

## Opinions of Teachers Employed in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers Regarding Mobbing

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## Özel Eğitim ve Rehabilitasyon Merkezlerinde Çalışan Öğretmenlerin Mobbinge İlişkin Görüşleri

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### Abstract

Mobbing, which is a significant issue in workplaces, negatively affects both society and individuals. This problem in educational institutions not only reduces teachers' quality of life but also undermines the effectiveness of educational activities. This study, designed with a phenomenological approach, a qualitative research method, aimed to reveal the mobbing experiences of teachers working in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers in Izmir. The research data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 24 teachers and analyzed using content analysis. The findings indicate that mobbing is common in these institutions, with tactics such as excessive workload and withholding deserved wages being prevalent. These practices have significant negative psychological, social, and professional impacts on teachers. It has been concluded that there is a critical need for training programs to inform teachers about mobbing and their legal rights, and that these institutions should be subject to rigorous supervision through legal regulations.

**Keywords:** *Special education, mobbing, gender, teachers, private special education and rehabilitation centers.*

### Öz

İşyerlerinde önemli bir sorun teşkil eden mobbing hem toplumu hem de bireyleri olumsuz etkilemektedir. Eğitim kurumlarında yaşanan bu sorun, öğretmenlerin yaşam kalitesini düşürmenin yanı sıra eğitim faaliyetlerinin etkinliğini de zayıflatmaktadır. Nitel bir araştırma yöntemi olan fenomenolojik yaklaşımla tasarlanan bu çalışma, İzmir'deki Özel Eğitim ve Rehabilitasyon Merkezlerinde çalışan öğretmenlerin mobbing deneyimlerini ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamıştır. Araştırma verileri, 24 öğretmenle yapılan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yoluyla toplanmış ve içerik analizi kullanılarak çözümlenmiştir. Bulgular, mobbingin bu kurumlarda yaygın olduğunu ve aşırı iş yükü ile hak edilen ücretin ödenmemesi gibi taktiklerin yaygın olduğunu göstermektedir. Mobbing davranışları çoğunlukla kurum sahipleri ve yöneticiler tarafından dikey olarak uygulanmaktadır. Ayrıca, maruz kalınan mobbingin türünün (fiziksel iş yükü zorlaması/duygusal istismar) cinsiyete göre farklılık gösterdiği tespit edilmiştir. Bu uygulamaların öğretmenler üzerinde önemli düzeyde olumsuz psikolojik, sosyal ve mesleki etkileri bulunmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, öğretmenleri mobbing ve yasal hakları konusunda bilgilendirecek eğitim programlarına kritik bir ihtiyaç olduğu ve bu kurumların yasal düzenlemelerle sıkı bir denetime tabi tutulması gerektiği sonucuna varılmıştır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** *Özel eğitim, mobbing, cinsiyet, öğretmenler, özel eğitim ve rehabilitasyon merkezleri.*

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## Introduction

The concept of mobbing involves the use of psychological harassment by individuals or groups in workplaces to exhaust and drive another person or group to the point of quitting their jobs (Baykal, 2014). Behaviors such as conscious or unconscious humiliation, insult, or denigration exemplify mobbing (Einarsen, 1999). The person targeted by mobbing is subjected to hostile behaviors. However, these negative behaviors must persist for at least six months to identify mobbing (Leymann, 1996). Regardless of whether it occurs in the public or private sector, mobbing detrimentally affects employees' mental and physical health and individual and organizational performance. Furthermore, it results in socioeconomic losses for individuals, organizations, and society (Tutar, 2004).

## Theoretical Framework

This study approaches mobbing not merely as isolated incidents of psychological aggression, but primarily through the lens of Organizational Stress Theory. Mobbing, defined as the systematic and prolonged exposure to hostile behaviors (Leymann, 1996; Einarsen, 1999), is fundamentally a severe form of workplace stress that originates or is intensified by organizational failures (Tutar, 2004). The Organizational Stress Theory highlights how managerial leadership styles, job stress, and the overall organizational climate (Güven, 2019; Işıkhan, 2002) create an environment conducive to intimidation and interpersonal conflict. According to this framework, when an organization experiences structural deficiencies such as poor communication, role ambiguity, or lack of support, these factors act as organizational stressors. These stressors can lead to employee burnout (Billingsley et al., 1995) and, subsequently, generate mobbing behaviors. Mobbing thus manifests as a mechanism used by dominant actors (often management or institution owners) to cope with or transfer the organizational stress onto vulnerable employees.

The theoretical framework is further integrated with the structural peculiarities of PSERCs. These centers frequently prioritize economic interests over employee well-being (Korucu, 2005). This profit-driven motivation acts as a primary stressor, leading to management imposing excessive workloads and engaging in wage-related pressures (Öztürk et al., 2015). The abundance of personnel from non-specialized fields (Kılıç, 2020) not only fuels horizontal mobbing through professional jealousy (Efilti & Eid Koçbeker, 2020) but also creates an environment of job insecurity, where employees feel easily replaceable. Therefore, the Organizational Stress Theory guides the investigation by helping to interpret how these structural (economic pressure, staffing issues) and managerial deficiencies in PSERCs systematically elevate teacher stress and generate the specific forms of vertical and horizontal mobbing observed in this study. The framework is essential for linking the participants' lived experiences (phenomenology) directly to the organizational causes, moving the analysis beyond simple interpersonal conflict.

## Mobbing in Education and the Research Gap

Studies indicate that mobbing is most prevalent in the healthcare sector, followed by education. In education, mobbing is fueled by rising student numbers, authoritarian management styles, escalating disciplinary issues, excessive administrative workloads, and inadequate physical facilities within schools (Ertürk, 2013). While mobbing can affect individuals of any gender or background, traditional gender roles contribute to workplace mobbing against women (Ergenekon, 2006).

Within the education sector, Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers (PSERCs) present a particularly vulnerable and under-researched context for mobbing. One prominent issue in special education is the prevalence of teachers not explicitly trained in the field (Kılıç, 2020). This leads to challenges, including horizontal intimidation from special education graduates towards non-field teachers (Efilti & Eid Koçbeker, 2020). The need for one-on-one attention with a large number of students significantly increases the teachers' workload (Kılıç, 2020).

Crucially, the private sector dynamic introduces economic pressures. PSERCs often prioritize economic interests over teacher quality by attempting to keep wages low rather than choosing qualified teachers. This disparity in compensation, coupled with low wages, fosters employee burnout and conflicts (Işıksan, 2002). Teachers worry about job termination to hire cheaper replacements (Korucu, 2005), a clear form of intimidation fueled by the abundance of potential, less-qualified employees. Given the complex interplay of economic motives, specialized staffing issues, heavy workload, and administrative pressures in PSERCs, the experiences of teachers in these institutions are profoundly affected. Moreover, existing studies on the relationship between mobbing and gender in these centers yield conflicting results. Therefore, there is a critical need to understand the mobbing phenomenon specific to this under-researched setting.

### **Aim of the Study and Research Questions**

Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by employing a qualitative research method and a phenomenological design to explore in depth the lived experiences and perspectives of teachers working in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers in Izmir regarding mobbing. The research seeks to uncover the essence of these teachers' experiences and provide suggestions for improving working conditions. In pursuit of these objectives, the study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the opinions of teachers working in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers regarding mobbing and their experiences with it?
2. To what extent do teachers employed in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers experience mobbing?
3. What are the opinions of teachers working in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers concerning the causes and consequences of mobbing?
4. How do teachers in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers react when confronted with mobbing?
5. What is the prevalence of teachers in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers considering changing jobs or institutions due to mobbing?
6. What recommendations do teachers in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers propose for preventing and addressing mobbing incidents?

