

# Strategies of Migrant Textile Workers in Turkey to Cope with Workplace Bullying: A Qualitative Study\*

(Research Article)

*Türkiye'deki Göçmen Tekstil İşçilerinin İşyeri Zorbalığıyla Başa Çıkma Stratejileri: Nitel Bir Araştırma*

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## ABSTRACT

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Despite being discussed by the scientific community and practitioners for decades, bullying remains a severe problem in modern work life. The problem will likely continue to grow exponentially with the reality of migration. In fact, immigrant workers have been reported to be in the highest risk group in terms of being exposed to workplace bullying. The aim of the study is to understand the extent to which migrant textile workers in Turkey are exposed to bullying behaviors and the strategies they develop to cope with these unintended behaviors. The data of the research, which has a qualitative design, was collected through in-depth interviews (N=24) and analyzed thematically. The study demonstrates that migrant workers utilize a range of strategies to handle workplace bullying, which can be classified into three main categories: (1) individual strategies aimed at enhancing job-related competencies, (2) preventive measures adopted to avoid the emergence of bullying, and (3) eliminative interventions intended to stop existing bullying incidents. Individual strategies primarily involve building resilience by improving job-related skills. Preventive measures include forming supportive relationships with native colleagues and deliberately choosing safer and more inclusive work environments. Finally, eliminative strategies include mental support seeking, quiet quitting, and alternative employment options. These strategies underscore the multifaceted nature of their coping mechanisms.

## ÖZET

**Anahtar Kelimeler:**  
İş Yeri Zorbalığı, Başa Çıkma Stratejileri,  
Göçmen İşçiler, Tekstil Sektörü, Türkiye

Zorbalık, bilim camiası ve uygulayıcılar tarafından onlarca yıldır tartışılmasına rağmen modern iş yaşamında ağır bir sorun olmaya devam etmektedir. Göç gerçeğiyle birlikte bu sorunun katlanarak büyümeye devam etmesi muhtemeldir. Nitekim göçmen işçilerin işyeri zorbalığına maruz kalma açısından en yüksek risk grubunda olduğu belirtilmektedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Türkiye'de tekstil sektöründe çalışan göçmen işçilerin zorbalık davranışlarına ne ölçüde maruz kaldıklarını ve bu istenmeyen davranışlarla başa çıkmak için geliştirdikleri stratejileri anlamaktır. Nitel bir tasarıma sahip olan araştırmanın verileri (N=24) derinlemesine görüşmeler yoluyla toplanmış ve tematik olarak analiz edilmiştir. Çalışma, göçmen işçilerin işyerinde zorbalıkla başa çıkmak için üç temel yaklaşım olarak sınıflandırılabilir bir dizi strateji benimsediğini göstermektedir: (1) iş ile ilgili yetkinlikleri artırmaya yönelik bireysel stratejiler, (2) zorbalığın ortaya çıkmasını önlemek amacıyla benimsenen önleyici tedbirler ve (3) mevcut zorbalık vakalarını durdurmaya yönelik ortadan kaldırıcı müdahaleler. Bireysel stratejiler temel olarak işle ilgili becerilerin geliştirilerek dayanıklılık kazanılmasını içermektedir. Önleyici tedbirler, yerli meslektaşlarla destekleyici ilişkiler kurmayı ve daha güvenli, kapsayıcı çalışma ortamlarının bilinçli olarak tercih edilmesini kapsamaktadır. Son olarak, ortadan kaldırıcı stratejiler; mental destek arayışını, sessiz istifa eğilimlerini ve alternatif istihdam seçeneklerine yönelmeyi içermektedir. Bu stratejiler, göçmen işçilerin başa çıkma mekanizmalarının çok yönlü doğasının altını çizmektedir.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Management scholars have been studying unintended organizational behavior for decades. Workplace mistreatment is an umbrella term that encompasses abusive and aggressive behaviors employees may encounter on a regular basis in their workplace. One of those, workplace bullying, refers to continuous exposure to negative and aggressive behaviors (Hoel, Einarsen & Cooper, 2002, p.6). Being exposed to such behavior might cause physical illness (Aagestad et al., 2014; Glambek et al., 2018), depression (Gullander et al., 2014; Hoprekstad et al., 2019), burnout (Naseer & Raja, 2021) and even suicidal ideation (Nielsen et al., 2016). In fact, those who are exposed to bullying behaviors may face undesirable situations such as domestic incivility (Sarwar, Bashir & Karim Khan, 2021) and work-family conflict (Liang, 2020). Thus, these undesirable behaviors are likely to go beyond organizational boundaries throughout the whole society.

