

## Mobbing in Primary Schools (A Case Study for Hendek County, Sakarya)

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**Abstract:** This study aims at focussing on psychological violence, which is adopted as a way of management so as to force an individual to quit his job through cowing, frightening, isolating and humiliating; and which is actually a factor in workplace stress-often ignored. The study also aims to build consciousness and to inform the relevant individuals in terms of taking precautions against purposeful practice of psychological violence and in terms of taking the necessary actions to protect the working peoples' rights. The research universe is composed of teachers and principals employed in the primary schools in Hendek county, Sakarya province. According to the research results, those teachers and principals in Hendek who were subject to differing forms of communication and negative influences, various psychological attacks including attacks on social relations, honour, life and work quality as well as attacks having direct effects over health were determined. Besides the intensity and direction of attacks were also explained. Research findings revealed that males were more often subject to attacks than females and those with eleven year or more work experience encountered more attacks than those with less work experience.

**Key words:** Mobbing . psychological violence . healthy organization

### INTRODUCTION

System approach regards organisations as living systems dwelling in a large environment on which they are dependent so as to meet their needs and to keep existing; and the approach is based on the principle that organisations are open to the neighbourhood just like organisms and that they need to set up proper relations with the environment to remain in life. According to the approach, organisations are composed of a superior system and dependent inferior systems comprising them. Just like an organism is made up of such systems as circulation, respiration, etc, a system has also sub-systems such as structural, managerial, technical, etc composing the overall system. An organisation's harmonious and functional interaction with its environmental sub-systems and upper systems has vital importance. Only in this way can a system be open, well-balanced and alive according to common belief.

For such reasons, some theorists claim that an organisation too can be ill or healthy, just like an organism. The health status of an organisation is related to its capability to attain its goals.

World Health Organisation defines health as physically, psychologically and socially completes wellbeing. And psychological health is an individual's adjustment to the environment according to life conditions and his satisfaction with himself. In order for a body to be healthy, its organs must work in harmony; similarly, for an organisation to be healthy, all its sub-systems need to be in harmony and in order a healthy organisation is functional, it operates regularly and can provide products and services effectively. An organisation's level of health is closely connected with its ability to attain its goals and objectives [1].

Accordingly, the concept of organisation health is used along with the concepts of organisation climate, organisational interaction and organisation culture in the field of organisational behaviour and industrial psychology. Many factors are influential in organisation health. It is possible to consider them as internal and external factors. External factors of various kinds from society to family and government policies and varying internal factors such as employees' individual characteristics, organisation structure and culture have significant effects on the performance of organisation

and thus on its capability to attain its goals and objectives [2].

In this context, the physical health of the organisation along with its upper and lower systems is important; in addition, its psychological health is also important with regard to the level of institutionalization, organisation climate and culture and its interaction with the environment. It is also believed that the source of many problems that are perceived as structural may be psychological or that structural problems may lead to various psychological disorders.

It is stated that psychological violence (mobbing), which has spread especially in western countries recently and which is considered to be an organisational disease, has been rising in such countries as France, Italy and Germany. The disease is defined as the case of experiencing tension in the workplace both with the colleagues and with the self. First it emerges in the form of enmity and then it may gradually turn into intravertness, into making evil plans and even into sexual harassment.

A considerable number of employees are subject to psychological violence in the above mentioned countries; however, neither administrators nor employees consider this case as a disease [3]. There is common agreement that this is the case. Yet, the fact that definitions are not concluded, that symptoms are difficult to identify, also that the initial phases are interpreted as ordinary disagreements or as just daily problems makes it difficult to diagnose “psychological violence” in organisational working circumstances [4].

Psychological violence is a long lasting torture applied to an employee usually due to his knowledge, success and positive behaviours, which set threats to others, by one or more individuals. Generally, the aim in doing this is to cow the employee and to impose the idea that “I can do anything to this person because he works under me” in order to make him quit working there [5].

Psychological violence outnumbers even sexual harassment in developed countries and it is often practised by senior managers. Psychological violence is like an epidemic. Unless precaution are taken, it spreads across the organisation leading to a fall in the level of motivation and efficiency; consequently, in adjustment arises [6].

The major reasons forcing individuals in a workplace to form opposing groups are [7].

**Administration’s search for perfection:** Even though your work environment is not perfect, the administrators or your colleagues can oppose you under the pretext of your not being perfect.

**Disappearance of ethical values:** Institutions where unethical behaviours are considered ordinary and some of the ethical values got lost long ago are ideal environments for the emergence of psychological violence.

**Changes in organisation structure:** Unexpected changes in the managerial structure of the organisation, new defences of status among the employees, redundancies and recent employment can cause unease among employees. Such cases are the most convenient circumstances for psychological violence.

**Low level of emotional intelligence:** Failure of particularly individuals with a leader role in human relations will increase tension within organisation, which will in turn hinder the formation of an environment of peace and will cause attempts of psychological violence to be unnoticed.

