

Research Article

The experiences and views of elementary school teachers regarding mobbing

Yeliz Temli Durmuş

Uşak University, Faculty of Education, Uşak, Türkiye (ORCID: 0000-0003-0769-8782)

The aim of this phenomenological study was to determine the experiences and views of elementary school teachers about mobbing. To address this issue, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 female and 19 male elementary school teachers working in public elementary schools. Four themes emerged during the analysis: reasons for mobbing, experiences of mobbing, struggling with mobbing, and consequences of mobbing. These themes, along with their corresponding categories and codes, were identified through a collaborative effort between two researchers. The codes associated with these themes include limitation in expressing one's experiences of mobbing, failure to respond to the mobber's inappropriate behavior and inability to substantiate these actions, and non-membership in an educational union, which motivates mobbers to persist in their harmful behaviors. The study concluded with a number of recommendations for future studies.

Keywords: Mobbing; Psychological pressure; Elementary school teachers; Workplace bullying

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1. Introduction

People may control and dominate others and these desires result in feelings of hate and jealousy. In response, some individuals resort to mobbing as a means of self-preservation (Arnautovic, 2013). While interpersonal conflicts are considered a normal part of social life, if aggressive, deliberate, inappropriate communication, or the absence of respectful actions persist for over six months, occurring at least once a week, these negative and disruptive harassing behaviors and communication styles are categorized as mobbing (Leymann, 1996). The sufferer's motivation at work reduces and mobbing events affect other workers as well (Tan, 2005). Malignant behaviors have a detrimental impact on an individual's ability to fulfill their responsibilities. Apart from the harassment experienced in the workplace, people are also psychologically and physically affected, thereby influencing their daily life activities negatively (Einarsen et al., 2011). The terms *psychological terror*, *physical harassment*, and *group bullying* are closely associated with the concept of mobbing (McCormack et al., 2009). In summary, mobbing is a concept that directly impairs both individual effectiveness and social relationships in people's lives.

The term *mobbing* has been examined in numerous studies, and its origins can be traced back to the English word "mob," which denotes a large, angry crowd engaged in violent activities. In the context of workplace dynamics, mobbing refers to the act of surrounding, collectively attacking, or

Address of Corresponding Author

Yeliz Temli Durmuş, PhD, Uşak University, Faculty of Education, Department of Educational Sciences, 64200, Uşak, Türkiye.

✉ yeliz.temlidurmus@usak.edu.tr

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bullying an individual (Tınaz, 2008). It is characterized as a pattern of unethical and systematic behaviors directed at an individual with the intent to discourage them from their workplace, create disruption, and cause harm through various forms of violence and pressure (Leymann, 1996). While occasional disagreements are expected in any organization, persistent resentment, grudges, and animosity among employees in such situations should not be considered normal. Neglected and unresolved instances of mobbing behaviors tend to propagate like malignant cells within their distinct dynamics (Tutar, 2015). When a person who has been subjected to mobbing is not provided with support, they may ultimately resign, leave their job, and shirk their responsibilities, all while experiencing profound psychological impacts (Tınaz, 2008).

Mobbing occurs in the form of an interaction between two sides. These sides can be two individuals or groups of individuals, or sometimes one group collectively targets a single individual (Leymann, 1996). The mobbing process generally comprises individuals actively involved in the mobbing behavior, the victims of such behavior, and an audience that may not be directly impacted by the process, but still witnesses it (Güngör, 2008; Tınaz et al., 2008). All individuals in a workplace are likely to be victims of mobbing. Mobbing incidents in an organization progress from one stage to another, moving from one status to different statuses (Cemaloğlu & Ertürk, 2007). The vertical or horizontal course of mobbing depends on the organisational culture and hierarchical structure (Davenport et al., 2003).