### **Method**

This section discusses the methodology, theoretical framework, research design, data collection tools, population, and sample characteristics of the study. Ethics approval for this research was granted by the Izmir Democracy University Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee on 08/09/2023, with approval number 2023/11-06.

### **Research Model**

This study adopted a qualitative research method and utilized a phenomenological design to explore the perspectives of teachers working in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers on mobbing. Qualitative research involves the use of techniques

such as observation, interviews, and document analysis to uncover events and perceptions realistically and comprehensively within natural settings (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021).

Phenomenology was chosen because the study's central aim was to uncover the shared structure and essence of the lived experience of mobbing as perceived by the participants. This design is uniquely suited to understand the subjective meaning and how the phenomenon (mobbing) presents itself to those who have experienced it, which goes beyond simply describing behavior (as in grounded theory or case study). Specifically, a Descriptive Phenomenological Approach was employed to provide a rich, detailed account of the phenomenon as it appeared to the teachers, ensuring the findings closely reflect the participants' original descriptions.

**Table 1.** Participant Characteristics

Variable		Frequency
Age	22-25	6
	27-29	11
	31-34	4
	37-45	3
Gender	Female	20
	Male	4
Marital Status	Married	7
	Single	17
Graduated Department	Child Development	4
	Preschool	7
	Special Education	9
	School Guidance	2
	Psychology	1
Seniority in the profession	Classroom Teacher	1
	1-3 years	14
	5-8 years	7
	9-23 years	3
Total Number of Institutions Studied	1-4	18
	5-8	6
Weekly Course Load	8 hours	1
	24-25 hours	2
	30-32 hours	4
	40 hours	17

### Study Group

The study aimed to include teachers working in private special education and rehabilitation centers, and criterion sampling and maximum diversity were used for convenience and purposeful sampling techniques. Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers in Izmir were contacted for maximum diversity sampling, and teachers from these centers were selected based on specific sampling criteria. Criterion Sampling was utilized, meaning participants were selected based on the following specific criteria relevant to the research:

- Participants must be currently employed as a teacher in a Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Center in Izmir
- Participants must have a minimum of one year of professional experience working in a Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Center.
- Participants must have either personally experienced or witnessed mobbing behaviors in a PSERC setting.
- Participants must voluntarily agree to take part in the interview process.

Maximum variation sampling was also applied to ensure that the sample included a diverse range of perspectives across key characteristics such as gender, graduation field, years of experience, and weekly course load (as detailed in Table 1). A total of 24 teachers participated in the study. During the research, participants were coded as P1, P2, etc.

### Data Collection Tools

The data were collected using a demographic information form developed by the researcher, alongside a semi-structured interview technique.

**Demographic Information Form.** Participants were requested to complete a form detailing their age, gender, marital status, graduation field, years of experience in the profession, total number of previous workplaces, and weekly course load.

**Semi-Structured Interview Form.** The semi-structured interview format is a key data collection tool in qualitative research, allowing for the gathering of diverse perspectives while ensuring all dimensions of the research topic are addressed. The interview form was meticulously crafted using theses and articles from national and international literature and finalized by three experts (two in Special Education and one in English Language Teaching) to ensure its comprehensive coverage and content validity. A pilot interview was conducted on October 7, 2023, to confirm the clarity and suitability of the questions for the interview process. To provide transparency regarding the study's scope, the interview questions were structured around the research questions, covering the following main thematic areas and including relevant example items. The structure of the interview form, thematic areas, and sample questions are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Sample Interview Questions by Thematic Area

Thematic Area	Example Interview Question
Concept and Definition of Mobbing	What does the concept of "mobbing" mean to you personally?
Prevalence and Types of Mobbing	Do you think mobbing is experienced in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers? If so, what are the most common mobbing behaviors you observe or encounter?
Perpetrators and Causes	In your opinion, who are the individuals who engage in mobbing behaviors in these institutions (e.g., owner, director, other teachers, parents)? What do you think are the root causes of mobbing in your workplace?
Personal Experience and Reactions	Have you personally been exposed to mobbing? If yes, what was your reaction, and why did you choose that reaction? (If no, what would your reaction be?)
Mobbing and Gender Dynamics	Do you believe mobbing behaviors experienced in your institution differ according to gender?
Consequences and Impacts	What kinds of negative effects does being exposed to mobbing have on a person's psychological, social, or professional life?
Solutions and Recommendations	What are your recommendations for preventing and addressing mobbing incidents in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers?

To ensure the content validity of the interview form, the questions were based on the literature and reviewed in detail by three field experts. The expert opinions confirmed the relevance and comprehensiveness of the questions to the research objectives. In addition, a pilot interview lasting 14 minutes and 6 seconds was conducted on October 7, 2023, to test the applicability of the form; the form was approved as usable by evaluating the clarity, fluency, and suitability of the questions to the interview process. In the data analysis process, coding was done using the inductive content analysis method, and independent researchers compared the codes and themes to ensure consistency of the

analysis. Before the interviews, the participants were provided with an informed consent form, detailed information about the research's purpose and process, and compliance with ethical standards was ensured by ensuring their voluntary participation. These steps aimed to increase the validity and reliability of the interview process.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Since most participants were available during the vacation, the interviews were conducted online. Interviews were conducted via Zoom and WhatsApp applications. Before conducting the interviews, participants were given an informed consent form outlining all pertinent details about the research. They were asked to thoroughly review and sign this form, indicating their voluntary participation in the study. Additionally, participants completed a demographic information form. All interviews were conducted individually in a quiet setting, and audio and video recordings were made with participants' consent. Due to the summer vacation, interviews were conducted online using ZOOM and WhatsApp Video Call applications. The collected data underwent analysis using the inductive content analysis method. Records of the interviews are stored in Google Drive. Codes were generated based on similarities and differences observed in the data, and themes were developed by grouping related codes. The goal of this inductive content analysis approach in qualitative data analysis is to derive conclusions directly from the data and ultimately develop theoretical insights (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). To ensure coder reliability, 30% of the data obtained from 24 participants was randomly selected and sent to an expert in special education. In the calculation of coder reliability, the formula "Reliability = (Agreement / (Agreement + Disagreement)) x 100" proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) was used. The reliability value was calculated as 95.94%. Ethical compliance and voluntary participation were ensured before and during the interviews. The collected data underwent analysis using the inductive content analysis method, with coder reliability calculated at 95.94%.

### **Researcher Role and Reflexivity**

The researchers' primary role was that of external observers attempting to capture the phenomenon of mobbing as authentically experienced by the participants, without imposing pre-existing assumptions. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process by actively acknowledging the potential for researcher assumptions, particularly concerning the hierarchical power dynamics prevalent in the private education sector. Before analysis, the researchers engaged in self-reflection to bracket personal experiences or preconceived notions regarding workplace conflict, aiming to ensure that the interpretations remained grounded in the participants' voices.