**High level of stress in workplace:** The fact that working environment and work itself can cause stress can tense the relations between employees. An employee who causes slowing of workflow may receive negative response from others or may encounter opposing behaviour due to his superior achievement.

**Monotony in workplace:** People commuting between home and workplace and thus have got bored are also seen to apply policy of cowing just to make life colourful, to escape life’s routines and to be busy with something.

**General characteristics of individuals in the organisation:** Such characteristics as believing that one is privileged, having narcissist personality, forcing others to obey group norms are the characteristics common to those who apply psychological violence. Besides, some individuals influenced by mob psychology may also adopt the same way of behaving as others do even though they don’t bear such characteristics.

Research into the issue reveals that individuals being subject to psychological violence usually tend to be intravert in social life, have less self reliance, are honest and submissive in character. However, a considerable number of the victims have been proven to be of superior traits, intelligent, creative, achievement-focused and to sacrifice themselves to their job. Those people especially who have well-developed creativity have been cowed by those traditionalist employees who never desire things to change.

Initially, there is a conflict in the practice of psychological violence and this leads to the emergence of communication problems. Relevant research shows that psychological violence stems from such causes as victims' refusing obedience and showing resistance against control, jealousy for being superior than the other person in terms of occupation, victim's popularity in the workplace and his positive attitudes and social capabilities, the belief that reporting the problematic cases to the administration is a kind of spying and cruel personality of the bully [8]. Moreover, administrators' desire to make a change on the staff, to replace an employee with another, or to get rid of a person in the organisation and thus manage the organisation in the way they wish and attempts at hindering uncovering corruptions in the organisation are also the sources of psychological violence [9].

Leyman identifies five phases in the process of mobbing:

- Conflicts arising in critical cases (psychological violence may not be available at this stage, but can turn into the behaviour of psychological violence practice [10].
- Aggressive actions and psychological attacks, activation of psychological violence dynamics.
- Administration's getting involved in the case (although the administration does not play a direct role in the second phase, it can participate in the practice of psychological violence in this negative circle if the case is interpreted wrongly).
- Labelling the victims as "difficult, maladaptive, lazy, etc." (Administration's misjudgement may accelerate this negative circle and may lead to redundancies and compulsory resigns).
- No longer employing. The shake of this case may result in stress disorder following a trauma. After being made redundant, affective tension and even psychosomatic diseases may increasingly continue.

If the individual is primarily influenced by the process, he may cry, suffer from insomnia, susceptibility and difficulty in concentration, try to resist, escape at earlier stages, or rehabilitation is preferred. If he is influenced secondarily, he cannot resist or escape, yet may suffer from physical or mental diseases and thus have difficulty in returning to his job. Moreover, he may suffer from permanent sleep disorders, stomach and intestine problems, put on or lose excessive amounts of weight, get depressed, become addicted to alcohol or drugs, ask for off days frequently to escape from the workplace, or have fears with no reasons and hence need medical help.

And the individual receiving tertiary influence may become unworkable and may not return to work again. In some cases, harm received physically and psychologically may not be undone. Consequently, the individual may live in terror as though he suffers trauma, he may have serious depression, occasions of panic attack, heart attacks and serious illnesses. Besides, he may make attempts at committing a suicide, additionally, he may resort to violence against others; and therefore, medical and psychological help may be obligatory [11].

Psychological violence may be used by one or more attackers against employees' honour, honesty, reliability and professional competence in a humiliating, cowering, troubling, evil and controlling way directly or indirectly, overtly or covertly. Psychological violence is applied continuously, in a multiple way and systematically in a period of time. The aim is to give the impression that the victim is faulty and thus to cause his losing credit and to cause him to get confused, to cower, to isolate him and to force him to surrender, thus to make others believe that quitting the job is the victim's choice. Psychological violence, mobbing, may sometimes not be understood, mis-interpreted, ignored, displeased, or encouraged, or even provoked by the organisation's administration [12].

Types of psychological violence and what they can lead to are listed as what follows [13].

- In terms of Communication Form and Its Effects
- Being interrupted by colleagues working above and under you, being restricted in your opportunity to self-express, being scolded, being shouted at, being constantly criticised for your work, being disturbed by telephone, being threatened in written or spoken form and being implied that you are a liar.
- In Terms of Attacks on Social Relations
- Being spoken by nobody, giving no opportunities to others to talk to you, being deprived of the right to meet others, being isolated from other employees, forbidding others to talk to you, pretending as if you were absent.
- In Terms of Attacks on Honour
- Being talked of badly, being gossiped about, being mocked, being treated as if you are mentally ill, being forced to receive psychiatric care, being mocked for one of your weaknesses, being mocked by being imitated, being mocked for your political views or religious belief, being mocked for your nationality, being forced to perform a duty which will affect your self-esteem, being evaluated unfairly in terms of your efforts and achievements, being questioned for your decisions, being called

humiliating names, being subject to sexual implications.

