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## The Mediating Role of Mobbing on the Relationship between Organizational Silence and Turnover Intention

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### Abstract

This paper examines the effect of organizational silence and mobbing on turnover intention of 1794 employees, who are employed in 39 different companies. The findings of the study indicate a significant positive effect of both organizational silence and mobbing on employees' turnover intention, besides according to the results there exist a positive significant effect of organizational silence on mobbing. In addition, the findings demonstrate a partial mediation effect of mobbing on organizational silence and turnover intention relationship. Since organizational silence and mobbing is a relatively new phenomenon for Turkish organizations, the results of this study contribute to the literature by creating awareness about the topic not only for scholars but also for the executives as well.

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### 1. Introduction

In order to be successful, nowadays more and more organizations give attention to methods and applications such as teamwork, organizational democracy and strengthening the culture of the organization. As a result of this, in today's organizations, employees expressing their ideas and sharing their knowledge lead to high organizational performance. Therefore creating such an organizational climate is important for organizations. However, most of the employees prefer to be silent. This may be associated with many factors such as fear of losing the job or being not able to have an opportunity to state their ideas to the managers or it may be due to simply cultural values. According to Morrison and Milliken (2000), as well as organizational and environmental factors, management team can also create a climate supporting organizational silence. In their study, Milliken, Morrison and Hewlin (2003) summarized the reasons for silence. According to the authors, the first group of reasons consists of fears and beliefs, which are fear of being labeled or viewed negatively, fear of damaging a relationship, feelings of futility, fear of retaliation or

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punishment, concerns about negative impact on others. The second group of reasons is related with either individual (lack of experience, lack of tenure) or organizational characteristics (hierarchical structure, unsupportive culture) or poor relationship with the supervisor (unsupportive supervisor, distant relationship). Organizational silence can create detrimental problems for organizations. Due to lack of feedback, silence can have a negative effect on decision making, learning and change at the organizational level; on the other hand, at the individual level, employees can perceive being invaluable, lack of control and dissonance (Morrison and Milliken, 2000). Since decision-making, error correction, innovation and improvement are weakened due to organizational silence (Vakola and Bouradas, 2005), it arises as an important research topic.

Besides, having serious unfavorable effects both on individual and organizational even on a social levels; realizing the mobbing behavior, identifying its reasons and taking the necessary caution have become essentially important. Leymann (1996) classified such behaviors as targeting self-esteem and the means of communication, attacks on personal social relations, attacks on the persons' reputation, attacks on the person's professional quality and life situation, and attacks on the person's health. Mobbing creates detrimental problems in organizations such as increase in absenteeism and turnover rate and decrease in productivity and organizational performance. Although mobbing occurs in any type of organizations, in order for the employees to work efficiently, mobbing should be prevented. As the previous studies indicates, theoretical and practical implications include that awareness needs to be raised about consequences of mobbing behaviour.

One of the important consequences of both organizational silence and mobbing is turnover of employees. Therefore, understanding the relation between organizational silence, mobbing and turnover intention is important for today's organizations. With this study, it is aimed to analyse the employees' behaviours by identifying the moderating effect of mobbing on the relationship between organizational silence and turnover intention. The study consists of three main parts. In the first section, the relationship between the employee silence and turnover intention, the moderating effects of mobbing on the relationship between employee silence and turnover intention are discussed in light of conceptual framework. The second part consists of methodology of the research and the discussion of the findings. In the last section, empirical findings are evaluated.

## **2. Literature Review And Hypotheses**

### *2.1. Organizational Silence and Turnover Intention*

Turnover intention refers to the possibility of employees leaving their job and organization on their own will (Kuvaas, 2006). When the turnover intention increases, rate of job turnover and absences also increase. Turnover intention causes psychological, sociological as well as economic problems. Because of these negative effects, researchers predict turnover behaviors and try to explain them so that the managers can take some measures to avoid potential turnovers (Hwang and Kou, 2006). One of the most important premises of turnover intention is organizational silence.