1.1. Reasons for Mobbing

Mobbing shows variety in implementation and is affected by the culture of the society, the culture of organizations, and the hierarchical structure in organizations (Zapf & Einarsen, 2005). The causes of mobbing may not be attributed to a single factor. Mobbing typically arises from a combination of complex circumstances and multiple underlying reasons. Mobbing research initially began with incidents stemming from humor differences that could hurt individuals due to varying senses of humor. Over time, investigations have also delved into the role of personality characteristics in mobbing situations (Broadsky, 1976). Research has indicated that individuals with extraverted, conscientious, and neurotic personality traits are more prone to being targets of mobbing. The psychology of both mobbers and mobbed individuals, their characteristic features, the organizational culture in which they work, the influence of leadership, daily interpersonal conflicts, competitive attitudes and behaviors, and the interplay of these various factors can all contribute to the occurrence of mobbing (Güngör, 2007). Additionally, İzmir and Fazlıoğlu (2011) have listed potential reasons for mobbing, including fear of job loss in a competitive work environment, excessive workloads, the struggle to maintain administrative or executive positions, and dealing with unmotivated colleagues within the same organization.

According to Rayner (1997, as cited in Gökçe, 2008), one of the primary reasons for mobbing is jealousy in the organisation. In such situations, individuals who put psychological pressure on victims are jealous because they lack the characteristics that these individuals have. On the other hand, offenders may choose an individual who can threaten their position in the workplace. When they continuously compare themselves to those in their target due to jealousy, this leads to the inferiority complex and the escalation of mobbing. Furthermore, people who engage in mobbing usually have a negative personality, feel shy and envy and have certain psychological conditions, influencing their tendency to exhibit mobbing behaviours (Çobanoğlu, 2005; Kokko & Pörhöla, 2009).

Although all employees in an organisation can be exposed to mobbing, certain characteristics victims have cause them to be easier targets compared to others. Managers and fellow employees may sometimes perceive intelligence, attractiveness, a strong career, educational achievements, individual skills, qualifications, and diverse perspectives as potential threats (Cayvarlı, 2013; Özen, 2007). Einarsen (2000) states that the size of the organisation has an effect on mobbing. In a large organisation, mobbing behaviours are observed more often as it is easier to conceal such offences. Conflicts within the organisation, communication among the staff, and the leadership style,

authority and behaviours of managers are some of the organisation-related reasons that cause mobbing (Eken, 2014).

1.2. Effects of Mobbing

The effects of mobbing are typically examined under two main categories: psychological impacts and physiological effects (Leymann, 1996). Individuals who are exposed to mobbing are observed to have health issues, psychological disorders, depression, anxiety, stress, depression, low self-efficacy and self-confidence (Davenport et al., 2003; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012; Zapf, 1999). The effects of mobbing influence individuals' daily lives by impacting the psychological well-being of the mobbed person and indirectly affecting their family members (Kara, 2019).

Research indicates that mobbing leads to a decrease in self-efficacy levels and productivity, diminished organizational commitment, and fosters negative attitudes towards both jobs and the working environment (Bloisi & Hoel, 2008; Şener, 2013). Burnout and quitting job are also among the consequences of mobbing (Tong et al., 2017).

Mobbing causes damage in social relations and financial stability of an organisation. Davenport et al. (2003) state that mobbing impairs organisational culture, decreases employees' motivation, reduces effectiveness, leads to frequent changes of staff and more medical leaves, and increases staff, compensation and legal costs.

According to Tınaz (2008), mobbing results in undesirable outcomes within an organization's psychology, including employee reluctance, conflicts, disrespect, a negative atmosphere, a lack of trust, and the erosion of organizational culture. Mobbing also has adverse effects on people's overall health and emotional well-being. Furthermore, the organization bears substantial economic costs when it loses experienced staff and must recruit new employees.

Mobbing has effects on both society and the organization and its employees. The social costs encompass the absence of essential services when a victim, suffering from psychological or physiological disorders due to mobbing, is unable to perform their job adequately and loses their employment (Yaman, 2009).

1.3. Education and Mobbing

Effective communication skills within an organization play a significant role in preventing mobbing. Within educational settings, conflicts among individuals can diminish motivation for teaching, hinder professional development, and erode tolerance levels (Şener, 2013).

