


## Mobbing (Psychological Violence) in Different Aspects Farklı Yönleriyle Mobbing (Psikolojik Şiddet)

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### Abstract

Recently, being a universal fact, mobbing has been attracted academic interest in Turkey as well. Psychological violence in the workplace (mobbing) is a process in which one or more of the employees, for at least 6 months another employee or group, has a variety of behaviors that may threaten mental and physical health, such as long-term and systematic humiliation, prevention of duties. It is a malicious behavior model that aims to expel people from their work by the applying unfair accusations, gossip, humiliation, emotional abuse and psychological violence. Mobbing behaviors happen quite destructive effects on the personnel's motivation, productivity, job satisfaction, performance and organizational loyalty level. Although mobbing is a phenomenon that can be encountered in every sector, it is more common among employees of education and higher education sector. Mobbing can happen to any employee regardless of gender, age, seniority or educational background.

**Keywords:** Mobbing, psychological violence at work, bullying, emotional abuse

### Öz

Evensel bir gerçek olan mobbing, Türkiye'de de son yıllarda akademik ilgiyi çekmiştir. İşyerinde psikolojik şiddet (mobbing), bir veya birden fazla çalışanın, bir diğer çalışana veya grubuna uzun süreli ve sistematik olarak aşağılama, görev yapmayı engelleme gibi zihinsel ve fiziksel sağlığı tehdit edebilen davranışlar yönelttiği bir süreci ifade etmektedir. Haksız suçlamalar, ima, kinaye, dedikodularla itibarı sarsma, küçük düşürme, taciz, duygusal istismar ve psikolojik şiddet uygulayarak kişiyi işinden uzaklaştırmaya bezdirmeye iten kötü niyetli davranış modelidir. Mobbing davranışları, personelin motivasyonu, verimliliği, iş tatmini ve örgütsel bağlılık düzeyi üzerinde oldukça yıkıcı etkilere neden olmaktadır. İşyerinde psikolojik şiddet, her sektörde karşılaşılabilen bir olgu olmasına karşın, eğitim ve yükseköğretim sektörü çalışanları açısından daha fazla risk arz etmektedir. Cinsiyet, yaş, kademe, öğrenim durumu vs. gibi hiçbir ayırım gözetmeksizin her çalışanın başına gelme ihtimali bulunmaktadır.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Mobbing, işyerinde psikolojik şiddet, yıldırma, zorbalık, duygusal taciz

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**THE CONCEPT** of mobbing comes from the latin word of mobile vulgus, and has the meaning of unstable crowd, siege, harassment, disturbing or chevy. In English, this concept means that “gathering and attacking in an illegal place” (Davenport et al. 2003). The Turkish Language Association uses the term “harassment” for the term of mobbing (TDK 2015). In terms of human behaviors, the concept of psychological violence at workplace was first used by Heinz Leymann, a Swedish industrial psychologist. According to author, “systematic and deliberate exposure to hostile and unethical aggressive behavior by an individual or a group people in the workplace” (Leymann 1990, 1996). This was the thing that Leymann defined as mobbing which includes a psychological harassment in workplace, systematically practiced by an individual or a group of people toward another person with unethical and unfriendly methods.

In a different study, the concept of mobbing is defined as sistematik all kinds of maltreatment, threats, violence and humiliation behaviors systematically applied to employees by their superiors, subordinates or peer employees (Tutar 2004). When mobbing is considered as a behavioral pathology, it can be used to mean that the disturbing, enclosure, mass assault, psychological violence, and distress (Cobanoglu 2005). The concept of mobbing was first used by scholar Konrad Lorenz in the 1960s for describing the behavior of animals. Also, Lorenz define the form of conduct adopted by weaker animals to intimidate and fend off their strong rivals (Leymann 1990, 1996). The term mobbing is prior which is derived from the English word “mob” meaning gang. Also, this word inspired by Konrad Lorenz’s work on mob behavior in animals.

