EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS' EXPOSURE TO MOBBING AND THEIR HAPPINESS AT WORK LEVELS

Aylin SOLMAZ
MsC, Independent Researcher, Nicosia, North Cyprus
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0005-2528-7735
aylinslmz6687@gmail.com

Cahit NURİ
Assist. Prof. Dr., Atatürk Teacher Training Academy, Faculty of Education, Nicosia, North Cyprus
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0805-1972
cahit.nuri@ciu.edu.tr

Abstract

This study aimed to examine the relationship between the levels of mobbing exposure and happiness at work among special education teachers, considering various variables. The research was conducted using a relational survey model, a quantitative research method. Participants included 127 special education teachers working during the 2023-2024 academic year. The "Mobbing Scale" and "Happiness at Work Scale" were used as data collection tools. Results revealed a negative correlation between mobbing exposure and happiness at work: as teachers' exposure to mobbing increased, their levels of happiness at work decreased. Additionally, mobbing experiences significantly and negatively predicted workplace happiness. The study concludes with recommendations to raise awareness about mobbing and its impacts.

Keywords: Special education, mobbing, happiness, happiness at work, special education teacher.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers' positive attitudes toward their profession significantly contribute to students' educational outcomes and the effectiveness of teaching practices. However, numerous factors influence teachers' happiness, including professional loneliness (Bayar & Bayar, 2022). While some individuals may not feel isolated in their personal lives, they might experience intense loneliness in the workplace. Work environments are social settings where individuals encounter diverse emotional experiences (Demirbaş & Haşit, 2016). Another critical concept is mobbing.

Mobbing refers to systematic psychological pressure exerted on individuals or groups in the workplace. This phenomenon often follows a deliberate strategy aimed at harming individuals (Demir, 2021). It encompasses bullying, harassment, and abuse, representing a process anyone might endure (Keashly, 2021). Victims of mob-bing typically face disrespectful behavior first, followed by verbal ridicule, damage to their social status, and eventual coercion to leave their jobs (Grotto-de-Souza et al., 2022). Under current conditions marked by intensified competition, economic crises, and rising unemployment, mobbing cases have notably increased (Işık, 2021).

Mobbing is particularly prevalent in the education sector. Interactions among teachers, administrators, and students in schools place all parties at risk of workplace harassment (Akgün & Temli-Durmuş, 2020; Çobanoğlu, 2005). Like other sectors, mobbing in schools leads to adverse consequences for both individuals and instituti-ons, underscoring the critical role of school administrators in addressing this issue (Yıldız, 2021).

Teachers' happiness, as the cornerstone of the education system, profoundly impacts society. Schools are institutions where both inputs and outputs are human beings. Thus, ensuring teachers' happiness is essential for fostering environments where children can thrive (Lavy & Bocker, 2018). Unhappy teachers are likely to raise unhappy individuals, with negative repercussions for society. Consequently, educational institutions must develop policies that prioritize employee well-being (Akbulut, 2015; Dreer, 2024).

Special education teachers, in particular, face heightened psychological pressure and mobbing due to the demanding nature of their work (Berry & Gravelle, 2013). This can diminish their motivation and professional performance (Ateş, 2019). While existing literature examines teachers' experiences of mobbing and its correlations with various factors, no studies specifically explore the relationship between mobbing exposure and workplace happiness among special education teachers.

This study aims to investigate the relationship between mobbing exposure and workplace happiness levels among special education teachers. It focuses on the dimensions of mobbing they encounter and its impact on their well-being. The findings may provide critical insights for educational administrators and policymakers to foster healthier work environments, enhancing both teachers' job satisfaction and the quality of education for students. The following research questions guide this study:

1. What are the levels of teachers' mobbing perceptions and workplace happiness?

2. Is there a relationship between teachers' mobbing perceptions and workplace happiness?

METHOD

This section outlines the research model, study group, data collection tools, and procedures for data collection and analysis.

Research Model
The study employed a relational survey model, a quantitative research met-hod, to examine the relationship between mobbing exposure and workplace happi-ness levels among special education teachers. A relational survey model is defined as a research design that evaluates relationships between multiple variables and identi-fies variations among them (Karasar, 2012).

