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Mobbing in Academy: Have Mobbing Really Happened to Assistants?

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1. INTRODUCTION

In today's dynamic and complex environment it is hard to compete and become a successful organization. Employees are the main sources of competitive advantage. To be competitively successful today's organizations must eliminate all work-related negative factors. Mobbing is one of the significant work-related factors. Mobbing can be considered as the most problematic factor that should be prevented. It is an extreme form of social stress factor at work place. The basic characteristic of social stress factors is that they are related to the social relations of employees within the organization (Zapf, Knorz and Kulla, 1996).

Mobbing involves a hostile social interaction through which one individual is attacked by one or more individuals on a daily basis. This can continue for many months, bringing the person into an almost helpless position with potentially high risk of expulsion (Leymann, 1996). The importance of mobbing has been increasing in Turkey as well as in the world. Many studies have been conducted regarding this issue in the literature.

The objective of this paper is to investigate whether research assistants in Turkish universities have been subject to mobbing. We believe mobbing activities have different levels of success on different age groups, marital statuses and gender. We also believe there is a distinction between the fields of study. We also suspect a difference in state versus private sector and the number of working hours an employee works.

The second section reviews the literature on mobbing and develops the research hypotheses. In the third section the methodology used in the paper is presented. The empirical findings are given in the fourth section, finally section five concludes.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Although mobbing is a very old phenomenon, its theoretical context began in 1980s. When it comes to give a specific date it can be said that mobbing was first described in 1984 by Leymann and Gustavsson (Leymann, 1996). Besides the studies of Leymann (Leymann and Gustavsson, 1984) Matthiesen, Raknes and Rökkum (1989), Kihle (1990), Einarsen and Raknes (1991), Paanen and Vartia (1991), Toohey (1991), Adams (1992), Björkqvist et al. (1994), Becker (1993), Einarsen, Raknes, Matthiesen and Hellesoy (1994), Niedl (1995), Kaucsek and Simon (1995), McCarthy, Sheehan and Kearns (1995), Knorz and Zapf (1996), and Knorz and Kulla (1996) can be mentioned as the main research who had examined this phenomenon.

Mobbing should be taken into consideration as a multidimensional concept. Regarding the effects that the mobbing activities have on the victim, this phenomenon was described by Leymann (1996) with five dimensions. These five dimensions are; effects on the victims' possibilities to communicate adequately, effects on the victims' possibilities to maintain social contacts, effects on the victims' possibilities to maintain their personal reputation, effects on the victims' occupational situation, and effects on the victims' physical health. On the other hand, Zapf, Knorz and Kulla (1996) analyzed this concept with seven dimensions. There are also other differences among the views regarding this concept. Zapf (1999) indicates the behaviors of the mobbing victims as a cause of mobbing, whereas Leymann (1996) states the leadership problems and the workplace itself which causes mobbing. Regardless of the causes, individuals who are in a weaker power position are more likely to become mobbing victims (Knorz and Zapf, 1996; Niedl, 1995; Zapf, Renner, Bühler and Weinl, 1996; Zapf, Knorz and Kulla, 1996).

Since research assistants are in a weaker position among the academicians, we have decided to take them as our study on mobbing. The sample of the research consists of 200 research assistants from 14 universities and 7 faculties in Istanbul.

The research hypotheses are classified into five groups. The first group is about the effects of mobbing on victim's possibilities to communicate adequately. The hypotheses in this group are given as follows:

H1. There is no relationship between University Foundation and criticizing a person's work

H2. There is no relationship between age of the respondent and possibility to communicate

H3. There is no relationship between the faculty of the respondent and possibilities to communicate

H4. There is no relationship between the University Foundation of the respondent and possibilities to communicate

H5. There is no relationship between the age and verbal attack /shouting or cursing at a person

H6. There is no relationship between working hours of the respondent and verbal attack/ shouting at or cursing

The second group of hypotheses is about the effects of mobbing on victim's possibilities to maintain social contacts. The hypotheses in this group are given as follows:

H7. There is no relationship between the faculty of the respondent and refusal to communicate

H8. There is no relationship between the University Foundation of the respondent and refusal to be talked to/refusal to communicate

The third group of hypotheses is about the effects of mobbing on victim's possibilities to maintain their personal reputation. The hypotheses in this group are given as follows:

H9. There is no relationship between the marital status of the respondent and saying nasty things about a person behind or spreading rumors

H10. There is no relationship between the faculty of the respondent and suspecting a person to be psychologically disturbed / forced psychiatric treatment

H11. There is no relationship between the working hours of the respondent and suspecting a person to be psychologically disturbed

H12. There is no relationship between the faculty of the respondent and making fun of person's nationality

The fourth group of hypotheses is about the effects of mobbing on victim's occupational situation. The hypotheses in this group are given as follows:

H13. There is no relationship between the gender of the respondent and judging a person's job performance wrongly

H14. There is no relationship between the faculty of the respondent and judging a person's job performance wrongly

H15. There is no relationship between the hours of work per week of the respondent and questioning decisions

The fifth group of hypotheses is about the effects of mobbing on victim's physical health condition.

