



Destructive Leadership and Organizational Culture as the Predecessors of Academic Mobbing

Akademik Mobbing'in Öncüleri olarak Yıkıcı Liderlik ve Örgütsel Kültür

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ABSTRACT

While global trends like university rankings and neoliberal policies have changed the operation of the higher education systems worldwide, they brought a new managerial understanding that prioritized competition and quantification of performance over collegiality and quality. This transformation rendered values like trust and professionalism hollow, weakened the relationships among faculty and directors, and eventually prepared a suitable ground for mobbing to flourish. The study aims to examine the phenomenon of academic mobbing from the perspectives of Turkish faculty based on Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Model. 12 semi-structured in-depth interviews with the targeted faculty working at different universities in Ankara, İstanbul, Konya and Eskişehir were conducted. The major findings of the study were as follows: the perpetrators of mobbing were the directors who adopted autocratic and laissez-faire leadership styles and had good relationships with in-group members; academic culture was described with threat, fear, jealousy, humiliation, high-power-distance and collectivisms, all of which triggered mobbing; the targeted faculty were determined, strong and self-confident in nature as well as impulsive and aggressive at times; mobbing predominantly ended in resignation, psychological and psychosomatic problems, and the lack of belonging; the top two coping strategies were getting social support and facing the mobbers; and the most frequent suggestions were for leaders to ensure meritocracy, for faculty to leave the institution the soonest time possible, and for the state to create a mobbing law.



Finally, it is recommended that democratic and transformative leadership styles be used at universities and independent expert groups inspect them.

Key words: Mobbing, academia, higher education, leadership, culture, faculty members

ÖZ

Üniversite sıralamaları ve neoliberal politikalar gibi küresel eğilimler tüm dünyada yükseköğretim sistemlerinin işleyişini değiştirirken beraberinde getirdikleri yeni yönetsel anlayış, mesleki işbirliği ve kalite yerine rekabete ve performansın sayısal ölçütlerle değerlendirilmesine öncelik verdi. Bu dönüşüm, güven ve profesyonellik gibi kavramların içini boşalttı, öğretim elemanları ile yöneticiler arasındaki ilişkileri zayıflattı ve sonunda mobbingin gelişmesi için uygun bir ortam hazırladı. Bu çalışma, akademik mobbing olgusunu, Hofstede'nin Kültürel Boyutlar Modeli'ne dayandırarak, Türk öğretim elemanlarının bakış açısından incelemeyi hedeflemektedir. 12 yarı yapılandırılmış mülakat, Ankara, İstanbul, Konya ve Eskişehir'de farklı üniversitelerde çalışan mobbinge maruz kalmış öğretim elemanı ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Çalışmanın temel bulguları şu şekildedir: mobbingin failleri, otokratik ve serbest bırakıcı liderlik biçimlerini benimseyen ve iç-grup üyeleriyle iyi ilişkiler içinde olan yöneticilerdir; akademik kültür, tehdit, korku, kıskançlık, küçük görme, yüksek-güç-mesafesi ve kolektivizm ile tanımlanmış ve tüm bunlar mobbingi tırmandırmıştır; mobbing mağduru öğretim elemanları yapı olarak kararlı, güçlü ve özgüvenli oldukları kadar zaman zaman fevri ve agresif olarak da tanımlanabilir; mobbing olgusu büyük oranda istifa, psikolojik ve psikosomatik problemler ve aidiyet duygusunun kaybı ile sonuçlanmıştır; ilk iki başa çıkma stratejisi, sosyal destek alma ve faillerle yüzleşmektir; en sıklıkla dile getirilen öneriler, liderler açısından liyakati sağlamak, öğretim elemanları açısından işyerinden en kısa sürede ayrılmak ve devlet içince mobbing yasası çıkarmaktır. Son olarak, üniversitelerde demokratik ve dönüşümcü liderlik biçimlerinin kullanılması ve üniversitelerin bağımsız uzman grupları tarafından denetlenmesi önerilmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Akademi, kültür, liderlik, mobbing, öğretim elemanları, yükseköğretim

INTRODUCTION

It is one of the duties of higher education institutions (HEIs) to maintain qualified human capital not only for the development of society as a whole but also for adaptation to changing environmental circumstances. However, the vulnerability of global higher education systems (HESs) across some external and internal forces that affect the dynamics of the system

adversely also puts the health of human capital in danger. These forces range from internationalization of trends such as university rankings, to neoliberal policies that increased privatization, encouraged competition and quantity rather than collegiality and quality in academia and changed the managerial understanding (Forest & Altbach, 2007; Quinn, 2012). As managerial decisions and implementations affect employees' mental health and job performance (Montano et al., 2017), their support is necessary at normal times but more so during challenging processes. The resulting cumulative effect of these transformative developments influenced the academic profession by hollowing out the key concepts such as autonomy, academic freedom and collegiality (Currie, 2004). These stressors tensed relationships among faculty and gave way to an unhealthy organizational culture that can be named as "workplace bullying" (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018) or within the specificity of this article, in the higher education (HE) context, "academic mobbing".

Workplace bullying takes place not only in the lower levels of education among teachers (Korkmaz & Cemaloğlu, 2010), but also in HE among university staff (Einarsen, 1999; Crawford, 1997; Giorgi, 2012; Keashly & Neuman, 2010). About the global prevalence of workplace bullying in all sectors, a meta-analysis indicated that around 15% of employees experienced it at some level, though the rate may be affected by geographical (Nielsen et al., 2010), methodological (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018) and economic-climactic factors (Van de Vliert et al., 2013). Specifically for academic mobbing, this percentage ranges from 8% to 65% (Lester, 2013; Raskhauskas, 2006) in international studies, and from 16% to 55% in the Turkish context (Erdemir, 2015; Erdemir et al., 2020; Sert & Wigley, 2013).

As universities affect society as much as they are affected by it, academic mobbing needs to be explored more thoroughly. Workplace bullying has been studied in different countries and sectors, the most reported of which are industry, education (Hubert & Veldhoven, 2001) and health sector (Leon-Perez et al., 2019). In educational environments, lower levels rather than HE cover a larger space. Despite its serious consequences on the targeted faculty and the HES, mobbing in HE has been of less demand by researchers. Therefore, this study, focusing on mobbing in HE aims to close the gap in terms of contributing to the development of a healthy academic environment that supports its stakeholders to realize organizational and individual goals while protecting ethical values that do not give way to mobbing. Another thing is that, all sectors including HE are influenced by ever changing economic, social and technological developments in today's life. This already existing transformative dynamic is now challenged



with new viruses that take into control the whole world. In these unstable and unpredictable circumstances, it is important for HEIs to exert effective leadership that is open to development, learns from each other and respects individual differences. Especially for a country like Türkiye, which goes through frequent changes in its education system, creation of a healthy HES that has zero tolerance to mobbing is of utmost importance.

Drawing on Cultural Dimensions Model of Hofstede, this study aims to examine the phenomenon of academic mobbing from the perspective of targeted Turkish faculty at universities. The secondary aim of the study is to set a route for an “ideal academic culture” based on “supportive leadership” practices to enable universities as “mobbing-free zones”. The guiding research questions are as follows: (1) *What are the preparatory factors of academic mobbing?* (2) *What kind of mobbing behaviors are faculty exposed to?* (3) *What are the characteristics of perpetrators (mobbers) and targets (mobbees)?* (4) *What are the consequences of academic mobbing?* (5) *How can faculty cope with academic mobbing?*

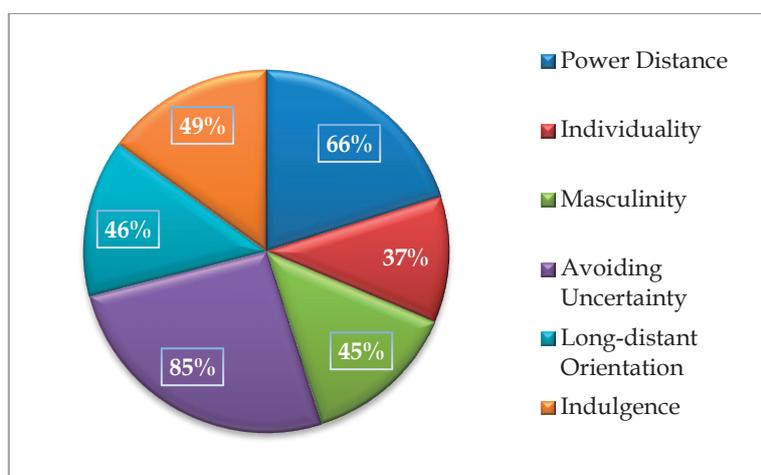
Theoretical Framework

Geert Hofstede’s “Cultural Dimensions Model”

The multidimensional concept of “culture” has been defined as “software of the mind” and collective programming of the mind that distinguishes one group of people from others (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 5-6). This description underlines the role of sharing emotions, views and behaviors by people who form that culture. Hofstede and his friends called this interaction displayed in thoughts, behaviors and attitudes as “the layers of culture” (p. 17). When examined from the perspective of HEIs, based on the principle of interaction in the formation of a culture, every individual is responsible for creating a healthy culture by using those layers. At this point Murphy (1989) draws the attention to the effect of organizations by stating that ethical workplace practices pass through ethical organizational culture. This is valid in HEIs too as organizational culture reminds faculty of their occupational responsibilities, roles and behavior patterns that are accepted or unaccepted by the organization.