Study Group
The target population of the study consists of special education teachers. The sample was selected using purposeful sampling, a method applied to compare and define the characteristics of a specific group (Büyüköztürk et al., 2016). A total of 127 special education teachers participated in the study. The socio-demographic characteristics of the participants are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution according to participants' socio-demographic characteristics.

Category	Subcategory	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	68	53.54
	Male	59	46.46
Age	20-29 years	85	66.93
	30-39 years	36	28.35
	40-49 years	6	4.72
Marital Status	Single	75	59.06
	Married	52	40.94

Data Collection Tools
In line with the research objectives, data were collected using a socio-demographic information form developed by the researcher, the Mobbing Scale, and the Happiness at Work Scale.

Socio-Demographic Information Form
This section of the survey included demographic characteristics of the partici-pating teachers, such as age, gender, marital status, and educational background.

Mobbing Scale
The Mobbing Scale used in the study was developed by Tursun (2019) to me-asure participants' perceptions of workplace mobbing. The scale consists of 22 items on a 5-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from Never Encountered (1) to Always Encountered (5). Items were categorized into three dimensions: Factors ba-sed on ideological and visual features (Items 17, 18, 27, 16, 29, 26, 20, 28, 24, 15, 25), Trivialization in professional life (Items 23, 21, 19, 7, 14), Social relationships and lack of appreciation (Items 4, 2, 3, 5, 11, 12). The scale's Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was reported as 0.913 (Tursun, 2019).

Happiness at Work Scale
To assess teachers' workplace happiness, the Happiness at Work Scale deve-loped by Polatçı and Ünüvar (2021) was used. This 38-item scale employs a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). It comprises four sub-dimensions: Managerial-related happiness, Workplace-related factors happiness, Person-job fit-related happiness, Workplace friendship-related happiness. The scale's overall Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was 0.95 (Polatçı & Ünüvar, 2021).

Data Collection
Prior to data collection, permission was obtained from the original authors to use the scales. The study was conducted with ethical approval from the Internatio-nal Cyprus University Scientific Research Ethics Committee. Data were collected via face-to-face interviews, with participants informed about the study's purpose and assured confidentiality. Participation was voluntary, and the survey took app-roximately 20 minutes to complete.

Data Analysis and Interpretation
Data were analyzed using SPSS 27.0. Frequency analyses and descriptive sta-tistics were employed to summarize socio-demographic characteristics and scale sco-res. Reliability was confirmed via Cronbach's alpha (0.956 for the Mobbing Scale, 0.931 for the Happiness at Work Scale). Normality assumptions were tested using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and skewness-kurtosis values, confirming normal dist-ribution. Parametric tests (independent samples t-test, ANOVA, Tukey post-hoc) were applied for comparisons. Relationships between variables were analyzed via Pearson correlation, and multivariate linear regression was used to predict workpla-ce happiness based on mobbing scores.

Table 2. Normality tests for participants' mobbing scale scores.

Variables	Kolmogorov-Smirnov				
	Test Statistic (D)	sd	p	Skewness	Kurtosis
Factors based on ideological and visual features	.123	127	.000*	-.272	-.984
Trivialization in professional life	.114	127	.000*	-.109	-.691
Social relationships and lack of appreciation	.102	127	.002*	-.183	-.716
Mobbing Scale	.103	127	.002*	-.369	-.855

*p<.05

Table 2 presents the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and skewness-kurtosis coefficients to assess the normality of participants' Happiness at Work Scale scores. According to the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test results in Table 3, the Happiness at Work Scale scores did not conform to a normal distribution (p < .05). However, since the skewness and kurtosis coefficients fell within the range of ±1.5, the data was deemed to follow a normal distribution. Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) state that skewness and kurtosis coefficients between ±1.5 indicate normal distribution. Con-sequently, parametric tests were used to test the research hypotheses.

Table 3. Normality tests for participants' happiness at work scale scores.

