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An empirical analysis of the leader–member exchange and employee turnover intentions mediated by mobbing: evidence from sport organisations

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ABSTRACT

Despite the existence of numerous important factors that affect organisations' efficiency and productivity, including leader–member exchange, mobbing, and employee turnover intentions, studies analysing the relationships among these variables are scarce in the sports literature. Hence, the purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships between leader–member exchange and turnover intentions, focusing primarily on the mediating role of mobbing. The sample for the study was collected from participants who worked in a public organisation providing sports and physical activity services. The results of the study showed statistically significant relationships among leader–member exchange, mobbing, and employee turnover intentions. More specifically, leader–member exchange was found to have a significant negative relationship with mobbing and employee turnover intentions. Mobbing, on the other hand, had a significant positive relationship with employee turnover intentions and mediated the relationship between leader–member exchange and employee turnover intentions. Managerial and research implications and contributions of the study were discussed.

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1. Introduction

The current globalised and competitive business environment forces sports and physical activity organisations to provide customer-focused quality service that requires motivated and committed employees. Therefore, one of the most challenging conditions these organisations face relates to long-term retention of their good employees, who are the centrepiece of providing company services. Long-term employee retention is closely related to job satisfaction and reduced turnover intentions. Employee turnover is known to be a common problem, occurring in all types of organisations (Yin-Fah, Foon, Chee-Leong, & Osman, 2010), but it is more common in service industries (Wasmuth & Dawis, 1993). For example, a study of 20 hotels in North America in 1983 showed that voluntary turnover rate was 60% (Wasmuth & Dawis, 1983); from September 2005 to August 2006, the voluntary

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turnover rate for the leisure and hospitality industry in the United States was 52.2%. Such high employee turnover rates in the services industry is considered a significant influential factor of the performance of sports and physical activity organisations, whose main offerings are pure services performed by well-qualified and trained employees.

A report by the International Labour Organisation highlighted an increasing trend of workplace-related negative psychological problems, such as mobbing (Yildiz, 2015). Studies conducted in European countries have reported frequent incidents of workplace mobbing behaviour. Tsuno, Kawakami, Inoue, and Abe (2010) found that approximately 3.6–16% of employees in Europe had been subjected to mobbing at work. Similarly, based on an extensive research in the health sector in England, researchers reported that approximately one-third of employees had been subjected to mobbing in the previous years (Quine, 1999), while another study from the Spanish public sector found that mobbing affected 9.5% of employees (Chappell & Di Martino, 2006). Finally, a study of the Turkish Super League argued that a number of professional footballers had been subjected to mobbing by teammates and managers (Iyem, 2013). Based on these reports, we can infer that workplace mobbing is an important phenomenon regardless of the cultural environment and thus warrants further research.

The concepts of leader–member exchange and mobbing and their relationships with employee turnover intentions have increasingly become an important topic of research for investigating their effects on organisations and employees. Considering that employees are key elements of service organisations for providing quality service in competitive industries, highly motivated and productive employees are needed to achieve success and ensure consistent performance. The literature presents a number of studies on the relationship between leader–member exchange and turnover intentions in various service industries (Harris, Kacmar, & Witt, 2005; Kim, Lee, & Carlson, 2010; Morrow, Suzuki, Crum, Ruben, & Pautsch, 2005). However, research analysing the effects of mobbing on turnover intentions are very limited (Davoudi, Fartash, Allahyari, & Yarahmadi, 2013; Ocel & Aydin, 2012). To the best of our knowledge, the only study that investigated the relationship between leader–member exchange and mobbing was presented by Foster (2012). Accordingly, we argue that a significant gap exists in the literature in terms of examining the direct and indirect roles of mobbing and leader–member exchange quality on employee turnover intentions. Therefore, this study aims to examine the relationship between leader–member exchange and turnover intentions by treating mobbing as a mediating variable. By addressing the gap in the literature, the results of this study are expected to contribute to service management literature in general and sports literature in particular.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Leader–member exchange

The vertical dyad linkage theory (Dansereau, Cashman, & Graen, 1973), later called ‘leader–member exchange’ (Graen, Novak, & Sommerkamp, 1982), focuses on the relationship between leaders and members (employees/subordinates) in the workplace. According to the theory, leaders are not able to approach all subordinates with the same leadership style (Wayne, Liden, & Sparrowe, 1994) because they have limited power, time, and resources within the organisation (Bauer & Green, 1996). As a result, various qualities of relationship

develop between the leader and his/her subordinates (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). In summary, this theory attempts to explain how leaders use their power, time, and limited resources while developing various relationships with subordinates (Deluga & Perry, 1994).