Hofstede (2001; 2010; 2011), who explores how social and organizational cultures are formed, examined the culture of 76 countries and regions and collated them under six cultural dimensions as “high/low power distance, collectivistic/individualistic, high/low uncertainty avoidant, short/long term orientation, indulgent/restraint and masculine/feminine” (Figure 1).

In this study, the first two of these dimensions will be focused on in exploring academic mobbing in the Turkish context.



Note. Taken from Hofstede, 2010.

Figure 1. Hofstede's cultural dimensions –The case of Türkiye

Indicated in Figure 1, in the high-power-distance (66%) Turkish culture people view it normal that power is dissipated hierarchically rather than shared (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede n.d). This hierarchical structure in social and work life brings with itself corruption and an unequal approach in relationships (Hofstede, 2011). For instance, while individualistic western societies such as Denmark, Norway and Australia view themselves in equal status with others, eastern societies such as Japan, Korea and India respect authority (Rockstuhl et al., 2012; Shavitt et al., 2006). The situation for the latter, which Türkiye is a part of, can be explained with having a high power distance and a centralized culture (Hofstede et al., 2010). Hofstede resembles this cultural composition to the patriarchal family order where father is the head of the family and others submit to him.

In the same model, Turkish society being low in individualism (37%) and high in collectivism positively suggests that individuals will be loyal to their group, protect its benefits and take each other's responsibility. Negatively, inferring from Hofstede's collectivism/individualism dichotomy, the effort to maintain group harmony may cause suppression of real emotions and covering up of some moral issues, which may problematize settling down democracy in society. The other thing is, rewarding hard work with only inner satisfaction, as in collectivist cultures, rather than material rewards too, as in individualistic



cultures, is demotivating in terms of achieving a challenging goal, and thus, may affect individual and/or collective success adversely.

With regard to academic mobbing, as high power distance wipes off the equality perception between the faculty and the director, it situates faculty as passive and powerless right from the beginning. Hence, the director holding the position power in hand stacks the odds in his favor in the slightest dispute that may arise in between the two, and requires the faculty to put more effort to prove oneself. Even in collectivist cultures, individuals have their own dispositions that may go against dominant cultural norms. Namely, an individualist faculty wanting to express her opinion freely and expecting others to respect this, may contradict with a collectivist director that favors high-power distance. Thus, preventing this outcome to escalate into mobbing requires everyone in HEIs to have high consciousness about individual and cultural differences and act in a solution oriented, responsible manner.

In collectivistic societies, there is more nepotism and structures like “in-group” and “clique” (Hofstede, n.d). In other words, “high power distance” and “collectivist culture” act as enabling factors for groupings/cliques in academia. However, as mobbing takes place based on perceived power imbalance between the parties (Einarsen et al., 2003, p. 15), cliques as such combine their forces along with a common goal (Shavitt et al., 2006) and prepare the suitable grounds to exert mobbing on individuals who stand against their goals. The other attention grabbing issue about collectivism is the feeling of “belonging”. It may be assumed that if individuals do not feel belong to their institutions, they will not be loyal to them either, not consider each other’s benefits and not take on responsibility, as an indication of a clash with the dominant culture. Considering the fact that mobbing occurs due to such kinds of unresolved conflicts (Rayner et al., 2002), especially directors at all levels but faculty as well should find ways to create an inclusive culture that fosters the feeling of commitment and tolerates differences rather than allows the formation of cliques. Considering that in a nepotistic society it takes more time to form a trust-based environment (Hofstede, n.d), the seeds to create an anti-mobbing academic environment should be sown immediately as they can be collected only in the middle to the long-run.

(Academic) Mobbing

The first systematic descriptions of mobbing was made by Leymann (1996) as “workplace-related psychological problem”, “ganging up on someone” and “psychological

terror” (p. 165). Einarsen and Raknes (1997 as cited in Einarsen et al., 2019, p. 673), on the other hand, called mobbing as “workplace bullying” and defined it as:

... direct or indirect aggressive behavior directed either deliberately or unintendedly toward organizational member(s) by other members, perceived as humiliating, offensive and causing severe distress for the victim and in some cases obstructing job performance and/or causing a general unpleasant work environment.

The concept of mobbing is used with other words synonymously in the literature some of which are “bullying” (Einarsen et al., 2003), “emotional abuse” (Davenport et al., 2003; Keashly, 1998; Lester, 2013), and “workplace trauma” (Wilson, 1991). When bullying is used on its own, it refers to a physically more powerful or a bigger child physically attacking a less powerful one. When it is used as “workplace bullying” (Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Salin, 2003; Vartia, 2003) it suggests psychological attacks at work, or as Tinaz (2006) calls “psychological abuse”. In this study, while mobbing in HEIs is referred to as “academic mobbing”, attackers are named as “perpetrators” or “mobbers”, and individuals who are mobbed as “targets”.

Although the main duty of universities is to create environments where independent behaviors and thoughts can develop, unfortunately, they are also places where mobbing is witnessed frequently. When compared with mobbing in other institutions, academic mobbing shows some differences. While Westhues (2006) states that mobbing can be experienced in institutions that are described by high job security, subjective performance measures and bureaucratic structure, Crawford (1997) suggests that this description suits very well with educational institutions. Westhues (2005) also states that university campuses are perfect grounds for mobbing culture to flourish and that academic mobbing develops more implicitly: “*Academic knives are more polished and keen than those made of steel, and they are thrown with such grace that targets sometimes scarcely know they have been stabbed in the back until their campus lives are lost*” (p. 46). Literature suggests, mobbing in educational environments is one of the most frequent one with 42%, followed by health and banking sectors (Yıldız, 2007). Yet another study indicated that, out of 2400 mobbing targets, 14% was composed of schools, universities and other educational institutions (Leymann, 1996). Hence, just as the definition of mobbing clarifies the severity of the phenomenon, the reflections in educational institutions indicate its prevalence.



Leadership

As leaders are key people who shape organizations a lot with their visions, decisions and implementations, leader behaviors and their relationships with employees have been explored frequently. There is not a single definition of leadership as it possesses many qualities. In 1950, Stogdill making one of the first definitions of leadership as: “*the process (act) of influencing the activities of an organized group in its efforts toward goal setting and goal achievement.*” (p. 4) stressed that leadership is more about the process of affecting others rather than a composition of personal traits. The trend in 90’s led by Bass (1990) explained that leadership is not only a process but the way of communicating among group members to construct a situation or perceptions and wishes of group members. During the same period, there was also the trend of “leaders and their followers” as well as the approach of Bennis, that viewed leadership as the capacity to transform the vision into reality (Bennis & Townsend, 1995).

Indeed, it is not possible to meet the needs of the 21st century based on the definitions of the 20th century. Therefore, today’s leadership definition should be made again with reference to the globalized world and the accompanying conditions that challenged HEIs. Although the aim here is not to come up with a definition of leadership, it is important to state leadership qualities required to meet the needs of the present era. Accordingly, the leader should be a person who makes it possible for the organization and its members to reach their goals by also allowing organizational members to use their potentials and bring forth their unique qualities, who instills the values of meritocracy, collegiality and solidarity, and pioneers a transparent, solution-oriented system.

When favorable leader qualities were sought, the following took the lead: motivation-power linked with emotional intelligence, empathy, the ability to make a correct decision, intuition and imagination, responsibility-consciousness, sense of humor, balanced personality and sense of justice (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008; O’Moore & Lynch, 2007). Constructive and effective leadership styles constitute the subject matter of many studies (Tepper, 2007). However, as downward mobbing, i.e., from the director to the employee, is one of the most important issues at workplaces (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2003), examining the dark side of leadership can be more meaningful. It allows us to grasp the scope of the matter better and only in this way, ineffective leadership qualities can be developed and destructive leadership prevented (Einarsen et al., 2007). Poor leadership is described in aggressive behaviors, abuse, punishment,

high rates of employee stress (Offermann & Hellmann, 1996) and interpersonal conflicts. When these are combined with negative social climate, they escalate into mobbing (Bowie et al., 2005). Destructive leadership and organizational culture are indicated as the two important predictors of mobbing (Einarsen, 1999; Davenport et al., 2002; Leymann, 1990; Vartia, 1996). In some studies, leadership has been stated as the predecessor of workplace mobbing (Einarsen, 1999; Hoel et al., 2010; Leymann, 1993; O'Moore & Lynch, 2007; Stouten et al., 2010). The fact that academic mobbing originated more from leadership weaknesses was also reported in national studies (Erdemir et al., 2020; Fettahlioğlu, 2008). In the education sector, the ones who said that they were mobbed by their directors were 38% (Hubert & Veldhoven, 2001) and teachers and university personnel were the most mobbed group (Einarsen, 1999).