- Attacks on the Quality of Life and Work
- Being assigned meaningless duties or duties below your capabilities or qualities, being restricted regarding your duties, being continuously assigned differing duties, being assigned duties to affect your self-esteem in a negative way, being held responsible for harms given, destroying your workplace/home.
- Attacks Having Direct Effects on Health
- Being forced to perform a physically hard duty, being subject to physical violence, being slightly threatened, being physically and/or sexually harassed.

The phase of psychological violence experienced is regarded as the criterion which determines how much harm the victim receives and with how much harm he can escape the attack. It would be a great mistake to think that this “workplace terror”-which is persistently ignored-costs one’s job at most. Victims subject to such behaviours for long may resign from work, have economic losses and also suffer physical and psychological breakdowns [14].

Research results show that both males and females apply psychological violence; apart from that, not only those working in superior positions but also those in inferior positions are likely to apply psychological violence to the managers. Yet the bullying person is often in the superior position and less often those in the same position or those in inferior position do this [15]. The practice of psychological violence is more often encountered in horizontal organisation constructions and in such cases employees requiring promotion may apply violence to others in order to cover their incompetence. Most victims of psychological violence are in their thirties, well-educated or even hold post-graduate or PHD degrees [16].

Although psychological violence is observed in all sectors, those with the highest risk are primarily education sector, which is followed by banking and insurance sectors. In addition to that, technical staff and staff working in sectors supplementary to medicine are also under high risk [17].

As no agreement concerning the definition of this illness has been reached and not much research has been available in Turkey yet, it seems difficult to produce solutions. However, precautions can be taken and work can be done to improve the situation in attempts at escaping the trouble. Some of these which are common and feasible to any organisation are listed below [18]:

- It is helpful in providing the environment which hinders the emergence of psychological violence to give no permission for obscurities regarding the distribution of status and duties and to define everything in a way so as not to cause dilemmas,
- Such concepts as honesty and sincerity should not be lost in inside organisation communication; or if they are weak, they need to be strengthened.
- Sufficient care should be taken so that complaint and performance evaluation mechanisms work properly. Hence, acts of psychological violence stemming from injustice belief may be prevented.
- In giving employment, candidates must be evaluated in terms of proficiencies, personality traits and emotional intelligence; whether or not they have personality traits to cause problems in the workplace must be determined.

Provided that sufficient care is taken in these issues, such cases as emotional aggression, isolating and discrimination which turn the workplace into hell will probably be avoided.

This study aims at focussing on psychological violence, which is adopted as a way of management so as to force an individual to quit his job through cowering, frightening, isolating and humiliating; and which is actually a factor in workplace stress-often ignored. The study also aims to build consciousness and to inform the relevant individuals in terms of taking precautions against purposeful practice of psychological stress and in terms of taking the necessary actions to protect the working peoples’ rights.

**Problem statement:** Do administrators, colleagues working in the same position and under them apply psychological violence to the principals and teachers employed in primary schools in Hendek county, Sakarya province?

#### **Sub-problems**

- Do administrators, colleagues working in the same position and under them apply psychological violence to the principals and teachers employed in primary schools in Hendek county, Sakarya province?
- At what level is the psychological violence that the victims are subject to in terms of
  - The form of communication and its effects,
  - Attacks on social relations,
  - Attacks on honour,
  - Attacks on the quality of life and work,
  - Attacks made directly against individuals’ health?

- Are there any significant differences among  
Duty  
Gender  
Seniority variables in becoming a victim of  
psychological violence?

**Significance:** It can be assured through this research that victims can take action against the psychological violence applied in primary schools. Besides, it can make contributions to the issue that those who are subject to psychological violence should not accuse themselves and that they should develop strategies to protect themselves.

**Scope:** The research is restricted to the principals and teachers employed in the primary schools of Hendek county, Sakarya province.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This part of the research presents explanations concerning the research model, universe and sample of the research, data collection and analysis procedures.

**Research model:** The research was conducted in the model of relational survey.

**Universe and sample:** The research universe is composed of 293 participants who were 23 school administrators and 270 teachers employed in 9 central primary schools located in Hendek county, Sakarya province. Whereas all of the administrators were included in the research, a sample was established for teachers; in addition to that, in determining the sample, the formula of sampling in restricted societies was used [19]:

$$N=[N*P*Q]/[(N-1)*H^2+(P*Q)]$$

In the formula; n: the number of samples, N: Universe P: the rate of X observed in the society, Q: the

rate of X observed, H: the degree of certainty (standard error value) and the size of sample was determined as 160 participants.

According to the table, respondents are in a proportion close to each other on the basis of gender and seniority, the number of administrators is smaller than those of teachers on the basis of position-yet this number can be said to be sufficient. As to the variable of educational status, the number of teacher training college graduates is almost twice as big as the number of other faculty graduates.