Organizational silence is a behavioral issue where individuals do not express their thoughts, opinions and suggestions that will help revealing the disruptions, improving the organizational activities and creating new process / product /service (Alparslan 2010, 1). This state of behavior in organizations is often experienced. As a result of silence turning into a climate, the employees will display silence behaviors based on different reasoning. Morrison and Milliken (2000) have used this term in the literature for the first time. The opposite of the organizational silence which is seen as a negative issue, is stated as organizational voice (Alparslan, 2010). Individuals will be able to choose whether to remain silent or talk when faced with a problem in their organization. When individuals avoid discussions

and stay silent, innovative opinions do not occur, group opinion becomes a norm. This is why the possibility of the organization to find the problem and fix it is difficult (Souba et al., 2011).

Besides being an individual behavior, it also can create a climate since individuals affect each other. In this context, silence appears at two levels as individual and organizational (Johannesen, 1974). Therefore, management has also important duty to understand silence. The culture created by the top management will need to contribute to the productivity of employees. Managers should try to provide a safe environment with employees (Morrison and Milliken, 2003). In organizations, organizational silence causes dissatisfaction among employees. This causes communication impairment and other undesirable behaviors eventually leading the degradation of the general functioning of organizations (Yirik et al, 2012; Kılıç et al, 2013, Çakıcı, 2007; Xu et al, 2005; Çetin et al, 2013; Bagheri et al, 2012).

In the related literature, silence is examined in terms of active, conscious, deliberate and purposeful behavior. Although, initially, the concept of silence in organizations is considered as a sign of devotion, mainly, it is deliberately portrayed as storage of negative organizational issues and problems by employees (Çakıcı, 2010, 9). It is possible to come across different surveys on the behavior of organizational silence both in national and international literature. However, little attention is drawn by the studies on the topic of the silence behavior of the employees and its effect on turnover intention (Özdemir and Uğur, 2013). Limited research have rather focused on the relation between organizational silence and diverse workplace variables.

## *2.2. Moderating Effect of Mobbing on Organizational Silence and Turnover Intention*

Mobbing in the workplace is a series of an act of systematic emotional attacks that target specific individuals (Tetik, 2010, 81). Mobbing practices have recently been increasing in organizations. Within the business life, mobbing has been approached as all types of intimidation, suppression, depression and exclusion process towards a person or a group of people. It is generally intangible but sometimes tangible oppression manner which has been aiming to transform the active employees within the business life into passive ones or fade them out. Also described as emotional oppression, mobbing, by creating psychological pressure over the person who has been targeted, has been intending to fade away the person's identity as an employee with regular, continuous and insisted oppressions (Aldıg, 2011).

In organizations where mobbing occurs disagreements appear, discomfort arises and employees search for an escape. As a result, organizations lose their key employees. Individuals lose their sense of belonging towards their organizations. Eventually they lose their will to withstand hardships and try to find a job with better working conditions (Tetik, 2010, 11). This behavior makes employees feel uncomfortable at where they work and this cause them to lose their motivation towards the organization. While Carnero et al (2012) and Bjørkelo (2013) presents the health problems that mobbing causes on the victims (dermatological disorders, cardiovascular diseases, etc.); Mona and Niall (2011) focused on both physical and psychological problems. Vega and Comer (2005) and similarly Garvois (2006) state in their study that mobbing causes psychological problems such as depression, psychosomatic and neurological disorders. Mortina et al (2003) demonstrates that mobbing decreases the motivation and the creativeness of an employee. There are numerous researchers who discovered that mobbing decreases job performance (Barling et al, 2001; Budd et al, 1996), increases the medical and psychiatric expenses, weakens the morale and productivity. This causes trained employees to leave the company as the company basically loses its experience which is why the training costs (Lybecker and Sofield, 2000; Tetik, 2010) while litigation expenses increase (Yamada, 2000).

Mobbing occurs when someone at work is systematically subjected to aggressive behavior from one or more colleagues or supervisors over a period of time, in a situation where the targets find it difficult to defend himself or

herself to escape the situation. Such treatment tends to stigmatize the target and may cause severe psychological trauma. Mobbing which means oppression and coercion exercised on employees may result in negative consequences both for the organization and its employees (Tetik, 2010, 81). In the literature it is widely observed that, mobbing victims tend to increase organizational silence of employees, that the silence is one of the possible reactions of mobbing victims (Taş et al, 2010, 341). However, despite being subject to various investigations, effect of mobbing on the relationship between organizational silence and turnover intention is still being debated and yet the moderating effect of mobbing is observed within limited research. Overall impact of mobbing in the literature is studied on various scope (Einarsen and Mikkelsen, 2003; Tetik, 2010) however there are limited research that investigates the relationship between mobbing and turnover intention (Djurkovic and McCormack, 2008; Öcel and Aydın, 2012; McCormack et al, 2009) where mostly cover health sector employees (Lee et al, 2013; Simons, 2008; Hogh et al, 2011; Berthelsen et al, 2011; Wilson et al, 2011; Hutchhinson et al, 2010).