### **Measures to Enhance Trustworthiness**

To further enhance the trustworthiness of the findings (beyond the reported high coder reliability):

- **Peer Debriefing.** The main researcher consulted an expert (one of the content validity experts) during the analysis phase to challenge emerging interpretations and codes, promoting an objective view of the data.
- **Audit Trail.** A detailed record of all transcription, coding decisions, categorization, and theme construction was maintained to allow for external review and ensure the confirmability of the findings.
- **Thematic Saturation.** Data collection continued until thematic saturation was reached, ensuring no new themes or significant information emerged from subsequent interviews.

## Findings

As a result of the analysis, five main themes emerged regarding the perspectives of teachers working in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers on mobbing. These themes are presented in Table 3. Additionally, sub-themes and corresponding codes are provided in accompanying tables. Participants' opinions regarding high-frequency codes are also included in this section.

**Table 3.** Themes Related to Teacher Perspectives Regarding Mobbing

Teachers' experiences and understandings of mobbing
Perceived impacts of mobbing
Comparative perceptions of mobbing
Mobbing as a catalyst for job or institutional change
Teacher-proposed strategies for preventing and addressing mobbing

### Teachers' Experiences and Understandings of Mobbing

Seventeen teachers who participated in the study defined mobbing as psychological violence, 12 described it as disillusionment and disengagement from work, and eight as verbal abuse. Only two participants identified physical violence. The distribution of these opinions is detailed in Table 4. The majority of participants perceived psychological violence as the primary form of mobbing. P12, who referred to mobbing as psychological violence, expressed: "When I talk about mobbing, I am talking about psychological violence that occurs in the workplace environment... I see it as psychological violence that employers inflict on employees in any sector...". P22 explained the perspective on making employees work beyond their capacity, categorized under "disillusionment and disengagement from work": "They expect me to get involved in areas outside my expertise. I might be burdened with tasks that go beyond my duties and responsibilities. Honestly, these situations amount to mobbing for me".

**Table 4.** Teacher Opinions Regarding the Concept of Mobbing

Code	F
Psychological violence	17
Disillusionment and disengagement from work	12
Overloading the employee with more than they can handle and giving them tasks for which they have no responsibility	7
Prompting to resign	6
Failure to give the value and remuneration they deserve in their profession	3
Verbal Abuse	8
Physical violence	2

### Prevalence of Mobbing

Upon examining the data, it was evident that 23 out of 24 participants reported encountering mobbing behaviors in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers. The distribution of these opinions is detailed in Table 5. P5, who believed that mobbing behaviors were present in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers, expressed their viewpoint simply by stating: "Yes, I think so.". In contrast, P1, who was the only one among the participants to believe that mobbing was not experienced in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers, stated their opinion as follows: "I do not think so because teachers already attend classes in classrooms with cameras... I do not think they have experienced such a thing...".

**Table 5.** Prevalence of Mobbing

Code	F
Yes, mobbing is experienced.	23
No, mobbing is not experienced	1

### Common Mobbing Behaviors

Most participants perceived behaviors that discourage them from the profession and cause exhaustion at work as forms of mobbing. According to their accounts, these behaviors include: assigning excessive workload and tasks beyond the employee's capacity (9 participants), undervaluing and underpaying the employee (9 participants), pressuring the employee to resign (5 participants), and setting performance expectations from parents (5 participants). Additionally, 8 participants cited verbal abuse. The frequencies associated with these themes are presented in Table 6. P16, who felt burdened with excessive workload and irresponsible tasks, expressed their viewpoint as follows: "They pile more classes on you... Every gap is filled, more workload is imposed, and you must engage with parents more, even during your break time... Let us say you have a 20-minute break. Even then, there is pressure and insistence that you must attend to parents." P20, who perceived mobbing in the form of favoritism and discrimination within the organization, articulated their perspective as follows: "As I mentioned, giving a higher course load or discrimination. For instance, assigning some teachers fewer classes while giving others more...".

**Table 6.** Common Mobbing Behaviors

Code	F
Disillusionment and disengagement from work	16
Assigning excessive workload and tasks beyond the employee's capacity	9
Undervaluing and underpaying the employee	9
Pressuring the employee to resign	5
Setting performance expectations from parents	5
Verbal abuse	7
Gossiping	4
Verbal assault	3
Contempt and humiliation	2
Favoritism and discrimination within the institution	5
Interference with the teacher	3
Failure of the employer to provide necessary physical conditions	2

### Perpetrators of Mobbing

Out of the 23 participants who believed that mobbing occurred in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers, 15 mentioned that mobbing behaviors were perpetrated by the owner of the institution, 15 by the director of the institution, 11 by other teachers, and 10 by parents. Frequencies related to this theme are presented in Table 7. P7, who said that mobbing in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers was perpetrated by the owner of the institution, and P9, who answered that the director of the institution used the following statements: "Usually by the owners of the institution..." and "It is being perpetrated more by directors.". P5, who responded by saying that other teachers perpetrated mobbing behaviors, explained their opinion as follows: "Mostly, the teachers who try to be close to the ruling power or to please him...".

**Table 7.** Perpetrators of Mobbing

Code	F
Owner of the Institution	15
Director	15
Other teachers	11

Parents	10
Staff	2

### Mobbing Behaviors Experienced by Gender

Ten out of the 23 participants who acknowledged the presence of mobbing in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers believed that there was no difference in mobbing behaviors between genders. Among them, 9 participants believed females experienced more mobbing, while four believed males were more exposed. The distribution of these opinions is detailed in Table 8. P11 stated, "I think it makes no difference. They treat everyone equally in this regard. So, it does not matter whether they are men or women." P24 observed, "Well, I noticed more female teachers experiencing intimidation at the institution where I worked." P8 expressed, "I think the disadvantaged group is males because, as I said, our male students can sometimes be very overweight and tall, powerful, and if they exhibit aggressive behavior, they tend to direct it towards male teachers... Because they believe male teachers can handle it better. I think male teachers are at a disadvantage in this regard."

**Table 8.** Mobbing Behaviors Experienced by Gender

Code	F
There is no difference between genders.	10
Women are subjected to mobbing more.	9
Men are subjected to mobbing more.	4

### Reasons for Mobbing

Out of the 23 participants who believed that mobbing occurred in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers, 17 attributed this situation to the institution's focus solely on economic interests, 5 attributed it to negative personality traits of the perpetrators, 5 related it to internal relations within the institution, and 3 mentioned the abundance of potential employers (employability) as a factor. Frequencies about these themes are presented in Table 9. P3, who thought that the institution operated solely based on economic interest, said the following: "Also, when a rehabilitation center becomes a commercial establishment, these mobbing behaviors arise. In other words, if profit rather than the well-being of children is the main focus for the institution's founder, such behaviors may occur. This creates an environment conducive to mobbing, perhaps exacerbated by low wages, which can lead to conflicts between employers and employees." P13, who mentioned the abundance of potential employers in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers, elaborated: "Furthermore, mobbing persists because they can easily replace me with someone from outside the field who holds certification or another teaching degree." P4 offered a different perspective: "As I mentioned, these institutions have a predominantly female workforce. The teaching profession itself is already female-dominated. Therefore, since the founders are often male, this dynamic may contribute to the prevalence of mobbing."

