The moderating effect of gender on the relationship between workplace mobbing and intent to quit work – "Which one is more difficult: to be a man or a woman?"

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to examine the relationship between the perceptions of personal mobbing in workplaces of public servants and the intentions to quit work. The study also tested how and to what extent the employee gender affected the relationship between mobbing perceptions and intent to quit work. In the study, the data and information were obtained by questionnaire method and 364 questionnaire forms were included in the analysis. Five hundred questionnaires were distributed to civil servants working in different public institutions. While the questionnaire forms were distributed, the number of personnel of the public institutions was taken into consideration. Of the questionnaires, 385 were returned, but 364 questionnaires were analysed with the elimination of missing and incorrectly filled questionnaires. In order to measure the mobbing behaviours in the workplace, we used a scale with 5 sub-dimensions and 45 items adapted by Leymann's Typology (1990, 1996). In order to measure employees' intention to quit work, we used a scale of Intention to Quit Work with 3 items developed by Cammann et al. (1979). Both scales are structured as a 5-point Likert scale (1 = never agree, 5 = fully agree). This study is important in terms of highlighting the factors affecting the relationship between mobbing perceptions and intentions to quit the work, and the requirements of considering other factors.

Keywords: Workplace Mobbing; Mobbing Perception; Workplace; Civil Servants; Public Institution

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1. Introduction

Mobbing, which has recently become a subject of interdisciplinary research in a variety of areas such as psychology, sociology and law, was first used by Konrad Lorenz (1999), an animal scientist in the 1960s, to name counter-attacks of smaller animal groups against the threat of a large animal. Many employees undergo some bad and negative behaviour, oppression or insults throughout their working lives. It is not possible to describe all these behaviours as psychological harassment. "Psychological harassment" or "mobbing" at workplace is a different concept in terms of causes and process. It is important to distinguish these concepts from similar ones in that an employee finds out whether some behaviours against him are psychological harassment or not, and determines the precautions suitable for the situation (Schat and Kelloway, 2003).

Mobbing is emotional aggression towards any person through harassment, disturbance and misconduct, without any discrimination against the person, such as age, race or gender (Lewis et al (2002). In other words, often in the workplace, an employee is subjected to systematic pressure sometimes by one person, sometimes by a group (Williams, 2001), for a long period of time, for months or years, and it is deliberately made to exclude the person from work (Ezer and Ezer, 2012). In developed countries, mobbing is often carried out by senior employees and appears to be a profession illness of senior executives. Mobbing behaviours include questioning of professional competence, making the person feel untrusted, deliberately giving tasks that cannot be completed within the given period, ignoring the person and isolating him or her from the group, and reducing or confining his/her scopes of authority at workplace.

Mobbing victims are people who have high professional qualities and high competence, who are self-proven, creative, honest, successful (Michael, 2014), committed to themselves (Mizushima, 2013), affiliated with their institutions, trustworthy in their values , and afflicted deeply when they lose their jobs, who do trust in people, and do not know how to behave politically. It is also possible that employees with such good qualifications are easily envied by their colleagues in cases where they achieve the courtesy of the supervisor or the management staff, or take the praise of a client. However, the individuals who undergo mobbing do not always appear to have very superior features of mobbing. Silent, unprotected employees or handsome men, beautiful women can also be victims of mobbing. Mobbing practitioners are mostly jealous, insufficient, cowardly, inspecting, self-defeating, self-defeating, self-defeating, intolerant of differences, trying to shut their own deficiencies and insecurities by humiliating others. They try to hide their own inadequacies by amusing others in difficult situations.

2. Literature review

Psychologist Michael H. Harrison (2014) recently reported that 42 percent of female employees and 12 percent of male employees were bullied in the last two years in a study conducted on 9,000 public employees in the US, which accounts for 190 million dollars in lost time and productivity. Workplace mobbing is argued in a study by Duffy and Sperry (2014) to be a destructive process in which individuals, groups, or organizations target a person for ridicule, humiliation, and removal from the workplace. According to

Davenport et al. (2002), the victim of the mobbing is pushed to the point of being vulnerable and unhelpful. Such actions take a long time and often cause people living with mobbing syndrome either to resign, or to quit work or become forced to early retirement.

Baltaş and Baltaş (2016) argued that mobbing is a systematic series of emotional attacks and attrition actions aimed at certain people in the workplace. There may be times when workers in working life turn their anger in stressful environments into bad words, argue, criticize their colleagues with bad words. Mobbing is implemented by one or more people, it is a psychological terror that is deliberately carried out, systematically repeated, and lasting for at least six months, focusing on the person rather than on the happenings.

