

Gender and Mobbing: The Case of Turkey

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to demonstrate the importance of gender as a causative factor of mobbing, which is one of the prominent problems in today's occupational life. The study is important in that it brings together the findings of postgraduate theses in Turkey on the subject of mobbing to demonstrate the role of gender. The study was based on a descriptive screening model, since it aims to examine a current phenomenon. Data collection was performed using the document analysis method. In this study, all published doctorate, postgraduate and medical theses in Turkey investigating mobbing incidents in occupational life (281 theses in total) were examined. 213 theses - including 15 doctorate theses, 197 postgraduate theses, and one medical thesis - were included into the study analysis. 37% of these theses indicated that gender has an effect on mobbing. This result indicates that one in three persons in the workplace face mobbing behaviors due to their gender. In conclusion, this study determined that women face mobbing more frequently than men. The results of mobbing studies in Turkey are similar to those conducted around the world, demonstrating that women are at greater risk of mobbing in their occupational lives.

Keywords: Mobbing, Gender, Organizational Psychology, Industrial psychology, Social psychology

Introduction

Ever since humans have been engaged in the competitive, intensive, and often ruthless atmosphere of work, this atmosphere has created many problems of its own, and will likely continue to do so in the foreseeable future. In present-day occupational life, there has been an increasing focus on behavioral aspects, with studies from all angles addressing the ways in which these behavioral aspects affect performance. Increasing competition between workers, difficult work conditions, organizational problems, economic and cultural factors, social expectations, and various psychological problems in the work environment strain human relations and communication, often to a breaking point.

Certain organizations place little value on merit, have strong hierarchical structures, limit the sharing of information, restrict intra-organizational communication, and neglect the behavioral aspects of occupational life. Such organizations create an environment suitable for conflict, disputes, and ill-intentioned behaviors between individuals. Considering that certain persons in the workplace might have psychological issues, or be outright malevolent, such environments increase the likelihood of negative incidents.

Such negative behaviors are common in occupational life. The concept of “mobbing” was developed to define and frame these types of behaviors. Mobbing is defined as “a form of psychological terror directed in a systematic way through hostile and unethical communication by one or few individuals towards one individual” (Leymann, 1990).

Mobbing

The concept was first used by the scientist Konrad Lorenz (Lorenz, 1963; as cited by Davenport et al., 2003; Leymann, 1996) in his study evaluating the behavior of geese. The Austrian scientist used the term “mobbing” to describe the behaviors these geese exhibited to chase or scare away and animal they perceived as a threat. In 1972, Swedish scientist Dr. Paul Heinemann published a work examining the behaviors exhibited by school age children at the time, where he used the concept “mobbing” to describe the set of behaviors that alienated its victim, caused them to despair, and even brought them to the point of committing suicide (Heinemann, 1972; as cited by Leymann, 1996). In the 1980s, scientist Dr. Heinz Leymann used to term “mobbing” to define the negative behaviors observed between individuals in workplaces and as part of their occupational lives. Leymann was the first to use the concept of mobbing in occupational life. Furthermore, Leymann also published over 60 works on mobbing (LIPT: Leymann Inventory of Psychological Terror), where he described the causes and effects of mobbing behaviors, the persons who may become targets, the personality of those who commit mobbing, the psychological and physical consequences of mobbing, and the measures necessary for addressing these problems (Leymann, 1990; Leymann, 1996; Leymann and Gustavsson, 1996; Davenport et al., 2003). Leymann explained that individuals targeted by mobbing are left defenseless, being subject to a psychological terror through hostile and unethical communication that are directed over a long period of time (Leymann, 1996). Zapf, Knorz, and Kulla (1996) defined mobbing as “a social conflict characterized by long-term and conscious hostile behavior towards a targeted person or persons”.