**Table 1: The following terms are used instead of mobbing, in Turkish language, Turkey.**

Study	Turkish Term
Yüçetürk 2003	Yıldırma
Arpacioğlu 2005	Zorbalık, Duygusal taciz
Tutar 2004	Psikolojik şiddet
Solmuş 2004	Duygusal zorbalık/taciz
Tınaz 2011	Duygusal taciz
Baş 2012	Ruhsal tecavüz

The concept of mobbing started to be used to describe interpersonal behavior, when a scientist Peter-Paul Heinemann observed that school-age children showed aggressive behavior against the other children whom they considered lonely and weak. Also, his book “Mobbing: Group Violence among Children” was published, in 1972. (Leymann 1996). After then, a psychiatrist Carroll Brodsky, wrote the book “Harassed Worker” about to psychological violence at work in content about difficulties in their daily life, in 1976 (Leymann 1996). Today, the concept of mobbing has become a known psychosocial phenomenon in all countries of the world. The awareness of mobbing has gradually increased in all countries of the world and the term mobbing is widely seen in the literature as the different names. For the mobbing term is commonly used in Germany, Austria, Italy, Sweden, Spain and Turkey; “bullying at workplace” used in England, the United States (USA) and Denmark. “Harcèlement psychologique” used in Canada, especially in the province of Quebec; “harcèlement morale” used in France. “Petsen” in Belgium and the Netherlands, “Emosionele Teitering” used in South Africa (Izmir and Fazlioglu 2016). Unfortunately, a full agreement has not yet been reached on the provision in Turkish about the mobbing concept. In scientific studies, different terms are used such

as “intimidation”, “attrition”, “psychological harassment”, “psychological violence in the workplace”, “psycho-terrorism”, and “workplace bullying” (Tutar 2004).

There are three groups, with roles related to mobbing behavior;

1. Mobbing abusers
2. Victims of mobbing
3. Mobbing viewers (Tınaz 2011)

These three groups interact with each other while playing their roles (Tınaz 2011). Mobbing behaviors may be ignored, tolerated, misunderstood, or really provoked by the organization’s management as a deliberate strategy (Tutar 2004, Tınaz 2011). Unfortunately, monitoring the mobbing process is just as problematic as the implementation of mobbing. Therefore, to accept a behavior as mobbing; it should occur in the work environment, it should repeat, contain intentions, intimidate or dismiss the person (Leymann 1996, Tutar 2004, Tınaz 2011).

## Degrees of mobbing

In grading of mobbing, duration, severity and frequency of mobbing, in addition to individuals’ psychological structures, upbringing styles, personality traits with living conditions also play an important role (Davenport et al. 2014). Mobbing is reserved into 3 categories based on a rating similar to that in burns (Tınaz 2011, Davenport et al. 2014).

1. First degree mobbing: The employee can create resistance to attacks against himself. This is the lightest degree.
2. Second degree mobbing: It is the degree that employees cannot resist the attacks against them and therefore physical and mental disorders can be seen.
3. Third degree mobbing: The negative effects of mobbing on the victim have become very severe. Therefore, the victim has almost no chance of returning to work (Davenport et al. 2014).

## Possible reasons of mobbing

There are many underlying dynamics that can lead to mobbing. The reasons for mobbing can be considered in three different categories like personal, social and organizational reasons;

1. Personal reasons (personality characteristics of mobbing practitioner and victim, also psychological state, personality disorders, individual traits, social skills, demographic traits),
2. Social reasons (Hostility, envy, excessive competition, ambition, group pressure, the disposition to humiliate, social changes and cultural traits)
3. Organizational reasons (changes of management at work, wide change of organizational culture, conflict of role, excessive work load, job dissatisfaction, leadership style, lack of control) (Beswick et al. 2004).

Mobbing in the workplace includes hostile and unethical behavior which is directed systematically and continuously against target employees, who are pushed into a helpless and defenseless position. There is usually an event or conflict that initiates the process of

psychological violence in workplace (mobbing). The main intention is ensuring that the target employee leaves the workplace, as well as in recent studies for investigating to causes of the mobbing are revealed several reasons, such as interpersonal jealousy, childhood traumas, organizational injustices, and uncertainties (Davenport et al. 2003), the need for approval, the social inadequacy/victim characteristics (Cobanoğlu 2005), inadequate management/leadership characteristics, low moral standards or competitive reward systems (Einersen et al. 2003, WHO 2003, Eroglu and Solmaz 2005, Saraç 2011).