In the literature it can be observed that various studies tend to use bullying and mobbing interchangeably. In this respect, several studies have explored the relationship of workplace bullying or harassment and turnover intention. Workplace bullying is a term associated with persistent exposure to unwanted and negative acts from one or more persons against an individual or a group, where those at the receiving end struggle with defending themselves, as a result of an imbalance of power (Hogh et al, 2011, 2). Workplace bullying has detrimental consequences on the profitability, work quality and turnover intention of organisations, this phenomenon should be addressed. Houshmand et al (2012) investigated the simultaneous impact of, and interaction between, being the direct target of bullying and working in an environment characterized by bullying upon employees' turnover intentions. Using a hierarchical linear modelling analysis on health sector the study demonstrates that working in an environment characterized by bullying increases individual employees' turnover intentions. Importantly, employees report similarly high turnover intentions when they are either the direct target of bullying or when they work in work units characterized by high bullying. Hogh et al (2011) investigate the risk of turnover among targets of bullying at work by a three-wave study among Danish healthcare workers. According to them, bullying may be costly to an organization in terms of staff turnover and subsequent recruitment and training of replacements. They examined push factors such as low social support and low sense of community, intention to leave and ill health did not change the relation between bullying and turnover significantly. Three reasons for quitting stood out among reasons given by the bullied respondents: poor leadership, being exposed to negative behaviour and health problems. Berthelsen et al (2011) aimed to explore relationships between exposure to bullying at work and intention to leave the organisation, actual leaving the workplace, and exclusion from working life through sick leave or rehabilitation or disability pension. Authors measured bullying using two measurement methods: self-labelled victims of bullying and exposure to bullying behaviour. Their study shows partial support for Leymann's assumption that bullying at work will lead to exclusion from working life. Logistic regressions showed that victims of bullying considered leaving their work more often than did individuals who were not bullied, on both measurement times. The results also showed that victims have changed employer more often than non-victims.

Schalkwyk et al (2011) examined the role of POS as moderator in the relationship between workplace bullying and turnover intention across sectors in South Africa and demonstrated that bullying by superiors is more prevalent than bullying by colleagues. A positive relationship exists between workplace bullying and turnover intention. Role clarity, participation in decision-making and supervisory relationship moderates the relationship between bullying by superiors and turnover intention. McCormack et al (2009) in their study assessed whether the relationship between workplace bullying and intention to leave is mediated by affective commitment. Based on data from schoolteachers in

China, a partial least squares analysis revealed that affective commitment partially mediates the effect of bullying on intention to leave. Furthermore, the direct effect of bullying on intention to leave is stronger than the indirect effect.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Goal and the Theoretical Model

In this study, it was intended to examine how organizational silence and mobbing influence turnover intention of employees. In line with this purpose, the following hypotheses are proposed for testing:

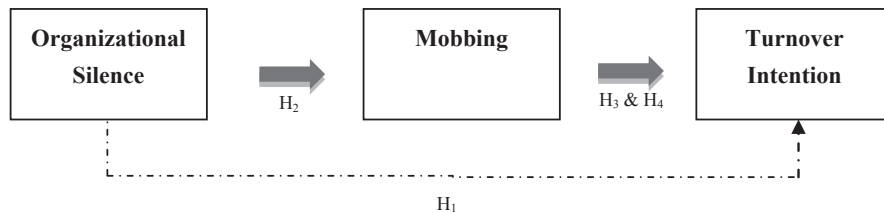
*H1: Organizational silence is related with turnover intention.*

*H2: Organizational silence is related with mobbing.*

*H3: Mobbing is related with turnover intention.*

*H4: Mobbing mediates the organizational silence and turnover intention relationship.*

Theoretical model of the research is demonstrated in Figure 1.