**Tool of data collection:** Following the relevant field literature review, psychological violence behaviours were first grouped so as to measure the 5 dimensions such as: the form of communication and its effects, attacks on social relations, honour, life and work quality and attacks having direct effects over health (Davenport, 2004). Afterwards, this was transformed into a 5-point Likert type scale determining the extent to which the respondents were exposed to such behaviours by their administrators, colleagues in the same position and under them. With regard to the scope and content validity of the scale, Assist. Prof. Dr. Fidan Korkut and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Filiz Bilge working in the field of psychological counselling and guidance at Hacettepe University were consulted for expert opinion. Following the corrections made in line with expert criticisms and recommendations, the scale was formed as having 37 items and was applied.

**Data collection:** Having obtained the permissions required, the scale structured by the researcher was applied to the sample larger than the actual sample size due to the belief that there would be some scales considered invalid; and thus data were obtained.

**Analysis of the data and findings:** In the analysis of the data, the order determined by the sub-problems was pursued and frequency analysis was conducted so as to determine whether psychological violence was applied

Table 1: The distribution of respondents according to the variables in the research problem

	Variables	N	%
Gender	Females	78	45.6
	Males	93	54.4
Position	Administrators	38	22.2
	Teachers	133	77.8
Seniority	1-5years	44	25.7
	6-10 years	60	35.1
	11+years	67	39.2
	Total	171	100

Table 1: The respondents' overall mobbing scores

Total scores	N	%	X	S.S.
.	.	.		
.	.	.		
.	.	.		
127.00	4	3.5	33.39	39.34
135.00	1	0.6		
147.00	2	1.2		
196.00	1	0.6		
Overall total	171	100		

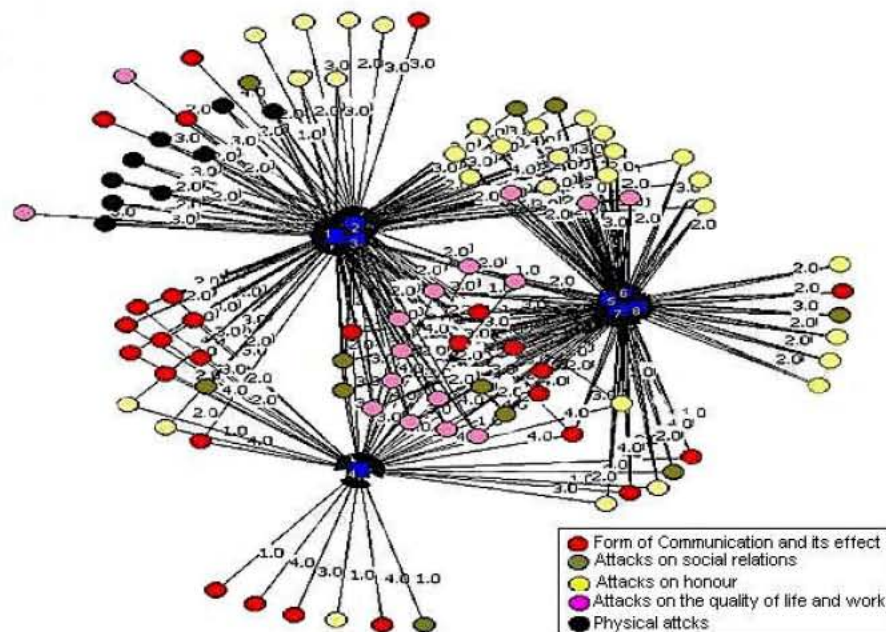


Fig. 1: The general perspective of mobbing applications that respondents were subject to