Organizations that do not function well due to mobbing (Simon & Simon, 2006) are regarded as emotionally unsafe or unhealthy (Hoy et al., 1991). In this sense, leaders serve as the primary contact for employees to report concerns and need to be the ones to keep the workplace mobbing-free (Bandow & Hunter, 2008). However, the fact that some academic leaders perceive mobbing as a managerial style (Martin & La Van, 2010) makes the solution to this problem even more difficult. Lester (2013) argues that directors need to be proactive to rethink current policies to manage academic bullies on their campus. Indeed, it has to be accepted by academic leadership that mobbing is mainly an organizational problem. Only in this way steps to take precautions and eliminate the problem can be taken.

Academic Mobbing and Leadership Styles

While effective leadership can stimulate people to become better in their jobs, negative leadership styles such as autocrat, tyrant, dictator or authoritarian can increase mobbing behaviors (Blasé & Blase, 2002). Many studies have been conducted to test the effect of different leadership styles on employees. This study focuses on mainly two groups of leadership behaviors; under the “destructive leadership styles” as *autocratic* and *laissez-faire* and under the “positive leadership styles” as *democratic* and *transformational*.

Autocratic Leadership

Leaders adopting autocratic leadership are typically directive, allow no participation in decisions, and create aggression and lower subordinate satisfaction, which decreases productivity in the long run (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008). These leaders can also be called



toxic leaders and *petty tyranny* (Ashforth, 1994; Einarsen et al, 2007) since they indulge in tyrannical and unpredictable management, causing low leader endorsement and greater psychological distance from subordinates. Studies show a positive correlation between bullying and autocratic leadership (Einarsen et al., 1994, Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Peker et al., 2018). For instance, in the study conducted by O'Moore et al. (2012), 90% of the bullied respondents reported to have been exposed to autocratic leadership. In another study (O'Moore & Lynch, 2007), while 51% of the non-mobbed participants felt the leadership was autocratic, this number was 67% with the mobbed ones. One other research (Agervold, 2009; Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004) investigating the relationship between environmental conditions and academic mobbing revealed similar results in that autocratic leadership style was frequently reported by people working in departments where mobbing was prevalent. In parallel with these findings, Poussard and Çamuroğlu, (2009) in their study indicated that autocratic leadership was the most effective reason lying beneath workplace mobbing besides stress, conflict, work-overload, injustice and uncertainty. Whether it is called autocratic or petty tyranny, these leadership styles make up more than 50% of mobbing cases (Ashforth, 1994), which is alarming. However, it is important to note that these results are not to totally reject autocratic leadership, as autocratic leaders can be desirable at times of crisis, in time-sensitive situations and/or under conditions that require structure (Houghton & Yoho, 2005).

Laissez-Faire Leadership

Laissez-faire leadership, one of passive-avoidant leadership styles (Avolio & Bass, 2004), gives complete freedom to the group and leaves it to the subordinates to make a decision. At first glance, this may sound positive, especially for employees in research and development industry who need more freedom and less close supervision to allow for creativity. However, as studies suggest, the absence of sufficient leadership may lead to disappointment and stress among some employees, escalating into tensed relationships (Einarsen, 1999). Research reveals that laissez-faire leadership is positively and directly correlated with workplace mobbing (Aasland et al., 2010; Hoel et al., 2010; Leymann, 1996; Nielsen, 2013; Tsuno & Kawakami, 2015), causes the most aggression compared to the other leadership styles (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008), and is regarded as being the least effective (Bass & Avolio, 1994) style. It was associated with adverse effects such as health issues and diminished job satisfaction (Skogstad et al., 2017). Referring to the disassociation of the leader with the followers in laissez faire leadership, studies explicate that as the negative behavior is not challenged in this kind of a

leadership, it aggravates mobbing (Einarsen, 1999; Leymann, 1996). In another study, 15% of the non-mobbed and 18% of the mobbed employees agreed that laissez-faire leadership was practiced in their workplaces (O'Moore & Lynch, 2007). It was found in a Turkish study with 500 primary school teachers from different cities that in schools where school principals adopted "low level of leadership" behaviors, teachers were exposed to middle level mobbing and the more principals practiced laissez-faire leadership the higher levels of mobbing teachers experienced (Cemaloğlu, 2007). To conclude, due to its direct positive relationship with mobbing and the resulting stress, laissez-faire leadership is not the ideal choice to be implemented in HEIs.

Democratic Leadership

Based on Bass (1990)'s proposition of categorizing leaders as being highly active and passive, Houghton and Carbo (2008) examine democratic leadership under two titles as power-building (active) and empowered (passive). While the prior, i.e., active democratic leaders focus on the development of employees and trust-building, the latter, i.e., passive democratic leaders encourage employees to assume their own responsibilities (Stewart & Manz, 1995). Because of these positive qualities of democratic leadership, it is accepted to lessen the effects of mobbing-related organizational factors by creating constructive and functional work conditions (Houghton & Carbo, 2008; Peker et al., 2018). In one of the studies, while the mobbed respondents with 15% accepted that their managers used democratic leadership style, this percentage rose up to 33% with non-mobbed respondents (O'Moore & Lynch, 2007). This may indicate that not only having a democratic leader does not totally prevent mobbing, but mobbed people also perceive their director's leadership style as less democratic than the non-mobbed ones. Hence, it can be concluded that the existing mobbing practices in an organization affects the perceptions of the mobbed more.

Transformative Leadership

Transformative leadership presents itself as an effective style in terms of predicting employee psychological well-being positively (Arnold, 2017) and workplace mobbing negatively (Cemaloğlu, 2011; Ertüreten, 2013; Nielsen, 2013; Tsuno & Kawakami, 2015). Additionally, it stimulates employees intellectually and increases individual attention and concentration (Avolio & Bass, 2004; Lowe et al., 1996). It also leads to lower levels of role stress (Podsakoff et al., 1996), enhances creativity and motivation (Burns, 1978), job



satisfaction, employee performance and organizational commitment (Brown & Moshavi, 2002; Hater & Bass, 1988; Koh et al., 1995) and provides stimulus for change and innovation (Bass & Avolio, 1994). As it respects individual needs and differences and encourages a supportive organizational climate (Bass, 1998), and a unifying organizational culture (Corrigan et al., 2002), it contributes to the prevention of academic mobbing as well.

Academic Mobbing and Organizational Culture

Organizational culture refers to common symbols, beliefs, attitudes and values in an organization. It can be described as something “not primarily *inside* people’s heads, but somewhere between the heads of a group of people where symbols and meanings are publicly expressed” (Bryman et al., 2011, p. 153). Thus, what people reflect based on their beliefs and behavior patterns help form the culture in an organization. In this way people give meaning to their experiences, i.e. culture is shared by others.

Fuller (2010, pp. 59-60), explains healthy work culture as the one where “*everyone, regardless of rank, exhibits a questioning attitude*”. He adds that only by showing respect for all ideas, maintaining transparency in decision making, being accountable, wiping out unneeded hierarchy and blessing cultural diversity, environment of respect can survive. Hoy et al. (1991), on the other hand, define healthy organizational culture as the one to have effective leaders who provide direction and encouragement for academic excellence. However, it is not the case in every organization. Namely, a strong relationship was found between organizational culture and workplace mobbing (Davenport et al., 2002; Galanaki, 2012; Leymann, 1996; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2010; Vartia, 1996; Zapf, 1999). At this point job and social structure are important as they define workplace dynamics and the culture (Leymann, 1996; Zapf & Einarsen, 2011). In other words, it is suggested that mobbing prevails in organizational cultures where incivility, rude behaviors and indignity are tolerated (Aquino & Lamertz, 2004). In such organizations, hierarchical structure rather than adhocracy culture was reported to prevail (Omari, 2007) and the subjects of that hierarchy, i.e., the leaders, are said to create, evolve and manipulate organizational culture (Schein, 2004). Hence, leaders should be the responsible figures to formulate ways to resolve abusive behaviors embedded in the culture.