The main reason; mobbing abusers has mostly neurotic, swollen self-perception and extreme controlling personality traits. However, the mobbing abusers who want to exert superiority to command or destroy the victims, often deny the consequences of their behaviors (Leymann 1996, Çobanoğlu 2005, Çakıcı 2008).

Probably, the fear and mistrust who they feel about losing their job position, direct them to mistreatment in this way. All definitions of mobbing are including to the four common traits, such as aggressive behavior, repetition, continue for long and power imbalance (Davenport et al. 2003, Yüksel and Tunçsiper 2011). Although the mobbing abuser and victim were initially at a similar level, the balance between them gets impaired, as time progresses. Many studies performed with mobbing viewers who remain silent in the face of mobbing. Mobbing viewers said that they remained silent against to mobbing, because of the many causes, such as strong position of mobbing abusers and fear of losing self academic jobs (Demirel and Yoldaş 2008, Mete 2013).

## Gender and mobbing

It is possible to say that gender is an important factor in mobbing. In various studies investigating the relationship between gender and mobbing, it is emphasized that female employees are exposed to the mobbing at a higher rate than men. According to results of the many studies, women have distinct perspectives and abilities than men, also women workers are mostly managed but male workers mostly in the manager position (Davenport et al. 2003, Çöl 2008).

Fourth European Working Conditions survey revealed that, female employees are exposed to psychological violence 3 times more than men, also female employees who live in Ireland, Finland and Luxembourg are exposed to more psychological violence than female employees in other countries (Eurofound 2007). Furthermore, the negative effects of psychological violence in the workplace have been shown to be more frequent, especially on the female employees. In these studies, it was found that approximately 65% of the victimized women aged 35-45 years had many psychiatric findings, also that the decisions of female academicians were more refused (Davenport et al. 2003, Eurofound 2007, Gül and Özcan 2011). It has been reported that the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) frequently occur in mobbing victims, this is seen in 49.0% of women and 35.3% of men (Leymann 1990, Davenport et al. 2003, Gül and Özcan 2011). In other study, the prevalence of PTSD findings was 31% in women and 21% in men by reason of mobbing. It was determined that 44% of the female employees quit their jobs as voluntarily and 38% of them quit their jobs as involuntarily (Gray 2000).

## Mobbing types

Mobbing is divided horizontally or vertically concerning the culture and hierarchical

structure of the organization. Vertical mobbing occurs if hierarchical structuring is more, and horizontal mobbing occurs if hierarchical structuring is less (Davenport et al. 2003).

1. Vertical (Hierarchic)
  - a. Top to bottom: Psychological violence applied from top to bottom is the excessive use of the power of a manager towards his subordinates by taking advantage of the position of his / her professional role (Tınaz 2011).
  - b. Bottom to top: Mobbing perpetrators are usually more than one. The employee's error is sought, in the form of crowded groups (CSGB 2014). It is generally experienced in workplaces where competition is high (Çöl 2008).
2. Horizontal (Between Equal): Victims of psychological violence in the workplace are colleagues with similar tasks and opportunities. It usually occurs among employees in the same position (Tutar 2004, Acar and Dündar 2008).

## Mobbing process

Although, studies have shown that the shortest duration of mobbing is 6 months, according to various researchers; even if there is no occurrence in a period of fewer than 6 months or once a week, it is possible to evaluate the psychological violence experienced as mobbing (Leymann 1996, Yüksel and Tunçsiper 2011). The common subject of the studies is that mobbing takes place directly for a specific purpose and the person cannot protect himself/herself under any circumstances (Yüksel and Tunçsiper 2011). However, the mean duration of exposure to mobbing is generally 15 months, and the period of the persistent heavy effects of the mobbing process is approximately 29-46 months (İzmir ve Fazlıoğlu 2010). The mobbing process has a dynamic structure that can change over time (Solmus 2004). According to this, mobbing process usually takes place as follows:

1. Conflict stage
2. Aggressive action or attitudes stage
3. Management intervention
4. Stamping with false rumors
5. Dismissal or resignation (Leymann 1996, Tınaz and Karatuna 2010).