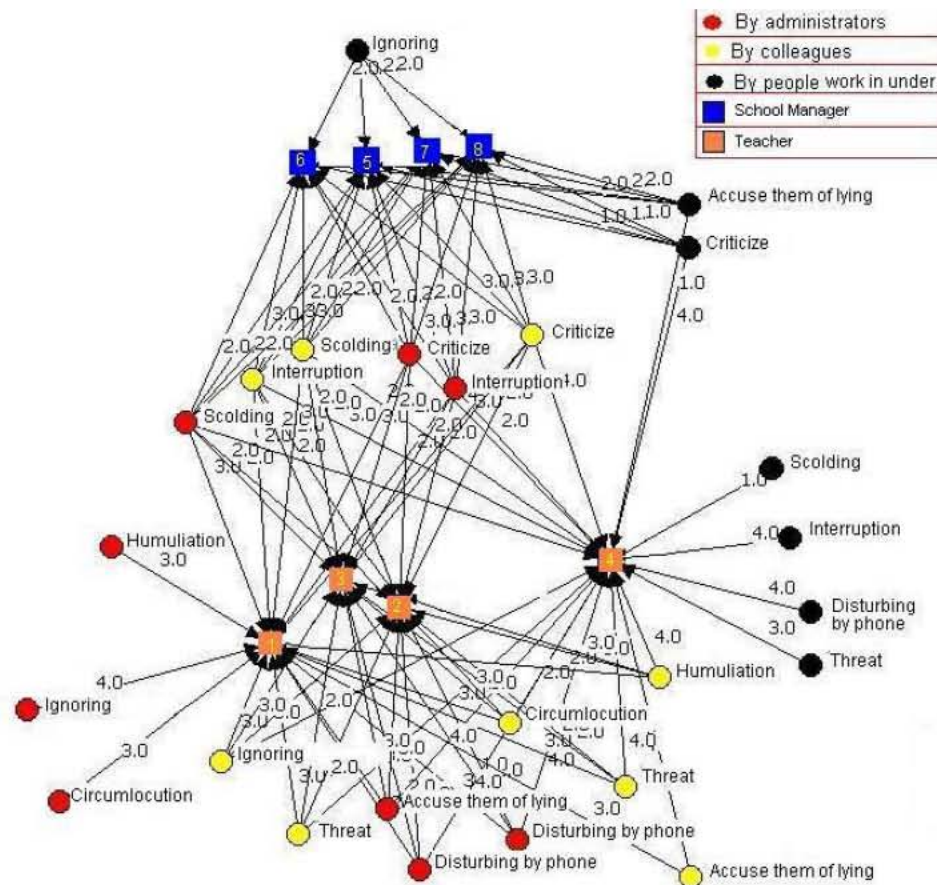


Fig. 2: Mobbing applied to the respondents in terms of the form of communication and its effects



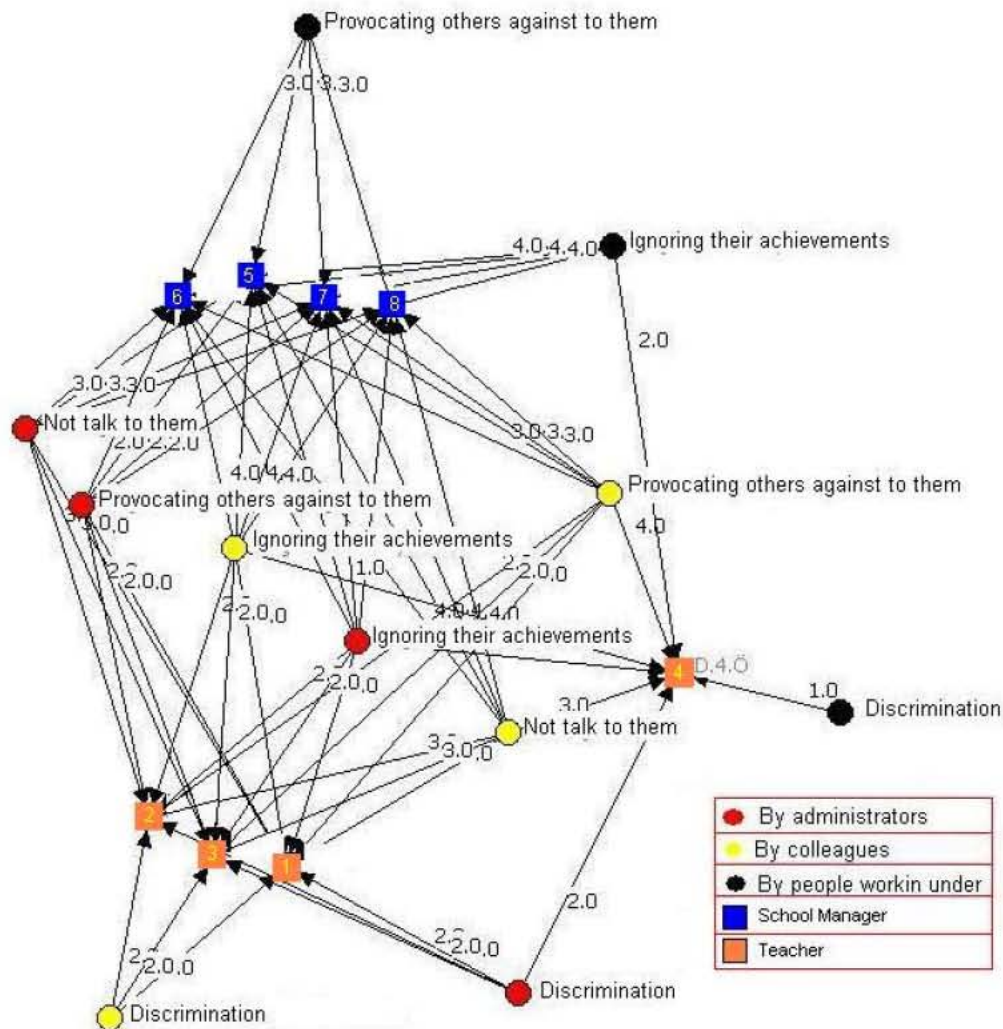


Fig. 3: Attacks on social relations

in schools, which were stated in the first sub-problem; whereby the 8 people getting the highest score-the 8 victims being subject to the highest level of psychological violence-were determined. As to the solution of the second sub-problem, UCINET 6.0 relations analysis programme was employed in order to show the level, direction and type of pressure applied to the 8 respondents. And in the solution of the third sub-problem, ttest was used to determine whether there was a significant difference in "being subject to psychological violence" according to position and gender variables; and one directional difference test was performed according to seniority variable.

#### FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

Rather than displaying the mobbing scores received by all the respondents, only the scores

concerning 8 of them were presented due to the fact that they had attained the highest scores. As can be found in the Table, the average score for all the respondents was 33; however, the selected respondents received higher mobbing scores than the average. Four respondents were administrators while four were teachers; and all of them were males with 10 year or more work experience

The levels and types of mobbing applied to the respondents by their administrators, colleagues and people working under them are shown in Fig. 1. Accordingly, mobbing was applied to the respondents at the level of communication, attacks on social relations and attacks on honour, on life and work quality and physical attacks. Arrows in the figure show the direction of communication, numbers 1-4 show the intensity level of attacks from "rarely" to "always". The mobbing behaviours that the respondents were subject

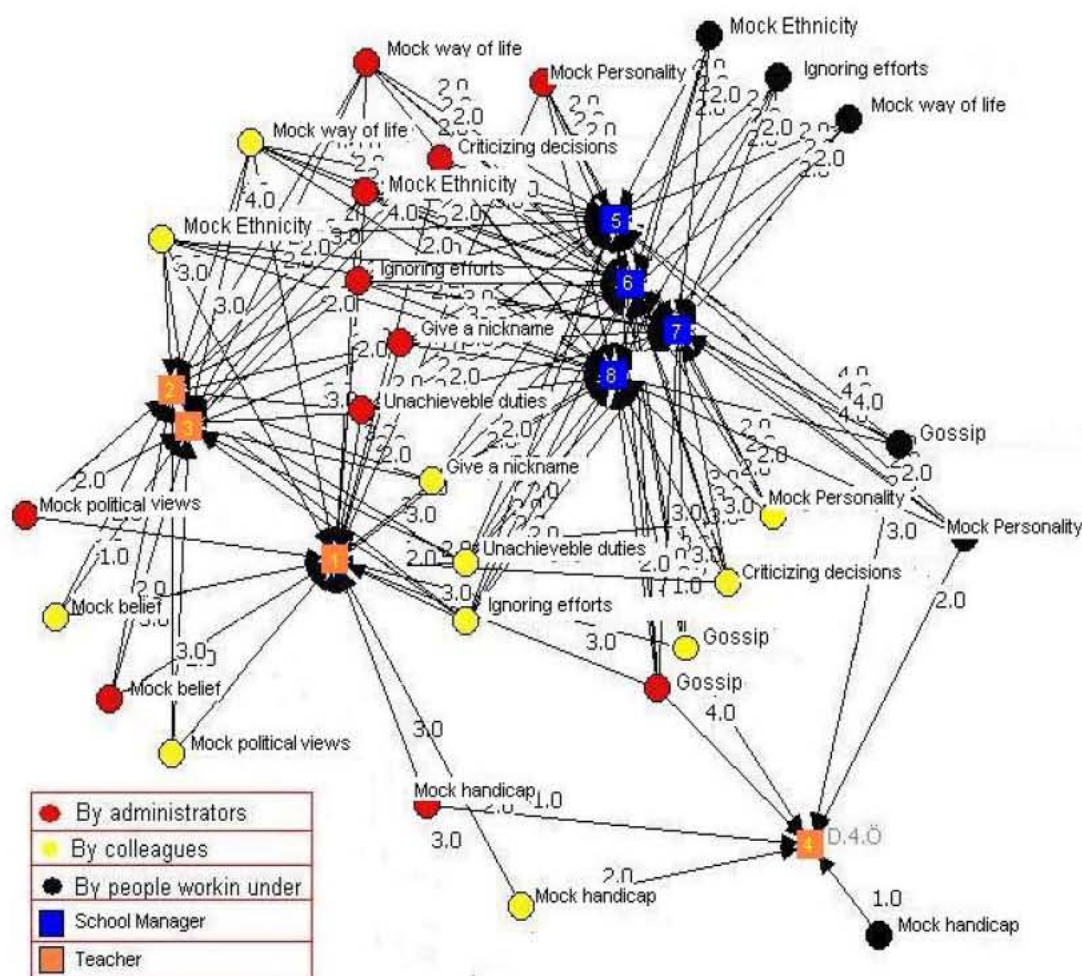


Fig. 4: Attacks on honour

to are shown in detail in these five dimensions. The figure shows that administrators are the most intensive appliers of mobbing, this is followed by colleagues and that the respondents are also subject to mobbing behaviours of people working under them despite infrequency. Moreover, the respondents ranking the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> are subject to mobbing of all dimensions, the other respondents are subject to mobbing of all dimensions except for physical attacks.

The figure shows that the respondents are subject to all mobbing methods in the dimension of the form of communication and its effects. Respondent 1, 2, 3 and 4 were teachers and pointed out that they were ignored by their administrators and their colleagues, were threatened orally and in written form, were humiliated and scolded, were interrupted while speaking, were criticised unnecessarily and were disturbed on the phone. Respondents 5, 6, 7 and 8 were administrators and said that they were interrupted, scolded, criticised, by administrators (such as supervisors, director of

National Education, governor, etc) and colleagues; that they were accused of telling lies and were ignored by people working under them. Considering this case, it can be thought that such a form of communication with colleagues, with people working above and under is quite bad in terms of individual's and organisation's health.