The hypotheses are:

H16. There is no relationship between the gender of the respondent and being given convenient job

H17. There is no relationship between the University Foundation of the respondent and damaging the workplace

3. METHODOLOGY

Research setting and procedure

The data are collected by using a questionnaire that includes questions regarding demographic aspects of the respondents and items considering mobbing actions. Mobbing was measured by 36 items adapted from Leymann Inventory of Psychological Terrorization (LIPT: Leymann, 1990) which originally involves 45 items representing five dimensions. All item scales were anchored on a five point scale with 5 = 'strongly agree', 4 = 'agree', 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 2 = 'disagree' and 1 = 'strongly disagree'. Demographic aspects were assessed with 6 questions. The total number of questions of the questionnaire was 42.

Sampling and sample characteristics

Every job has its own unique dynamics. Job requirements, objectives of the employee working for this job and career paths the employee follows vary according to job dynamics. Different jobs may also cause different problems. Mobbing as a problem will be assessed by taking the job into

consideration. In this paper research assistants are the respondents that are taken into consideration. The sample of the research consists of 200 research assistants from 14 universities and 7 faculties in Istanbul.

Data obtained from the questionnaire are evaluated by using the SPSS. Frequency distributions related with demographic factors are given and the hypotheses tests about the presence of certain relationships are conducted. Chi-square tests are conducted in order to determine whether demographic variables have any effect on the occurrence of the mobbing activities.

The Cronbach's alpha value shows the reliability level of the scale. This value provides the minimum acceptable level which is suggested by Neuman (2006). It can be argued that the questionnaire is reliable. The content validity of the study can also be seen as agreeable since the questionnaire was developed by using an appropriate widely accepted scale of Leymann (1990).

4. RESULTS

In this section the frequency distributions related with several demographic factors such as gender, age, marital status of the respondents and other specific information are provided. As can be seen from table 1, the sample size is 200. Approximately half of the respondents are male. The largest age group is between 26 and 30. 64 percent of the respondents are over the age of 31. 45 percent of them are in the age group of 21-25. More than 61 percent of the respondents are never married, 36 percent are married and 2 percent are widowed or divorced.

There are also differences with respect to fields of study. The largest group with 36 percent is in the faculty of engineering and architecture. The second largest group is in the faculty of Science-literature. The number of hours worked varies. 97 assistants work more than 40 hours per week. 4 respondents work more than 80 hours per week. As shown below half of the respondents are in state universities.

Table 1. Frequency Distributions

Age	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
21-25	45	22,5	22,5	22,5
26-30	91	45,5	45,5	68
31 +	64	32	32	100
Total	200	100	100	
Gender				
Female	101	50,5	50,5	50,5
Male	99	49,5	49,5	100
Total	200	100	100	
Marital status				
Single	123	61,5	61,5	61,5
Married	73	36,5	36,5	98
Widow/divorced	4	2	2	100
Total	200	100	100	
The faculty of the respondent				
Science-literature	51	25,5	25,5	25,5
School of economics and administrative sciences	33	16,5	16,5	42
Communication	7	3,5	3,5	45,5
Engineering & architecture	73	36,5	36,5	82
Law	1	0,5	0,5	82,5
Arts	16	8	8	90,5
Medical school	19	9,5	9,5	100
Total	200	100	100	
The number of hours worked per week				
40	103	51,5	51,5	51,5
40-60	81	40,5	40,5	92
60-80	12	6	6	98
80 +	4	2	2	100
Total	200	100	100	
The University type the research assistant works for				
Private	100	50	50	50
State	100	50	50	100
Total	200	100	100	

Table 2 provides the results of hypotheses tests about the existence of a relationship between several demographic factors and some of the items used in the measurement of mobbing. Only the significant findings are reported in the table. The first group of hypotheses looks into the effects of mobbing on victim's adequacy of communication. The relationship between the type of University (private vs state) of the respondent and evaluating a person's work, age and possibility to communicate, faculty and possibility to communicate, type of University and possibility to communicate, age & verbal attack /shouting or cursing at a person, working hours and verbal attack or shouting at or cursing are investigated. For all of the hypothesis it is found that there exists a relationship at 5 percent significance level using Pearson chi-square test statistics.

University could be considered as a component of educational service sector. In service sector communication between the employer and the employee is very important. The communication skills of these parties become important in business life. Leymann (1996) argues that the management's responsibility is to lead the employees to company goals by working in harmony. The managers are responsible for the establishment and control of this harmony. It is important that both sides share the same organizational goals.

The second group of hypothesis looks into the effects of mobbing on victim's possibilities to maintain social contacts. In this group the relationship between faculty of the respondent & refusal to communicate and type of University & refusal to be talked to/refusal to communicate are examined. It is known that mobbing causes low job satisfaction and there is a positive relationship between mobbing and low level of maintaining social contacts. Mobbing activities are observed in competitive and stressful conditions. Also, lack of team work, jealousy and competition in the organization has a positive relationship with mobbing activities.