In a study by Tınaz et al. (2008), it is pointed out that in America, discrimination in mobbing cases is applied comparatively, whereas in Japan, the provisions on the protection of personality rights are applied in these cases. It is known that one out of every five Americans who work is a mobbing victim. In Bangladesh, one of the oriental countries, however, a significant source of work stress is associated with aggressive behaviours at workplace (Tehrani, 2004; Zapf and Einarsen, 2001; Colligan and Higgins, 2005)

According to Tutar (2004), there are many factors that lead to the emergence of mobbing, and the causes of mobbing can be individual or organizational. In another study, Reyner and Hoel (1999) emphasized that today's rising unemployment rates, the tendency of firms to shrink due to frequent economic crises, and the internal competitive environment created by new career theories, have significantly increased mobbing behaviour.

Conducted by Hansen et al. (2006), an analysis of self-reported health symptoms, and physiological stress reactivity of 437 employees shows that the employees who have experienced workplace harassment demonstrated high level of anxiety and nervousness. In a similar study, Anderson and Pulich (2001), and Levin-Epstein (2002) have found out that stress in workplace increases absenteeism, dysfunctions and reduces the productivity of employees.

3. Method and results

The main purpose of the study is to examine the relationship between the perceptions of personal mobbing in workplaces of public servants and intentions to quit. However, how and why the employee gender influenced the relationship between mobbing perceptions and intent to quit was also tested. In line with these basic objectives, mobbing and intent to quit scale were adapted to the Turkish Language by using the reverse translation method of the questionnaires previously used in domestic and foreign scientific studies.

3.1. Scope, constraints, sampling process and data collection method of the research

The main body of this work is made up of civil servants working in different public organizations in Turkey. The inclusion of public sector employees in the scope of the research constitutes the most important limitation of the research. Nevertheless, it is thought that the research will provide important clues to the

public administrators in public organizations. In the study, the survey technique was used to collect the data and 364 questionnaires were included in the analysis. While 500 questionnaires were distributed to civil servants working in different public organizations, the number of personnel was taken into consideration. 385 of these survey forms were returned but 364 questionnaires were analysed with the elimination of missing and incorrectly filled questionnaires.

The response rate obtained (.73) is well above the desired response rate for scientific studies. Original questionnaires were in English and were translated into Turkish by a language expert who speaks both Turkish and English. The Turkish questionnaire form was then translated back to English by a linguist who knew both languages. The method of back translation was repeated until compliance with the original version (Brislin, 1980). Considering the socio-demographic characteristics of the employees included in the survey, 126 of the total 364 employees were female and 238 were male, and the average age ranged from 34 to 41 years.

3.2. Statistical measurements

3.2.1. Independent variable

3.2.1.1. Mobbing

In order to measure employees' perception of mobbing, 5 sub-dimensions and 45 items (Leymann, 1990) were applied by using Leymann's Typology (LIPT). Mobbing perceptions of employees based on the questionnaire used in this study were measured in 5 sub-dimensions such as "affecting self-confidence and communication", "affecting social relationships", "affecting quality of life and occupational status", "affecting reputation and bodily healt". Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the scale is .79.

3.2.2. Dependent variable

3.2.2.1. Intent to quit

In order to measure employees' intention to quit, a 3-item intention to quit scale developed by Cammann et al. (1979) was used. Both scales are structured as a 5-point Likert scale (1 = never agree, 5 = fully agree). The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the scale is .84.

3.2.3. Control variables

We included some demographic variables, such as age and marital status, and the total duration of service as control variables, as a determinant of intent to quit. Table 1 provides averages, standard deviations, and correlations for the variables of the study. The age variable was coded as 1 = 18-25 years, 2 = 26-33 years, 3 = 34-41 years, 4 = 42-49 years and 5 = 49 years and over. Marital status is coded as 1 = Single and 2 = Married. For the total work duration, 1 = 1 year less workers, 2 = 2-5 years, 3 = 5-10 years, 4 = 10-15 years and 5 = 15 years and more.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations

	Male		Female		1	2	3	4
	Mean	SD.	Mean	S.D.				
1. Age	3.37	.63	3.05	.65	-			
2. Marital Status	1.78	.41	1.94	.22	-.236*	-		
3. Total Public Service	3.10	.45	2.81	.51	.002	.125	-	
4. Mobbing	2.76	1.36	2.79	1.39	.049	-.093	.065	-
5. Intent to quit	2.10	1.06	3.05	1.27	.073	.025	.142	.637**

[a]n=364. Every value above |.236| are significant at the 1% level.