**Table 9.** Reasons for Mobbing

Code	F
The institution operates solely based on economic interest	17
The perpetrator of mobbing has negative personality traits	5
Internal relations	5
Competition and cliques	4
Personal problems, conflict, and miscommunication	2
Abundance of potential employers	3
Other	2

### Traits of Teachers Subjected to Mobbing

Regarding the common traits of teachers exposed to mobbing, most participants stated that they exhibit recessive/non-dominant personality traits. Other frequently mentioned traits include having economic concerns and insufficient work experience. The frequencies of participants with different opinions are detailed in Table 10. P22, who attributed recessive personality traits to teachers exposed to mobbing, expressed the following opinion: "It is likely that they are much calmer and quieter individuals. They have more passive characters, but they might be perceived as more naive, and frankly, people who find it difficult to say no. P2, who suggested that the common characteristic of mobbing victims is their gender, expressed his opinion as follows: "As I mentioned, they could be of different genders. I believe it affects women more."

**Table 10.** Traits of Teachers Subjected to Mobbing

Code	F
The victim has recessive personality traits	11
Having economic concerns and feeling obligated to work	4
Insufficient work experience	4
Being diligent and using the proper methods	3
Lack of correct knowledge of rights	3
Feeling dissatisfied and bored with one's job	3
Being a female employee	2
Not being successful at work	2
Inability to defend one's rights	2

### Teachers' Experience with Mobbing

When examining the participants' personal experiences with mobbing, 13 stated they had been exposed to mobbing, while 11 stated they had not. Frequencies related to this theme are shown in Table 11. P24, who acknowledged being exposed to mobbing, and P8, who stated they had not experienced mobbing, expressed their views as follows: P24, "Yes, I was initially exposed.", P8, "So far, I have not encountered any. I hope it stays that way.", and P8, "So far, I have not encountered any. I hope it stays that way."

**Table 11.** Teachers' Experience with Mobbing

Code	F
Yes, I was exposed to mobbing.	13
No, I was not exposed to mobbing.	11

### Type of Mobbing Exposed

Findings and frequencies regarding the types of mobbing experienced by the participants are detailed in Table 12. Seven participants were exposed to verbal abuse; 4 were given excessive workload or tasks beyond their responsibilities; 4 were reported to authorities; 3 were subjected to discrimination; and 3 were paid less than they deserved. P11, who was subjected to mobbing by the employer about imposing more workload on the employee than they could handle, expressed their experiences as follows: "I was asked to do the job of three people alone. After the pandemic, the number of our students decreased, and fewer teachers were in the institution. Later, no extra teachers were recruited, and a heavy burden was placed on one teacher. I was one of them. This is how mobbing was perpetrated."

**Table 12.** Type of Mobbing Exposed

Code	F
Verbal abuse	7
Employer imposes a workload on the employee that exceeds their responsibilities	4
Being reported	4

Favoritism, discrimination, and cliques	3
Paying employees less than they deserve	3
Manipulating the employee by keeping them from work or making it difficult for them to work	2
Other	1

### Teacher Reactions to Mobbing

When examining the participants' reactions to mobbing, it was found that 11 participants demonstrated behavior aimed at defending their rights or seeking compromise through discussions with the mobbing perpetrator or management level. Four participants remained silent and unresponsive, three resigned from their positions, and three initiated judicial and legal processes. Frequencies related to these responses are detailed in Table 13. P5, who addressed the mobbing perpetrator or management to defend their rights or seek compromise, expressed: "I sought an alternative communication channel within the institution and explained my problem to the authorized person." P11, who initiated judicial and legal processes, stated: "Since there was no resolution, I had to part ways with them. Judicial processes have been initiated."

**Table 13.** Teacher Reactions to Mobbing

Code	F
Trying to defend rights or compromise by talking to the perpetrator or management	11
Remaining silent and unresponsive	4
Resigning	3
Keep working	3
Initiating judicial and legal processes	3

### Reasons Behind the Reactions of Teachers to Mobbing

When the participants were asked about the reasons for their reactions to mobbing, 4 participants stated that they refused to remain silent against injustice; 2 participants expressed their dedication to the profession and students; 2 participants mentioned fear of facing sanctions within the institution, and 2 participants emphasized the importance of protecting their boundaries. The frequencies related to this theme are detailed in Table 14. P11, one of the participants who emphasized the importance of not remaining silent against injustice, expressed his views as follows: "You know, I did not want to tolerate mobbing. I did not want to give up my rights and walk away. So, I took action. I have been going through a process that is going well and positively. I encourage everyone to stand up for their rights."

**Table 14.** Reasons Behind the Reactions of Teachers to Mobbing

Code	F
Not remaining silent against injustice	4
Love for the profession and students	2
Fear of facing sanctions within the institution	2
Desire to protect boundaries	2
Believing that nothing will change	2

### Reactions to Mobbing Among Non-Exposed Teachers

Participants who stated that they had not been exposed to mobbing before were asked about their reactions if they were exposed to mobbing. Nine participants said they would defend their rights or try to compromise by talking to the mobbing perpetrator or management level, eight said they would resign, and two said they would initiate judicial and legal processes. The frequencies of the participants' opinions are given in Table 15. P3, one of the participants who stated that they would react by resigning, said the

following: "If I saw that the other party did not understand this, they did not change their attitude, this thing that disturbed me did not change, and then I believe I would resign."

**Table 15.** Reactions to Mobbing Among Non-Exposed Teachers

Code	F
Trying to defend rights or reach a compromise by talking to the perpetrator or the management level	9
Resigning	8
Initiating judicial and legal processes	2
Cutting off communication	1

### Rationales for Anticipated Reactions Among Non-Exposed Teachers

The participants who stated that they had not been exposed to mobbing before were asked about the responses they would present if they were exposed to mobbing. Six participants said they would react to mobbing because they desired a more positive work environment; 3 anticipated no improvement; one because of perceived injustice, and one because of fear and hesitation. The frequencies related to these reactions are provided in Table 16. P7, one of the participants who indicated that they would react to mobbing because they desired to work in more positive conditions, expressed their perspective as follows: "As I said, having a positive working environment and good communication are crucial to me... Therefore, if a positive communication environment could not be ensured, I would choose to resign."

**Table 16.** Rationales for Anticipated Reactions Among Non-Exposed Teachers

Code	F
To work in more positive conditions	6
Believing no improvements would be made	3
Believing that the treatment was unfair	1
Because of fear and hesitation	1

### Reactions to Witnessed Mobbing

When participants were asked about their potential reactions if they witnessed someone else being subjected to mobbing, 23 expressed their willingness to assist the victim. At the same time, two stated they would remain silent. The frequencies related to this theme are detailed in Table 17. P9, one of the participants who indicated a readiness to intervene by speaking to the mobbing perpetrator, the victim, or the management level to aid the victim, remarked: "If necessary, for instance, if the institution's owner is the perpetrator, I would try to talk if needed. I aim to maintain communication with both parties separately... I would help by facilitating dialogue."

**Table 17.** Potential Reactions to Witnessed Mobbing

Code	F
Assisting the victim	23
By talking to the perpetrator, victim, or management level, or by speaking at the meeting	17
Looking for solutions	
Advising the victim	10
Providing psychological support to the victim	6
Being a witness for the victim	2
Keeping silent	2
Taking a stand against the perpetrator, being reactive	2

### Reasons Underlying Reactions to Witnessed Mobbing

When examining the reasons for the participants' reactions to witnessing mobbing, it was found that empathy was the primary motivator (8 participants), followed by considering

potential future experiences (7 participants). Six participants stated they would react to avoid remaining silent against injustice, and five indicated that they would respond to foster a positive working environment. The frequencies related to these themes are presented in Table 18. P8, one of the participants who mentioned empathy as the reason, expressed: "I would not stay silent; I would try to offer help... It stems from empathy, essentially." P3, one of the participants who mentioned fearing sanctions within the institution, stated: "It might sound like let sleeping dogs lie... but that does not directly involve me, but if it is happening in a place I am unaware of... If I have not seen it, it is as if it has already been said to me by relaying this. Initially, it will cause trouble for that person. Eventually, it will cause problems for me, too. Ultimately, it will hurt both of us."

