17-29% in academic personnel. In addition, the frequency of verbal mobbing experienced by academicians in our study was similar to that of another study [20] but it was lower compared to other two studies [17,25].These studies reported that the rate of verbal mobbing behaviors was between 82-90 %. Differences in the rate of mobbing in these studies may be a result of using different mobbing definitions, scales [21,25] settings and participants(academic staff, only academic nurses, only physicians [14] and differences perceptions of workplace violence [1,26, 27].

In our study, the most common threatening behavior was “assault to professional status”, the second common was “assault to personality.”, and the least common was “direct negative behavior.” In other studies [17,18,28-30] too, in conformity with our results “assault to professional status and personality” were the most common threatening behaviors on academicians . In line with other studies [17,31] in this study threatening behaviors such as “groundless talk about the person in question” and “controlling the person or their work without the knowledge of the person” and “criticizing and rejecting the person’s decisions and suggestions” were the most three common exposed mobbing behaviors by academic personnel.

Mobbing Behaviors	The perpetrators of mobbing				Statistical assessment	
	Managers	Co-workers	Subordinates	Others*	X2	p
	%	%	%	%		
Isolation from work						
Not being giving an opportunity to prove themselves	56.3	32.5	2.5	8.8	15.39	0.221
Being criticized and rejected because of decisions and recommendations	50.5	35.2	5.5	8.8	26.77	0.008
Having their duties taken from them and given to a subordinate	59.2	24.5	6.1	10.2	21.17	0.048
Being inspected by others in a lower positions	49.9	25.5	10.6	14.9	22.31	0.034
Not being informed about social meetings that are organized	38.6	45.7	4.3	11.4	12.12	0.043
Not being able to get an answer to their request for a meeting	63.3	18.4	2.0	16.3	14.13	0.292

Being treated in their workplace as if they are invisible and don't exist	47.8	37.7	5.8	8.7	27.76	0.006
Frequently being interrupted while speaking	42.4	42.4	3.0	12.1	23.49	0.024
Not receiving an answer to e-mail and telephone calls	43.9	31.7	2.4	22.0	16.09	0.187
Being pressured to leave their job or change workplace	54.1	24.3	2.7	18.9	16.83	0.156
Having information, documents, and material needed for work hidden from them	43.8	35.4	10.4	10.4	20.70	0.190
Assault to Professional Status						
Always having errors found in their work and work results	36.7	43.3	6.7	13.3	23.22	0.026
Being held responsible for work above capacity	52.9	26.5	5.9	14.7	14.64	0.262
Being held responsible for bad results in work done with others	39.3	39.3	9.8	11.5	21.40	0.045
Being blamed for things they are not responsible for	34.1	36.6	9.8	19.5	24.29	0.019
Constant questioning of professional adequacy after each work completed	44.7	40.4	4.3	10.6	9.93	0.622
Considering the work they have done as not valuable and unimportant	44.3	29.5	8.0	18.2	22.56	0.070
Constant negative evaluation of their performance	58.3	25.0	5.0	11.7	21.78	0.040
Having them feel they themselves or their work are being controlled	67.0	21.4	7.1	4.5	8.55	0.740
Being forced to do a job that will negatively affect their self-confidence	58.3	20.0	6.7	15.0	22.42	0.033
Assault to Personality						
Facing behavior such as slamming fist on a table	52.6	26.3	5.3	15.8	21.70	0.153
Having untrue things said about them	21.4	58.7	7.9	11.9	19.69	0.041
Being verbally threatened	48.3	26.7	5.0	20.0	8.62	0.735
Having someone speak about them in a belittling and demeaning manner in the presence of others	47.3	34.1	3.3	15.4	22.02	0.037
Having someone behave in a demeaning manner (using body language) to them in the presence of others	33.8	48.8	5.8	11.6	17.73	0.124
Having false rumors said about their private life	17.6	56.9	15.7	9.8	22.58	0.032
Having someone suggest that they are not psychologically well	36.4	45.5	0.0	18.2	22.58	<0.001
Having their honesty and reliability questioned	48.6	36.1	5.6	9.7	35.39	0.002
Having unfair reports written about them	57.7	15.4	7.7	19.2	14.87	0.534
Direct Negative Behaviors						
Being exposed to physical violence	23.1	53.8	0.0	23.1	5.32	0.324
Harmful behavior to personal belongings	42.1	21.1	0.0	36.8	13.07	0.042
People leaving intentionally the area they happen to enter	27.6	41.4	3.4	27.6	11.09	0.521
Preventing or forbidding coworkers from talking with you	62.2	24.3	0.0	13.5	14.40	0.072

Table 4: The frequency of exposure to mobbing according to mobbing perception scale (n: 241), Mean: 2.22 ± 1.48, Median 2.00 (min: 1.00, max: 5.00) other: Patient, relatives of patient

Reaction	Victims of mobbing (n: 241)	
	Number	%
Talking with family and friends	90	37.34
Pretending nothing had happened	74	30.70
Reporting to the management and getting help from the manager	38	15.76
Taking legal action	6	2.48
Other*	23	9.54

Table 5: Distribution of victims' reactions after exposure to the mobbing behaviors , *Other: Warning the perpetrators, reacting with violence, reporting to the union, talking with the perpetrators face to face, hiring the mafia, being more careful about communicative styles, solving or handling the problem themselves- defending their living, struggling alone, cursing

According to Leymann's [1] mobbing identification steps we can think that the psychological violence exerted on our academicians has completed the first level of mobbing that is asserting oneself (56.3%), and trying to prevent the development of communication (62.0-63.0%), and the second level of mobbing, that is assault to social relationships. It has thus reached the severe mobbing level of the third and fourth degrees. The next stage is that in which direct assault to personal health begins: threat of physical violence, physical damage and sexual harassment [1,8]. In this context, in our study, the fact that 3.1% of the academicians were victims of physical violence, most perpetrators were co-workers, and 5.0% had experienced damage to their personal belongings, especially from their own managers, show the extent to which violence has reached.