Variables	Kolmogorov-Smirnov				
	Test Statistic (D)	sd	p	Skewness	Kurtosis
Managerial-related factors	.141	127	.000*	.406	.337
Workplace-related factors factors	.126	127	.000*	.189	.379
Person-Job Fit	.133	127	.000*	-.702	1.246
Workplace Friendship	.185	127	.000*	.248	.906
Happiness at Work Scale	.108	127	.001*	.268	.991

p<.05

Table 3 examines the normality of participants' Happiness at Work Scale scores using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and skewness-kurtosis coefficients. According to the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test results, the Happiness at Work Scale scores did not follow a normal distribution (p< 0.05). However, since the skewness and kurtosis coefficients fell within the range of ±1.5, the data was considered to approximate normality.

FINDINGS

Findings on the Mobbing Scale

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Participants' Mobbing Scale Scores

Variables	n	$\bar{x}$	SD	Min	Max
Factors based on ideological and visual features	127	24.57	8.39	11	46
Trivialization in professional life	127	11.70	4.05	5	22
Social relationships and lack of appreciation	127	14.09	4.69	6	24
Mobbing Scale	127	50.37	15.93	22	84

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics for participants' Mobbing Scale scores. According to Table 4, participants scored 24.57 ± 8.39 on the Factors based on ideological and visual features subscale, 11.70 ± 4.05 on the Trivialization in professional life subscale, and 14.09 ± 4.69 on the Social relationships and lack of appreciation subscale. The total Mobbing Scale score was 50.37 ± 15.93.

Findings on the Happiness at Work Scale

Table 5. Descriptive statistics for participants' happiness at work scale scores.

Variables	n	$\bar{x}$	SD	Min	Max
Managerial-related factors	127	42.10	10.03	14	70
Workplace-related factors factors	127	28.16	6.37	10	45
Person-Job Fit	127	25.41	5.17	8	36
Workplace Friendship	127	12.41	2.98	4	20
Happiness at Work Scale	127	108.08	20.21	36	167

Table 5 displays the descriptive statistics for participants' Happiness at Work Scale scores. According to Table 5, participants scored an average of 42.10 ± 10.03 on the Managerial-related happiness subscale, 28.16 ± 6.37 on the Workplace-related factors happiness subscale, 25.41 ± 5.17 on the Person-Job Fit-related happiness subscale, and 12.41 ± 2.98 on the Workplace Friendship-related happiness subscale. The total Happiness at Work Scale score averaged 108.08 ± 20.21.

Findings on the Relationship Between the Mobbing Scale and the Happiness at Work Scale

Table 6. Correlations between participants' mobbing scale and happiness at work scale scores.

		Factors based on ideological and visual features	Trivialization in professional life	Social relationships and lack of appreciation	Mobbing Scale	Managerial-related factors	Workplace-related factors	Person-Job Fit	Workplace Friendship	Happiness at Work Scale
Factors based on ideological and visual feature	r	1								
	p									
	N	127								
Trivialization in professional life	r	.875	1							
	p	.000*								
	N	127	127							
Social relationships and lack of appreciation	r	.743	.720	1						
	p	.000*	.000*							
	N	127	127	127						
Mobbing Scale	r	.967	.926	.868	1					
	p	.000*	.000*	.000*						
	N	127	127	127	127					
Managerial-related factors	r	-.480	-.437	-.448	-.495	1				
	p	.000*	.000*	.000*	.000*					
	N	127	127	127	127	127				
Workplace-related factors	r	-.159	-.151	-.163	-.170	.631	1			
	p	.074	.091	.066	.056	.000*				
	N	127	127	127	127	127	127			
Person-Job Fit	r	-.425	-.371	-.515	-.470	.512	.493	1		
	p	.000*	.000*	.000*	.000*	.000*	.000*			
	N	127	127	127	127	127	127	127		
Workplace Friendship	r	-.433	-0,395	-.513	-0,480	.562	.364	.588	1	
	p	.000*	.000*	.000*	.000*	.000*	.000*	.000*		
	N	127	127	127	127	127	127	127	127	
Happiness at Work Scale	r	-.461	-.418	-.481	-.490	.909	.808	.752	.692	1
	p	.000*	.000*	.000*	.000*	.000*	.000*	.000*	.000*	
	N	127	127	127	127	127	127	127	127	127