In a different study, the mobbing process are listed below;

1. Making rumors that will cause prejudice behind the target person
2. Avoiding or excluding the person, so ensuring that he/she is left alone
3. Discriminating and exposing the victim to disturbing attitudes and promises
4. Engaging in physical assaults or acts that may cause harm to the victim (Einarsen 2003).

Mobbing at the workplace can take the form of psychological intimidation, threats or physical violence. When the studies are examined, it is seen that psychological violence can reach more destructive than physical violence (Yıldırım and Yıldırım 2010, Karatuna and Gök 2012). There must be power instability to be exposed to the mobbing and behaviors must systematically go on at a certain time (Fox and Stalworth 2004, Mete 2013). It is not possible to evaluate every negative behavior in the workplace as mobbing.

Leymann describes that mobbing as unethical communication which is directed in a systematic way by one or a number of persons mainly toward one individual, rendering the person helpless and defenseless. In addition, Leymann (1996) maintains that exposure to harassment once every week for at least 6 months is required for this definition. In a study, it was observed that the employees were asked whether they had been exposed to psychological violence, the yes responses increased from 8.8% to 24.1% after the definition of psychological violence (Saraç 2011)..

According to some studies performed in our country, the most common mobbing behaviors are listed below;

- a. Secretly looking for flaws about his work and its consequences
- b. Embarrassingly and humiliating talks
- c. Continuously assigning unnecessary tasks
- d. Secret control of his work
- e. Controlling his work by the lower position's employee
- f. Giving many unqualified tasks to reduce reputation
- g. Only the victim is held liable for the results of mutual work
- h. Intentional abandonment of a victim's periphery
- i. Ignoring, treating the victim as if it were unavailable
- j. The decline of authority and responsibilities
- k. Mistake rumors about personal life
- l. Restricting the chance of the victim's job
- m. Don't stop him from being promoted
- n. Exclude or alienated/isolated in the workplace
- o. Storing the necessary information for the job, making unannounced meeting
- p. Composing unnecessary investigations or official reports (Tigrel and Kokalan 2009, Yıldırım and Yıldırım 2010, Tınaz 2011).

In research by Leymann, 45 different psychological violence behaviors were reported. These behaviors are divided into 5 different categories according to their characteristics;

1. Communication forms and effects: The mobbing victims' are limited to self-expression, their speech is constantly interrupted or criticized.
2. Attack on social relations: The people around the mobbing victim no longer talk to him, he is isolated as well as he is treated as if he is not present.
3. Reputation attack: The issues that are not related to the victim, in particular, the sexual content speeches are implied by making false rumors about it.
4. Attack on life and work quality: Beyond the obvious severe psychological trauma caused by workplace shootings, threats of violence cause anxiety, fear, and frustration, with resulting in damaged morale and productivity.
5. Attacks that directly affect health: Mobbing victims may suffer severe stress with psychologic, sexual and physical violence problems (Leymann 1990, 1996).

## **Mobbing in higher education institutions**

The risk of exposure to psychological violence in the workplace is higher in some sectors and job groups. Most seen places are non-profit organizations, the health sector, and higher education institutions (Tınaz 2008). Psychological violence against employees has many negative consequences not only to the victim but also to the organization, family

and society in which the victim is involved. Therefore, the struggle against mobbing should be performed in multifaceted. Several studies founded that the risk of physical and psychological violence in the workplace is higher in the public sector (6%) than in the special sector (4%) (Zapf and Gross 2001). Excessive workload and disorganized working place in the public sector are important factors that increase the risk of psychological violence with especially burnout feelings of health workers (Eurofound 2007). In a study investigating the relationship between the period of work and mobbing, it was said that new employees or junior workers were greater risks of being subjected to psychological abuse (McKay et al. 2008).

Universities have an important effect on the social, political, economic and technological developments in the world (Acar and Dündar 2008, Tınaz 2011). The fact that universities interact with society shows that they are very much affected by changes in society (Karatuna and Gök 2012). The opening of unnecessary disciplinary investigations and disciplinary punishments in order to intimidate the officials in an unlawful way is described as psychological violence in workplace (Tınaz 2011, Bilgili 2012, Çögenli and Asunakutlu 2016).