Beyond the victims' traumas and the repercussions of these traumas into social problems, the costs of such behaviors to organizations are also quite considerable. Apart from direct costs like significant compensation liabilities resulting from judicial procedures, indirect ones might incur, such as talent loss, which may seriously damage organizational performance. Furthermore, experiencing and/or witnessing such behaviors may undermine the relational dynamics of organizations as a whole. The reason is that bullying is likely to spill over throughout organizations that extend beyond the perpetrator and the target (Rayner, Hoel & Cooper, 2001, p. 54). Considering the significant and far-reaching costs of workplace bullying, these challenges have become even more complex in the context of global trends such as migration.

Due to the increasing pace of migration, workplace bullying has become a more widespread and pressing global concern. Evidence suggests immigrant workers are more likely than others to be subjected to this type of conduct. In Hogh et al. (2011), for instance, it is evidenced that non-Western immigrants had a significantly higher risk of exposure to bullying at work independent of previous bullying experiences. A more in-depth study by Cheo (2017) identified that migrants experience differential treatment in overtime, verbal harassment, overwork, and work abuse. The difficulties migrants face already leave them vulnerable, but when they encounter such behavior in the host country, it makes things even worse. In a sense, the consequences of such mistreatments are expected to be more severe for these disadvantaged workers than others.

The existing body of research on workplace bullying towards immigrant workers appears to be insufficient, suggesting the need for further investigations. Furthermore, coping strategies of targets towards such behaviors have not been properly explored. This, in fact, suggests that previous studies have just provided a snapshot of the current situation. This study, on the other hand, primarily aims to understand the coping strategies of immigrant workers with such unintended behaviors. The current one is promising since it is one of the few that identifies workplace bullying coping strategies. The findings are expected to guide migrant workers to get by such unpleasant behaviors. It will also allow managers to devise new techniques that would intervene before bullying behavior occurs.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1. Workplace Bullying and Coping Strategies

Bullying defines situations in which an individual is subjected to negative acts by supervisors, coworkers, or subordinates on a regular and long-term basis (Einarsen, 2000). This definition includes three distinctive features that distinguish workplace bullying from other workplace mistreatments: first, the victim systematically becomes the target of negative and unpleasant social behavior. Second, the exposure occurs over a long period of time. Finally, the target feels trapped in the situation and unable to stop the unintended treatment (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). Hershcovis (2011), on the other hand, designates the power imbalance between the target and the perpetrator as a distinctive feature of workplace bullying.

The effects of bullying in the workplace are far more devastating than the effects of other forms of abuse. A comparative study by Hershcovis (2011) noted that incivility is usually low intensity and unclear target, whereas bullying is high intensity and clear intention, and there is an asymmetrical power balance between actors. Hence, being exposed to workplace bullying has a detrimental effect on employees both physically and mentally (Boudrias, Trépanier & Salin, 2021). These behaviors have also been ascertained to spill over into the social lives of those exposed, causing work-family conflict (Liang, 2020) and domestic incivility (Sarwar, Bashir & Karim Khan, 2021). In a sense, the consequences of such unfavorable experiences transcend institutional boundaries and turn into a social problem.

Researchers have categorized the possible causes of bullying behavior. According to studies focused on individual causes, these behaviors may result from personality traits. Parkins, Fishbein & Ritchey (2006), for instance, have shown that low social liking and high social dominance tendencies can contribute to formation such behaviors. In their study, Wilson & Nagy (2017) found that bullying behavior is positively correlated to neurotic personality

traits. A similar argument is made by Baughman et al. (2012) who claim such behavior may result from the dark triad (Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy). Apart from individual factors, group dynamics have also been considered as a means of explaining bullying behavior. Skogstad et al. (2011) identified that in-group characteristics such as role ambiguity, and role conflict are predictors of bullying behavior. Escartín et al. (2013), on the other hand, evidenced that identification with the group reduces the likelihood of being bullied.