Mobbing has negative effects such as distrust in the school climate, stress, and lack of respect and tolerance (Kış, 2016). It negatively affects teachers' organisational commitment (Çiftçier, 2019; Fahie, 2014; Karakoç, 2016; Yumuşak, 2013), motivation (Acar, 2013; Lechner et al., 2023) and job satisfaction (Okçu & Çetin (2017), whereas it elevates feelings of alienation within the workplace (Zorgül, 2014) and encourages employee silence (Karaman, 2015).

The implementation of effective instructional methods, as well as the support for teachers' self-confidence and psychological well-being, hinges on the recognition of the effects of mobbing (Okçu & Çetin, 2017). Creating a peaceful working environment is crucial for identifying and resolving mobbing incidents. This study aims to capture the daily-life experiences of mobbing from the perspective of school administrators. The findings have the potential to raise awareness among teachers and all staff within the school regarding mobbing, shedding light on how to mitigate undesirable behaviors that staff perceive as mobbing, and how school administrators can prevent them.

The psychological and emotional harm experienced by teachers in educational institutions results in both individual and institutional losses, affecting financial stability, psychological and physical well-being, concentration on educational outcomes, and overall prestige. The excessive demands of teaching, student behavioral issues, unprofessional conduct, and communication challenges contribute to a stressful school climate (Tekşen, 2023). As a consequence, teacher performance may suffer, while productivity declines. In the broader context, these negative effects impact not only teachers but also students and parents (De Wet, 2010). To create an effective

learning environment for students and a confidential workplace for teachers, both school administrators and teachers bear the responsibility of cultivating a peaceful school atmosphere (Kök, 2006; Özdayı, 1998). This can be achieved by avoiding gossip, judgment of others' lives, and the spread of false information (Holland, 1996). Mobbers and victims are often considered as the most undesirable individuals in a workplace, sharing this unfortunate commonality. However, a significant difference between these two groups is that victims are often forced into isolation, while mobbers maintain strong communication with their colleagues (Veenstra et al., 2005). In summary, mobbing has far-reaching consequences, including psychological, physical, and financial damage, as previously mentioned. Interestingly, those who engage in mobbing behaviors typically do not do so deliberately (Tekşen, 2023). By better understanding mobbing and related negative actions, people can become more mindful, which may help mitigate the adverse effects on themselves and their colleagues.

1.4. The Aim

The literature highlights that teachers are frequently implicated in cases of mobbing (Cemaloğlu & Ertürk, 2008; Koçak, 2018; Mammadov, 2010). Consequently, the primary objective of this study is to gather the perspectives of elementary school teachers on mobbing, with a focus on obtaining in-depth data supported by clear statements. To achieve this goal, participants were asked interview questions pertaining to their experiences with mobbing, their observations of it, and their suggestions for combating this issue.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

A qualitative research approach known as phenomenology was utilized to collect the views, observations, and experiences of elementary school teachers. Phenomenology is a research design that emphasizes exploring phenomena that we are aware of but lack a profound and detailed understanding of (Willig, 2013). The collection of qualitative data was carried out using a semi-structured interview technique.

2.2. Participants

The study was confined to the Uşak province center. Following the acquisition of ethical approval, a comprehensive list of all elementary schools in the city center was compiled. The researcher then visited these schools, inquiring whether they were willing to participate in a study on mobbing. Interviews were subsequently conducted with those elementary school teachers who expressed a willingness to participate. For this qualitative study, convenience sampling was employed, with the primary criterion being that the teachers worked in the city center. In total, the study involved 20 female and 19 male elementary school teachers from 12 different elementary schools in Uşak.