When the causes of mobbing experienced in universities are examined; many reasons such as increased workload due to the high number of students per faculty member, the difficulty of the academic process, ambition to gain status and pathological personality traits of abusers are determined (Yıldırım and Yıldırım 2010). Psychological violent abusers reported that they often use the social exclusion strategy to make the targeted person difficult to face according to the senior management of institution (Şimsek 2009). In a study, academicians said that there is ambiguity in their work descriptions, ethical rules of conduct are not followed, there are no role models, and communication with managers is very difficult (Yaman 2010, Çögenli and Asunakutlu 2016).

## **Struggle methods by mobbing**

It is very important that the victim's is supported socially (Yaman 2010). The point to remember; Maintaining a sense of helplessness will only serve to increase the victim's perception of psychological violence and to weaken their coping skills (Eurofound 2007, Yavuz 2007). Obtaining psychiatric assistance for the provision of professional assistance, as well as the legal remedies are one of the important methods of struggle by mobbing (Izmir and Fazlıoğlu 2010). Some of the recommended methods to combat by the mobbing are as follows;

1. Recognize psychological violence and symptoms
2. Not to give up
3. Increasing self-confidence
4. Keep the normal communication with the violent practitioner in order to avoid the victim mentality (WHO 2003, Bozbel and Palaz 2007, İzmir and Fazlıoğlu 2010).

## **Outcomes of mobbing**

It is known that psychological violence in workplace against employees has several negative consequences not only for the victim but also for the organization, family, and society. Therefore, the fight against mobbing should be versatile (Karcioğlu and Aslan

2010). It is reported that psychological violence triggers “silence” behavior on employees and reduces their feelings of organizational commitment (Gül and Özcan 2008, Çakıcı 2009). Unfortunately, one of the most important factors that create job dissatisfaction in the working life of the individual is burnout syndrome which caused by mobbing (Elvira et al. 2003). Researches have shown that there is a significant relationship between psychological violence in workplace and stress, health problems, feelings of burnout, reduced functionality, job dissatisfaction, decreased self-confidence (Zapf and Gross 2001, Özler et al. 2008, Tigrel and Kokalan 2009). In other studies with similar results, various psychiatric symptoms such as aversion, indifference, depression, anxiety, helplessness, variable mood symptoms, irritability, intolerance, sleep problems, decreased attention and decreased self-esteem have been reported in mobbing victims (Tutar 2004, McKay 2008, Tınaz 2011, Mete 2013, Tutar 2015). In addition to, it was emphasized that mobbing can lead to psychosomatic symptoms with asthma, skin sensitivity, chronic pain syndromes (Elvira et al. 2003).

When the negative effects of mobbing on the organizations are examined, it is seen that there are lead to many negative consequences, such as an intention to quit the job, low motivation, high treatment and accident costs, conflict environment, disturbed organizational culture, low productivity, with the job dissatisfaction (Davenport et al. 2003).

## Judicial dimension of mobbing

Although, mobbing was accepted as a crime in Sweden in 1994, in Japan in 1996, in Finland in 2000, in Germany, France, and the USA in recent years, a special law to strengthen the fight against mobbing has not yet been prepared in our country (Özkul and Çarıkcı 2010). The basis of the legal arrangements to be made on mobbing in our country is the 49th substance of the constitution. According to Article 49 of the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey; the state is obliged to take the essential measures to improve the quality of life of the employees, to protect the employees and the unemployed in order to improve the working life, to create an economic environment suitable for preventing unemployment and to ensure the peace of work.

For prevention of the mobbing; for the first time, some measures were taken with the Prime Ministry Circular No. 2011/2 which was published in the Official Gazette dated 19/03/2011 and numbered 27879. This circular was found that psychological harassment in both the public and private sectors undermined employee honor, reducing their productivity and causing serious workforce losses. In order to protect employees from mobbing, ALO 170 telephone support line and Combating Psychological Violence Committee are planned to be established, monitor for the mobbing incidents and to create preventive methods (ÇSGB 2014). In addition, the 4-10 February week is considered as Mobbing awareness week by the Association for Combating Mobbing.