Finally, institutional factors that may lead to bullying behavior have been strived to be understood. Samnani & Singh (2012) classified organizational factors that cause bullying behavior under four categories: Leadership & management style, organizational culture & ethical climate, organizational policies, and situational factors. For instance, the power of the leader (Einarsen et al., 1994), while it has been argued that overly weak and passive leadership may invite bullying behavior by failing to solve existing problems (Strandmark & Hallberg, 2007). Others have argued that a hyper-competitive organizational culture with unclear ethical norms may cause such abusive behaviors (Coyne, Craig & Smith-Lee Chong, 2004). Research has also shown that similar abusive behaviors are likely to occur in organizations where power imbalance is high (Salin, 2003).

The consequences of bullying behaviors have been shown to be destructive for individuals, organizations, and even society. Individuals exposed to such behavior often suffer physical and mental problems, including post-traumatic stress and anxiety disorders (Rayner, Hoel & Cooper, 2001). As a form of bullying behavior, physical intimidation can even lead to suicidal ideation (Nielsen et al., 2016). Bullying behavior, which has devastating consequences on individuals, is also very costly for organizations. A significant cost of workplace bullying is employee turnover (Coetzee & van Dyk, 2018; Gawas, 2022). This is not just because high cost incurred recruiting and training new employees, but also loss of talented human resources. It is also possible for organizations to face judicial liabilities, which might damage their reputations as well. Finally, the problem spills over beyond organizational boundaries since it affects the target's entire life. Recent studies show that those who are exposed to bullying behaviors may face undesirable situations such as domestic incivility (Sarwar, Bashir & Karim Khan, 2021) and work-family conflict (Liang, 2020). In a sense, bullying means more than failing to achieve career goals; it harms the target and the entire social environment around him or her.

Various coping strategies have been reported for dealing with workplace bullying, depending on the characteristics of the bully, the context, and the dynamics of the organization. These strategies are commonly categorized as *problem-focused*, *emotion-focused*, or *avoidance-oriented* responses. Problem-focused strategies aim to address the bullying situation directly, including actions such as confronting the perpetrator or seeking managerial or institutional support (Xu, Gutierrez & Kim, 2008; Ho et al., 2022). Emotion-focused strategies focus on managing the psychological impact of bullying and often include drawing strength from religion, family, or peer support (Tschirhart et al., 2019), as well as leveraging hope and problem-solving skills to cope effectively (Tortumlu & Uzun, 2022). Avoidance-oriented coping, which is especially prevalent when formal mechanisms are perceived as inaccessible, includes behaviors such as resignation, job change, or social withdrawal (Liem et al., 2021). Furthermore, recent research has begun to highlight *collective coping mechanisms*, such as union support or solidarity among migrant workers, as a crucial and underexplored dimension of workplace resilience (Shinnar & Zamantılı Nayır, 2019). These strategies reflect not only individual agencies but also the broader socio-cultural and legal environments in which migrant workers attempt to navigate workplace bullying.

## 2.2. Workplace Bullying Towards Migrant Workers

The risk of exposing abusive and discriminatory behaviors of migrants is far greater than that of non-migrant counterparts because of their status and the complexity of migrant work policies in host countries (Liem et al., 2021). These workers often find themselves in a highly vulnerable position, subject to systemic abuse and discrimination that is deeply ingrained in contextual conditions. Research indicates that migrant workers are disproportionately affected by exploitative labor practices, which include wage theft, poor working conditions, and a lack of legal protections (Bretones, 2020). A study focusing on domestic workers in Portugal reveals that migrant domestic workers are particularly vulnerable to severe forms of abuse, including sexual harassment and psychological violence (da Conceição Figueiredo et al., 2018). Similarly, the research on Latino migrant day laborers highlights the systemic marginalization and discrimination they face, which adversely affects their health and well-being (Fleming et al., 2017).

It is not only the frequency of experiencing such unintended conducts, but they are also more vulnerable in terms of consequences of such behaviors compared to native counterparts. This vulnerability is triggered by both personal and contextual challenges. Since migrant workers live apart from their families and lack social support, they are particularly vulnerable to mental health issues such as depression and anxiety (Ho et al., 2022). Additionally, these workers face numerous challenges due to cultural distances and legal frameworks in host countries. They frequently encounter stereotypes, are viewed as disposable workers, and are often blamed for being financial burdens (Enh et al., 2024). In some countries, legal frameworks do not adequately protect migrant workers from discrimination and xenophobia (Devadason & Meng, 2014). Studies have shown that in countries

experiencing economic decline, migrant workers are often scapegoated and face increased discrimination, further marginalizing them within the legal system and society at large (International Labour Organization, 2011; Vogt Isaksen, 2019).