It is possible to provide even more definitions and details about the concept of mobbing. Based on these definitions, it is possible to highlight three important points regarding mobbing. First of all, the process of mobbing involves three separate groups, which are: those who commit the mobbing, or the “mobbers;” those who are subject to mobbing, the “target” or “victim;” and those who witness the act of mobbing, the “bystanders or onlookers.” The onlookers are generally unwilling to intervene or become involve, since they are also fearful of becoming targets themselves. This makes the mobbing process all the more worrisome. While the victim is already being isolated and alienated in the workplace, witnesses avoid taking any action out of fear that they might become the next victims; this makes the mobbers’ work all the more easier, and even supports their actions. It is therefore possible to say that witnesses play an

important role in cases of mobbing. The second point that needs to be highlighted is that mobbing is a definitely systematic and continuous process. This means that not all negative attitudes or behaviors can be designated as mobbing. Many researchers in the literature describe that to be defined as mobbing, the relevant attitudes and behaviors must be consciously and systematically committed over a period of at least six months (Leymann, 1990; Leymann 1996; Davenport et al., 2003; Zapf et al., 1996; Çobanoğlu, 2005). This point is important in that while it is common for people to have disagreements or various problems, or to experience disputes as part of their occupational life, not every one of these negative events means that there is a conspiracy, or a person who is targeted by mobbing. The third point is that the objective of the unethical acts committed during mobbing is to negatively impact the life of lives of the person or persons being targeted, thus humiliating them and eventually forcing them out of the workplace. Based on the definitions in the literature and the important points mentioned above, the definition of mobbing can be framed as followed: Mobbing is the set of malevolent behaviors exhibited systematically, consciously, and continuously with the intention of humiliating a person or persons and forcing them to leave the workplace.

The phenomenon and process of mobbing is reminiscent of a theatrical play. There are three main actors, or groups, involved in this play. The first and foremost is the “mobber(s),” the lead actor(s) of the play who are also involved in “staging” it, and endeavor to have the target of their malevolent behaviors humiliated, alienated and/or removed from the workplace. The second is the “victim(s)/target(s),” the person(s) who is (are) targeted by the mobbing, and who are forced to take part in this play where they are the subject of malevolent acts and behaviors. Last, but not least, is the “onlookers” or “audience,” who may at times applaud the act that is being staged, or at times be silently angered by it, but who will, in either case, not intervene in any meaningful way, thus preventing the play from unfolding, or the victim from becoming isolated and alienated.

Causes Of Mobbing

There are many underlying causes for mobbing. These causes include personal reasons (i.e. reasons stemming from the mobber or victim), organizational reasons, and sociocultural reasons (Leymann 1996; Leymann and Gustavsson, 1996; Davenport et al., 2003; Zapf, 1999; Chappell and Di Martino, 2000; Einarsen, 1999).

Ruth and Gary Namie (2003) describe that people who are well-liked in their social environment, confident, and talented can become the victims of mobbing due to the jealousy they cause. It is therefore possible to say that persons who feel threatened or outclassed by workers with positive qualities resort to mobbing as a solution. In a study on academics, Westhues (2004) notes that individuals who are autonomous, who have no political affiliations, who dislike being controlled by another, and who are generally talented, hard-working, and reliable can become the target of mobbing. Individuals with lower self-esteem and higher levels of anxiety may also be harmed to a greater extent by psychological violence, and thus be more exposed to or defenseless against attacks (Matthiesen and Einarsen, 2001).

Davenport et al. (2003) explain that while mobbing is observed in every type of workplace and institution, workers have a higher chance of experiencing mobbing in small and non-profit organizations compared to larger and more institutionalized

companies. This is largely due to the fact that smaller organizations are more likely to be managed by persons with little understanding of administration or management. Hirigoyen (2000) sees mobbing as a form of deviant behavior, and notes that the acts and methods associated with this deviance are only possible if the organization supports or turns a blind eye to them. It is known that disputes occur more easily in groups under pressure, and that new methods implemented for increasing productivity generally ignore the human factor, thus creating a stressful work environment suitable for malevolent behavior. Taking into account the psychological atmosphere of the workplace, it has been suggested that mobbing is more common in organizations with little or no information sharing, and where there is a general uncertainty regarding tasks and objectives (Vartia, 1996). Mobbing can also be triggered by the organizational structure; bad management; the selection of inadequate managers based on a system that ignores merit; communication problems; rigid hierarchical structures; and the groups formed by employees within the organization.