**Figure 1:** The Theoretical Model

#### 3.2. Sample and Data Collection

Data were collected from 1.794 employees from 39 different companies, of which 58,2% are male and 54,8% are single. 61,1% of the participants are employed in service, 20,4% of them are employed in manufacturing, 10,5% are employed in finance and 8% of them are employed in IT industries. The 54,7% of the participants are employed in public sector and the remaining are employed in private sector (45,3%). Most of the participants' ages are between 18 to 60 years, and their tenure in their organizations ranged from 1 year to over 30 years; Most of the participants (69,7%) have a university degree. The occupations of the participants include staff positions (83,9%), managerial positions (14,6%) and professional positions (1,4%).

The scale for measuring perception of organizational silence of employees was adopted from Van Dyne et al. (2003). Employees' perception of mobbing was measured with a scale which was adopted by Pranjic et al. (2006) and turnover intention was measured with a scale which was adopted from Mobley et al. (1979). Responses were obtained using 5point Likert-type scale where (1) represents 'strongly agree' and (5) represents 'strongly disagree'. Data obtained from the participants were analyzed by SPSS statistical package program.

#### 3.3. Data Analysis and Findings

The result of the factor analysis of research variables is presented in Table 1. A strong factor structure is supplied through the factor analyses performed upon variables concerned with organizational silence, mobbing and turnover

intention of employees. This indicates that the questionnaire statements used to measure these concepts were loaded to the variables. The total variance explained by this analysis is 58,666. The variance of mobbing is 32,637, the variance of organizational silence is 17,402 and the variance of turnover intention is 8,627.

**Table 1:** Factor analysis for Organizational silence, Mobbing and Turnover Intention

Rotated Component Matrix <sup>a</sup>			
	Component		
	MB	OS	TI
MPRE2: Teasing and abrasive insinuations are made containing my personality.	.797		
MPRE1: My integrity is bad- treated.	.782		
MISO1: Required information is withheld from me.	.776		
MISO2: I'm being ignored.	.775		
MDES4: My area of responsibility is restricted without consultation to the top management.	.775		
MDES1: My ideas are advertised as the ideas of others.	.772		
MPRE3: Oral and behavioural threats are made against me.	.771		
MPRO3: I have been exposed to humiliating treatments in front of my colleagues.	.767		
MO1: Unlawful pressure is applied while doing my job.	.755		
MDES5: Plans are made for me without consulting my top management.	.746		
MPRO4: Powers and authorities are used as a tool of threatening.	.742		
MO2: Targets that are set for me are not realistic and not being able to perform.	.721		
MDES2: They gossip about me.	.681		
MISO3: The necessary training and tools such as prizes are not provided.	.671		
MDES3: Value of my efforts are taken for granted.	.623		
MPRO1: I feel belittled.	.615		
MPRE5: My personal assets are being harmed.	.583		
OS8: I keep my work-related information for myself as I fear from my leader's reaction.		.789	
OS6: I hesitate to speak as I fear from my leader's reactions.		.771	
OS9: I hesitate to explain my views with a view to protect the continuity of business for missing issues.		.763	
OS3: I keep my opinions to myself at the resolving stage of the problems.		.707	
OS10: I hesitate to develop solutions to problems that arise because I fear the reactions of my leader.		.707	
OS4: As I don't believe that the solder to make a change in my favour, I refrain from expressing my ideas for improvement.		.699	
OS7: To be able to continue to work, I ignore adverse conditions.		.683	
OS5: As I think that it does not matter how the work could be done better, I refrain from expressing my views.		.673	
OS2: Since I consent to the decisions, I keep my thoughts to myself.		.629	
IQ3: I'll leave this organization at the earliest possible opportunity.			.849
IQ2: I am actively looking for an alternative job.			.847
IQ1: I consider quitting my job.			.840

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. a Rotation converged in 4 iterations. Total explained variance: 58,666 MB: Mobbing OS: Organizational Silence TI: Turnover Intention

Variance analyses were conducted in order to develop an understanding of the differences between different variables. According to the results of t-test for sector, there exist differences between private and public sector concerning participants' perceptions of mobbing and organizational silence, and there exist no difference between the sector groups concerning their turnover intention. As it can be inferred from Table-2, the perceptions of public sector employees of mobbing and organizational silence are slightly higher than those of private sector employees.