Discriminatory attitudes towards migrant workers are particularly prevalent in certain industries, which have consequently developed reputations for poor labor practices. These sectors are frequently cited for their exploitative conditions and mistreatment of migrant laborers. The reason is that migrant workers are often employed in industries that demand low-skilled labor due to their limited educational backgrounds and qualifications (Castles & Miller, 2009). The fishing industry, for instance, is notorious for its poor labor practices, where migrant workers often endure severe forms of labor exploitation, including unpaid wages, excessive working hours, and inhumane living conditions (Murphy, Doyle & Murphy, 2020). These abuses are perpetuated by weak enforcement of labor laws and the complex legal frameworks governing migrant labor. Another area of work where migrant workers is exposed to discriminatory behavior, including workplace bullying, is in the textile & garment industry. Numerous studies document widespread instances of poor labor practices toward migrants in various countries globally, including Malaysia (Crisis, 2010), India (Baskaran, Nachiappan, & Rahman, 2012), Bangladesh (Islam et al., 2011), and Turkey (Mutlu et al., 2018).

This highlights the pervasive challenges faced by migrant workers globally, particularly within industries known for exploitative labor practices. It underscores the critical need to examine how migrant workers navigate and cope with workplace bullying and discrimination. Central research questions include understanding the psychological and socio-economic impacts of workplace bullying on migrant populations and exploring the effectiveness of existing coping strategies employed by migrant workers. These questions will serve as a starting point for a deeper understanding of migrant workers' experiences of workplace bullying and provide evidence-based interventions that seek to improve their rights and well-being within the workplace.

### 3. RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research method to delve into the coping strategies of immigrant workers, specifically focusing on Syrian migrants working in the textile industry in Turkey, who have experienced workplace bullying. The interpretative phenomenological design is chosen for its strength in exploring the depth and complexities of individual experiences (Murray & Holmes, 2014; Smith & Fieldsend, 2021), allowing for a detailed understanding of the coping mechanisms these workers employ. Through in-depth interviews, this research aims to uncover the personal narratives, feelings, and strategies of the participants, providing insights into their resilience and responses to challenging work environments. The study aims to answer the following research questions:

*What forms of workplace bullying do migrant textile workers face?*

*What coping strategies do they adopt?*

The participants of this study consist of twenty-four (24) Syrian migrants who are currently employed in the textile industry in Turkey. The sample size was determined based on the concept of *information power* rather than numerical saturation. As suggested by Malterud et al. (2016), the adequacy of a qualitative sample depends not only on the number of participants, but also on factors such as the aim of the study, sample specificity, use of established theory, quality of dialogue. Given the focused research aim, the homogeneity of the sample (i.e., Syrian migrant workers in the textile sector), and the richness of the narratives obtained through in-depth interviews, the selected sample was considered sufficient to generate meaningful insights.

Participants are selected through purposive sampling to ensure that all participants have experienced workplace bullying and are thus able to contribute valuable insights into the coping strategies they have employed. This sampling method is chosen to focus on the specific experiences of Syrian workers in the textile industry, where instances of workplace bullying are reportedly prevalent (Malik et al., 2019). The demographic characteristics of the participants are summarized in *Table 1*.

**Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Participants**

1	32	F	PS	Yes / SS	NO/MAMI
2	19	M	PS	No	NO/MAMI
3	24	F	HS	Yes / DS	NO/MAMI
4	21	M	HS	Yes / DS	MO/MIMI
5	29	M	HS	Yes / DS	NO/MAMI
6	42	F	BC	Yes / DS	NO/MIMI
7	20	F	HS	No	NO/MIMI
8	22	F	PS	No	NO/MIMI

9	33	M	HS	Yes / both SS & DS	NO/MIMI
10	39	M	PS	Yes / SS	NO/MIMI
11	31	M	BC	Yes / DS	NO/MAMI
12	27	M	HS	No	NO/MAMI
13	22	F	HS	No	MO/MIMI
14	26	F	PS	No	NO/MAMI
15	46	M	BC	Yes / both SS & DS	MO/MAMI
16	41	M	BC	Yes / both SS & DS	MO/MAMI
17	18	M	PS	Yes / DS	NO/MIMI
18	51	M	HS	Yes / SS	NO/MIMI
19	40	F	HS	Yes / SS	MO/MAMI
20	32	M	BC	Yes / both SS & DS	NO/MAMI
21	19	F	HS	No	NO/MIMI
22	24	F	PS	Yes / DS	NO/MIMI
23	27	F	PS	Yes / DS	NO/MIMI
24	53	M	HS	Yes / both SS & DS	MO/MAMI