Considering that culture defines behavioral standards in an organization, higher professional standards should be aimed for as poorly defined cultural norms and behaviors set a breeding ground for academic mobbing (Lester, 2013; Leymann, 1990; O'Moore & Lynch, 2007; Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott, 2008; Twale & De Luca, 2008). Davenport et al. (2002) defines dysfunctional organizational culture by poor leadership (51%), non-recognition of achievement (46%), workload (51%) and unsupportive management (48%), which he states contribute to mobbing formation. For cleansing the academic environment, some elements need to be instilled into the culture as; empowerment of faculty, and encouragement of creativity, cooperation and trust. While doing so, holding a critical perspective will not only continuously improve the culture and make perpetrators apparent, but also keep people alert and discourage them from being submissive.

METHOD

Being one of the qualitative methods, phenomenological design was used as it allows an in-depth understanding of a sensitive issue like mobbing through targets' lived experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Accordingly, 2 pilot and in total 12 semi-structured, tape-recorded, one-on-one interviews were conducted in November and December 2022. As the topic of mobbing is a sensitive one, it was important that the participants felt secure to talk with the interviewer. Hence, the participants were reassured that the data would be made available only to the researcher's access and be saved with a password in the researcher's computer, the signatures on the consent forms would not be matched with the answers to the questions and that instead of the real names of the participants, codes (e.g., P1, P2,..) would be used. These explanations enabled the participants to feel safe and join the interview based on voluntary purposes. The interviews typically lasted for about thirty minutes before which the participants were informed about the content and ethical procedures. The instrument, for which expert opinion had already been taken, was developed by the researcher aligned with the available literature and the research questions. 11 content and process questions were prepared that gave the chance to the researcher to explore the problem in depth (e.g., How is the general atmosphere in the department? Is everyone equally treated in the department?).

The participants as faculty members were purposefully selected through maximum variation sampling and reached through snowball method based on the criteria that they had been working at the same university at least for one year and exposed to academic mobbing. It

is suggested that in phenomenological studies sample size range from 3 to10 (Creswell, 2014). Based on the saturation level in this study, 12 participants were interviewed with. They displayed a diverse profile regarding their gender, departments, university type (state/foundation), cities lived in (Eskişehir, Ankara, İstanbul, Konya) and the year of experience (4-19) (Table 1).

The interviews were first transcribed and then through MAXQDA software program, inductive content analysis was made to categorize the data into themes and codes based on the nature of the data, research questions and the literature. To ensure trustworthiness, after coding, the data were subjected to member check to allow for changes to be made. To enable transferability of the data to other studies, thick descriptions were made that enabled reflection of the details of the participants' experiences. The data will be preserved until a publication is produced within a year, and the information gathered from this study will not be used for any other future research.

Table 1. The Demographic Information of the Participants

Participants	Gender	Department	University Type	Title	Year of Experience
P1	F	English Language Teaching (ELT)-Preparatory School	State	Instructor- PhD student	19
P2	F	ELT-Freshman	State	Instructor	6
P3	F	International Office	State	Research Assistant (RA) - PhD student	10
P4	F	Educational Sciences	State	RA - PhD student	7
P5	M	International Office	State	RA - PhD student	13
P6	F	Educational Sciences	State	RA - PhD student	7
P7	F	ELT-Freshman	State	Instructor - MA	7
P8	F	ELT-Preparatory School	Foundation	Instructor - PhD student	16
P9	F	ELT-Preparatory School	Foundation	Instructor - MA	4
P10	F	ELT-Preparatory School	Foundation	Instructor	12
P11	M	Physics	Foundation	RA – MA	5
P12	M	Foreign Language Teaching	State	Assist. Prof.-PhD student	18

Limitations

Academic mobbing was analyzed relying on faculty perspectives but not directors. This may have shadowed some other preparatory factors lying beneath. Therefore, it is suggested that future studies be conducted in mixed method and cover the perspectives of the supervisors

as well. This will also help put forth a clearer picture of academic mobbing to better inform policy makers about the measures they can take.

RESULTS

The study aimed at investigating and reflecting the experiences and perspectives of Turkish faculty who were exposed to mobbing at their universities. Analyzing the data, there appeared 5 themes with their sub-categories and 46 codes (Table 2).

Table 2. The Data Analyzed into Themes and Codes

Themes	Sub-categories	Codes	Participants	Frequency	Explanation	Research questions
Predecessors of Academic Mobbing		power groups and inequality	All	High		
		threat perception, jealousy	1,3,5,7,8,10,11	High		
		autocratic leadership	All	High	Factors that prepare the ground for mobbing	1
		laissez faire leadership	P11	Low		
		professional and personal incompetency	3,5,11	Low		
	learned helplessness	1,7	Low			
Mobbing Behaviors		capacity and relevance related duties	1,2,3,4,6,7,9,11,12	High		
		gossips, rumors	1,7,9	Low	Mobbing behaviors faculty were exposed to	2
		humiliation, irritation, sarcasm	3,4,6-10	Middle		
	ignoring and isolating	1,6	Low			
Personal Characteristics	Perpetrator	being unappreciative	2-8; 10	High	Perpetrator and target dispositions	3
		obedience-seeking	4,10	Low		



		closed communication	7,9	Low	
		psychologically unhealthy	3	Low	
	Target	being different and diligent	1,3,4,7,11	Middle	
		determined, strong	1,3,4,6-12	High	
		self-confident	1,3,4-11	High	
		aggressive, impulsive	1,3,6,7,9,11	Middle	
Consequences					
	Material	resignation	4,7,8,9,10,12	Middle	
		financial loss	4,11	Low	
	Immaterial	lack of belonging	1-10	High	
	Negative				
		psychological and psychosomatic effects	1,3-5,7-9,10,11	High	
		questioning oneself	2,4,6,8,10	Low	
		feeling insecure	1,4,5,11,12	Low	The effects of academic mobbing on the targets
		lost time and ideals	1,3,4,9,11,12	Middle	
		demotivation	1,2,3,4,6,7,9	Middle	
	Immaterial	isolation	1,3,4,5,11,12	Middle	
	Positive	self-confidence boost	8,9	Low	
		exculpation	1,11	Low	
		ambition	10	Low	
Faculty Coping Strategies and Suggestions					
	Coping				
		social support	1-11	High	
		oral - written complaints	1-6, 9,10	Middle	
		health experts and medication	1,3-6, 9,10	Middle	Faculty coping strategies for mobbing and their suggestions for prevention
		suing	3-5, 9,11	Low	
		improving oneself academically	1,5,7	Low	
		keeping distant	3,5,6	Low	
		facing the mobbers	1,2,3,6,7,8,9, 10,11, 12	High	

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Suggestions			
Directors	giving and receiving feedback	5,6,7,11,12	Low
	meritocracy	2,4,5,7,8,11,12	Middle
	independent inspection boards	1,4,5	Low
Faculty	not worth staying	1,3-6,10	Middle
	bonding and forming unions	1,4,8,9,10	Low
	keeping distant	3,6,10	Low
	talking to authorities	2,5,6	Low
	facing the mobber	3	Low
The state	mobbing law	3,10,11	Low

Theme 1: Predecessors of Academic Mobbing

This section is about the first research question that inquires the preparatory factors of academic mobbing.

Power Groups and Inequality

All faculty believed that they were discriminated and treated unequally by their directors due to a nepotistic approach and existence of *power groups* that were in close contact with the directors. These in-group members were privileged in that they had fewer duties, taught fewer classes, took a leave or a health report without difficulty. P3 added that the fact that she did more work than others in the office caused her to continuously account for the work she did and not take a leave as easily as others who had fewer duties and were less experienced. This, she perceived as a mobbing behavior and although she raised this issue several times, it caused her relationship with the director to be tensed. P6 observed that while other research assistants were given informal leaves to study in the library for the PhD proficiency exam, were not given extra workload and did not even come to the department, she was being checked whether she was still in the office at 5 p.m. or given weekend duties in the department by a faculty.

An example to *unequal* treatment was about not being allowed to follow the PhD courses at a different university while another faculty in the power group was. P1 said the excuse was given by the director as the heavy workload in the department that needed help. For P1,



mobbing behavior lasted for 12 years, after which she could get enrolled again to the PhD program but due to lost motivation she had to drop the program eventually. P12 and P8 experienced similar setbacks to continue with their graduate classes. P8 explained the director's biased treatment toward the power groups as:

Other instructors, whose academic capabilities were not so distinctive, were praised, at least they never experienced the psychological pressure we felt. His relationship with others was like the little angels of him running around for him; it was like they were in a summer camp having a holiday and everybody was happy. We were like working in two different institutions.