We found that psychological violence seems to be more prevalent among academicians working in healthcare programmes (63.3%), which is consistent with findings obtained by Yildirim et al. [17] and Aytac et al. [32]. Study results show that workers in the health sector are at a 16 fold risk of being exposed to mobbing behavior compared to other sectors [15,33], 18-37% of the health professionals are exposed to directly mobbing behavior in the workplace, and 74-91% were exposed to one or more than one types of mobbing behavior [8]. In the literature, the causal relationship between socio-demographic variables and mobbing has not become clear. Previous studies [3,17,34] show a large variation in the prevalence rates of mobbing according to descriptive characteristics. In our study, exposure to mobbing behavior was not associated with socio-demographic characteristics in accordance with some studies [1,19]. However, some studies [22,25,18,28,32,35,36] reported that being young female, being university educated [32, 35] or having lower educational level and being single [15,35] and having more work experience [32] was found to be significantly associated with exposure to mobbing.

Our findings parallel to those of previous studies [1,22,33,37] revealed that mobbing behavior were primarily exerted by the managers and vertical mobbing was the most common type. In accordance with literature [1,8] our results show that while the mobbing behavior towards subordinates from superiors consisted mostly of controlling, preventing communication development, humiliating, damaging self-confidence, unfair evaluation of success, and correspondence, the mobbing behavior among peers consisted of asserting oneself, preventing communication development, and direct assault to prestige, social relationships and health. As reported by

Einarsen [16], the stress involved in trying to fulfill the criteria necessary for advancement in the profession, which becomes more difficult day by day, and a professional career that is based on ambition to achieve status, creates a hidden or open competitive environment, leading to hostility, and negative behavior among peers. As a matter of fact, in our study too, the hostile behavior among peers had come to the point of direct physical violence, against at the victim's health.

Our study revealed out that a great majority (68.0%) of the academicians exposed to mobbing had not received professional help after being subjected to psychological violent behavior, they preferred a passive defense strategy against it; they either shared the issue with friends and family, or else internalized mobbing, as if nothing was happening. The results of previous studies [2,38] are similar to ours; most victims (70.0%) did not tell anyone about what they were going through or stated that sharing with friends was their most common reaction. Due to the traditional hierarchical good manners and for the sake of not risking their profession, academicians perceive the mobbing behavior from their superiors as a situation related to the nature of the profession and as normal in the hierarchical structure, and thus normalize it. It is either for the above mentioned reasons that mobbing is not perceived as an important issue, or else the fact that it is hard to prove harassment, that the victim is driven to fear of not obtaining any results and fear of even being blamed for it [32,39]. Nevertheless, in our study, approximately one in every five academicians referred to active defense mechanisms such as informing superiors of harassment, or by taking legal actions. Active reporting rates following mobbing are quite low. Studies report different results. While the results of Yildirim et al. [17], in a study they conducted among academicians in the health sector, showed a reporting rate of 51.0% in verbal mobbing, Ozcan et al.[40] reported a disclosure rate of mobbing, including verbal mobbing, of 50.0% and above in a review article comprising all workers in the health sector. On the other hand, Baskan et al. [22] established that only 5.6% of academicians sought legal redress. Likewise in a study [41] another factor aggravating the problem is the fact that, in our study, one of ten personnel try to solve the psychological violence according to their own methods, therefore leading to uncontrollable situations, as violence leads to more violence.

Conclusion

This research found out that workplace mobbing seems to be a critical problem for the academicians in our university. More than half of the academicians are subjected to psychological violence behavior from their own managers and peers. Approximately one out of seven academicians are victims of directly mobbing behaviors. The main mobbers were the managers in an academically superior position. A great majority of the victims resorted to passive defense strategies and the rate of reporting was very low. These findings suggest that this problem has been regarded as a “personal” one in Turkey and that professional health care has not been received. In order to solve vertical and horizontal mobbing, which has personal, social and institutional destructive effects, we suggest an initiation of a reporting system and training activities to gain consciousness and awareness in high-risk groups, for both the perpetrators and victims.

Competing interests

The authors have no competing interest.

Study Limitations

Our study has some limitations.

The cross-sectional nature of this study is an important limitation because causal relationship has not been able to be investigated

Another limitation in our study the response rate (53.0 %) is low. Although the questionnaires were sent by mail to all academicians, 450 out of 850 questionnaires were returned.

The findings of this study cannot be generalized to the universe because the data are limited to the workplaces that participated in the study.

All the measures rely on self-report, which may have recall bias; the extent of psychological violence may have been reported under the actual one.

Despite these limitations, this study gives considerable information about psychological violence occurring among the academics in a university in the central region of Turkey.

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