Organizations are also influenced by the values, norms, economic structure, and mentality of the society in which they exist (Davenport et al., 2003); in this context, it is necessary to also address the social aspects of psychological violence (Kırel, 2008). In a given society, high levels of violent crimes may also indirectly affect the workplace. Furthermore, the culture of violence promoted by the media can also have an effect on work environments (Poussard and Çamuroğlu, 2009).

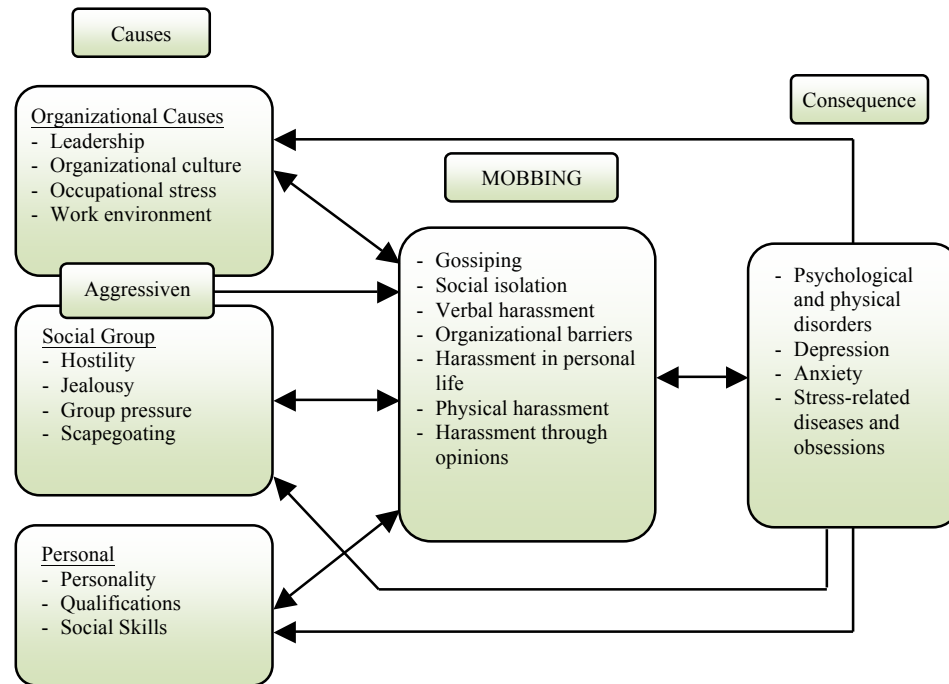


Figure 1: Causes and Consequences of Mobbing (Zapf, 1999)