**NO/MAMI:** Native ownership/ majority of workers are migrants, **MO/MAMI:** Migrant ownership/ majority of workers are migrants, **NO/MIMI:** Native ownership/ Minority of workers are migrants, **MO/MIMI:** Migrant ownership/ minority of workers are migrants; **SS:** Same industry, **DS:** Different industry; **PS:** Primary school, **HS:** High school, **BC:** Bachelor's degree,; **F:** Female, **M:** Male

Data collection is conducted through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the selected participants. Each interview is designed to last approximately 60-90 minutes and is conducted in Arabic, the native language of the participants, to ensure comfort and facilitate open, honest dialogue. The interviews, which were conducted between November and December 2024, are structured around a series of open-ended questions that guide the discussion towards the participants' experiences of workplace bullying and the strategies they have used to cope with these situations. Prior to the interviews, participants are informed of the study's purpose, its voluntary nature, and the confidentiality of their responses, with informed consent obtained from each participant.

The interviews are recorded with the participants' consent, transcribed verbatim, and then translated into English for analysis. The data analysis employs a thematic analysis approach, which involves a detailed examination of the transcriptions to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within the data (Nowell et al., 2017). Initial codes are generated by reading through the data and noting down recurrent coping strategies and experiences. These codes are then collated into potential themes, which are reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately reflect the interview data. This iterative process allows for the emergence of detailed themes that encapsulate the coping strategies of Syrian migrants in the face of workplace bullying.

To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of this study, the principles of credibility, transferability, and confirmability, as outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), were carefully followed. Credibility was strengthened by spending considerable time engaging with participants. Some participants were invited to review and validate their interview transcripts and the researchers' preliminary interpretations. Transferability was supported by offering rich, detailed descriptions of the participants, the research setting, and the broader context so that readers can judge how the findings may apply to other situations. Confirmability was addressed by keeping an audit trail, which included reflective notes and records of the analytical steps taken, helping to reduce personal bias and promote transparency throughout the research process.

The study adheres to ethical standards to protect the dignity, rights, and welfare of the participants. Ethical approval is obtained from the Mersin University Ethical Committee (12.24/364) prior to commencing the study. Participants are ensured confidentiality and anonymity; all identifying information is removed from the transcripts and any publications resulting from this research. Participants are also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without any consequences.

#### 4. FINDINGS

The first question, we asked participants, *“What types of bullying have you encountered, and how frequently have you experienced it?”* Their responses indicated widespread exposure to different forms of bullying, including verbal harassment, discrimination based on nationality, exclusion, and denial of basic rights. One participant described,

*“They made me feel that being Syrian was wrong or shameful. When I performed well at work, they would say, ‘You haven’t even benefited your own country, why would you benefit us?’”*

This sentiment was echoed by others who recounted being blamed for societal problems such as rising rents and unemployment. Another worker shared,

*“[...] One time, a colleague told me, ‘You Syrians are taking our jobs, and if it weren’t for you, we would have higher salaries.’”*

Another participant detailed how local workers would openly criticize management for employing Syrians, noting:

*“[...] I witnessed local employees telling the managers loudly, ‘You should have hired locals instead of Syrians.’”*

This suggests that bullying is not just an interpersonal issue but is embedded in the organizational culture, where both overt and subtle forms of xenophobia manifest. Other forms of bullying were more structural, as some participants reported wage discrimination and being deprived of social security. Another participant added.

*“Syrian workers are paid less than local employees, and we are not given the same respect or legal rights,”*

This reflects how bullying was also tied to systemic inequalities.

In many cases, bullying stemmed from language barriers, with workers who spoke little Turkish being ridiculed or isolated. One participant noted,

*“[...] During my early years, my poor Turkish skills made me an easy target for harassment, and many of my job experiences ended in failure because of this.”*

These examples underline how bullying is not just a one-off occurrence, but a pervasive problem deeply intertwined with the social and economic status of Syrian migrants. The extent and frequency of bullying, as described by the participants, suggest an environment where discrimination and exclusion are commonplace.