**Table 18.** Reasons Underlying Reactions to Witnessed Mobbing

Code	F
Due to empathy	8
Due to the possibility of facing a similar situation	7
Not to remain silent in the face of injustice	6
Due to the desire to work in a positive work setting	5

### Perceived Impacts of Mobbing on the Exposed Individual

According to 22 out of 24 participants, exposure to mobbing detrimentally impacts psychological well-being and increases negative emotions. Fourteen participants believe that mobbing leads to adverse outcomes such as failure, unhappiness, and job dissatisfaction. The frequencies related to this theme are detailed in Table 19. P4, who emphasized the impact on psychological well-being and increased negative emotions, stated: "It makes one feel negative and inadequate initially. This psychological impact starts a cycle that affects your entire life.". P14, who highlighted adverse effects on physical health, sleep, and fatigue, commented: "...It also impacts people's health. You know, headaches, stomach aches... This stress and distress could potentially lead to more serious illnesses in the future."

**Table 19.** Perceived Impacts of Mobbing on the Exposed Individual

Code	F
It harms psychological well-being and increases negative emotions.	22
It creates negative situations such as failure, unhappiness, and dissatisfaction in work life.	14
It negatively affects the desire to socialize, social relations, and communication.	11
It negatively affects physical areas such as health, sleep, and fatigue.	10

### Teachers' Perceptions of Mobbing in Public School

Fourteen participants stated that they believed mobbing also occurred in public schools, while 10 thought it did not happen in public schools. The frequencies related to this theme are illustrated in Table 20. P5, who believed mobbing occurred in public schools, commented: "Yes, I think there may be instances of mobbing.". P24, who believed mobbing did not occur in public schools, remarked: "I do not think so. I believe the permanent staff teachers are not subjected to mobbing."

**Table 20.** Teachers' Perceptions of Mobbing in Public School

Code	F
Yes, mobbing also occurs in public schools.	14
No, mobbing does not happen in public schools.	10

### Comparative Perceptions of Mobbing

Thirteen out of 14 participants who believed that Special Education Teachers working in public schools were also exposed to mobbing thought that mobbing occurred more frequently in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers. The frequencies of

these opinions are detailed in Table 21. P13, who perceived mobbing as more frequent in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers, shared their opinion: "If I compare the two, there is a higher incidence of mobbing in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers." P15, who believed it occurred more frequently in public schools, shared their opinion: "I think it happens more in public schools because, as I mentioned, since Special Education Teachers usually prefer public appointments, they are more prevalent there... I believe employers in private special education and rehabilitation centers would strive to retain special education teachers more effectively and act more professionally."

**Table 21.** Comparative Perceptions of Mobbing

Code	F
Mobbing occurs more frequently in private special education and rehabilitation centers.	13
Mobbing occurs more frequently in public schools.	1

### Reasons for the Perceived Absence of Mobbing in Public Schools

Eight out of 10 participants who believed that Special Education Teachers working in public schools as permanent staff were not exposed to mobbing attributed this to the state schools' more comfortable and independent working environment. Six participants also cited the lack of pressure from the director or owner, and better personal rights (e.g., job security) in public schools. The frequencies related to this theme are provided in Table 22. P11, who attributed the absence of mobbing to the comfortable and free working environment in public schools, explained it in the following manner: "First of all, they do not have an employer. Everyone is connected to a single place, working under the National Education. Okay, we also work under National Education, but some manage us. In other words, individuals manage us... Your principal is not your boss, just the principal... We also have a principal in our school, but he is not our boss. However, we also have an extra boss. They only have principals with certain responsibilities that they have to do, and they undertake them."

**Table 22.** Reasons for the Perceived Absence of Mobbing in Public Schools

Code	F
The fact that the working environment in state schools is more comfortable and independent	8
Lack of pressure from the director or owner of the institution	6
Working in more comfortable conditions in public schools	4
No obligation to improve oneself	2
Existence of better personal rights in state schools	6
Having protective mechanisms such as civil service law, job security, and unions	5
Regulations regarding wages and working hours	4

### Job Changes Due to Mobbing

Among the teachers interviewed, 17 participants did not change their jobs or institutions due to mobbing. Three participants changed jobs or institutions once, and two changed jobs or institutions more than once. The frequencies related to this theme are provided in Table 23. P1, one of the participants who has never changed jobs due to mobbing, and P15, who changed jobs once, said the following, respectively: P1, "No, I was not affected." and P15, "I was affected once."

**Table 23.** Job Changes Due to Mobbing

Code	F
I did not change jobs.	17
I changed jobs once.	3
I have changed jobs more than once.	2

### Teachers Suggestions for Addressing and Preventing Mobbing

When asked for their suggestions to combat mobbing, most of the interviewed teachers emphasized the importance of fostering a favorable institutional climate and enhancing communication (16 participants). Many participants also highlighted the necessity for the state to implement measures and ensure suitable working conditions (15 participants), including establishing specific criteria for directors/owners (7 participants) and conducting frequent audits (8 participants). The frequencies related to this theme are provided in Table 24. P11, advocating for state intervention and improved working conditions, stated: "There needs to be more oversight... I mean, not just for teachers but also for bosses and employers. They should be thoroughly audited to ensure the conditions under which teachers are employed... You know, many teachers receive cash payments reported as minimum wage. There should be rigorous oversight to prevent this, and our government should support teachers financially and morally. Especially in terms of financial support, it would be beneficial if they closely monitor these financial matters."

**Table 24.** Reasons for the Perceived Absence of Mobbing in Public Schools

Code	F
Organization should create a favorable climate, and communication should be strengthened	16
Communication and bilateral relations should be emphasized	9
Psychological support and social activities should be planned	8
Awareness-raising activities against mobbing should be carried out	6
Favoritism and discrimination within the organization must be prevented	3
State should take measures and provide appropriate working conditions	15
The institution's conditions (salary, physical conditions, etc.) should be audited frequently	8
Criteria should be implemented to ensure that directors/institution owners are competent	7
Special education graduates should be employed in institutions	2
Associations and organizations should be formed to promote organized activity and rights	2
Owners should intervene less in the organization	2
Employees should know their legal rights	2
Working conditions should be transparently stated at the outset	2

### Additional Reflections and Recommendations Regarding Mobbing

When asked if they had any additional comments about mobbing, 11 participants stated they had nothing further to add, while 7 participants emphasized the importance of preventive measures against mobbing. Additionally, 3 participants expressed their hope that mobbing situations would cease altogether, while 2 participants believed mobbing would persist regardless. The frequencies related to this theme are provided in Table 25. P16, who wished to end mobbing situations, shared the following sentiment: "I would like to add... I wish it did not happen, I mean I wish we did not have to face these situations..."