One can use role theory and social exchange theory to explain leader–member exchange theory. Role theory focuses on the roles of leaders and members, while social exchange theory emphasises how to explain the exchange between leaders and members. According to Graen (1976), members of organisations perform their duties and assignments by undertaking different roles within the organisation. In this respect, role theory can be used to understand how the role development processes work during leader–member exchange (Dienesch & Liden, 1986). The first stage in the affiliation between leader and subordinates is usually shaped by the similarities of demographic characteristics, personalities or social status, and common acquaintances. This is followed by an exploration of the abilities, willingness to work, and attitudes and behaviours of the subordinate to affiliate with the leader. Graen and Scandura (1987) called this first stage ‘role taking’, in which the members are evaluated. The next stage is considered ‘role making’, in which the relationships develop. In this stage, the quality of the relationship between the leader and the subordinates is substantially shaped by the performances of the subordinates. The last stage is called ‘role routinisation’, in which the relationship level between leader and subordinate becomes a routine. At this stage, the quality of the relationship between the leader and subordinates is more visible and becomes permanent. If the subordinates during this stage perform as expected, a high-quality relationship with the leader develops. However, this still does not indicate that the relationship quality will never change and will stay at the same level all the time (Bauer & Green, 1996). According to social exchange theory, individuals will continue to engage in relationships so long as expected rewards outweigh the expected social costs. Unlike the economic exchange, social exchanges do not have specific rules and agreements that organise the relationship, and there is no guarantee of a quid pro quo situation in return for social costs. The perception as to whether the other party will perform as expected or not is the key determinant of social exchange (Lambe, Wittmann, & Spekman, 2001), which states that individuals are more willing to participate in the exchange if there is a strong expectation that the other party will reciprocate.

According to leader–member exchange theory, working relations between the leader and subordinates can vary from high quality to low quality (Liden & Graen, 1980). In high-quality exchange relationship, leaders establish closer affiliations with some subordinates, called the ‘in-group’, whom they consider to be crucial for business operations. Therefore, leaders provide support and resources beyond the expected to these in-group members (Dockery & Steiner, 1990). Such relationships can lead to advantageous opportunities for the subordinate, including positive performance evaluations, promotions, career development support (Deluga & Perry, 1994), open communication, and trust (Bauer & Green, 1996). In return, leaders get more committed and hardworking subordinates (Deluga & Perry, 1994). On the other hand, leaders establish relatively lower-quality relationships with those subordinates not considered to be part of the in-group. These subordinates are called the ‘out-group’, and leaders generally exercise their positional power over them. It can be characterised with low-quality affiliations, less trust, less support, fewer interactions, and fewer rewards (Wilhelm, Herd, & Steiner, 1993). In low-quality relationships, leaders expect subordinates to fulfil formal business requirements. Subordinates are compensated to the degree of fulfilling formal requirements (Le Blanc, Jong, Geersing, Furda, & Komproe, 1993). Low-quality

relationships can lead to poor job performance among out-group members (Janssen & Van Yperen, 2004), weak organisational commitment (Kinicki & Vecchio, 1994), and low job satisfaction among out-group members (Schriesheim, Neider, & Scandura, 1998).

2.2. Mobbing

Mobbing was first defined by Konrad Lorenz, Austrian zoologist, as animal group behaviour in which 'attacks from a group of smaller animals [are] threatening a single larger animal'. However, Peter-Paul Heinemann, Swedish physician, later used it to refer to 'the very destructive behaviour of small groups of children directed against a single child' (Leymann, 1996). Although mobbing is an old concept, it has only recently been considered an important variable in the business setting because of its common prevalence in the modern business work environment. Heinz Leymann, along with other researchers, has argued that negative psychological behavioural consequences of mobbing were quite common in business life. In his study, Leymann (1996) provided detailed explanations of the characteristics and emerging structures of mobbing as well as the individuals subjected to mobbing and their psychological outcomes.