Autocratic Leadership

All faculty found the exerted leadership as too controlling and coercive. While P12 explained it as *"They were trying to crush us down by pressurizing"* and P1 told about the process she had been through as:

Now everybody does master's and PhD in the school. Being secluded in those years, being punished, as if I did something wrong...it was just getting enrolled with the director's knowledge; nothing was hidden but an inquiry was started against me. In that period, one of the vice presidents was waiting for me by the door, in my class hour. Indeed, she was given the right to do her PhD at that time but she didn't see it as a right for me.

P4, who was having her PhD in another city than her workplace said she received a letter from the directorate: *"To make me uncomfortable, they sent me a letter saying that I had to transfer my PhD to the city I was working in. It was a kind of threat and there wasn't the same PhD program there."* P8, referring to the atmosphere in the department said: *"I had been feeling under very serious pressure by all means. ..._Under such pressure, it was almost impossible to exercise friendship or have healthy relationships."* P8 continued to tell about the trauma caused by her supervisor:

The vice president, after hearing that I was accepted to the program, told me that we had to talk a bit. Then, he locked the door and said to me that I could never go the PhD program I was accepted for! That day was a milestone for me. He said that “we work under a very hectic schedule here and you are the one to know this the best, so we cannot give you a permission to go to that program”.

The reflections of the autocratic leadership style were in the form of “top-down decision-making”, applied to faculty by their directors, and to the directors by their supervisors. This, P8 said, caused “fear” and “untrustworthiness” in the campus. P6 said “*the decisions were taken by the department head and the faculty were made known about them. Sometimes changes were made in the assigned tasks when we asked for it, but mostly we were not involved*”. A similar work atmosphere was described by P11 as: “*hypocritical, self-seeking and indecent*”. P9 gave examples about what she called “the slavish mindset” around the campus referring to the excessive control mechanism:

For example, you went to school five minutes late or left five minutes early. They said the chairman of the board of trustees got very angry with this and decided to deduct those minutes from our salary at the end of the month. Once, they were even multiplied by three. The dean, the vice rector were watching the campus from their windows; there was extreme surveillance until 10 p.m. when we still had classes. Once the dean had interrupted my class and questioned the number of students and why they didn’t show up. All my concentration was lost!

Laissez Faire Leadership

P11’s director was being *uninterested* in finding fair solutions to upcoming problems in the department:

For instance, the director says something needs to be done in the department. Looked from outside, the instructors are doing the work, there seems to be no problem for the director. However, the problem about the work is resolved by “us”, racking “our” brains just to have a “fair” work allocation, not the director is doing this! ... Ideally, “the director” needs to allocate the duties among us fairly, in a written form, before setting the task. Since we know that in the present system she won’t do it fairly, we don’t ask her to do it.



The decisions, P11 said, should also be well-thought by taking into account the course load of instructors:

When giving the responsibility of teaching a course to an instructor, to enable quality teaching, the director should give minimum teaching hour to the instructor. She needs to feel this responsibility and empathize, especially when there are instructors taking their job seriously. She has to ask for an additional teaching staff and want us to do the extra duties in the summer term when there is no teaching. This is about leadership skills and necessitates taking on responsibility and devotion.

Threat Perception and Jealousy

Many of the mobbed faculty thought they were seen as threats to the authority and to some colleagues, which also caused them to be the targets of jealousy. P7 said “*you know the competition among women; I think I couldn’t be bared with*”. P11 explained it as:

In none of the academic circles I have been in until now, has it been beyond jealousy. Because people are uneducated and get hollow PhDs, associate professorships and full professorships to increase their salaries and be reputable. I mean I don’t believe they do anything believing in knowledge.

P10 thought the director’s jealousy stemmed from his own inferiority complex:

For years, he told me “you are after my position”. By the way, I don’t even have a master’s degree. How can I be a director? For instance, I want a duty, I am not given it; he thinks I can influence others.

Professional and Personal Incompetency

P5 said the incompetency of the directors in their jobs fueled the feeling of jealousy in them and caused them to despise the quality of the work of instructors. Whereas P3 thought the reason for abusive behaviors were related to managerial and personal weaknesses:

While some colleagues promote themselves well, I keep silent as I may have taken a back seat not having been praised for so long. This being the case, the other colleague may have appeared to work more. If she was a good director, she could have observed well to understand what was going on.

Learned Helplessness

A few faculties thought learned helplessness that mobbed individuals or bystanders felt was one of the enabling factors of mobbing it left the ground for perpetrators to do whatever they wanted. P1 said: *“I was the first one to be accepted to a PhD program in the department and was exposed to 10-12-year mobbing, and other faculty backed off with learned helplessness upon seeing me being psychologically abused.”*

Similarly, P 7 explained it as: *“People think wrongly in the department as: ‘it’s been just the way it is’. People don’t have the notion that ‘we suffered for years, so the new comers should not’. They are like ‘let sleeping dogs lie’.”*

Theme 2: Mobbing Behaviors

This section explored the second research question, as the kinds of mobbing behaviors faculty were exposed to.

Capacity and Relevance Related Duties

Faculty said they were given duties over or below their capacity or some were even given no duty. Regarding the latter, P1 said that due to the jealousy of the director, a kind of punishment was given to her; i.e., asking her to teach four classes (more than other instructors) because she was specifically requested by a professor in another department to teach writing to her class due to her superior performance. Whereas P11 said he was asked to do the secretarial work too and teach at the same time, neither of which was within his job description. P9 said because she resisted accepting an irrelevant duty, she was not given any class to teach and made a substitute instructor. P9, being an English language instructor, refused to teach free English classes to a coordinator at her university as this duty was not within her job description.

Humiliation, Irritation, Sarcasm

P6 sadly reported that her perpetrator’s irritation of her as: *“oh, you have come to school! We thought you resigned!”* P8 said her director approached her with a *“sarcastic approach”* to despise her efforts for the good works she performed. P9 complained that her director told her off twice by the secretary; the first one because her colleague complained about her to the director and the second one was like: *“She said I gave a high mark to a student. She humiliated me and I got angry and talked back to her.”* P4 sadly talked about her director’s behavior: *“we*



had a loss in our family and despite hearing about this, he expressed his sympathy with a smile on his face as if he was mocking. This wore me down a lot”.

P7 reported the teacher trainer’s personal comments attacking her and how she felt humiliated:

Months later I had started working at the university, she said: “We accepted you from the backup position; first, we liked you and then we got disappointed”. Such kinds of personal opinions tired me a lot here. When I went to the department head to talk about this, she was already informed about it and I was told off in a very aggressive tone.

Gossips, Rumor

P9 said “*there was discrimination and people were spreading gossip*”. P1 said:

Gossip culture was so widespread at those times; everybody was prejudiced against each other and these were reflected to the department head. ... They warned newly employed faculty as: “be careful with X, don’t talk to him/her!”. They made this against me a lot. They talked behind me as: “she makes groups, be careful!” or “she does her job very well ‘but’ ...; she reads a lot ‘but’ she is impulsive!” I was laughing at them because these things did not serve anything. I made very good relationships with people and they saw this.

Ignoring and Isolating

P1 said that her ideas had been ignored by the director and the power group in the meetings for the last four years whereas the same ideas raised later on by the power-group members were always appreciated. She also said due to these unfair treatments and not being given a class to teach, she isolated herself from others by spending the whole semester in the library reading academic magazines. P6 also complained about being ignored: “*She pretended not to see me in meetings while she talked to everybody, and then she came to me and said ‘Oh were you here?’*”

Theme 3: Personal Characteristics

This section answers the third research question as the distinctive personal characteristics of the perpetrators and the targets. It should be underlined that these specifications cannot

legitimize the mobbing behaviors the targets were exposed to but are just observations that need to be examined further by other researchers so that more definitive results can be attained.

Perpetrator-Related

The perpetrators of mobbing were all directors at different levels at universities; i.e. an exposure to top-down mobbing was experienced. “Being unappreciative” was the most common behavior of the perpetrators. P7 said she was not appreciated by her director when she did a job well and was responded as “*no problem, okay!*”. P5 refrained from similar issues: “*Appreciation mechanism doesn’t work well here. Although I work until 8-9 pm, I don’t expect anything financial. There is no promotion system or a system to be the office director. The rector appoints whoever he wants*”. P8 also felt degraded by the director’s treatment of her achievements: “*I was in an atmosphere where my education and my existence were so much respected and valued but this man spoiled them all!*”.

Another issue was about “obedience-seeking” directors. P4 explained:

On my first day, he didn’t say any welcoming words to me but told me to submit my documents. He gave short answers as if I was a rookie. He is a curmudgeon; he continuously desires flattery. He didn’t want me to work there. ... There is bondage among assistants too; there are a few favorite ones.