3.3. Hypothesis tests

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used to test all hypotheses. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used to test all Hypotheses. First, the effect of intention to quit on the control variables was analysed by regression analysis (see Table 1, Model 1). We included mobbing in order to determine the variance increase attributed to intent to quit (Model 2). We included the remainder of mobbing to detect non-linear relationships (Model 3). We then included the gender variable we used as moderators in our analyses (Model 4). In the next step we calculated the interaction between mobbing and gender and we entered it into the regression equation (Model 5) in order to determine the relationship between mobbing and gender. Finally, we calculated the binary relation between the square of mobbing and gender, and entered the regression equation to test our hypotheses (Model 6).

In order to support our hypotheses, there should be a statistically significant increase in the variance (ΔR^2), which is explained by the inclusion of the interaction of the gender variable with mobbing[2] in the regression. Hypothesis 1 was assessed in Table 5 model 2, which provided the necessary support for H1, indicating a significant positive correlation between mobbing perception and intent to quit (b = .587, p <.001). We also tested the moderator effect of gender on the relationship between perceived mobbing and intent to quit. According to Table 5, the gender of the employees has a statistically significant effect on the relationship between perceived mobbing and intention to quit (b = -.331, p <.01). Our H2 hypothesis, which advocates that the gender of employees affects the relationship between mobbing and the intention to quit as moderator, has also been accepted. We developed Figure 1 to determine whether we can find support for the moderator effect, especially expressed in H2. In Figure 1 we have shown the effect of the gender on the relationship between perceived mobbing and intent to quit. In terms of the gender of the employees, the data set was divided into two parts and the analysis was performed in this way, and the regression coefficients obtained for both gender groups were revealed. Thus we obtained two separate graph curves for two groups of genders.

Table 2. Results of regression analysis for intent to quit

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
Age	,154	(,234)	0,122	(,181)	0,115	(,183)	,025	(,164)	,037	(,166)	,141	(,064)
Marital Status	,095	(,446)	0,322	(,347)	0,293	(,352)	-,045	(,323)	-,058	(,326)	,075	(,315)
Total Public Service	,348	(,294)	0,226	(,228)	0,216	(,230)	-,038	(,213)	-,047	(,215)	-,156	(,209)
Mobbing			,587***	(,084)	,813 †	(,419)	,937*	(,374)	1,073*	(,443)	-1,853	(1,163)
Mobbing²					-,038	(,069)	-,059	(,062)	-,060	(,062)	,437	(,193)
Gender							,95***	(,217)	1,198*	(,480)	-1,061	(,954)
Mobbing X Gender									-,088	(,152)	1,865*	(,738)
Mobbing² X Gendert											-,331**	(,123)
R²	,026		,425		,427		,552		,555		,599	
R² Variation	,026		,399***		,002		,124***		,003		,044**	
Model F	,645		13,119		10,453		14,148		12,058		12,439	

Non-standardized coefficients and standard errors are specified in brackets. † $p < ,10$; * $p < ,05$; ** $p < ,01$; *** $p < ,001$ (2-tag), N=364.

   As can be seen in Figure 1, the relationship between perceived mobbing and intent to quit varies according to the gender of the employees. The relationship between perceived mobbing and intent to quit has gained an inverted U-shaped curve for female workers. Thus, support is provided for additional analysis by dividing the data set for H2. For male workers, figure 1 shows a positive and linear relationship between perceived mobbing and intention to quit.
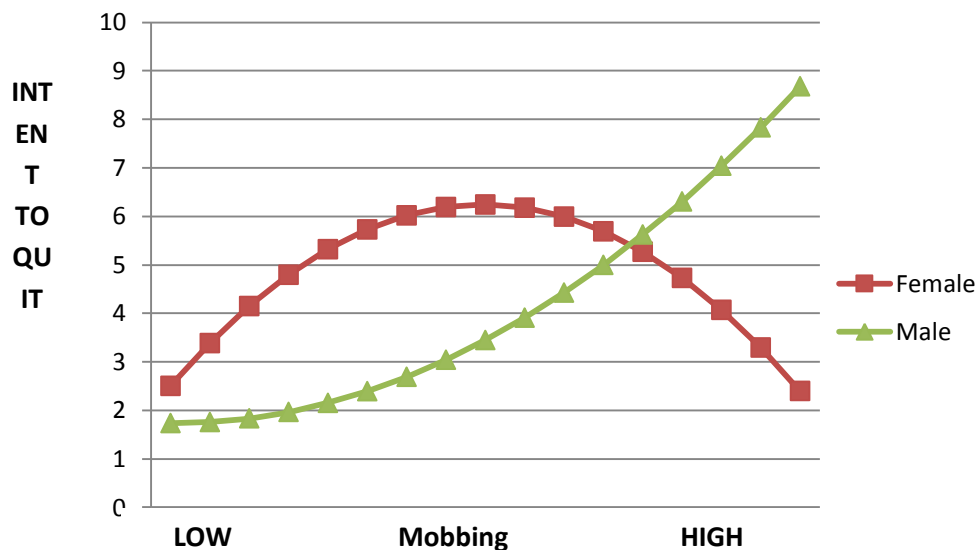
Figure 1. The effect of interactions of mobbing with gender on intention to quit