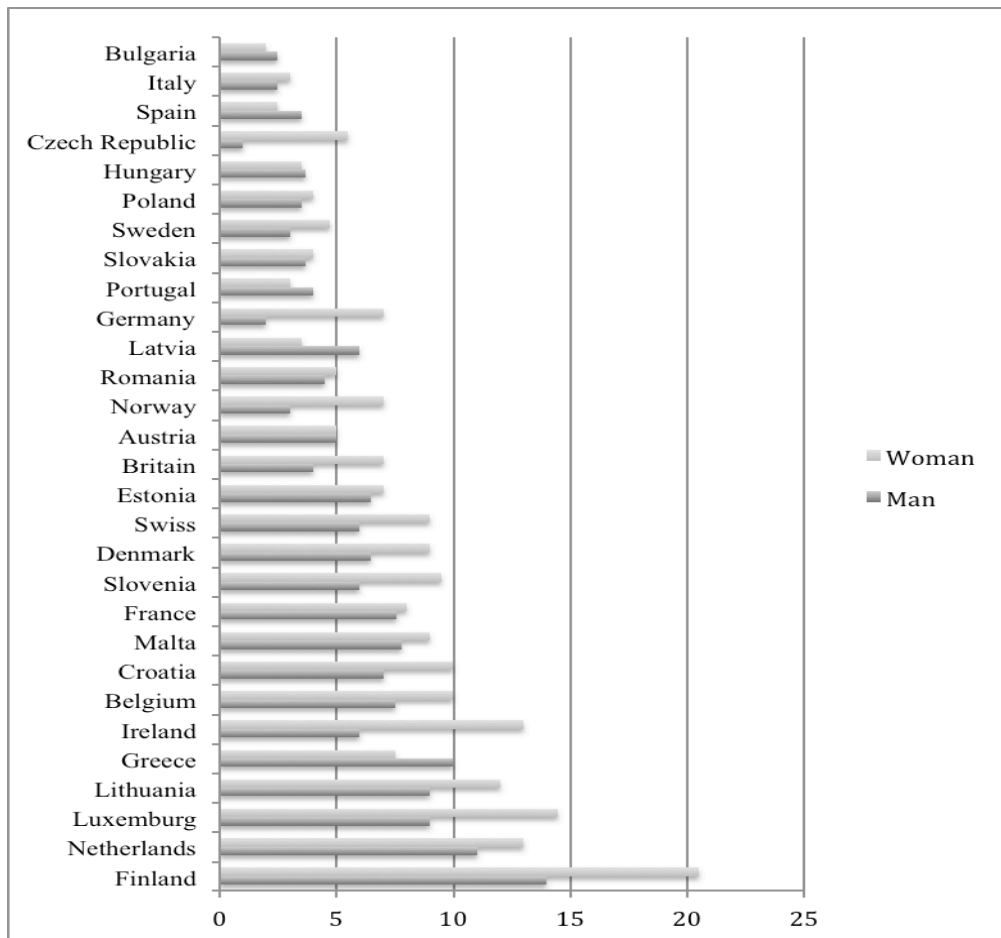
As shown in Figure 1, there are many underlying dynamics that can lead to mobbing. These dynamics may exist or appear in every organization. Every employee may face a wide variety of negative behaviors or problems in their occupational life that stem from their work environment. Eliminating these behaviors or problems may not always be possible; however, it is possible to prevent them from escalating into graver incidents between employees. Organizations that place greater emphasis on the

organization's goal and objectives rather than personal interests, and whose activities are guided by such considerations, will be better at preventing mobbing.

In addition, it is possible to say that gender is an important factor in mobbing. Especially in patriarchal societies, it is especially difficult for women to find a place in the work life. The way in which women are undervalued or treated dismissively in the difficult and competitive conditions of the workplace may also serve as the starting point of many mobbing incidents. According to Westhues (2004), gender, physical characteristics, and belonging to a more advantaged or disadvantaged social class are sufficient in themselves in causing someone to become the victim of mobbing. For this reason, evaluating mobbing from the perspective of gender, and identifying the causes of gender-related mobbing, may bring a new dimension to the efforts and recommendations for solving this problem.

Many studies suggest that gender is an important factor in mobbing incidents. In addition to the risk of sexual abuse they face (Chappell and Di Martino, 1999), studies also indicate that women are more likely than men to experience mobbing (Salin, 2001; Fourth European Working Conditions Survey, 2005), with women generally having a 75% higher risk of becoming the target of mobbing (Di Pasquale, 2002).

Many studies have investigated the relationship between gender and mobbing. One such study is the Fourth European Working Conditions Survey (2005), whose results are shown in Graph 1 according to country and gender.



Graph 1: Mobbing According to Country and Gender (FEWCS, 2005)

As shown in Graph 1, women experience mobbing incidents more frequently than men in most countries of Europe. For this reason, it is possible to say that gender is one of the main causes of mobbing.

This study aims to investigate the gender-related aspects of mobbing in order to better understand the problems experienced specifically by women, and to delineate the current situation regarding mobbing and women. The study will perform a general evaluation by bringing together and examining numerous studies on the subject. This is important both for demonstrating the common findings and conclusions of current studies, and for allowing gender-related data from mobbing studies in Turkey to serve as a source for international studies.

In recent years, mobbing has become a widely heard and known concept, on which numerous studies are being conducted. Many researchers are discussing and investigating the problems and negative incidents workers experience at the workplace, especially in relation to their personal rights. The findings and results of these studies are important for addressing the problems women in Turkey experience in the workplace, and finding solutions for these problems.