Being “closed to communication” was the other attacker characteristic that demotivated the targets. P7, referring to her director, exemplified it as: “*In order to smooth our relationship, I had a box of chocolate made for her. She said ‘take your chocolate with you!’. I emailed her for the same reason but there was no reply*”. P9 expressed the situation as “*if you resist her or don’t agree with her, she becomes moody; she is not open to criticism*”.

Some directors being “psychologically unhealthy” was another issue, which P3 described as:

She is such a hardheaded person; even if she comes with a pipe of peace, her opinion doesn’t change. I told this to her too. In the slightest problem, this rises to the surface. ... I think she is manic-depressive. I have it in my family too, she is so similar. When someone is schizoid, she shows great interest to that person. I have always thought that in her distressed periods she argued with me making me a scapegoat.



Target-Related

One of the most common dispositions was being “determined and strong”. Quite a number of faculty felt that they were righteous in resisting mobbing and defending their rights. P1 said being the vice president in the department, she did not submit to the president but questioned his decisions at times. Similarly, P7 said: *“I am a resisting character; I mean I question everything and they don’t like this. When I was in [...] university they perceived my character as positive; as a person who thinks critically, but here, negatively, as if I am awkward”*.

Another attention grabbing common quality of the participants was “self-confidence”. P3 said that it was her self-confidence that they tried to shatter. P1 expressed her self-confidence as: *“I don’t like group decisions; if the group believes in what I believe, that’s okay but I can stand against my friends if I believe in something else”*. P5, on the other hand, said *“I never questioned my self-worth; I understood how valuable I was when I received positive reactions from people I was not expecting when my office director humiliated me”*.

Being “different and more diligent” than others were also among common qualities. These could be neutral qualities such as thinking differently than colleagues or positive and competitive qualities like having uncommon hobbies and interests, or being academically successful that have caused them to be perceived as threats. Interests and success stories of the participants were about: wanting to become a cultural attaché, a documentary producer and a book writer (P1); being transferred to one of the best universities in the world as a PhD student to study with a well-known professor, playing the cello and the guitar, being a diver and underwater photographer, and visiting uncommon countries (P7); being able to read and write before primary school and having read classical books until then, and being able to play chess at the age of three (P11). As for the negative qualities, some instructors accepted that they had the “anger management problem”, and were outspoken, which caused them to be perceived as “impulsive” and as a threat.

Theme 4: Consequences of Academic Mobbing

This section clarifies the fourth research question that queries the effects of mobbing on the targets, which can be examined as “material” and “immaterial” consequences. For the prior, some faculty had to “resign” and go to another university (P8), and some others could not do it

due to financial difficulties (P1), not finding a suitable alternative then or thinking that it (mobbing) would pass (P9). Some faculty experienced “financial burdens” after they resigned (P4, P11) and had to survive with their close contacts’ supports.

As for the “immaterial” consequences, although there were a few positive effects, most were negative such as “lack of belonging”, as P1 suggested:

During the period I was not let go to my PhD courses, I brought all my stuff home; I did not belong to their mentally. I had only a dictionary in my room and academic magazines. They punished me by putting me in charge of a passive duty that they thought would hurt and degrade me. Thanks for the god that I don’t evaluate myself with what they do to me but then, my ties were totally cut. If I didn’t need money then, I would do my PhD, and to survive, I would sell anything in the market! I am not resentful as even that involves some kind of an emotion.

The second most encountered immaterial outcome was “psychological and psychosomatic effects”. P1 said the petitions she had to write “*were something very tiring. ... I was worn out so much during that period.*” For P3, it was as follows:

I went through very troubled times. I didn’t spare time to anything else. I put on a lot of weight, I got acnes. If I had not experienced that process, I could have been more sociable or maybe gotten married. However, in depression, your vision gets narrow and your energy is lowered.

Similarly, P7 said seeing that such unprofessional behaviors took place in an important university of Türkiye, she felt so negative, sad, frustrated and surprised. P5 said he could not tell what he was going through to his wife, which made him feel depressed. He added “*I felt everybody was looking at me. I couldn’t go to lunch with anyone; it affected my social life a lot. Even when that person left, the effects did not pass for months*”. On the other hand, P11, having sued the mobbers said: “*they didn’t accept my letter of resignation and pretended that I escaped from school without telling them about it and they made me worn out during the lawsuit for seven months*”. P10, about getting the diabetes after her exposure to mobbing said: “*it affected my motivation a lot; if I had stayed there one or two more years, I would be hospitalized*”.

“Questioning oneself” was another disturbing emotion some faculty felt. P8 described the period as: “*First of all, you get into a very big internal conflict in terms of the undeserved*



behavior you are faced with. You start to question why you are there". While one faculty questioned herself whether she was too tolerant (P2), another (P4) asked herself the question:

Why me? I was valedictorian at the university; I asked myself why they did not want me to have a PhD. I asked the question why" all the time. ... Even my husband told me whether I was doing something wrong or something was missing with me. When I heard that they were doing the same things to others too, I knew that it was nothing to do with me but them.

Although it was not a frequent outcome, some faculty "felt insecure" both financially and psychologically. While P11 said he never felt comfortable in that environment, P4 said that she lost her self-confidence. For P12, it was firstly financial insecurity he felt and then the lack of confidence:

There is self-confidence among others but they don't want to spread that confidence around to prevent it to become organized. ... You cannot tell an opinion of yours comfortably in the academic environment. This is something that needs to be handled psychologically.

It was sad to hear that some faculty deeply felt their "lost time and ideals" during and in the aftermath of mobbing. P4 said that rather than sparing her precious time to getting ready for the doctorate qualification exam then, she lost time moving to another city to get away from her mobbing experience. P1 added:

Starting a PhD thirteen years after you earned the right to do so means that you have finished your career before you started. ... It could have been so much different. For the last two years I am looking forward to the early retirement law; normally why would I think about it? Faculty, in general, don't want to leave the university because it is comfortable.

P2 explained why she got "demotivated": "*because I was teaching the same demanding course over and over again, there was no break, no reason for enthusiasm, which I could feel by teaching another course, for example. These inevitably reflect to the students*". P6 acknowledged that her work life was affected highly as she did not want to do work or go to school during the mobbing period. Similarly, P7 said she even did not have the motivation to

use the course materials she had prepared. Such kind of psychology also caused some faculty feel “isolated” as P1 explained:

Not to put them [her colleagues] in a difficult situation, I got isolated. For a semester, I came to school in the morning when nobody was there yet and left after everybody left in the evening. I didn’t talk to anyone; when they saw me months later, they even found my hair had grown.

Interestingly, some faculty also experienced the positive effects of academic mobbing. One of them was “self-confidence-boost” as P8 explained: “*This situation raised my self-confidence in terms of realizing my self-worth because what he did to me made me think that I was so valuable, and for this reason, he was annoying me all the time*”. P10 suggested that she became more “ambitious” about her academic goals. P1 said another positive outcome was that her “exculpation” finally came out when all her colleagues obtained the right to do graduate studies owing to her struggles throughout the years. P11 also said that he believed he proved his righteousness with the lawsuit he initiated as this helped everybody to learn about the mobbers’ wrong doings.

Theme 5: Faculty Coping Strategies and Suggestions

This section clarifies the fifth research question by presenting both coping strategies faculty used and their suggestions for the prevention of mobbing.

Coping Strategies

One of the most commonly used strategy was getting “social support” from friends and family members. However, P1 added that the person she is today, she would get a professional help, considering the difficulties she had been through. While P4 said she shared her depressive period with her husband and family members, P5 said his wife could not understand his problem and he did not have a friend to share it with either. P8 reported her talk with her mother as: “*She told me not to fight with this problem as I had the capacity to find a good job everywhere. She wanted me to change the job without thinking for a moment. Hearing this, you feel yourself in safety*”.

The other coping strategy for faculty was making “oral and written complaints”, which was not easy all the time as they had to contact with authority figures or people they had issues with. Some faculty had to go and talk to the (vice) president a few times to raise their problems



or to other authority figures whom they thought could help. However, it was sad to hear that none of the faculty could receive a favorable answer.

A number of faculty made use of “health experts and medication” to get through the mobbing period. While one said it was helpful that she was on medication for 1.5 years (P10), another said it was not of much help maybe because she did not get frequent sessions (P3). Some other faculty tried to cope with it on their own by taking some tranquilizers (P4) or with mind power (P1, P5, P6, P9). However, the ones who did not get expert help said it would have been better if they did.