As shown in Figure 1, the relationship between perceived mobbing and intention to quit differs according to the gender of the employees. It can be said that there is a linear relationship between mobbing and intention to quit for male workers. As the perception of mobbing increases for male employees, so does the intention to quit. The opposite is also true, the lower the perceived mobbing, the lower the intention to quit. However, this situation was different for women workers. The highest intent to quit for female employees will occur if the level of perceived mobbing is moderate. Of course, the level of perceived mobbing is important for all employees, but this is a bit more important for female employees. For women workers, as the mobbing level of the perceived mobbing increases to the moderate levels, the intention to quit increases, while this trend continues to the point where the perceived level of mobbing is at the moderate levels, and reaches to the highest level.

After this point, female workers start to give up their intention to quit even though their perceived levels of mobbing increase. As the perceived level of mobbing increases from moderate level, their intention to quit decreases. It is evident that mobbing increases in intentions to quit in this context, but after that point, personal ambition, the need to achieve, and perhaps the feeling of not sacrificing intolerance and achievement, and how much females are willing to sacrifice their gains to a certain point (middle level mobbing). If mobbing is applied, the intentions of the application to quit are beginning to decrease. It may be possible to explain this with "learned helplessness" or "level of pain tolerance" of females.

4. Discussion

The results of the study showed that there were significant relationships between perceived mobbing and intent to quit. In order to support our hypotheses, there should be a statistically significant increase in the variance, which is explained by the inclusion of the interaction of the gender variable with mobbing[2] in the regression. Hypothesis 1 was assessed in Table 5 model 2, which provided the necessary support for H1, indicating a significant positive correlation between mobbing perception and intent to quit. We also tested the moderator effect of gender on the relationship between perceived mobbing and intent to quit. According to Table 5, the gender of the employees has a statistically significant effect on the relationship between perceived mobbing and intention to quit. Our H2 hypothesis, which advocates that the gender of employees affects the relationship between mobbing and the intention to quit as moderator, has also been accepted. The results of this study contribute to the literature by investigating the effects of perceived mobbing on intention to quit and the effects of gender on the relationship between these two variables. Another contribution of this study is that it needs to investigate the influence of other variables behind the positive relationship patterns that appear to be very clear between perceived mobbing and intention to quit. Since the amount of the relationship between the variables examined in this study is high as evidenced by many other investigations, testing the moderator's effectiveness will also be important. Detecting the moderator effect is an extremely effective one in determining what is effective and how effective it is in revealing the relationships between variables.

5. Conclusions

In this study, it is aimed to examine the relationship between the perceptions of personal mobbing in workplaces of public servants and the intentions to quit work as well as tested how and to what extent the employee gender affected the relationship between mobbing perceptions and intent to quit work. The results of the regression analysis for Hypothesis 1 were supported. As reported, mobbing perception was found to be significant predictor of intent to quit (b=.587, p<.001). Initially, these results were supporting past studies as mobbing perception is generally seen as an impetus toward intent to quit and, at least within certain contexts, has been shown to be positively associated with, or as having a positive impact on intent to quit. As a result, the findings are consistent with some of the theoretical and empirical research in the field. The results of the analyses strongly support Hypothesis 2, which posited that the gender of employees would moderate the relationship between mobbing and the intention to quit, was supported. This suggests the relationship between perceived mobbing and intention to quit differs according to the gender of the employees. It can be said that there is a linear relationship between mobbing and intention to quit for male workers. As the perception of mobbing increases for male employees, so does the intention to quit. The opposite is also true, the lower the perceived mobbing, the lower the intention to quit. However, this situation was different for women workers. The highest intent to quit for female employees will occur if the level of perceived mobbing is moderate. Of course, the level of perceived mobbing is important for all employees, but this is a bit more important for female employees. For women workers, as the mobbing level of the perceived mobbing increases to the moderate levels, the intention to quit increases, while this trend continues to the point where the perceived level of mobbing is at the moderate levels, and reaches to the highest level.