**Table 25.** Additional Reflections and Recommendations Regarding Mobbing

Code	F
I have nothing to add; I have explained everything.	11
Everyone should take precautions to prevent mobbing.	7
I hope that mobbing will not be experienced in the future.	3
Mobbing will always be there.	2

### Conceptual Model of Mobbing Dynamics

Based on the synthesis of the qualitative findings, a conceptual model was developed to illustrate the systemic relationships among the causes, behaviors, and consequences of mobbing in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers. Grounded in Organizational Stress Theory, the model conceptualizes mobbing not as an isolated interpersonal conflict, but as a severe form of workplace stress emerging from structural

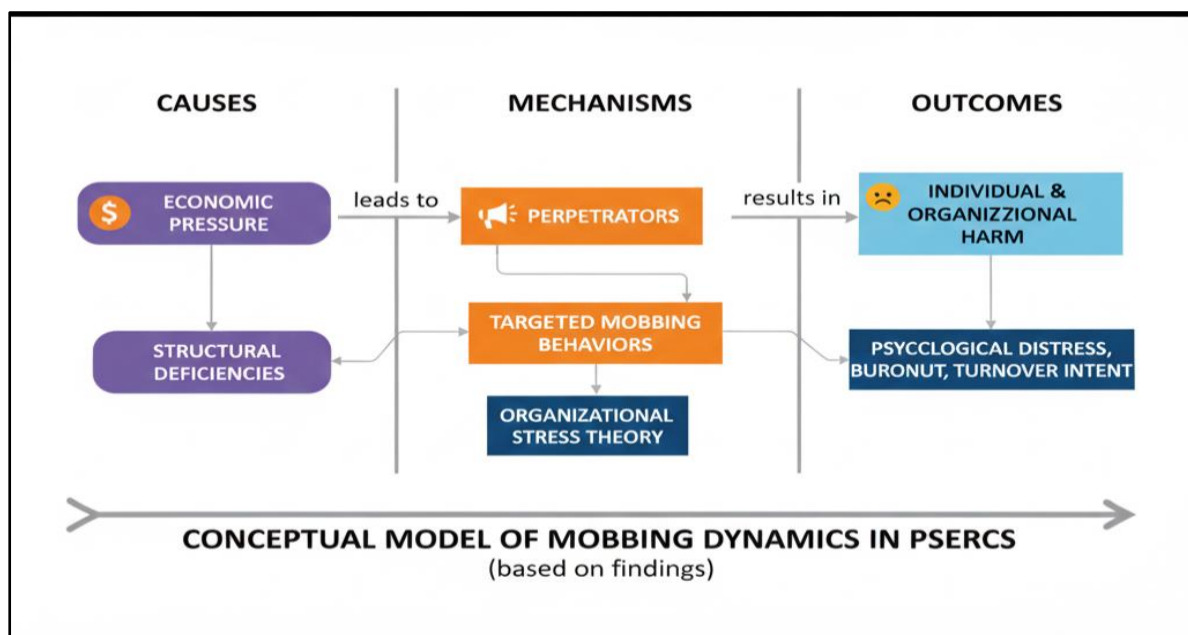
deficiencies and economic pressures within organizations. As illustrated in Figure 1, the model demonstrates how organizational stressors initiate a cascading process that results in individual-level consequences for teachers, highlighting mobbing as a systemic and cyclical phenomenon rather than an individual issue. The key components of the model include (a) structural stressors as the root causes of mobbing, (b) perpetrators and mechanisms of mobbing, (c) targeted mobbing behaviors, and (d) consequences for teachers.

**Structural Stressors (The Root Cause).** The model highlights economic factors and structural deficiencies as the primary motivators for mobbing. This includes the institution's sole focus on economic interests leading to low wages and job insecurity. The systemic stress created by these factors is then transferred to employees.

**Perpetrators and Mechanisms.** Mobbing is primarily vertical (top-down), perpetrated most frequently by Institution Owners and Directors. These dominant actors utilize the structural weaknesses (like the abundance of non-specialized, cheaper staff ) to exert pressure.

**Targeted Mobbing Behaviors.** Targeted mobbing behaviors were found to be intentional and differentiated, with gender influencing the form of mobbing experienced by teachers. Participants described practices such as excessive workloads, assigning duties beyond individual capacity, and the withholding of deserved wages, which reflect forms of economic and physical pressure. Male teachers were more frequently exposed to physically demanding workloads. In contrast, female teachers more commonly reported experiences of emotional and social abuse, including discrimination and emotional mistreatment, indicating gendered patterns in the application of mobbing behaviors.

**Consequences.** The final output of this systemic stress is detrimental to the teacher's well-being. Consequences include severe psychological harm and increased negative emotions , leading to job dissatisfaction and the decision to resign. This completes the cycle of organizational stress transferred to the individual.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Model of Economically-Driven Mobbing Dynamics in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers

## Discussion

The study examined teachers' opinions working in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers regarding mobbing, its reasons, frequency, effects, relationship with gender, and instances of job changes due to mobbing, along with teachers' suggestions to prevent it. The overwhelming finding that nearly all participants reported encountering mobbing behaviors confirms that the phenomenon in PSERCs is not incidental, but systemic, validating the study's central premise, rooted in Organizational Stress Theory, that mobbing is generated by organizational stressors rather than purely interpersonal conflict. The common identification of mobbing as psychological violence or disillusionment from work reflects the teachers' perceived loss of professional agency and autonomy under economic duress, aligning with the core concept of role conflict within the theoretical framework.

The most prevalent form of mobbing in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers involves behaviors aimed at alienating individuals from their profession and causing exhaustion. Employees frequently report being burdened with workloads exceeding their capacity or tasks outside their responsibilities, coupled with inadequate recognition and compensation. Some participants also perceive physical deficiencies within these centers as forms of mobbing. These findings align with Forlin's (2001) research on Special Education Teachers. Verbal violence emerges as another commonly reported mobbing behavior in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers, characterized by gossip, verbal attacks, and the use of demeaning language. Additionally, psychological violence, favoritism, and discrimination within institutions are noted forms of mobbing. These observations parallel Efiltili and Koçbeker's (2020) study among Special Education Teachers, where participants reported encountering various forms of mobbing, including physical, social, emotional, and verbal abuse.

The dominant factor cited—the institutions' sole focus on economic interests—serves as the primary organizational stressor, systematically generating vertical mobbing from owners/directors aimed at reducing labor costs and maximizing profit. The pervasive issue of underpayment and excessive workload is, in this context, interpreted as a deliberate management tactic, turning the teaching role itself into the mechanism of stress transfer. The abundance of non-specialized personnel willing to accept low wages further exacerbates this cycle of intimidation and job insecurity.

The participants held varying perspectives on whether mobbing in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers differed based on gender. While some believed gender was not a factor, others asserted that women or men were more susceptible to mobbing. Those who perceived women as more vulnerable often cited gender itself as a reason for mobbing. Moreover, one participant mentioned harassment incidents among women within these centers, suggesting a particular dynamic of mobbing from woman to woman (pink abuse-queen bee syndrome). In the context of gender and mobbing, participants in the study perceive a clear relationship between gender and the experience of mobbing. Participants highlighted distinct types of mobbing experienced by women versus men. Female teachers were commonly associated with emotional abuse and discrimination within the institution. The synthesis of views regarding gender susceptibility suggests that rather than gender determining if mobbing occurs, gender determines the type of mobbing applied. Administrators and colleagues appear to exploit traditional gender role expectations to select the most effective form of harassment. This targeted mechanism resolves the conflicting statistical findings in the literature by shifting the focus from frequency to the qualitative nature and strategic purpose of the attack.