*$p<.05$

When Table 6, which presents the Pearson correlation test results between the participants' scores on the Mobbing Scale and the Happiness at Work Scale in the study, is examined, it is determined that there are statistically significant correlations ($p<.05$) between the participants' total Mobbing Scale scores, as well as their scores on the subscales of "Factors based on ideological and visual feature",

"Trivialization in professional life", and "Social relationships and lack of appreciation", and their total Happiness at Work Scale scores, along with the subscales of "Managerial-related factors", "Workplace-related factors", "person-job fit", and "workplace friendship". These correlations are negative in direction, indicating that as the participants' scores on the total Mobbing Scale and its subscales (Factors based on ideological and visual feature, trivialization in professional life, and social relationships and lack of appreciation) increase, their scores on the total Happiness at Work Scale and its subscales (Managerial related factors, Workplace-related factors, person-job fit, and workplace friendship) decrease.

Table 7. The predictive role of participants' total mobbing scale scores on their happiness at work scale scores.

	Std. Coeff.			Std. Error			R^2
	B	SE	β	t	p	F	AdjR²
(Constant)	139.41	5.22		26.699	.000*	39.573	.240
Mobbing Scale	-.62	.10	-.49	-6.291	.000*	.000*	.234

*p< .05

Table 7 presents the results of the simple linear regression analysis conducted to examine the predictive relationship between the participants' total Mobbing Scale scores and their Happiness at Work Scale scores in the study. According to Table 7, it was found that the participants' total Mobbing Scale scores statistically significantly and negatively predict their Happiness at Work Scale scores (β = -.49; p < .05). The variance explained by the model regarding the predictive relationship between the participants' total Mobbing Scale scores and their Happiness at Work Scale scores is 23.4%.

Table 8. Prediction of participants' mobbing scale sub-dimension scores on happiness at work scale scores.

Variables	Std. Coeff.		Std. Error				R^2
	B	SE	B	t	p	F	AdjR²
(Constant)	140.43	5.28		26.596	.000*		
Factors based on ideological and visual feature	-.61	.41	-.25	-1.494	.138	14.089	.256
Trivialization in professional life	.16	.82	.03	.197	.844	.000*	.238
Social relationships and lack of appreciation	-1.36	.51	-.32	-2.650	.009*		

*p<.05

Table 8 presents the results of the multivariate regression analysis examining the predictive relationship between the participants' subscale scores on the Mobbing Scale and their Happiness at Work Scale scores. According to Table 8, the scores from the subscales of "Factors based on ideological and visual feature" (β = -.25; p>.05) and "Trivialization in professional life" (β = .03; p>.05) in the Mobbing Scale were found not to statistically significantly predict Happiness at Work Scale scores. However, the scores from the "Social relationships and lack of appreciation" subscale of the Mobbing Scale were found to statistically significantly and negatively predict Happiness at Work Scale scores (β = -0.32; p<.05). The model explained 23.8% of the variance in Happiness at Work Scale scores.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, and RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the study indicate that the participants' total Mobbing Scale score was 50.37 ± 15.93, suggesting that they experienced moderate levels of workplace mobbing. Similar studies have reported mobbing scores within comparable ranges (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2003). The subscale findings highlight distinct dynamics of mobbing. The high score on the "Factors based on

ideological and visual feature" subscale (24.57 ± 8.39) suggests that participants were targeted due to personal beliefs, appearance, or socio-cultural identities, aligning with Leymann's (1996) concept of "systematic exclusion" as a core mechanism of mobbing.

The score of 11.70 ± 4.05 on the "Trivialization in professional life" subscale reflects environments where participants' professional competence or contributions were deliberately disregarded, consistent with literature linking hierarchical power dynamics to mobbing behaviors (Zapf, Knorz, & Kulla, 1996). The score of 14.09 ± 4.69 on the "Social relationships and lack of appreciation" subscale indicates experiences of social isolation and communication barriers, a critical dimension undermining psychological resilience (Niedl, 1996). However, cultural and organizational contextual limitations must be acknowledged. For instance, collectivist cultures may manifest conflicts more indirectly (Aquino & Thau, 2009), warranting future research on cultural validity and qualitative validation.