It is very important to investigate whether gender affects one person's likelihood of becoming a target of mobbing at the workplace. There are many studies and results on the gender aspect of mobbing. In this context, we deemed it necessary to conduct a study that examines postgraduate theses in Turkey on the subject of mobbing from a gender perspective, while also evaluating their findings and identifying their shortfalls. The present study will provide a general conclusion regarding the findings of these theses, and also serve as a guide for future studies. The aim was thus to gather all extant studies on this subject in Turkey to perform a general assessment. The present study was performed to meet all of these requirements.

Purpose

The main purpose of this study was to examine the findings of doctorate, postgraduate, and medical theses on mobbing in Turkey from the standpoint of gender. In Turkey, the number of studies on mobbing is comparatively less than the number of such studies conducted in other countries. This study will demonstrate the results and conclusions of postgraduate theses in Turkey on mobbing from the standpoint of gender, and also contribute to the international literature on the subject.

Method

This study has a qualitative descriptive survey research design. The method was preferred because the survey model aims to identify the general characteristics of the sample concerning the phenomenon studied, and the distribution of these characteristics by different variables (e.g. age, gender, political preferences, etc.) (Frankeal and Wallen, 2006). The survey model was deemed to be appropriate for the present study because it aims to examine the phenomenon of mobbing from the perspective of gender. Qualitative surveys can use, in addition to observation and interview techniques, document analysis as well (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis involves the evaluation of both written and printed documents on the studied subject (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2008). Best (1959) defined this method as “the system review of existing records or documents as a source of data” (As cited by: Karasar, 2007). Document analysis was preferred because graduate theses written in Turkey on mobbing constitute a very

comprehensive and rarely studied data source that allows discussing the phenomenon of mobbing from the perspective of gender.

In this study, all published doctorate, postgraduate, and medical theses in Turkey investigating mobbing incidents in occupational life were examined. All thesis studies performed by postgraduate and doctorate students in Turkey are published on the electronic database known as the National Thesis Center (*Ulusal Tez Merkezi*) of the Council of Higher Education (*Yükseköğretim Kurulu, YÖK*). Theses were found and examined using this database. The first study in Turkey on the subject of mobbing was performed in 2005. The present study evaluates of theses from 2005 to 2015 (inclusive). There are 23 doctorate, 257 postgraduate, and one medical theses on mobbing that have been published between 2005 and 2015. As such, there are a total of 281 theses on mobbing that have been published in Turkey until 2016.

Results

Data concerning the doctorate, postgraduate, and medical theses evaluated in this study are shown in the tables below.

TABLE 1: Distribution of the theses included into the study

Distribution of Theses	Results	Inaccessible	Qualitative	Exclusive Men or Women Sample	Included into the Study
Doctorate Theses	23	5	1	2	15
Postgraduate Theses	257	34	17	9	197
Medical Theses	1	0	0	0	1
Total	281	39	18	11	213

Between 2005 and 2015, a total of 281 theses have been written on the subject of mobbing, including 23 doctorate, 257 postgraduate, and one medical theses. An evaluation performed on the webpage of the Council of Higher Education (www.yok.gov.tr) revealed that the authors of five doctorate and 34 of the postgraduate theses had not granted access permission for their studies, meaning that these theses were inaccessible. In addition, there were one doctorate and 17 postgraduate studies that were performed using qualitative methods. And in two doctorate and nine postgraduate studies, the study sample consisted entirely of men or women, with no gender-related assessments being performed. Table 2 provides information regarding the studies that were included into the study and evaluated.

TABLE 2: The distribution of the theses with respect to the gender of the participants

Distribution of Theses	Evaluated Studies	Sample	Women	Men
Doctorate Theses	15	8122	3807	4315
Postgraduate Theses	197	56120	27517	28603
Medical Theses	1	161	80	81
Total	213	64403	31404	32999

Once the theses that were inaccessible, qualitative, or with exclusively men or women study samples were removed, a total of 213 theses remained, which included 15

doctorate, 197 postgraduate and 1 medical theses. All of these remaining theses were included into the study. The total number of participants reached by the theses included into the study was 64,403. Within this sample, 31,404 (48.8%) were women, while 32,999 (51.2%) were men.

Evaluation of these data and results with respect gender provided the results shown in Table3.