The word 'mob' refers to a disorderly crowd engaged in lawless violence. It is derived from the Latin *mobile vulgus*, meaning 'vacillating crowd'. As a verb, mob means 'to crowd about, attack or annoy' (Davenport, Schwartz, & Elliot, 1999, p. 20). As experienced in the workplace, mobbing is considered to negatively influence both employees and the organisation as a whole, and has been further defined as 'bullying, harassment, psychological terror, ganging up on someone' (Leymann & Gustafsson, 1996, p. 252). Mobbing can take place in all workplace environments without any exceptions for culture or gender, and leads to serious negative consequences. Workplace mobbing includes any ill treatment, threat, and violence used toward subordinates (vertical mobbing) or at the lateral level among employees (horizontal mobbing) (Vveinhardt & Streimikiene, 2015). However, in order to consider mobbing in the workplace environment, it has to be a systematic behaviour ongoing for an extended period of time.

Leymann (1996, p. 168) defined mobbing as 'hostile and unethical communication in the workplace directed in a systematic manner by one or more individuals, mainly toward one individual, who, due to mobbing, is pushed into a helpless and defenceless position'. According to Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, and Cooper (2003), the objective of workplace mobbing is to harass, offend, ostracise socially, or negatively affect an individual's work. The mobbing behaviours need to occur repeatedly and periodically (e.g., each week) or continue for a period of time (e.g., 6 months) in order to be associated with a specific activity, interaction, or process. In addition, the individual (or individuals) subjected to mobbing should have a feeling of inadequacy in self-defence in order for the behaviour to be described as mobbing (Jennifer, Cowie, & Ananiadou, 2003). The person subjected to mobbing consequently falls into a psychologically lower position during that period and becomes the target of negative social behaviours (Notelaers, Einarsen, Witte, & Vermunt, 2006). In summary, it is possible to define mobbing as a long-term, ever-increasing conflict style, involving systematic and frequent harassment actions to the targeted individual that is different from the normal workplace stress factors (Zapf, 1999).

Studies have indicated that mobbing has certain negative effects on both victims and organisations (Vveinhardt & Streimikiene, 2015). Psychological and social problems, high

burnout, and low motivation and productivity are some of the common potential effects experienced by individuals subjected to mobbing (Sperry, 2009). Weakened social relationships, an environment of distrust, decreased work quality, turnover, and severance payments are examples of negative outcomes due to mobbing (Hogh, Hoel, & Carneiro, 2011).

The research on the role of mobbing in sports and physical activity organisations is rather limited (Yildiz, 2015). For example, there is evidence that mobbing behaviour is observed in football clubs. It has been reported that some professional football players have been subjected to mobbing by teammates and managers (Iyem, 2013). Therefore, mobbing should be studied empirically in professional sports and physical activity organisations that are rapidly growing, as such behaviours can be more common in these organisations due to their highly competitive nature.

2.3. Employee turnover intentions

Both work and workplace have various effects on employees. One of these effects relates to employees' turnover intentions. Turnover intention is not, actually, the act of quitting, but it is one of the main indicators of quitting. Turnover intention reflects the individual's opinion about not keeping the job (i.e., his/her negative attitude toward work). The individual's past experiences, working environment, and out-of-work environment play an important role in the formatting of such intentions. Low wages, declined promotion, negative relationships with superiors and coworkers, better job opportunities elsewhere, work safety issues, health issues, retirement, and reassignment are among the factors shown to influence an individual's turnover intentions.

Two types of turnover exist: voluntary and involuntary (Watrous, Huffman, & Pritchard, 2006). Voluntary turnover represents an individual's preference (Wells & Welty Peachey, 2011); the main factors influencing it include working environment, out-of-work environment, and the individual factors previously discussed. Involuntary turnover includes being fired or reassigned to another unit. It is a result of poor performance or inappropriate behaviour.