Although “suing” the perpetrator was an option by some faculty, they chose not to do it as some thought it would not yield desired results (P3). Others said mobbing related lawsuits were not so common in Türkiye or legislative process would last very long and also that they had no witness to support them in the court. The only person who sued the perpetrator (P11) said it cost him 7-month unemployment. “Improving oneself academically” to pursue new and promising career paths was another strategy offered. This could be applying for a PhD program or finding a position as a leader, both of which would ease making a decision to leave work. For instance, P7 was accepted from a competitive university in the United States for the PhD program and planned to move there with her husband for a totally new life. “Keeping distant” to minimize the contact with mobbers was also a method that some faculty said comforted them. Finally, “facing the mobber” was a frequent but futile strategy followed as the perpetrators denied their faults, and in some cases this even caused more aggression.

Suggestions

Faculty had some suggestions for three groups of people as “directors” including department heads, deans and rectors; “faculty” and “the state”. For the first group, the importance of making open policies were underlined besides empathizing and getting 360-degree “feedback” through periodical meetings and/or enclosed and autonomous questionnaires. About getting feedback P12 stated: “*you need to know that whatever you say will be taken into consideration because people withdraw themselves when they see they are not valued*”. P7, remembering how she was treated, stressed that directors’ approach when giving feedback should be democratic but not like: “*I am like this, ... know your place, shut up and do what I say!*”. *Otherwise, strings are stretched. When people take the power in their hands, they don’t know what to do*”.

Valuing “meritocracy” in promotions and work allocations were stated more frequently than other suggestions. A faculty thought that a person should not be made a director solely based on their academic success but it should be questioned whether the person has a humane approach (P7) and maintains unity through preventing power groups (P4). P8’s expectations of a director were:

In order for the management to work properly, they should be composed of people who have self-confidence and the vision to delegate the right job to the right people. ... If the manager is not good, then an institution can collapse in the real sense.

P1 and a few others drew the attention to the need for “independent inspection boards” formed outside the university, to which people would trust more. P1 explained why the proficiency of directors should be observed by that board: *“For example they appoint a director to the department for three consecutive years and then for three more years! Is that person successful there? Is s/he wanted there?”*

For “faculty”, the most frequently offered suggestion was to leave the mobbing-breeding work as it is “not worth staying” there baring the abuse. Faculty said if they had had better opportunities or financial support, they would have left that work immediately. P4 even said: *“stay unemployed and hungry but don’t bare that psychology!”*. Other suggestions were, “keeping distant” from all faculty and directors as much as possible; “facing the mobber”; “talking to authorities” with the idea in mind that once a mobber always a mobber (P5); and “bonding and forming unions” (P9) that would especially help in private sector since it sees employees as workers no matter what background they come from. For the last group, “the state”, it was suggested to form “mobbing laws” to protect employees and deter potential mobbers, which would also indirectly help make universities more autonomous through established meritocracy.

DISCUSSION

The study examined mobbing related perspectives of 12 targeted Turkish faculty. Analyzing the data, 5 themes and 46 codes were developed. The major results were compared and contrasted with the related literature. While doing so, Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions Model was made use of.



Answering the first research question, the perpetrators of academic mobbing were the directors, which was also supported by research (Rayner et al., 2002). Most directors adopted autocratic leadership style, which according to Agervold (2009) increases mobbing and ends up in what Namie and Namie (2009) call authoritative bullying. Similarly, in another study it was indicated that in faculties where negative leadership is implemented and unethical employee behaviors are prevalent, there is more mobbing (21%) (Erdemir, 2019). The finding that under the supervision of autocratic leaders' nepotism was observed can be explained with Hofstede (Hofstede, n.d)'s collectivist cultural dimension, which also refers to the existence of nepotistic tendencies and cliques.

The laissez-faire leadership, being another destructive style, was stated to escalate conflict development and workplace mobbing (Agotnes et al., 2020; Einarsen et al., 1994; Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Leymann, 1996) whereas in the use of transformational leadership, no conflict was observed (Agotnes et al., 2020). Also for the faculty who did not feel belong to their departments, or who observed helplessness and alienation (McCull-Kennedy & Anderson, 2002), the use of transformational leadership could have been helpful, as it positively affects organizational culture (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). Similarly, democratic leadership, by allowing employees to take on initiatives, make their own evaluations and set their own goals also leads to fewer mobbing cases (Houghton & Carbo, 2008; Houghton et al., 2021). Hence, owing to their constructive nature, while transformational and democratic leadership styles proved to build closer ties with employees and helped the prevention of academic mobbing, laissez faire and autocratic leadership styles triggered academic mobbing based on the current study findings.

Although in collectivist cultures like Türkiye, individuals tend to protect the benefits of the group and take on each other's responsibility (Hofstede et al., 2010; Notelaers et al., 2019), the present study findings proved that this quality of collectivism do not necessarily prevent mobbing. Referring to the second research question, some mobbing behaviors faculty were exposed to were isolation (also in Houghton et al., 2021), gossiping, spreading rumors (also in Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Zapf et al., 1996) ideas being ignored (also in Freedman & Vreven, 2016), humiliation and being given below or over-capacity duties (also in Leymann, 1996). The reason of these mobbing behaviors taking place can be explained by the disposition in collectivist cultures to oversee issues for the sake of maintaining harmony.

As for the third research question, the most frequently stated perpetrator characteristic, “being unappreciative”, was also reported by Einarsen (1999), who also stated that it can be overcome by constructive leadership. “Obedience-seeking” perpetrator characteristic can be aligned with the high-power-distance Turkish culture that sees the authority as superior. Although respect is not a negative notion, power distance should be at an acceptable amount as high power distance, to Özen (2009) is positively correlated with mobbing. The directors being “professionally and personally incompetent” and having “poor psychology” were backed by other researchers (Crawford, 1997; Zapf, 1999). Similarly, MacCarthy (2003, p. 232) stated perpetrators to be psychopaths and low-skilled individuals along with other negative qualities.

As can be inferred from target characteristics and targets’ explanations, being different in some way from others (Bozeman & Hershcovis, 2015), and being self-confident (Shallcross, 2003) were some reasons to be mobbed, as also indicated in the literature. Different than some researchers who reported that introverts who find it difficult to defend themselves are more likely to be mobbed (Coyne et al., 2000), this study found that faculty showing determination and strength to raise their opinions and defending their ideas were also mobbed. As the person in the latter character seems more extravert, Nielsen and Knardahl (2015) claim that this may also be annoying for colleagues and form a reason to be mobbed. Faculty being diligent, conscientious, highly qualified and performing better, as in the present study, could be irritating for others and cause the targets to be perceived as threats, and eventually be mobbed (Houghton et al., 2021; Lester, 2013; Nielsen & Knardahl, 2015; Tınaz, 2011; Westhues, 2005; Zapf, 1999; Zapf & Einarsen, 2003). On the negative side, having an anger management problem and being impulsive or feeling anxious have also been indicated in similar terms to be reasons for targeting (Coyne et al., 2000). However, from the environmentalist perspective, researchers also stress that personal dispositions are the “result” of mobbing, not the “reason” (Glasø et al., 2009) as individuals are exposed to influential factors in their social circles (Lewis & Orford, 2005; Srivastava et al., 2003). Hence, a traumatic event like mobbing may have caused a change of character in the targets rather than them possessing those characteristics innately. It should also be noted that both perpetrator and target characteristics are changeable and cannot be evaluated as definitive. Therefore, it is suggested that longitudinal studies be conducted to help conclude that certain characteristics constitute risk factors for mobbing (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018).

Although there is no definitive conclusion about the gender-based prevalence of mobbing, the fact that the majority of the participants being female has been reported in many other



studies too (Erdemir et al., 2020; Zapf et al., 2020). This may be explained with women reporting mobbing more readily than men (Rayner et al., 2002), that they are less self-assertive and less aggressive than men (which was not valid for this study) (Bjorkqvist, 1994) and/or women are represented less in effective positions than men at work (Salin, 2018). In other studies, women were the minority and they were exposed to mobbing more (Baş, 2011; Çevik, 2011; Günçavdı; 2015), which is backed by Leymann (1993)'s explanation that gender-based minority is likely to be mobbed more. Specifically, for Türkiye, male dominance in the cultural structure is a factor that cannot be ignored in shaping individuals' perspectives, including the academic culture. This may be a strong reason for abusive behaviors to be directed more towards women. Although there are studies reporting more women to be abused than men (Cayvarlı, 2013; Namie & Namie, 2009), the opposite is also true (Fettahlıoğlu, 2008). Hence, there is not definite evidence that proves one gender is mobbed more than the other.