#### **4.1. Core Strategies**

Many participants cited language barriers as a major factor contributing to their victimization. Improving their Turkish skills was a critical coping strategy to reduce bullying. One participant shared,

*“I used to experience a lot of harassment because of my poor Turkish, but I’ve been working hard to improve my language skills through online platforms and face-to-face classes [...].”*

Improving their language skills enabled participants to reduce misunderstandings and communicate their needs more effectively, which also helped in negotiating fair treatment and preventing further bullying.

Another coping mechanism was improving their professional skills to increase their value in the workplace. One participant explained,

*“I started as an unskilled laborer and was often bullied because I was seen as incompetent. But over time, I learned textile design programs and now I’m highly valued in the market [...].”*

Another worker, originally trained as a computer programmer, noted,

*“[...] When I applied my technical skills from my previous job in Syria to textile design, I became a respected worker here.”*

This suggests that workers who invest in self-development are better able to shield themselves from the negative impacts of bullying and may even transform their work relationships through increased competence.

A few participants expressed that they aimed to transition into managerial positions as a way to cope with bullying. One participant mentioned,

*“[...] I paid close attention to how my supervisors managed and tried to imitate their behavior whenever possible. I believe that improving my managerial skills could help me deal with workplace bullying more effectively.”*

For others, managing a team of migrant workers allowed them to control the work environment and shield their subordinates from bullying.

*“[...] I managed a small team of 20 workers, and having technical and managerial knowledge helped me solve issues that others were unable to deal with,”* said another one.

Social networks played a significant role in helping workers cope. Many participants described joining groups on social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Telegram, where migrants share job opportunities and advice. One participant explained,

*“I try to expand my work-related networks as much as possible because recommendations are usually how I find jobs. The larger my network, the better my chances of finding a less problematic workplace.”*

This statement reflects a coping strategy, in which the participant proactively seeks to avoid repeated exposure to bullying by identifying alternative employment options. The intention to expand work-related networks is not merely for career progression, but specifically to enable exit from hostile work environments.

#### 4.2. Preventive Approaches

Some participants found that building relationships with local employees helped prevent bullying and improve workplace dynamics. One participant stated,

*“At first, I only socialized with other migrants, but I realized the importance of communicating with the local population. Now, I have close local friends, which has helped me overcome some of the adaptation challenges.”*

Another worker emphasized how these alliances helped mitigate tensions:

*“I’ve developed good relationships with my native counterparts, and they’ve taught me technical skills while helping me understand local work practices [...].”*

Many workers felt safer and better treated when employed by migrant-owned businesses. One participant noted,

*“[...] In workplaces owned by migrants, we are treated more fairly. They are more empathetic towards us since they share similar experiences.”*

Another participant added,

*“When problems arise in migrant-owned businesses, there’s often a migrant friend who acts as a mediator, helping to resolve conflicts [...].”*

Several participants sought workplaces where the majority of employees were migrants.

*“Since I came to Turkey, my top priority when choosing a job has been to work in places where most of the workers are migrants. I feel safer there,”* one worker explained.

This suggests that working in an environment where they are not a minority can reduce the frequency of bullying and create a more supportive community.

#### 4.3. Eliminative Approaches

Many participants turned to religious faith and their social circles for psychological resilience. One participant stated,

*“[...] I protect myself through prayer and conversations with friends and family. This gives me the strength to cope with the challenges I face at work.”*

Religion played a key role in helping some workers endure bullying, providing both comfort and a sense of hope.

*“[...] I maintain my mental health by remembering that it is God who provides sustenance, not people,”* another worker explained.

In response to persistent bullying, some workers engaged in quiet quitting, performing only the bare minimum required.

*“Most of us are only working to feed our families and derive no satisfaction from our jobs, so our performance remains at the lowest acceptable level,”* said one participant.

In extreme cases, workers resorted to sabotage.

*“[...] I’ve seen workers deliberately damage machines or produce faulty products as a way of getting back at the management,”* explained another participant.

Some of the participants considered resignation the only solution to constant bullying, while others saw entrepreneurship as an escape. One worker said,

*“[...] I tried to endure, but when the bullying didn’t stop, I focused on finding alternatives and eventually quit my job.”*

Some participants, tired of mistreatment, expressed ambitions to start their own businesses.

*“I don’t think the attitude towards migrant workers will ever change, so the only solution is to become my own boss [...].”* one interviewee remarked.