People want to create a workplace where all employees feel equally appreciated, rewarded and secure enough to work as per their maximum potential. In reality, not all workplaces provide equal opportunities to both (or rather three) genders; in fact, studies have shown that just 20 of the Fortune 500 companies have female CEOs. There is clearly a disparity that needs to be addressed and bridged even with respect to the two primary genders. However, the process cannot be rushed either. Managers of Turkish firms could start by changing their outlook and providing a safe environment for both genders to comfortably work alongside each other. Firstly, Managers of Turkish firms should start by ensuring "Equal Opportunity". Employees like it when they are recognized and validated for the quality of the work that they do, not by the gender they belong to. One way of ensuring this at the initial stage is by removing the genders from their resume. Give all the candidates equal opportunities to prove their worth. Secondly, the firms should minimize the gender pay gap. If you have two employees under the same job description, there is no reason to have any difference in the pay. Turkish firms should minimize the pay gap by having a fixed range of salary for each description. Thirdly, Promotion is the one thing most employees look forward to throughout the year. If an expected promotion falls through, the employee may become disinterested. If the firms have a fair system where the most worthy candidate is chosen for promotion it will clear up any talk of unfairness or bias. The firms should ensure that their assessment parameters are gender neutral. Fourthly, the firms should address harassment issues. The statistics show that one in three women are subjected to sexual harassment in the

workplace. Hence, any reports, rumors or complaints of harassment should be immediately addressed. The person on the wrong side of it should be dealt with accordingly. For this, an open environment that is free of domination is a must. On doing so, all the employees will feel safe and confident of working to their best potential in the office. By making employees work together in mixed gender teams, the firms can make sure they get along well. This reduces bias on the basis of gender.

Employees become unwilling to quit in workplaces where they feel comfortable, are valued as individuals, empowered with their own work, included in the decision-making process, have no intimidation behaviour, are not discriminated racially, genderly, politically and religiously. The intentions to quit in the workplace will be reduced as much. When employees feel that they are talked behind at workplaces, which they are made up with their nicknames, that their communications with colleagues and managers are blocked, that they are imitated in a sarcastic way and that they are continually being exploited, they tend to quit. In the study, it was found that the relationship between perceived mobbing and intent to quit for female workers was interestingly different from male employees. The fact that female employees are evaluated as individuals in their workplace, that they are not seen as sexual objects, that some of the obstacles made to them - especially those who have lived in transition to senior management - are removed and eventually they are "women" (mother) will enable them to work more effectively and efficiently in their workplaces. It should not be forgotten that there are some limitations of the research, apart from the important findings obtained as a result of this study. The most important limitation of this study is that the data were obtained from only one source regarding perceived mobbing and intent to quit, and the gender of the employees. We hope that these results will excite researchers on the perceived mobbing and intent to quit. "If you want to deal with women, be brave!"

6. Limitations and directions for future research

Although this study advances our understanding of the complex mobbing–intent to quit relationship, it has several limitations. First, the data were obtained from only one source regarding perceived mobbing and intent to quit, and the gender of the employees. It is made every attempt to minimize concerns of sampling bias and common method variance by separating survey questions used in the study from each other (Podsakoff et al., 2003). In addition, it is conducted a test for common variance bias and multicollinearity. Second, the use of regression analysis and cross-sectional nature of the data precludes any inference of causality between variables. Finally, this study focuses on gender of workers while other personality characteristics or demographics characteristics may be important moderators of the mobbing-intent to quit relationship. Future research should focus on identifying potentially additional significant characteristics. Continued focus on the mobbing and intent to quit relationship is critical to developing theory, the construct and models. The current research suggests the need to go beyond simple linear models to more complex contingency and configurational models. Future studies can compare the relationships I proposed here in different cultural settings and countries to explore the potential variation in how different genders respond

within and between different industry and countries. In fact, future research could benefit from testing the framework with other personality or demographics characteristics.

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