Table 1

Personal details of the elementary school teachers in the study

| <i>Characteristics</i> | <i>N</i> |
|------------------------|----------|
| Gender | |
| Male | 19 |
| Female | 20 |
| Teaching Experience | |
| 1-5 Years | 0 |
| 6-10 Years | 6 |
| 11-15 Years | 8 |
| 16-20 Years | 15 |
| 20 Years and above | 10 |

2.3. Data Collection

The research process included several important steps. First, the researcher conducted a review of the existing literature on mobbing. Subsequently, the researcher developed a set of interview questions, and to ensure their quality, the opinions of two experts were sought. Revisions were made to the questions based on the feedback from the experts. For example, the seventh question was originally framed as "What responsibilities do your colleagues have regarding those who are mobbed?" but was adjusted to "What does the word 'mobbing' mean to you?" to inquire about the participants' perceptions of the concept, as it was considered an assumption that colleagues feel responsibilities. The questions were modified to be more open-ended to encourage detailed responses. However, when yes-no questions were necessary, a semi-structured approach was taken, including an invitation for respondents to elaborate on their answers, as seen in the second question. To ensure the effectiveness of the questions, two pilot interviews were conducted with experienced elementary school teachers in Mersin City, each with 20 years of experience, using the Zoom application. These pilot interviews were conducted to gain insights from the interviewees' perspectives and to refine the interview questions. After these pilot interviews, the interview form was finalized, consisting of eight open-ended questions (see Appendix 1), and the data collection process commenced.

Appointments were scheduled with the teachers for conducting the interviews. Following a clear explanation of the study's objectives, the interview questions were posed to elementary school teachers who willingly volunteered to take part in the research. The interviews were recorded using an audio-recorder after obtaining the participants' consent. However, for those who preferred not to have their conversation recorded, notes were taken during the interviews.

2.4. Data Analysis

The recorded or noted interviews were transcribed into a Word document. Qualitative data underwent content analysis, where themes were derived from the codes that emerged using an inductive approach. Following the approach described by Denzin and Lincoln (2008), content analysis involved conceptualizing the collected data, organizing the emerging concepts, and forming thematic categories. Instead of using coding with labels like A1, A2, A3, the researcher chose to identify participants by sex and teaching experiences alongside their statements directly. During the analysis process, codes that had similarities were grouped together to create themes and categories. The themes were connected to the corresponding codes and elaborated in detail. Tables were used to present the frequency values for the codes under the themes. Direct quotations from the participants were included to enhance the validity and reliability of the qualitative data.

In the qualitative research process, member checking and the involvement of multiple coders were utilized. Member checking is a valuable method for assessing the degree to which the data and findings accurately reflect reality, as outlined by Denzin and Lincoln (2008). After the initial interviews, all participants were revisited and asked to confirm the codes derived from the data or to provide any different insights they wished to express. Codes that were modified during the member checking process were updated, and the analysis proceeded with the data gathered from other participants.

In the process of code determination, the researcher reviewed the interview transcriptions once more to finalize the codes and shape the themes and categories. Throughout the analysis, the researcher conducted two meetings with an expert in qualitative research studies to resolve any contentious or ambiguous aspects and reach a consensus on the interpretation of the data.

3. Findings

3.1. Findings regarding the Elementary School Teachers' Views on Mobbing

This section presents the findings with respect to the elementary school teachers' views on mobbing. Out of the surveyed elementary school teachers, 10 responded affirmatively when asked

if they had ever experienced mobbing, while 8 teachers indicated that they had not been subjected to mobbing themselves. In terms of witnessing mobbing incidents involving others, 13 teachers reported having observed such occurrences during their careers as teachers and administrators, whereas 5 teachers did not report witnessing such incidents.

3.1.1. Theme 1: Reasons for mobbing

According to the teachers' responses, the reasons for mobbing were categorized into three main groups: victim-related reasons, reasons associated with the individuals engaging in mobbing, and workplace-related factors. Table 2 presents the categories and codes under this theme.