One participant recounted a surprising experience regarding union support as a way of coping with persistent bullying:

*“I was working in a small textile workshop in Mersin. The verbal abuse had become routine, especially from the supervisor. At some point, I just stopped reacting. I never thought about going to any official place because I assumed nobody would care, especially since I’m not Turkish. One day, a Turkish co-worker noticed what was going on and told me to speak to someone from the union. I didn’t even know there was a union there. A week*

later, I was invited to a meeting. I expected to be ignored, but the union representative actually listened. They even came to the workshop and talked to the employer. Things didn't become perfect overnight, but at least I felt protected for the first time [...].”

Figure 1 visualizes migrant workers' coping strategies with workplace bullying

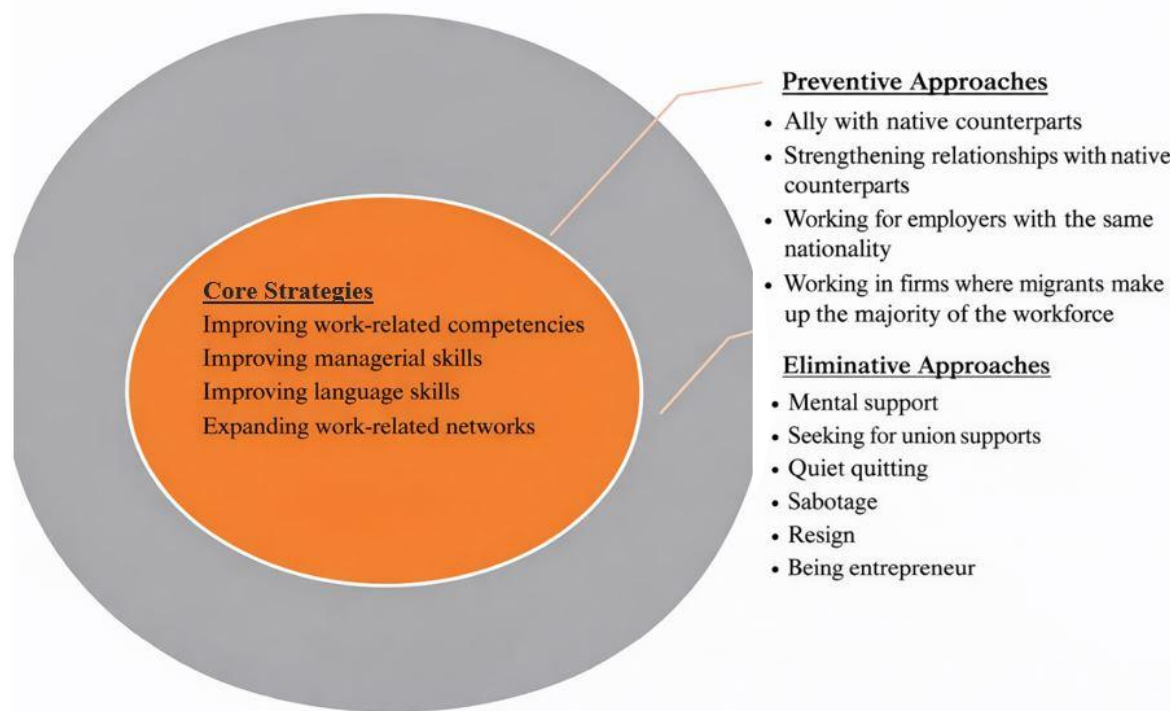


Figure 1. Migrant Workers' Coping Strategies with Workplace Bullying

## 5. DISCUSSION

The findings highlight the varied and multi-faceted approaches migrant workers employ to cope with workplace bullying, ranging from self-improvement and relationship formation to more drastic measures to quiet quitting and sabotage. Three main themes were identified: Core strategies, preventive approaches, and eliminative approaches. Core strategies include improving work-related competencies, managerial skills, language skills, and expanding work-related networks. Preventive approaches encompass proactive measures such as forming alliances with native counterparts, enhancing relationships with them, seeking employment with employers of the same nationality, and working in firms that predominantly employ migrants. Finally, eliminative approaches, primarily reactionary in nature, include measures aimed at the mitigating consequences of bullying, such as seeking mental health support, union support, quiet quitting, sabotage, resigning, and pursuing entrepreneurial endeavors.