Answering the fourth research question regarding the consequences of academic mobbing, just as almost all targeted faculty wanted to resign and leave their university, the literature indicates a correlation between mobbing and the intent to leave (Glambek et al., 2014; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). Especially HE faculty self-reported to have chosen to leave the mobbing generating organization (Taylor, 2012). The lack of belonging faculty felt, psychological and psychosomatic health issues, and financial loss were also cited by others (Lo Presti et al., 2019; Namie, 2021; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). Targets experiencing emotional disturbance after being psychologically abused has been indicated as a frequent outcome of mobbing in different cultures and countries too (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). As a psychosomatic symptom, diabetes came out in this study as well as in a meta-analytic study that mobbed individuals are 1.46% more likely to get diabetes (Xu et al., 2018). After being mobbed, experiencing familial issues (Tepper, 2000) and not being able to explain the mobbing process to the family members due to the fear of misjudgment (MacIntosh, 2005) were the commonly stated consequences, also aligned with this study. The other thing is that, although some faculty said they had anger management problems, which coincides with other research indicating that targets' emotions may not be stable (Glasø et al., 2007), target characteristics cannot solely explain mobbing since organizational factors (Salin, 2003) and psycho-social workplace environment also play important roles (Kwan et al., 2016).

As for the last research question, facing the mobbers as a coping strategy did not work in this study and even caused more aggression. Lester (2013)'s study indicated similar results as

39% of the participants said it escalated mobbing. Oral and written complaints, which were made at moderate levels in this study, was 5% in another study (Namie, 2021). This low percentage may be related to the disbelief of targets that the issue can be resolved. The other thing is that although almost all faculty said they made use of social support during the mobbing process, this support did not necessarily come from their colleagues but family members or friends outside of their workplace. Coworkers' reluctance to support the target was indicated as 13% in Namie (2021)'s study, and was explained by observers fearing that they would be targeted too (Rayner et al., 2002). The unwillingness of coworkers to support the target also signals the lack of trust among colleagues. It was also inferred from the participants' experiences that the nature of mobbing cannot be grasped easily by people outside the institution, even if they are the family members, which puts the targets into difficult situations in terms of feeling alone. In this sense, it is highly suggested that targets get professional help if they cannot find a way out. Finally, suing the perpetrator is a step taken by only one of the faculty, the rarity of which may be due to not having witnesses or the lack of mobbing law in Türkiye whereas many other countries have taken legislative initiatives to address mobbing cases. For instance, Sweden, as the leading one, has the most developed legal initiative under Labor Safety and Worker's Health (Yamada, 2003). While France, which established the victimology chair in 1994, accepts mobbing as a legal offense, Finland included both physical and psychological abuse in its Labor Law (Tınaz, 2006). Quebec took the first North American decision towards passing the law in 2004 (McDonald, 2006), and the United States devised legislative measures in certain states (Namie & Namie, 2011). Türkiye handles mobbing cases under certain legislative measures such as the Labor Law, the Law of Obligations, or the Penal Code (Erdemir, 2012). Türkiye also ratified 1996 dated European Social Charter (revised) in 2007 that regulated the dignity at work (Resmi Gazete, 2007) and The Turkish Prime Ministry passed a Circular in 2011 called Preventing Psychological Abuse (Mobbing) at Work that requires the establishment of a board and a Social Security Communication Center to address mobbing (Resmi Gazete, 2011).

Finally, as to eradicate mobbing in HEIs, the targets in this study and Çevik (2011) suggested consideration of meritocracy in promotions. The other striking measure offered was inspecting universities by independent boards (also in Erdemir, 2015). While many participants defended the idea that it was not worth staying long in the mobbing-prone institution, this was implemented by 12% of employees in another study (Pearson et al., 2000). Just as some faculty

underlined the importance of directors being open to getting periodical feedback from faculty, and also empathizing when giving feedback, studies also indicate that supervisors should respond to the problems and wishes of employees as this influences the good of organizations and the intention to leave (McClellan et al., 2013). Lastly, for the state authorities, the targets suggested preparing a deterrent mobbing law. Although there has been some measures taken to address mobbing in the Turkish law, the creation of a specific mobbing law could help address the core of the phenomenon.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The main implication is for organizational leaders, i.e. university president, deans and department heads and other middle level directors. The first condition to cope with mobbing is to accept the reality of mobbing and announce the university that university leadership is determined to implement a zero-tolerance policy against mobbing. This is because leaders are held responsible for mobbing to come into play at first place (Hauge et al., 2007, Salin, 2003) as well as for diminishing the recurrence of the issue and the seriousness of its repercussions (Namie, 2007). Leaders are highly influential in organizations and have important roles in fighting with this phenomenon especially considering the close link between academic mobbing and poor leadership (Leymann, 1996; Vartia, 2003). At this point the kind of leaders that will be appointed to the university needs to be evaluated carefully by the university presidency as costs of hiring a potential mobber may outweigh its benefits.

Some measures that can be taken by academic leaders in HEIs are; training middle and top level management as well as administrative and academic staff and students about all kinds of harassment. This should accompany the development of an anti-mobbing mechanism that involves both preventive measures as well as guiding procedures to be followed in case of a mobbing incident. Besides, 360 degree evaluations should be compulsory at universities, which can be implemented by an out-sourced reliable independent body made up of different occupations such as human resources specialist, lawyer, and mental health expert. Next is to ensure that promotional criteria for academic leaders and faculty be based on meritocracy.

In the formation of the organizational culture, the planned actions of leadership play an important role. Therefore, to prevent mobbing, the leadership need to work towards maintaining suitable working conditions, i.e. appointing knowledgeable and correct people for the correct position, ensuring collegiality, supporting professional development, encouraging cooperative

culture. Being a part of the organizational culture, human resources department at universities should not only support the benefits of the university presidency but also create a reliable and responsible mechanism so that targets of mobbing can share their experiences to find guidance and solutions. Namely, having ethical systems in organizations has been linked with having a superior human resources management (Einarsen et al., 2019). Finally, in order for mobbing incidents to be examined thoroughly and fairly, legal regulations should be specified urgently. The state should also allocate more positions for medical staff at hospitals and train them specifically for the treatment of mobbing victims.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

Referring to Hofstede's cultural dimensions, a more low-power distant model should be adopted where people in authority should be questioned and asked to be accountable for their behaviors. Faculty needs to be given equal rights, respected by directors, and involved in the decision-making mechanism so that conflicts can be communicated more easily without escalating into mobbing. Having a collectivist culture, Turkish academia should internalize the positive aspects of it as defending each other's interests and taking responsibility for one another. Turkish academia should also be open to the positive sides of individualistic culture. For instance, rather than doing away with intrinsic rewards only, faculty should know that it is their right to expect individual rewards too, for their hard work and accomplishments. In addition, diversity of opinions should also be respected, as an indication of an individualistic society. Hence, to create a healthier and balanced cultural environment and mobbing-free academia, positive sides of collectivist/individualist and high/low power distant cultures should be implemented.

CONCLUSION

This study explored academic mobbing at Turkish universities by resorting to the lived experiences of the targeted faculty. The discussions were based on Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Model. Accordingly, the major findings of the study are briefly stated below.

The first finding of the study put forth the predecessors of academic mobbing as HE directors' adoption of destructive leadership styles, i.e., autocratic and laissez-faire leadership. These were accompanied with professional and personal in competencies that also gave way to the formation of cliques, nepotism and inequalities. The other important finding is about the



cultural dimension's model of Hofstede being used, which helped explain the mobbing-prone academic environment with the dominant organizational and country culture. This culture affected practiced leadership styles, which caused the prevalence of threat, fear, jealousy, humiliation, isolation and rumors in the environment. The third finding revealed the most frequent mobbing behaviors as the amount and relevance of work being given, humiliation and sarcasm. The fourth outcome framed the most observed mobber characteristics as being unappreciative and seeking obedience, and the most common target qualities as being determined, strong, self-confident as well as being impulsive and aggressive. The fifth finding explicated the most frequent harsh material consequences of academic mobbing for the faculty as resignation, and the immaterial ones as psychological and psychosomatic effects, and the lack of belonging to the organization along with many other serious results. At the sixth place comes the top two coping strategies of faculty as getting social support and facing the mobbers. The seventh finding is about the most common suggestions as to ensure meritocracy for leaders, to leave the mobbing-prone institution for faculty, and to create a mobbing law for the state. The final outcome is about the theoretical model of Hofstede, which also relates to the first finding, i.e., the preferred leadership styles of directors. While the use of autocratic leadership style suggests the prevalence of high power distance between directors and faculty that triggered mobbing activities, that of laissez-faire leadership, though infrequent in use, not only clashed with the collectivistic nature of Turkish society that expect their interests to be taken care of by their leader but also bred a mobbing-prone academic culture. Hence, the study also suggests the use of positive leadership styles as transformative and democratic, to discourage mobbing in academia and support the development of a healthy workplace.

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