Table 2

Reasons for mobbing

| Victim-Related Reasons | <i>f</i> |
|---|----------|
| Codes | |
| Reasons related to the person who engage in mobbing | |
| Inability to express | 15 |
| Different political views | 37 |
| Ego satisfaction | 24 |
| Prejudices | 24 |
| Past experiences | 21 |
| Professional problems | 9 |
| Selfishness | 8 |
| The influence of a group | 6 |
| Workplace-related reasons | |
| Being a member of opposite unions | 30 |
| Unfair workload | 20 |
| Ineffective school administrators | 19 |
| Gossip | 14 |
| Arbitrary Behaviours | 7 |

The participants expressed criticism of the victims' silence in response to mobbing. They pointed out that victims often struggle to defend themselves and assert their legal rights. Additionally, two participants emphasized the significance of defending oneself from a Muslim perspective. Under the category labeled reasons related to the person engaging in mobbing, it was noted that individuals with differing political views tend to exhibit negative attitudes towards one another. This was highlighted by 37 out of the 39 teachers.

A notable finding in the study was that even if an individual's claims are true, they can become powerless when facing a group, leading to a reduction in their motivation to combat mobbing. It was observed that individuals who belonged to a group with shared political views were better equipped to withstand mobbing. However, it was also found that members of these groups could engage in mobbing against other well-respected individuals. Additionally, various codes were identified under the second category, reasons related to the person engaging in mobbing, including ego satisfaction (n=24), prejudices (n=24), past experiences (n=21), professional problems (n=9), selfishness (n=8), and the influence of a group (n=6). One of the participants, A21 asserted that "The principal cause of teachers engaging in mobbing against the administration is their belief that administrators are chosen based on political considerations." In another response, A28 stated that "I believe that political perspectives play a dominant role in instances of mobbing within schools. Individuals often adopt a self-assured 'I know it all' attitude, and differing union affiliations further fuel conflicts in the school environment."

The last category under the reasons for mobbing theme is *workplace-related reasons*. Within this category, the concept of *being a member of opposite unions* was frequently mentioned by participants (n=30). It was noted that these two concepts, *political views* and *being a member of opposite unions*, were often perceived as similar, although they were determined to be distinct after discussions

with two experts. Participants emphasized that teachers should join a union to safeguard their rights, as not every individual respects human rights or is raised with a proper understanding of these rights. They pointed out that non-union members are more vulnerable to mobbing, and that certain rights are exclusively granted to union members. The association of unions with political views and the challenges of individuality in the workplace were also highlighted. Furthermore, participants discussed unfair workload, providing examples such as, "My colleagues who have close ties to the administration arrange their course schedules in a way that leaves English class, for instance, for the last hours of the day on Fridays." Ineffective school administrators (n=19), gossip (n=14), and arbitrary behaviors (n=7) were also identified within this category. A participant focused on the reluctance to collaborate with individuals sharing their political alignment. As mentioned earlier, the participants revealed that individuals engaging in mobbing exhibit these behaviors with the intent of satisfying their ego. Driven by an inferiority complex, they emphasized that those seeking to assert their superiority and worth over others resort to premeditated and clandestine actions, adopting a communication style aimed at ego gratification and power display. According to the participants, the mobbers are willing to resort to extreme and inhumane actions. In this sense, A27 stated that "I believe it revolves around the desire of administrators or mobbers to assert their superiority over others, ultimately to gratify their egos.". In another response, A14 expressed that:

I believe they derive a sense of empowerment from engaging in mobbing, as it allows them to gratify their egos and manipulate others into compliance. They are willing to employ any means to attain this objective. They resort to slander against those who speak the truth and engage in various unacceptable tactics to diminish their reputation in the eyes of their peers.