**Table 2:** T-test for Sector Groups

	Sector	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Difference	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Mobbing	private	812	1.9386	.95091	-.62476	.011	.000
	public	982	2.5634	.94821			
Organizational silence	private	812	1.7682	.70153	-.38787	66.551	.000
	public	982	2.1560	.87706			
Turnover Intention	private	812	2.4610	1.20883	-.07634	.245	.182
	public	982	2.5373	1.20299			

The t-test for gender analysis suggests that, there exist differences between females and males concerning their perceptions of mobbing and organizational silence, and there exist no difference between the gender groups concerning their perceptions of turnover intention. As it can be inferred from Table-3, the perceptions of males of mobbing and organizational silence are slightly higher than those of females.

**Table 3:** T-test for Gender Groups

Group Statistics	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Difference	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
<b>Mobbing</b>	Female	749	2.0974	.96396	<b>-.31396</b>	<b>-6.642</b>	<b>.000</b>
	<b>Male</b>	<b>1044</b>	<b>2.4113</b>	<b>1.00345</b>			
<b>Organizational silence</b>	Female	749	1.8996	.79921	<b>-.13741</b>	<b>-3.491</b>	<b>.000</b>
	<b>Male</b>	<b>1044</b>	<b>2.0370</b>	<b>.83782</b>			
Turnover Intention	Female	749	2.4864	1.20740	-.02762	-.478	.633
	Male	1044	2.5140	1.20575			

We tried to test if mobbing plays a mediator role in the organizational silence – turnover intention relation. In order to make this test, first of all, we checked if all these variables are one-to-one related to each other. Correlation coefficients were calculated and it was found that each variable was correlated to the others for all the participants. The same was found when data was split into two considering gender and also working status (public – private). Considering these results of the correlation analyses depicted on Table 4, hypotheses 1, 2 and 3 purporting that organizational silence and mobbing are separately related both each other and also to turnover intention were accepted.

**Table4:** Correlation Results: One –to- one Relationship (correlation coefficients) among Organizational silence, mobbing and the Intention to quit considering their gender and working status

Variables:	For all the participants		For only male participants		For only female participants		For only public employees		For only private employees	
	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
Organizational silence (1)	1		1		1		1		1	
Mobbing (2)	0,393**		0,380**		0,395**		0,321**		0,389**	
Intention to quit (3)	<b>0,224**</b>	0,465**	<b>0,253**</b>	0,485**	<b>0,182**</b>	0,447**	<b>0,168**</b>	0,468**	<b>0,310**</b>	0,494**

\*\*p<0,01; \*p<0,05

Secondly, we conducted five consecutive regression analyses (Table-5) to check if mobbing overshadowed organizational silence. The first regression (Model 1) was conducted to see if the effect of the organizational silence on turnover intention reduced significantly when regressed together with the mediator, i.e mobbing. Results showed that for all the participants without any differentiation of gender or working status, organizational silence’s effect size on the turnover intention reduced (regression’s beta coefficient: 0,049\*) when compared to its one to one relation (correlation’s r coefficient: 0,224\*\*) to the turnover intention. There seems to be a partial mediation of mobbing, since both the magnitude of the effect and the significance level got lower. Then in models 2 and 3, we checked this mediator role when data was split according to the gender of the participants. For only male participants (model 2), regression results showed that organizational silence’s effect size on the intention to quit reduced a lot (regression’s beta coefficient: 0,080\*\*) when compared to its one to one relation (correlation’s r coefficient: 0,253\*\*) to the turnover intention. There seems to be a partial mediation of mobbing, since the magnitude of the effect got lower, even though it was still significant. As for the female participants (model 3), regression results showed that organizational silence’s effect on the turnover intention both reduced and became non-significant (regression’s beta coefficient: 0,007) when compared to its one to one relation (correlation’s r coefficient: 0,182\*\*) to the turnover intention.

Therefore, we can infer that mobbing plays a mediator role in the relationship between organizational silence and turnover intention among female employees.

Following the same procedure, we tested for the mediator role of mobbing considering the working status of the participants in models 4 and 5. For only public employees (model 4), organizational silence's effect on the turnover intention both reduced and became non-significant (regression's beta coefficient: 0,020) when compared to its one to one relation (correlation's r coefficient: 0,168\*\*) to the turnover intention. Thus, another full mediation was confirmed. We can again infer that mobbing plays a mediator role in the relationship between organizational silence and turnover intention, this time among public employees. As for the private employees (model 5), organizational silence's effect on the turnover intention reduced only to some extent (regression's beta coefficient: 0,138\*\*) but still its level of significance remained the same when compared to its one to one relation (correlation's r coefficient: 0,310\*\*) to the turnover intention. Therefore, we cannot attribute a mediator role to organizational silence among private employees.