The synthesis of these conflicting views suggests that rather than gender determining *if* mobbing occurs, gender determines the *type* of mobbing applied. This dynamic acts as a targeted discriminatory practice within the PSERC context. Administrators and colleagues appear to exploit traditional gender role expectations to select the most effective form of harassment. This results in male teachers being associated with facing mobbing through heavy workloads and challenging student assignments due to the organizational perception of their greater physical capability, while female teachers are commonly subjected to emotional abuse, gossiping, and organizational discrimination. This targeted mechanism resolves the conflicting statistical findings in the literature by shifting the focus from frequency to the qualitative nature and strategic purpose of the attack.

In contrast, male teachers were described as facing mobbing through heavy workloads and challenging student assignments due to their physical strength. Research on mobbing and gender supports these findings. Gökçe (2006) identified different types of mobbing experienced by male and female teachers, while Forlin (2001) noted higher stress levels among female Special Education Teachers. Güler (2023) similarly found that female Special Education Teachers encountered more mobbing. However, Koyuncuoğlu's (2017) study presented contrasting results, suggesting higher mobbing rates among male Special Education Teachers.

It has been suggested that one of the primary reasons for mobbing in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers is the institutions' focus on economic interests rather than educational values. Many participants expressed concerns that these centers prioritize profit over fair wages, leading to dissatisfaction among undervalued teachers. This disparity often stems from the recruitment process, which emphasizes accepting lower salaries rather than ensuring teacher quality. Consequently, teachers who perceive they are underpaid may experience diminished job and professional satisfaction, adversely affecting the classroom environment and their ability to benefit students. Reviewing the literature, similar findings indicate that institutions failing to provide fair wages can breed employee resentment, diminishing their motivation and increasing turnover intentions (Birinci Özürlüler Şurası, 1999). Studies by Korucu (2005), Işıksan (2002), and Öztürk (2015) further support this correlation, linking low wages with burnout and a higher likelihood of leaving the job. Given these insights, Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers must be rigorously monitored under existing legislation, ensuring teachers' rights regarding workload, salaries, and overall compensation. Other reasons for mobbing reported by teachers in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers include the personal traits of perpetrators and internal institutional dynamics such as competition, jealousy, cliques, and disagreements. These findings closely align with documented reasons for mobbing in the literature (Arpacıoğlu, 2003; Ertürk, 2013; Mercanlıoğlu, 2010; Şen, 2009).

Additionally, participants identified the gender dynamics within the field of private education as a contributing factor to mobbing. They noted that the predominance of male administrators and female employees in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers creates an environment susceptible to mobbing. Another significant finding highlighted in the study is the widespread employment of individuals from unrelated fields who lack qualifications in special education. When the literature is examined, it is noteworthy that there is a similar increase in employment outside the field in special education (Akçamete et al., 2001). Qualified special education teachers are crucial for effective teaching using appropriate methods, techniques, and materials tailored to the needs of students. Otherwise, the effectiveness and efficiency of the training provided are

open to discussion. Furthermore, the study participants emphasized that the influx of non-specialized personnel willing to accept low wages in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers fosters an environment conducive to mobbing. This practice, akin to strategies discussed in the literature where employers exploit economic interests to reduce costs and pressure employees (Korucu, 2005), not only compromises the quality of education but also fuels negative competition among teachers and undermines workforce competency.

Teachers exposed to mobbing in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers often exhibit common characteristics such as recessive personality traits, including passivity, silence, difficulty in asserting themselves, and a lack of knowledge about their rights. It is also seen that teachers who are inexperienced and do not know their rights are also exposed to mobbing. Similar to all these findings, studies in the literature reveal a relationship between exposure to mobbing and the personality characteristics of the victims. As observed in the study, these traits make them more vulnerable to mobbing behaviors. Similar findings are echoed in the literature. Leymann (1990) states that recessive personality traits increase the severity of mobbing. Arpacioğlu (2003) states that individuals who cannot say no and remain silent when mistreated are more exposed to mobbing due to these personality traits.

Furthermore, the perception that younger and less experienced teachers are more prone to mobbing aligns with existing research. For instance, studies on Special Education Teachers indicate that being young and inexperienced contributes to higher stress levels (Forlin, 2001). In the current study, a majority of participants reported experiencing various forms of mobbing, such as verbal abuse, undue workload, and discriminatory practices, which often led some to change jobs or institutions. Some participants stated that they were exposed to intimidation behaviors such as favoritism and discrimination, and that the administrator or owner of the institution constantly assigned students with severe disabilities to him, intimidating them and forcing them to resign. These findings are consistent with prior studies (Efilti & Koçbeker, 2020; Ertürk, 2013; Forlin, 2001; Işıkhan, 2002; Koç & Bulut, 2009; Künzi et al., 2006; Sarı, 2005).

Participants responded to mobbing in various ways, including speaking up, seeking compromise, or initiating legal action. However, some chose to remain silent, fearing repercussions or feeling that their actions would be futile. This reluctance to react may stem from learned helplessness or a pessimistic outlook exacerbated by persistent mobbing incidents. Participants may have acclimated to mobbing situations in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers due to their personal experiences or witnessing others' experiences. The reluctance to resign despite experiencing mobbing suggests that teachers adopt a survival strategy, striving to navigate their professional lives despite adversity.

Furthermore, even participants denying exposure to mobbing may have encountered it, indicating potential difficulty in acknowledging mobbing, possibly due to ongoing employment or a lack of awareness regarding its manifestations. Based on this situation, it can be argued that the participants may have difficulty in admitting that they have been exposed to mobbing, they may be hesitant to accept the existence of mobbing because they are still working in the same institution, and they may not be aware that the negativities they experience are mobbing. These insights imply that employers could exploit the threat of resignation to circumvent financial obligations like severance pay. Nonetheless, internal relationships significantly impact institutional functioning and service efficacy, with favoritism or discrimination undermining cohesion and organizational integrity. Therefore, teachers in Private Special Education and

Rehabilitation Centers must be well-versed in their rights and the legal framework governing their profession, irrespective of their tenure. This knowledge empowers them to recognize and address intimidation effectively, fostering a workplace environment that supports professional integrity and quality education delivery.

Participants who have not experienced mobbing tend to express a willingness to resign if they encounter such situations. This inclination is attributed to their desire for a more positive work environment and the perceived avoidance of pessimism associated with mobbing. Nearly all participants indicated they would assist a victim of mobbing if they witnessed it, reflecting empathy and a proactive stance against injustice. However, two participants expressed reluctance to intervene, fearing reprisals and isolation, particularly in the fragmented field of special education. This reluctance underscores the significant negative impact of mobbing on employees in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers, who approach the issue with apprehension. Moreover, those willing to support victims often cited personal empathy from past mobbing experiences or a preventive mindset anticipating future incidents. This proactive stance is seen as fostering a positive work environment. Consequently, many participants prefer passive support, such as offering advice to victims, rather than direct advocacy, likely influenced by concerns about their vulnerability to mobbing.