3.1.2. Theme 2: Experiences of mobbing

Leymann's work, based on research conducted in Northern Europe, identifies mobbing behaviors categorized into five distinct categories. In this current study, data on mobbing behaviors were classified based on the dimensions outlined in Leymann's (1996) typology. For this specific theme in the study, a deductive approach was employed. The categories and their corresponding codes were presented, along with the number of participants whose statements aligned with each code. Table 3 presents the categories and codes under this theme. As indicated in Table 3, the first category is *damaging one's reputation*. Within this category, various behaviors were identified, including discrimination (n=21), humiliation (n=11), exclusion (n=10), distorting the facts (n=10), discrediting (n=9), and exploiting one's weaknesses (n=7). The second category, *disrupting communication*, falls under the broader theme of *experiences about mobbing* and encompasses two codes: ignoring (n=18) and adopting a specific attitude toward a victim (n=16). The third category, labeled *social relationships*, involves behaviors such as grouping/ganging up (n=24), purposefully exhibiting inconsistent behaviors (n=20), persuading others of the victim's malignancy (n=17), and engaging in gossip (n=17). The fourth category, *job quality*, includes four codes: establishing closeness with administrators as a means of exerting pressure (power) (n=31), seeking out mistakes (n=27), creating difficulties regarding any responsibilities (n=15), and conducting actions surreptitiously (n=3). According to the participants, there are other teachers who actively seek re-assignment from village schools, often citing various excuses, and subsequently secure positions in more favorable schools, which may result in demotivation among other teachers. Another participant stated that the principals aim to damage the teacher's social connections with students and tarnish their reputation within the school by disseminating baseless rumors through another teacher, which is a sign of a deliberate attempt to harm the teacher's image and relationships within the school.

Table 3
Mobbing behaviors/ experiences

| Category Codes | f |
|--|----|
| Damaging one's reputation | |
| Discrimination | 21 |
| Humiliation | 11 |
| Exclusion | 10 |
| Distorting the facts | 10 |
| Discrediting | 9 |
| Exploiting one's weaknesses | 7 |
| Disrupting communication | |
| Ignoring | 18 |
| Adopting specific attitude towards a victim | 16 |
| Social relationships | |
| Grouping/Gang behavior | 24 |
| Exhibiting incoherent behaviors purposefully | 20 |
| Persuading others of the malignancy of the victim | 17 |
| Engaging in gossip | 17 |
| Job quality | |
| Establishing closeness with administrators as a means of exerting pressure (power) | 31 |
| Seeking out mistakes | 27 |
| Creating difficulties regarding any responsibilities | 15 |
| Conducting actions surreptitiously | 3 |

To undermine the victims' social relationships, the formation of groups, akin to gangs, is considered a significant aspect of the participants' experiences. In order to inflict psychological harm, mobbers exhibit alternating behaviors and attitudes. One day, they may appear genuinely cordial, but on another day, they might not even greet the victim, only to revert to sincere behavior on yet another day. Within the second category related to disrupting victims' communication, the codes encompass ignoring (n=18) and adopting a particular attitude toward a victim (n=16). As per the participants, one method frequently employed to disrupt victims' communication is simply ignoring the person. They choose to ignore the victim, neglecting their successes, and even overlooking instances of injustice. One of the statements and views on this matter includes the following:

I had a friend who was initially quite gullible, and I placed a great deal of trust in her. However, the mobber managed to persuade her that I was dishonest. I was aware of numerous negative aspects about the mobber, but he possessed a remarkable talent for convincing people. In reality, he was the one who was dishonest. (A29)

3.1.3. Theme 3: Struggling with mobbing

In the theme of *struggling with mobbing*, the categories encompassed individual efforts, administrative responsibilities, union responsibilities, legal actions, and social efforts. Table 4 presents the categories and codes under this theme. As illustrated in Table 4, within the realm of individual efforts, participants often stopped putting in extra effort, and some even reduced the time they allocated to school and their students. A subgroup of participants (n=20) focused solely on fulfilling their basic responsibilities and then left school when they encountered instances of mobbing. Furthermore, in the *individual struggle* category, many participants (n=20) refrained from explaining the reality or defending themselves, as they believed their explanations went unheard, or people simply believed whatever they wanted. Consequently, they opted to let time handle the situation. With regards to expectations from administrators, the participants