When all of the participants are considered together, mobbing plays only a partial mediation role. Accordingly, Hypothesis 4 is rejected.

**Table 5:** Regression Results: Effect sizes (Standardized Beta Coefficients) of Organizational silence and mobbing on the Intention to quit considering their gender and working status

Independent variables:	Model 1: For all the participants	Model 2: For only male employees	Model 3: For only female employees	Model 4: For only public employees	Model 5: For only private employees
Mobbing	0,446**	0,454**	0,445**	0,461**	0,440**
<b>Organizational silence</b>	<b>0,049*</b>	<b>0,080**</b>	<b>0,007</b>	<b>0,020</b>	<b>0,138**</b>
R2	0,218	0,239	0,198	0,218	0,258
F	250,531**	164,849**	93,334**	137,410**	142,218**
Finding: when regressed together with Mobbing, Organizational Silence's effect size on the Turnover Intention	gets both lower and less significant	is still significant, but reduces a lot	gets both lower and non-significant	gets both lower and non-significant	gets a bit lower but still significant
Interpretation:	partial mediation	partial mediation	<b>full mediation</b>	<b>full mediation</b>	no mediation

\*\*p<0,01; \*p<0,05

#### 4. Conclusion

Although, there exists extensive organizational silence in many organizations and organizational silence has detrimental effect on organizations, there exists insufficient research on this topic (Bowen and Blackmon, 2003; Morrison and Milliken, 2000). In addition, in recent years, concerns for mobbing increased among public institutions, non-governmental organizations and academic researchers. Organizational silence and employees' silent behaviors are often seen as a research subject in foreign literature (Hogan, 2008). As we investigate the simultaneous impact of, and interaction between, being the direct exposure of mobbing and working in an environment characterized by mobbing upon employees' turnover intention and organizational silence, the study provides consistent evidence with the literature that this behaviour makes employees feel uncomfortable where they work since it causes them to lose their sense of belonging to organization. Mobbing is an interrelated issue that links to managerial implications of an organization. Therefore, it is more likely to occur in a workplace with poor leadership and unclear goals. Furthermore, exposure to mobbing behaviour is also associated with workplace violence. Since organizational silence comprises individuals' expression of their thoughts, opinions and suggestions leading disruptions in an organization, executives have to search for ways to deal with this behaviour. In this respect, the managers need to provide upward communication and encourage it within the organization. Otherwise, the employees will lose their will to withstand

hardships and intent to leave. The culture created by the top management will need to contribute to the productivity of employees. There are many empirical researches about the positive effect of mobbing yet, the researches that focus on the effects of mobbing on turnover intention and organizational silence still reveals a significant gap in the literature. Because workplace mobbing has detrimental consequences on turnover intention of employees, this phenomenon should be addressed.

With this study, it was intended to contribute to the literature with the findings of a comprehensive research from Turkey, where organizational silence and mobbing are new phenomenon. The main purpose of this study is to measure the moderating effect of mobbing perceptions in the relationship between the silence behavior of employees and their intention to leave. Besides, the study is attempted to identify the underlying trends of silence behavior.

As the findings indicate, there exists a positive significant relation between organizational silence and turnover intention, organizational silence and mobbing, and also mobbing and turnover intention. The findings demonstrated that when compared to organizational silence, mobbing has a higher effect on employees' turnover intentions. When only female or male employees or the employees working in public or private sectors are considered, the results are the same. If managers or employers desire to reduce their employees' turnover intention, they should try to decrease the organizational silence and mobbing behaviours.

Although the findings suggest that organizational silence and turnover intention are positively related to each other, this relation is indirect in many cases. Especially when only female employees or employees working in public sector are considered, mobbing plays a mediator role in this relationship. When we consider male employees this mediation is only partial, and when we consider only private employees there is no mediation at all. As in other sectors, mobbing in the public and private sector closely affects the working conditions of employees. These behaviours, in general effect and lead to many negative consequences for the employees and organization. Finally, when all the participants are considered together, mobbing plays only a partial mediation role. This study, by and large, presents the fundamental evidence of mobbing in the workplace as well as reveals a scope with regard to its moderating effect in the relation of silence behavior and turnover intention manners of employees.

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