TABLE 3: The distribution of theses' results with respect to the gender

Distribution of Theses	Evaluated Theses	No Difference	Women / Number of Persons	Men / Number of Persons
Doctorate Theses	15	11	3 / 1110	1 / 691
Postgraduate Theses	197	122	43 / 6260	32 / 5495
Medical Theses	1	1	0 / 0	0 / 0
Total	213	134	46 / 7370	33 / 6186

It was observed that 134 (63%) of the 213 evaluated theses identified no differences with respect to gender. These included 11 doctorate, 122 postgraduate, and one medical theses, which described, based on their own analyses, that gender is not a factor that affects mobbing. Thus, 134 theses concluded that the incidence of mobbing does not differ significantly based on gender, and that women and men are equally as likely to become experience mobbing.

On the other hand, 79 (37%) of the 213 evaluated theses described that gender is a factor that affects mobbing. These included three doctorate and 43 postgraduate theses (total sample size: 7370) that observed that women are more likely to become targets of mobbing, as well as one doctorate and 32 postgraduate studies (total sample size: 6186) that observed that men are more likely to become targets of mobbing. According to our assessments performed with respect to gender, it was determined that 46 (21.5%) of the 213 evaluated theses described women as experiencing a higher incidence of mobbing, while 33 (15.5%) described men as experiencing a higher incidence of mobbing.

Considering that a total of 213 theses with 31,404 women participants were evaluated within the scope of this study, the ratio of women experiencing mobbing was determined as 23.5%. On the other hand, considering that a total of 32,999 men participants were evaluated within the scope of this study, the ratio of men experiencing mobbing was determined as 18.7%.

Conclusions

One of goals of this study was to determine whether gender is an important factor which affects the occurrence of mobbing. As indicated by the results of the present study, the theses that were included into this study and evaluated showed a greater incidence of mobbing for women. While 63% of these theses did not identify a significant difference with respect to gender in their assessments, 37% of these theses indicate that gender had an effect on mobbing. This result indicates that one in three persons in the workplace face mobbing behaviors due to their gender.

In addition, the ratio of women who were victims of mobbing was determined as 58.2%. According to a study conducted by the World Bullying Institute (WBI) on 7740 employees in the United States, the incidence of mobbing was 37%, with 57% of the

victims being women (WBI Survey, 2007; Namie, 2007). Another study conducted in Finland also described that women experience mobbing more frequently than men (Salin, 2001). Furthermore, these theses that were evaluated in the present study indicated that nearly one out of every four women is a victim of mobbing.

There are numerous studies demonstrating that women are more likely to become victims of mobbing than men. Nearly all of these studies portray gender as factor that affects mobbing (Zapf et al., 2003).

Di Martino et al. (2003) suggested that women are more frequently the targets of negative behaviors than men. In a study performed on women, Çöğenli (2016) found that 76.5% of women academics considered themselves as victims of mobbing, while the same ratio was 61.2% for men academics. Evaluations performed in this study indicated that women academics saw themselves as experiencing mobbing more frequently than men academics. The ratio of women academics who expressed that they were subject to mobbing was 1.838 time greater than among men academics. Similarly, women academics who expressed that they were partially subject to mobbing was 2.527 times greater than among men academics. As such, the likelihood of mobbing among women academics was found to be 4.365 times greater compared to the likelihood of mobbing among men academics (Çöğenli and Asunakutlu, 2014; Çöğenli and Döner, 2015).

A study conducted by Chappell and Di Martino (1999) in 15 European countries, which was also mentioned in the 1998 International Labor Organization (ILO) report, suggested that gender increased the likelihood of mobbing. According to a study conducted by Di Pasquale (2002) in Germany, age and gender both increase the risk of mobbing, with women having a 75% greater risk of becoming mobbing victims than men, and with 3.5% of women and 2% of men in the population having experienced mobbing. Another study conducted in Sweden (Voss et al., 2001) also described that women experience mobbing more frequently than men.