Table 4
Struggling with mobbing

| Category Codes | f |
|--|----|
| Individual Struggle | |
| Acting in accordance with the job definition | 20 |
| Letting time handle the situation | 20 |
| Ignoring the person | 17 |
| Expectations from Administrators | |
| Should be fair | 16 |
| Should create peaceful working environment | 16 |
| Should not exploit the weaknesses of others | 11 |
| Should not tolerate mobbing | 6 |
| Should have strong communication with all teachers | 5 |
| Should have a command over the school | 3 |
| Union Responsibilities | |
| Providing training | 8 |
| Being supportive | 8 |
| Social Struggle | |
| Social awareness against mobbing | 16 |
| Social awareness about legal ways | 15 |

emphasized the importance of fairness (n=16), the creation of a peaceful working environment (n=16), refraining from exploiting others' weaknesses (n=11), not tolerating mobbing (n=6), and maintaining strong communication with all teachers (n=5). Under the third category, *unions' duties*, the emerging codes included the provision of training (n=8) and offering support, as well as providing information (n=8) on mobbing cases. Lastly, in the *social struggle* category, participants identified the importance of social awareness against mobbing (n=16) and awareness about legal avenues (n=15). One of the participants, A1, stated the following views on this theme: "Foremost, unions should prioritize raising awareness among elementary school teachers regarding mobbing."

3.1.4. Theme 4: Consequences of mobbing

Three categories identified under the theme of consequences of mobbing comprise of *affective*, *physiological*, and *work-related* as shown in Table 5.

Table 5
Struggling with mobbing

| Category Codes | f |
|-------------------------|----|
| Affective | |
| Decreased Motivation | 15 |
| Mental Preoccupation | 6 |
| Feelings of depression | 6 |
| Reflections on family | 4 |
| Anxiety | 3 |
| Physiological | |
| Fatigue | 8 |
| Burnout | 7 |
| Work-related | |
| Lowered work quality | 9 |
| Changing schools | 9 |
| Reflections on students | 2 |

As presented in Table 5 above, the affective and physiological impacts of mobbing were highlighted, and a third category, work-related effects, was introduced. Similar to Davenport et al.'s (2003) study, mobbing leads to diminished self-efficacy, fosters derogatory communication styles, encourages the formation of mobbing groups akin to gangs in the workplace, reduces productivity, and undermines feelings of confidentiality through gossip and unfounded assumptions. These characteristics are collectively termed *mobbing syndrome*. This study also identified some characteristics of *mobbing syndrome*, including decreased motivation (n=15), mental preoccupation (n=6), feelings of depression (n=6), physiological fatigue (n=8), and burnout (n=7). In general, victims often consider changing their workplaces, particularly among teachers, as indicated by the code *changing schools* (n=9). Additionally, some participants expressed that they tolerated mobbing due to their lack of experience, and it was found to have a detrimental impact on teachers' communication with students. The participants focused on the decrease in teachers' motivation and engagement in tasks as a result, and depressive feelings which in turn negatively impacts the productivity. For instance A9 asserted that "It affects their psychological health, and prevents them from connecting with students and interacting with them."

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The qualitative data revealed that the study participants possessed a general understanding of mobbing, and their definitions closely aligned with those found in the literature. They identified factors that facilitated mobbing, such as victims' inability to assert themselves within the organization, their unresponsiveness to psychological attacks, and their lack of commitment to a particular union. In this study, the participants also characterized those who engage in mobbing as intolerant of differing political views, feeling inadequate, and using mobbing as a means of ego satisfaction. Leymann (1996) also suggests that individuals who engage in mobbing often do so to compensate for their inadequacies. Similarly, Güven's (2019) study, internalization of different political views and being a member of different union were among reasons of mobbing. Mobbers do not need any other reasons to behave negatively. Although Democracy Education is among Principles of Turkish Education System, this result showed creating a harmony with different truths are still a concern among people.