In concern with this, occupational health and safety act no. 6331 has been issued in Turkey, institutions and organizations have been given responsibilities. Mobbing methods change according to sectors and occupations. Employees may seek their rights according to the provisions of the relevant articles of the Labor Law No. 4857. It is also possible to apply to the closest judicial authorities to force sanctions in accordance with articles 105 and 117 of the Turkish Penal Code No. 5237 (TCK 2004, IK 2003). The person exposed to mobbing; either in accordance with the Labor Law No. 4857 or Law



of Obligations No. 6098 or may file a complaint with the Public Prosecutor's Office, under the criminal law (Oguzman et al. 2014). There are a "Worker Health and Occupational Safety Bylaw" in our country which is the most inclusive occupational health arrangement. An extended place is given to employees' health surveillance in the article 4857 of the bylaw 2003. Although, the provisions of work Labor Law No. 4857 (HR) do not directly address the concept of psychological harassment in the workplace.

**Table 2. Physical, psychological and economic outcomes of mobbing**

Mobbing victim			
Physical and psychological		Economical outcomes	
Stress	Separation sufferings, Loss of friends	Accident expenses- Insurance premiums	Drug treatments
Emotional problems	Suicide / Homicide	Lawyer costs	Psychological sessions
Physical problems	Loss of professional identity	Unemployment, Job search	Doctor fees
Accidents, injuries	Isolation	Move	Hospital costs
Family of victim			
Physical and psychological		Economical outcomes	
The pain brought by desperation		Family loss of income	
Complexities		Departure costs	
Separations or divorce pain		Alimony costs	
Effects on children		Therapies	
Organizations with mobbing			
Physical and psychological		Economical outcomes	
Organizational disputes		Health costs	Increased demand for public supports
Diseased company culture		Insurance costs	Increased demand for psychological and health support
Low motivation		Loss of expertise	Productivity drop
Losing creativity		Compensation	Decrease in job quality
Disease reports and permits		Tax losses	
Society - State			
Physical and psychological		Economical outcomes	
Unhappy individuals		Unemployment costs	
Political and political problems		Legal proceedings and expenses	
		New staffing costs	

According to this, the items that can be used to evaluate the claims and disputes about mobbing are as follows; Item 5; The principle of equality, Item 22; Changes in working conditions and termination of employment contract; Item 24; The right of the employee to terminate immediately for good cause; Item 25: Employer's right to immediate termination in the presence of justified reasons (Bilgili 2012, CSGB 2014).

The introduction of the concept of mobbing has occurred through Article 417 of the Code of Obligations No. 6098, which entered into force on 1.7.2012 for the first time. 'The employer is obliged to protect the personality of the worker, to provide an environment in accordance with the principles of honesty in the workplace, and to take measures to prevent the workers from being subjected to psychological and sexual harassment.' In order to have a good level of health and safety in our countries, there have been prepared regulations for the responsibility of employees and employers in recent years, among these regulations, employers face more responsibility with newly added legislations because of the reason that employees have to be supervised (Oguzman and Öz 2014).

According to Article 24 of the Turkish Civil Code No. 4721; the person whose right to personality is attacked can demand protection from the court against the attackers. Any attack on personal rights is unlawful. Article 8 of the Civil Servants Law No. 657 emphasizes that the civil servants should work cooperatively, and Article 10. emphasizes that the managers should treat their officials as justly. In an application to the 8th Chamber of the Council of State; on the grounds that acts of mobbing (harassment, psychological violence), boredom and intimidation against the faculty member adversely affect the spiritual structure of the faculty member. It was decided from the administration should be paid non-pecuniary damages to the faculty member for these unlawful actions so it has taken an important step in this field (E.2008/10606, K.2012/1736).

## Conclusion

Mobbing persists even in countries which have specific laws against it. In light of extensive studies on workplace mobbing, everyone agrees that they are unacceptable, having disastrous consequences on the employee's health, and a negative impact on employee performance. Unfortunately, mobbing is being mostly ignored term in our country, it is very important to analyze in detail each sector to understand the methods used in mobbing and the reactions of victims to these actions. As a result awareness of mobbing should be immediately increased in all segments of our society. In order to increase awareness about the mobbing, individuals, business circles, especially legislators should be showing the necessary importance.

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