Respondents 1, 2 and 3 in the figure were teachers and pointed out that the administrators often (3) refused to talk to them and provoked others against them, that they were occasionally subject to various negative applications in the same or similar cases, that their achievements were occasionally ignored. Respondent 4, another teacher, said that he received different treatment from people working under him and that their achievements were attributed to others or ignored rarely. He thought that he did not converse with colleagues very often and that everybody was provoked against him. Respondents 5, 6, 7 and 8 administrators-claimed that people under them and their



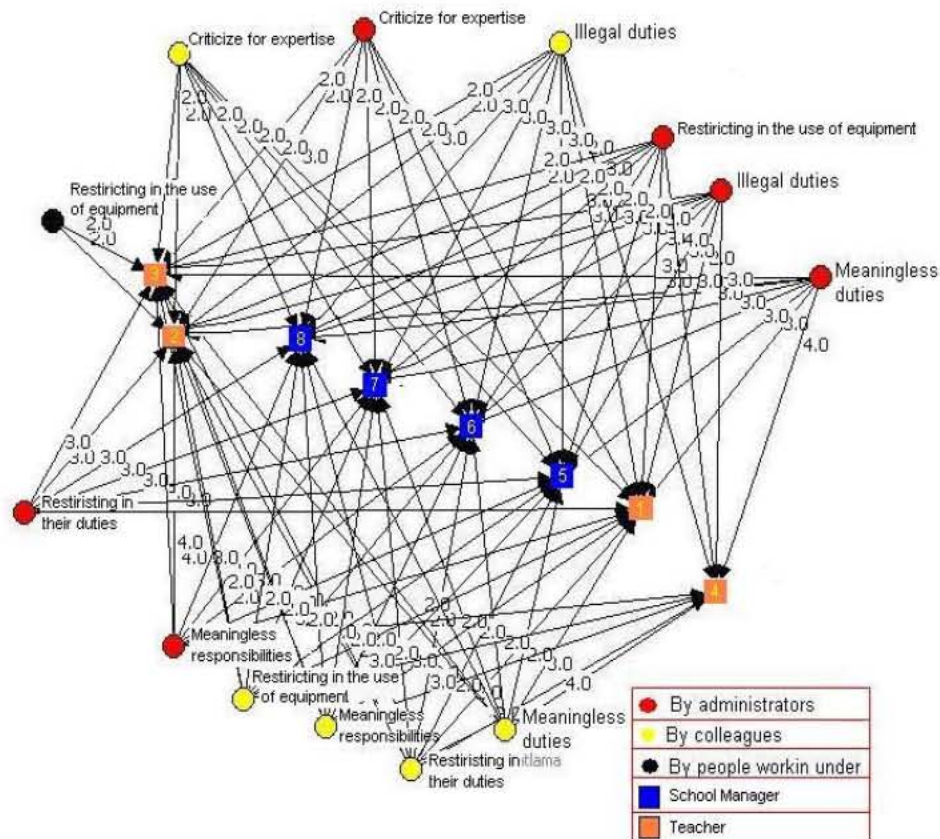


Fig. 5: Attacks on the quality of life and work

colleagues as well as people above them occasionally provoked others against them, that their colleagues and people under them almost always attributed achievements to themselves or ignored. They also pointed out that their colleagues administrators did often not talk to them.

In terms of attacks on honour, attacks made on respondents 5, 6, 7 and 8—who were administrators—were greatly similar. These occasionally included mockery for their ethnicity, private life and personality by their colleagues and by people working under them. Additionally, they stated that their efforts were not taken into consideration; they were subject of gossips made often by their colleagues and occasionally by their administrators. They were also given bad nicknames by their colleagues and administrators. Respondents 1, 2 and 3 stated that in addition to all these attacks, they were also mocked for their religious beliefs and political views. Respondents 4 and 1 were handicapped and were rarely mocked by people under them for their handicap.

Mobbing behaviours against the respondents in terms of attacks on the quality of life and work included

being assigned illegal, meaningless duties, being restricted in their duties, being unfairly criticised for their expertise by their administrators and colleagues, being restricted in the use of equipment by their administrators as well as their colleagues. The behaviour commonly encountered in this dimension was assignment of meaningless duties and being forced to perform illegal duties by administrators.

It is thought that the respondents were often restricted by being assigned illegal duties that they were often criticised and were forced to perform their duties with insufficient use of equipment; which negatively influenced them in effectiveness and efficiency.

In the dimension of mobbing behaviours having direct effects on individuals' health, respondents 1, 2 and 3 said that they were subject to various attacks, whereas the other respondents said they were not subject to any such attacks. Respondents 1, 2 and 3 pointed out that they occasionally received physical attacks from their colleagues as well as from their administrators and that they were forced to perform hard duties and to work in other places, or were appointed to other workplaces.