The study's findings, as discussed under the second theme "Experiences about Mobbing," revealed that victims often experienced discrimination, humiliation, and exclusion. This aligns with Neal's (2010) observation that mobbers frequently exhibit such behaviors. Moreover, the study identified characteristics of victims, including their tendency to remain silent, be isolated, and experience loneliness. This finding is consistent with the research by Einarsen and Raknes (1997), who also highlighted victims' difficulties in coping with mobbing due to the mobbers' group dynamics, problem-solving skills, and ability to isolate the victims. Mobbers often work as a cohesive group and are skilled at manipulation, making it challenging for victims to confront them alone. As a finding of the study, keep silence is internalize as a strategy to cope mobbing. Victims as a way to coping mobbing, keep their silence and leave the situation to time. Similarly, in Tekşen's (2023) study victims first adopt passive strategies and use informal strategies like ignoring mobbers and his/her behaviors. If this passive strategy was found ineffective by the victim, the second option is to adopt formal and legal ways.

The participants in this study emphasized the role of unions in relation to mobbing, particularly highlighting the unions' association with political views. While unions are traditionally seen as entities that protect the rights and interests of their members, this study revealed that some teachers refrained from joining unions as they wanted to maintain a clear political stance within their schools. However, it was noted that those who did become members of the same union benefited from enhanced protection of their rights. This reflects the tension between individualism and collectivism, which is influenced by cultural dimensions, and it can affect a teacher's self-perception in their profession. The perception of mobbing, career satisfaction, and the overall effect of mobbing on individuals are intertwined with these cultural factors. Moreover, the suggestion to

create social awareness regarding mobbing and the potential role of unions in supporting this effort is an important point. By raising awareness about mobbing and its consequences, unions can contribute to addressing the social impact of this issue.

The study's findings highlighted that mobbing has several negative emotional effects on victims, including psychological problems, decreased motivation and performance, failure, anger, stress, feelings of worthlessness, introversion, and anxiety. These findings align with some studies in the literature. For example, Fahie and Devine (2014) observed that mobbing leads to negative effects like stress, feelings of exclusion, suicidal thoughts, and self-doubt. Özdemir (2015) noted that mobbing has adverse impacts on one's quality of life in terms of home environment and social life. Aygün (2012) also reported similar findings, concluding that mobbing harms individuals' psychological and physiological well-being, social relationships, and leads to reduced performance and effectiveness. Another significant consequence of mobbing on teachers is the desire to leave the school. The findings of the present study are consistent with previous research in the field of mobbing. Erdirencelebi and Filizöz (2016) discovered a positive relationship between mobbing and employees' intention to leave the organization, corroborating the idea that mobbing can lead to a desire to quit one's job. Additionally, the emphasis on gossip and neglect as mobbing behaviors is in line with Eken's (2014) study on elementary and middle school teachers. Eken's (2014) study found that teachers were frequently exposed to mobbing behaviors such as having their views and opinions ignored, information being hidden that would affect a teacher's success, and the spread of rumors about teachers. These findings parallel the ones observed in the present study, highlighting the recurring nature of these behaviors in the context of mobbing.

This study aimed to investigate teachers' experiences and perspectives on mobbing. Like other similar studies and the prevailing definition of mobbing, it has been found that mobbing leads to various damages, including physiological, psychological, financial, and social harm. People's overall quality of life can suffer from mobbing, and different individuals may choose various ways to deal with it, from ignoring it to asserting their rights. The reasons for mobbing are diverse, including having different political views, holding prejudices, being unable to express thoughts or feelings, or choosing to remain silent. Future research projects could focus on creating social maps to identify mobbers, victims, and observers who resist becoming legal witnesses, and explore their relationships with other individuals. Such projects could also delve into preventive measures and raise awareness about legal rights and effective strategies for dealing with mobbing through educational initiatives and training programs.

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Appendix 1. Interview questions

- 1) What does the word 'mobbing' mean to you?
- 2) Have you ever witnessed mobbing in an educational institution?
- 3) What do you think are the reasons behind mobbing?
- 4) What behaviours do people who engage in mobbing exhibit in general?
- 5) Have you been exposed to mobbing during your career? If yes, can you explain it with details?
- 6) What are the effects of mobbing on teachers, and how is it reflected on their job quality?
- 7) What are your observations related to individuals who engage in mobbing?
- 8) What are your views about their behaviours, feelings and experiences?