Most of the strategies employed by participants echo those identified in the literature, particularly the importance of skill enhancement and relationship building. Research by Xu, Gutierrez & Kim (2008) and Lee, Park & Ban (2016) support the notion that acquiring new skills, such as language and technical competencies, empowers migrant workers, enabling them to navigate workplace challenges more effectively. In the present study, participants who improved their Turkish language skills reported a marked reduction in bullying incidents, highlighting the protective role of linguistic competence.

The importance of social support as a coping mechanism is further corroborated by Ho et al. (2022), who found that migrant workers often turn to peer networks and community groups to diminish the negative effects of workplace stress and discrimination. This will also help foster a sense of belonging among migrant workers. Similarly, the study shows that forming alliances with native colleagues and building networks within migrant communities are effective in preventing bullying. The use of social media platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook for emotional support and job opportunities aligns with findings by Weishaar (2010), who also noted the role of digital communities in fostering resilience among migrant workers.

Preventive measures, such as forging relationships with local employees, are emphasized in both this study and the existing literature. Schilgen et al. (2019) and Enh et al. (2024) reported that building cross-cultural relationships helped reduce workplace tensions, a finding also evident in the experiences of the participants in this study. Many

participants reported forming friendships with local employees, which improved workplace dynamics and reduced instances of exclusion and harassment. Eliminative strategies such as quiet quitting or transitioning to entrepreneurship as a means to escape toxic work environments are also reflected in broader academic research. Liem et al. (2021) discussed how migrant workers, when faced with chronic workplace stress and bullying, often resort to disengagement or alternative employment, similar to the quiet quitting described by participants in this study. Additionally, entrepreneurship as a long-term coping strategy was highlighted by Shinnar & Zamantlı Nayır (2019), who noted that migrants often see starting their own businesses as a path to regain autonomy and escape the discrimination prevalent in traditional employment.

Finally, religious faith and spirituality, noted as a key coping mechanism by some participants, align with findings by Tschirhart et al. (2019), who showed that faith-based coping strategies (Thai cultural practices and Buddhist cognitive thinking) help migrants manage stress by providing psychological comfort and a sense of hope amidst adversity. In our study, several participants highlighted the role of prayer and religious beliefs in maintaining their mental well-being and enduring workplace bullying.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the coping strategies of migrant workers in Turkey's textile sector in response to workplace bullying. While previous studies have addressed the exploitation of migrant workers, this research specifically examines the coping strategies employed by those vulnerable groups, offering a more refined understanding of their responses to adversity. The findings contribute to the literature by offering detailed insights into the coping strategies of migrant workers facing workplace bullying. These strategies - ranging from improving work-related competencies and social networks to more marginalized measures such as quiet quitting or sabotage - demonstrate the complexity of coping in the context of systemic inequalities and cultural barriers.

Theoretically, the study expands on the literature pertaining coping strategies help mitigate the impacts of bullying, contributing to broader discussions on resilience and social capital in vulnerable communities. The study also provides 'coping mechanisms framework' by offering a clear typology of responses to workplace bullying in the context of migration. Practically, the findings offer managers and policymakers actionable insights to create more inclusive work environments. By understanding these coping mechanisms, organizations can develop targeted interventions to prevent bullying and enhance workplace dynamics, particularly in industries with a high concentration of migrant workers. Additionally, the insight gained may support policymakers in formulating strategies to regulate and optimize the labor market on a broader scale.

Several limitations need to be acknowledged. The study employs a qualitative design, which limits the generalizability of its findings. Since the data is based on in-depth interviews with a specific group of Syrian migrant workers, the results may not be representative of the broader migrant population or other industries. Additionally, the sample size is relatively small (N=24). This also limits the ability to draw definitive conclusions about the experiences of migrant workers in Turkey's textile sector or apply the findings to other contexts. Another source of limitation is that the study relies on self-reported experiences through interviews. This approach may introduce biases, as participants might underreport or exaggerate their experiences of bullying or coping strategies.

Future studies should aim to expand the sample size and integrate quantitative methods to evaluate the prevalence of these coping strategies across various sectors and geographic regions. Moreover, an examination of host-country policies and their impact on workplace dynamics for migrants could offer critical insights for addressing workplace bullying on a systemic level. Interestingly, none of the participants in the study indicated that returning to their home country was a way to cope with the challenging conditions they are facing. Investigating why this phenomenon is not considered a coping strategy (at least in the context of Syrian migrant workers in Turkey) would also be valuable. Such studies will contribute to the comparison of the conditions of the host country with those of the home country and the development of strategies for the integration of the workforce.

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