Except for one participant, all teachers employed in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers acknowledge the presence of mobbing within these institutions. Nearly half of the participants believe that Special Education Teachers working in public schools on permanent staff are less likely to encounter mobbing. Many of those who consider mobbing possible in public schools assert it is more prevalent in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers. This perception suggests that teachers in private settings perceive a heightened risk of mobbing compared to their public school counterparts. Interestingly, only one participant believes that mobbing is more prevalent in public schools. This individual values the specialized education background acquired in private institutions and assumes that such entities prioritize favorable working conditions to retain staff. The opinion expressed by this participant, who has previously served as an institution principal, does not reflect the sentiments of those currently working in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers. This participant suggests that teachers who fail to enhance their skills may be subjected to mobbing if deemed necessary. Similarly, another participant, who holds a degree in special education, criticizes colleagues without specialized qualifications working in special education. This individual interferes with the methods and techniques these non-specialized teachers employ, highlighting the challenges associated with lacking a formal degree in special education. These perspectives underscore the ongoing issue surrounding the importance of specialized education qualifications within special education. According to Akçamete et al. (2001), a significant problem in special education is the substantial number of individuals working without the requisite qualifications. Participants who believe there is less mobbing in public schools attribute this to more comfortable and less restrictive working conditions, absence of pressure from owners and directors, civil service protections, and job security inherent in the public sector. The lack of job security in the private sector negatively impacts these participants, a condition not typically seen in the public sector, as noted in the literature (Şahin, 2023). Korucu's (2005) study on private educational institutions revealed that teachers experience anxiety about their future job security, fearing potential termination to hire cheaper replacements. Consequently, teachers concerned about job insecurity may struggle to maximize their effectiveness in serving students. Therefore, it is crucial to implement

necessary measures to ensure job security for teachers in private special education and rehabilitation centers.

Most Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Center teachers emphasized the need to foster a favorable institutional climate and enhance communication to prevent mobbing. These suggestions underscore the organizational factors contributing to mobbing and highlight empathy and effective communication as crucial elements in fostering healthy interpersonal relationships. Additionally, many participants advocated for government intervention to establish proper working conditions in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers. They proposed implementing specific criteria, especially for institution directors and owners, to ensure accountability and prevent top-down mobbing within these institutions. This indicates a widespread concern among educators about the need for regulatory oversight and supervision in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers.

### **Limitations**

This study, while offering rich insights into the lived experiences of mobbing in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers in İzmir, has several methodological limitations that must be acknowledged. The research findings are based on a qualitative, phenomenological approach with a study group drawn exclusively from İzmir. This focus on a single metropolitan area restricts the generalizability of the findings to PSERCs in other regions of Turkey, which may have different organizational cultures or regulatory enforcement levels.

The use of criterion and maximum variation sampling means the sample was purposeful, not random. While this ensured a deep exploration of the phenomenon, the findings are not statistically representative of the entire population of special education teachers in the private sector. Due to the sensitive nature of mobbing and the high rates of job insecurity reported, some participants who were still employed may have experienced hesitancy in fully disclosing all details or may have exhibited underreporting or normalization of mobbing behaviors. Data collection was based solely on the teachers' self-reports and perceptions, limiting the findings to the perspective of the subordinates (victims/witnesses). The study lacked perspectives from the administrative side (owners/directors), which would offer a more holistic view of the organizational dynamics contributing to mobbing.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on these limitations, the following suggestions are offered for future research:

- Conduct comparative studies focusing on teachers in public schools versus private PSERCs in various geographical locations (e.g., Eastern, Central, and Western Turkey) to confirm the regional differences in mobbing prevalence and dynamics.
- Future research should include managers, directors, and institution owners in the sample to establish a more comprehensive understanding of the top-down pressures and organizational justifications for the reported mobbing behaviors.
- Employ quantitative or mixed-method designs to allow for statistical generalization and the testing of the Conceptual Model (Figure 1) developed in this study.
- Given the conflicting findings and the suggestion that mobbing tactics are gender-dependent, further studies specifically focusing on the qualitative differences in the types of mobbing experienced by male versus female special education teachers are essential.

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

The findings underscore that mobbing in Private Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers is fundamentally an organizational crisis rooted in economic exploitation and requires targeted, legislative intervention in three main areas:

- The primary policy goal must be to neutralize the institution's "sole focus on economic interests" as the main driver of mobbing.
- Implement rigorous, periodic, and unannounced financial audits to prevent the widespread practice of underreporting salaries (e.g., reporting minimum wage while paying cash). Audits should ensure strict adherence to fair wage compensation commensurate with teacher qualifications and experience.
- Establish clear legal limits on the teacher-to-student ratio and weekly course load. This directly counters the most prevalent mobbing behavior: assigning excessive workload and tasks beyond the employee's capacity to force resignation.
- Implement measures equivalent to public sector protections to ensure job security for PSERC teachers, mitigating the anxiety about termination to hire cheaper, less-qualified replacements.

### **Ensuring Accountability for Perpetrators**

Since mobbing is predominantly vertical from the owner/director, accountability must be focused on management.

- Require directors and owners to undergo mandatory training and certification in ethical management, communication, and workplace anti-mobbing laws to ensure competency.
- Beyond fines, administrative sanctions—such as suspending or revoking the institution's operating license for proven cases of mobbing by the owner or director—must be enforced to create a genuine deterrent effect.

### **Addressing Targeted Discrimination and Vulnerability**

Policies must acknowledge the specific vulnerabilities identified in the findings, including recessive personality traits and gender-specific mobbing tactics.

- Implement mandatory training programs for all staff and management focusing explicitly on gender-based mobbing tactics (e.g., psychological abuse vs. extreme workload), emphasizing that discrimination is a tool of harassment.
- Provide regular, mandatory information sessions for teachers, particularly those who are inexperienced or perceived as "passive", on their legal rights, reporting mechanisms, and judicial processes to empower them to defend themselves against intimidation.

### **Conclusion**

As a result of the research, it was seen that intimidation behaviors are frequently experienced in Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers and that these intimidations are mostly top-down. It was also found that the type of intimidation can vary depending on the employee's gender. When the causes of intimidation are examined, the functioning of the institutions that consider economic interests comes to the fore. In terms of being exposed to intimidation, it has been observed that special education teachers working in the private sector think they are at greater risk than teachers working as permanent staff in public schools. Therefore, it is believed that raising awareness of teachers working in Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers about the concept of intimidation and their legal rights will be effective in preventing intimidation. In addition, making the necessary

legal arrangements for employment, job security, and job satisfaction, as well as inspecting Special Education and Rehabilitation Centers, will reduce intimidating situations. In addition to all these, it is thought that managers adopting more democratic leadership styles and providing training to parents to increase their awareness about special education will be beneficial in preventing intimidation.

Including principals in the sample in future studies will benefit the literature because, in the current study, the opinions of a teacher who has been a principal in the past add diversity to the research findings. In addition, it is also recommended that research be conducted in which the views of teachers working as permanent special education teachers in public schools are also considered and compared with the opinions of teachers working in the private sector. As in the literature, different views on the relationship between gender and intimidation emerged in this study. Therefore, it is essential to examine intimidation in the context of gender in future research.

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### **Author's Declarations**

**Authors' Contributions:** The authors contributed equally to this article.

**Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate:** Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the İzmir Democracy University Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee with decision dated 08/09/2023 and numbered 2023/11-06 (Protocol No. 2023/86). The study was conducted in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. All participants were provided with detailed information about the purpose of the study, and written informed consent was obtained through an informed voluntary consent form. Participants' identities were kept confidential, and all data were anonymized prior to analysis.

**Data availability:** Data will be made available on request.

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