Third group of hypotheses are about the effects of mobbing on victim's possibilities to maintain their personal reputation. Here, marital status of the respondent & saying nasty things about a person behind or spreading rumors, faculty of the respondent & suspecting a person to be psychologically disturbed / forced psychiatric treatment, working hours of the respondent & suspecting a person to be psychologically disturbed, faculty of the respondent & making fun of person's nationality are taken into consideration. In general, in the studies about the victim of

mobbing, the victims are found to be honest, cooperative, hard working, self-confident, enterprising persons. A high level of loyalty is observed among the mobbing victims of the service sector. According to Leymann (1996) there are no specific characteristic of mobbing victims except dishonesty, trustworthiness and goodness.

Fourth group of hypotheses are about the effects of mobbing on victim's occupational situation. The hypotheses considered are: gender of the respondent & judging a person's job performance wrongly, faculty of the respondent & judging a person's job performance wrongly, hours of work per week & questioning decisions. There are strong links between the judgments of the victim's performance wrongly and despotic behavior in the work place. The despotic people don't respect the other people's opinions and feelings. Also, these kind of people are usually jealous, suspicious and revengeful.

Fifth group of hypotheses are about the effects of mobbing on victim's physical health. The relationship between gender of the respondent & being given convenient job, type of University & damaging the workplace are investigated. If job satisfaction of the research assistants in the working environment is low, then the physical health of the employees could be affected negatively. The employees, whose job satisfaction is low, could face mental and emotional stress.

Table 2. Results of Hypothesis Test

I. Group Hypothesis Effects on Victim's Possibilities to Communicate Adequately					
HYPOTHESIS	Correlation	Test	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Type University & Evaluating a person's work	Significant	Pearson	8,180 ^a	2	0,017
Age & Possibility to communicate	Significant	Pearson	11,918 ^a	4	0,018
Faculty & Possibility to communicate	Significant	Pearson	33,480 ^a	12	0,001
Type of University & Possibility to communicate	Significant	Pearson	6,340 ^a	2	0,042
Age & Verbal attack /shouting or cursing at a person	Significant	Pearson	11,257 ^a	4	0,024
Working Hours& verbal attack or shouting at or cursing	Significant	Pearson	34,489 ^a	6	0
II. Group Hypothesis Effects on Victim's Possibilities to Maintain Social Contacts					
Faculty & Refusal to communicate	Significant	Pearson	30,529 ^a	12	0,002
Type of University & Refusal to be talked to/refusal to communicate	Significant	Pearson	8,533 ^a	2	0,014
III. Group Hypothesis Effects on Victim's Possibilities to Maintain Their Personal Reputation					
Marital Status & Saying nasty things about a person behind or spreading rumors	Significant	Pearson	10,320 ^a	4	0,035
Faculty & Suspecting a person to be psychologically disturbed / forced psychiatric treatment	Significant	Pearson	24,311 ^a	12	0,018

Working hours& Suspecting a person to be psychologically disturbed	Significant	Pearson	13,854 ^a	6	0,031
Faculty & Making fun of person's nationality	Significant	Pearson	24,894 ^a	12	0,015
IV. Group Hypothesis Effects on Victim's Occupational Situation					
Gender & Judging a person's job performance wrongly	Significant	Pearson	7,692 ^a	2	0,021
Faculty & judging a person's job performance wrongly	Significant	Pearson	21,636 ^a	12	0,042
Hours of work per week & Questioning decisions	Significant	Pearson	20,992 ^a	6	0,002
V. Group Hypothesis Effects on Victim's Physical Health					
Gender & Being given convenient job	Significant	Pearson	8,507 ^a	2	0,014
Type of University & Damaging the workplace	Significant	Pearson	9,476 ^a	2	0,009

Limitations and areas for further research

The research was conducted in İstanbul. Extending the research to other cities of Turkey would introduce different results regarding the different cultural characteristics, and that would provide a more comprehensive approach to the context. The study can also be developed to make a comparison and to investigate whether there is a difference among research assistants who are working for a state university or a non-profit university.

5. CONCLUSION

It is difficult to collect data and assess the environment of the work place objectively about mobbing. The data are obtained from the victims according to their interpretations. It should be considered that human relations in the organizations depend on the mutual interaction between employees and managers. In this respect personal characteristics, job performance, job satisfaction and job loyalty of employees or assistants in the universities are quite effective.

The results of mobbing could lead the employees to quit the job, mental and physical illnesses, suicide and even murder. Therefore, precautions should be taken against these activities, since they are harmful for personal and social life in business environment as well as in the universities.

Although our test results show that there are negative effects of mobbing activities in universities considering our sample data, we could still conclude that there aren't significant mobbing activities among research assistants in the universities.

For future research a detailed data showing the relationship between the degree of mobbing and other socio-economic variables could be studied for instance; the effect of age and the effectiveness of mobbing, the effect of marital status and mobbing, the effect of the field of work on mobbing, the effect of the type of university on mobbing.

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