Regarding Happiness at Work Scale scores, the "Managerial-related factors" subscale had the highest mean (42.10 ± 10.03), aligning with studies emphasizing leadership styles and managerial support as key to employee well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Lower scores on the "Workplace-related factors" subscale (28.16 ± 6.37) suggest potential deficiencies in institutional policies or physical conditions, resonating with literature on resource inadequacy and motivation (Demirtaş & Öztürk, 2021). The relatively low scores for "person-job fit" (25.41 ± 5.17) and "Workplace Friendship" (12.41 ± 2.98) may reflect skill-job mismatches or insufficient social support, underscoring the need for interventions (Bilgin & Kutlu, 2023). The total score (108.08 ± 20.21) suggests moderate workplace happiness, with potential cultural variability compared to global averages (Sever, Özdemir, & Acar, 2020).

The findings confirm significant negative correlations between mobbing and workplace happiness, consistent with literature on mobbing's detrimental effects (Einarsen et al., 2003; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). High scores on "Factors based on ideological and visual features" and "Social relationships and lack of appreciation" subscales reduced perceptions of managerial and workplace-related factors happiness, reflecting exclusion and discrimination dynamics (Parzefall & Salin, 2010). These align with theories linking thwarted belongingness (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and identity threats (Verkuyten, Yogeeswaran, & Adelman, 2023) to diminished well-being.

The nonsignificant negative relationship between "Trivialization in professional life" and happiness suggests indirect or long-term effects (Bowling & Beehr, 2006), while "person-job fit" and "friendship" inversely correlating with mobbing highlights disrupted adaptation and social support (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Riordan & Griffeth, 1995). These findings align with research on work experiences impacting performance and resilience (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). Organizations should develop anti-mobbing policies, enhance leadership sensitivity, and foster inclusive communication. Happiness at work initiatives (e.g., work-life balance programs) may buffer mobbing effects (Nielsen et al., 2017; Yelmen, Nuri & Bağlama, 2024).

Total Mobbing Scale scores significantly negatively predicted Happiness to Work ($\beta = -.49$; $p < .05$), explaining 23.4% variance. While not the sole determinant, mobbing's significant role underscores the need for preventive measures (Hogh et al., 2011). Multivariate analysis revealed differential subscale impacts: "Social relationships and lack of appreciation" significantly predicted reduced happiness ($\beta = -.32$; $p < 0.05$), emphasizing social support's role (Diener et al., 2010). Non-significant results for other subscales (e.g., $\beta = -.25$, $\beta = .03$; $p > .05$) suggest cultural or contextual mediation (Einarsen et al., 2003). The model's 23.8% variance explanation aligns with conservation of resources theory (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Yelmen, Nuri & Bağlama, 2024), where social resource depletion heightens stress.

Conclusıon
This study empirically confirms mobbing's adverse impact on workplace happiness, urging proactive anti-mobbing strategies and psychosocial risk mitigation. Cross-sectional limitations necessitate cautious interpretation, with future research exploring cultural contexts and longitudinal dynamics. Strengthening social relationships and psychological safety is vital, while non-significant subscale effects highlight the need for culturally adapted measurement tools.

Recommendatıons
To enhance happiness, organizations should prioritize manager training, workplace improvements, and person-job fit programs. However, the cross-sectional design limits causal inferences; future longitudinal studies are recommended. Culturally sensitive mobbing assessments and mixed-method approaches are critical.

Ethics and Conflict of Interest
This study was conducted according to ethical and research standards. All participants participated to study were volunteers. Information about study subject, aim and researchers were given to the participants. As the authors of this study, we declare that we collected data in accordance with ethical rules during the research process and acted in accordance with all ethical rules. This study was conducted in accordance with publication and research ethics. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Cyprus International University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee under decision number EKK24-25/01/11 on October 09, 2025. Data collected from participants on a voluntary basis were treated with confidentiality. We also declare that there is no conflict among the authors.

Author Contribution
All authors contributed equally to the research.

Data availability
The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

Corresponding Author
Correspondence to Aylin SOLMAZ, aylinslmz6687@gmail.com

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