There are also numerous studies in the United Kingdom (Hoel et al., 2001), Norway (Einarsen and Skogstad, 1996; Matthiesen and Einarsen, 2001), Ireland (O'Moore et al., 1998), Germany (Zapf et al., 1996b), Finland (Vartia, 1993), Turkey (Cogenli and Barli, 2013) and Denmark (Mikkelsen and Einarsen, 2001) that similarly demonstrate that women are more often the targets of mobbing than men.

Since gender is an important factor in mobbing, it is necessary to take steps that take gender into account when combatting mobbing. It is possible to say that a working and social environment that is culturally and organizationally male-dominated with present a greater risk for women in terms of the problems they might experience (including mobbing). For this reason, to ensure a healthier and more sustainable working environment, it is first necessary to eliminate sexist perspectives. The notion that men are stronger, more hard-working, more independent and free, more unconstrained (in terms of having greater freedom to act in the way they choose to), more entrepreneurial and more dominant forms the basis of many gender-related problems both in socio-cultural life and occupational life. Since men expect women to assume responsibilities unrelated to having a career or profession - such as domestic work, having children, and raising children - they are likely to consider women's presence in the work environment as a nuisance.

Turkey has no specific legislation on mobbing. Europe and the United States have many laws on this phenomenon. Legislation that addresses psychosocial problems of employees in workplaces and, to prevent the emergence of these problems, targets persons who engage in mobbing, coupled with heavy penal sanctions, would be one of the most important tools for minimizing and eliminating mobbing.

The first official step taken in Turkey concerning the phenomenon of mobbing was the “Prime Minister’s Circular” published in March 2011 in the Official Gazette (Başbakanlık, 2011). The circular, consisting of 8 articles, referred to mobbing as “psychological abuse”, and listed the measures to be taken. In terms of legal sanctions, this circular was the first official step to prevent cases of mobbing in Turkey.

Even though there are not many studies on gender and mobbing, the first official study that considered mobbing from the perspective of gender was the “Report on Psychological Abuse (Mobbing) in the Workplace and Its Prevention” prepared by the Committee on Equality of Opportunity for Women and Men of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (2011). The Committee, which consists of members of parliament, prepared the report after holding meetings with academics, lawyers, mobbing experts and mobbing victims. After these meetings, 41 solutions were proposed concerning the phenomenon of mobbing. However, mobbing experienced by women did not receive particular emphasis, and the report provided a general outlook.

The present study aims to demonstrate that women are over-represented among the victims of mobbing in Turkey, and emphasize the need for more studies on this topic and more official initiatives that focus on gender. Female employees in Turkey experience many gender-related problems in the workplace due to various cultural issues and social prejudices. From the moment they join the labor force and at each step of their career ladder, women face mobbing because of their gender. Single women, in particular, encounter this problem more frequently. As a cultural phenomenon, married women are treated with more caution in Turkey, which has a patriarchal social structure. Yet, unfortunately, as much as one in four women trying to make a living in different industries face mobbing because of their gender.

More comprehensive studies should be conducted on the phenomenon mobbing from the perspective of gender. The place of women in the labor force should be emphasized and their presence in the labor force should be supported. No study argues that gender is the main cause of mobbing, but it should be kept in mind that gender is an important factor.

In conclusion, this study determined that women face mobbing more frequently than men. It is therefore possible to see that gender is an important element in the work environment, and that it can be a cause of mobbing. The results of mobbing studies in Turkey are similar to those conducted around the world, demonstrating that women are at greater risk of mobbing in their occupational lives. Nearly one out of every four women experience mobbing. This indicates that gender is a highly important factor in the workplace that needs to be addressed. Based on theses that were evaluated, it was determined that gender is an important factor in mobbing incidents; that women face mobbing behaviors more frequently than men; that women are at a greater risk of mobbing; that the mobbers of women at the workplace are also women in most cases; and that there is a visible relationship between gender and mobbing in occupational life.

Mobbing is a form of psychological violence that targets people in the workplace, and victims can be from any demographic. Dealing with mobbing requires informed and determined managers and the creation of a merit-based career system. In addition, the government needs to provide additional sanctions by creating legislation concerning this phenomenon. Various committees and teams consisting of public officials, civil society organizations, labor unions, experts and academics should be formed to investigate and prevent cases of mobbing, and to identify those responsible.

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