Table 2: t-test concerning the differences in respondents' being exposed to mobbing

Gender	N	X	S.S.	S.H.O	F	t	sd	P
Females	78	16.10	18.38	2.08	64.63	-5.73	169	
Males	93	47.90	45.95	4.76		-6.11	125.02	
Position	N	Mean	S.S.	S.H.O	F	t	sd	P
Administrators	38	38.63	47.27	7.66	6.17	.92	169	
Teachers	133	31.90	36.84	3.19		.81	50.53	

Table 3: One-directional difference test concerning the case of significant difference yielded by seniority variable in being subject to mobbing

Source of difference	Seniority	N	K. Tpl.	sd	K. Ort.	F	P	Tukey's B	
								1	2
Between groups	6-10 Yıl	60	67187.11	2	33593.56	28.79		17.10	
In-group	1-5 Yıl	44	195993.84	168	1166.63		0.000	18.02	
Total	11+	67	263180.95	170					58.08

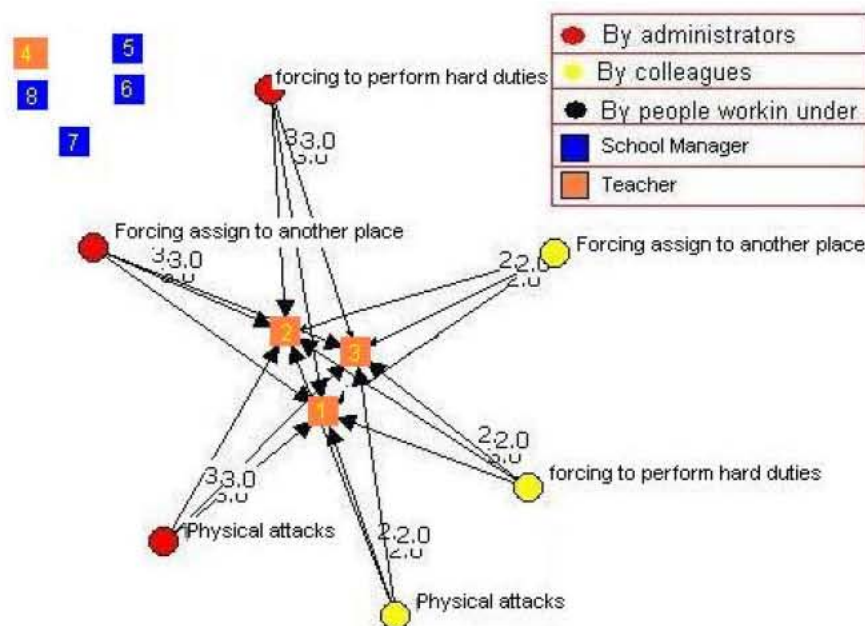


Fig. 6: Attacks having direct effects on health

The results of t-test which was conducted to find whether being exposed to mobbing behaviours had any significant differences on the basis of gender variable showed that males were more often exposed to mobbing than females. On the other hand, no significant differences were found in being exposed to mobbing on the basis of position variable.

The results of one-directional difference test, which had been performed so as to see whether or not the case of being exposed to mobbing had any difference according to seniority variable, revealed that employees

with 11 years or more experience were more often exposed to mobbing than their colleagues with less work experience ( $P=0.00$ ).

## CONCLUSIONS

The most intensive levels of psychological violence were applied by administrators, who were followed by colleagues and people working under victims. If the case is further continued, it will definitely lead to losing ethic values and to considering

unethical behaviours as ordinary in schools where the research has been conducted; and will turn them into institutions where some of the values were lost long ago.

Research findings made it clear that respondents with eleven years or more experience were more often subject to mobbing applications and that it seemed difficult for them to resign from work or to change their job considering their socio-economic levels. Obviously, this case is a disadvantage from the victims' perspective, whereas it is an advantage from the attackers' perspective. Unless precautions are taken, the case will be increasingly in favour of the attackers; yet it will make life unbearable for the victims.

Males are more often subject to mobbing behaviours than females in primary schools. However, unless precautions are taken, the application will spread across the organisation; consequently, in-organisation security and respect will reduce, the level of motivation will decrease and in adjustment will arise. From the victim's perspective, working in such an environment will become a torment; organisational effectiveness and efficiency will fall in turn. Individually, victims will suffer from at least one of such problems as crying, sleep disorders, susceptibility, difficulty in concentration, short-term or long-term physical /mental problems, high blood pressure, permanent sleep disorders, stomach and intestine related problems, problems in weight, depression, addiction to alcohol or drugs, frequent requests for off-days to escape from the workplace, fear with no reasons and losing their job.

The significance of establishing good and healthy communication and empathy in an organisation becomes obvious so as to escape mobbing applications in institutions. It is vital that legal and administrative regulations be put into effect rapidly so that they are both discouraging and protective.

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