Organisations must deal with both direct and indirect costs of employee turnovers. Direct costs include finding, recruiting, and training new personnel; indirect costs include the demoralisation of remaining personnel, increased workloads, and social capital loss (Dess & Shaw, 2001; Staw, 1980). As a result, turnover intention negatively affects organisations as it leads to both the loss of human resources and the interruption of workflows. Therefore, organisations should strive to reduce or eliminate their employees' turnover intentions by providing a consistent and stable work environment in which individuals succeed.

2.4. Research hypotheses

Through the role development processes, leaders assign various duties to their subordinates and monitor their progress. Individuals' knowledge, skills, talents, and willingness to performed assigned tasks are taken into consideration by leaders when assigning duties. In this context, leaders evaluate subordinates' activities related to their duties. Subordinates can be classified into in-group or out-group categories based on their performances. Willing subordinates with high performances end up in the in-group whereas underachieving subordinates with poor performances end up in the out-group (Gerstner & Day, 1997). Considering

that the expected duties are not performed as expected, underperforming subordinates considered to be in the out-group might be subjected to mobbing behaviour by their leaders. Similarly, it is possible that creative, successful, and well-qualified subordinates who have the potential to be in the in-group might also be subjected to mobbing behaviour by their superiors because of the potential rivalry threats posed by these employees for higher levels of organisational positions. Therefore, we offer the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Leader–member exchange quality will have a negative relationship with mobbing.

Mobbing is considered to negatively affect job satisfaction and employee morale because of the psychological harm it causes, which leads to tensions and a conflicting work climate within organisations. The main purpose of mobbing is to put pressure on individuals to make them feel that they are ‘unwanted’ in the organisation and, by continuously harassing them, to demoralise them and ultimately cause them to quit their positions in the organisation. Accordingly, an employee subjected to mobbing will have increased turnover intentions because of the fact that he/she feels offended, desperate, and defenceless. Therefore, the following hypothesis is offered.

Hypothesis 2: Mobbing will have a positive relationship with turnover intentions.

As previously mentioned, during the role development process, some poorly performing employees along with some successful employees might be classified in the out-group, as a result of the evaluation based on the assigned duties to subordinates by leaders (Dunegan, Duchon, & Uhl-Bien, 1992). Subordinates who end up in the out-group will not be able to get any organisational support beyond the formal labour contracts from their leaders, participate in the decision-making process, or acquire additional benefits from organisational resources such as career development opportunities or positive social interactions (Deluga & Perry, 1994; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Le Blanc et al., 1993). Therefore, the relationship quality between the leader and the member is expected to influence subordinates’ turnover intentions. Therefore, the following hypothesis is developed:

Hypothesis 3: Leader–member exchange quality will have a negative relationship with turnover intentions.

In the context of social exchange, leaders provide support beyond the formal labour contracts for in-group subordinates, incorporate them into the decision-making process, provide additional organisational resources, and encourage them to benefit from career development opportunities (Deluga & Perry, 1994; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Le Blanc et al., 1993). In such situations, where in-group subordinates have developed high-quality relationships with leaders, they would not be subjected to mobbing. However, the relationship between leaders and out-group subordinates can become frail as a result of the low trust, low support, reduced interactions, and fewer rewards shared (Wilhelm et al., 1993). Due to occasional disagreements, leader–member exchange quality can decrease, leading to further conflicts. Mobbing behaviour can occur when conflicts become chronic (Soliva, 2009), meaning that leader–member exchange can indirectly affect turnover intentions. Therefore, this hypothesis is developed:

Hypothesis 4: Mobbing will mediate the relationship between leader–member exchange and turnover intentions.

In this study, we consider three different types of mobbing: work related, person related, and physical intimidation. We aim to explore the relationships among different types of mobbing

and uncover the dependent variables in terms of their potential mediating roles. These sub-dimensions can be affected by independent variables and can affect turnover intentions (dependent variable) at different levels. Therefore, additional hypotheses are developed:

Hypothesis 4a: Work-related mobbing will mediate the relationship between leader–member exchange and turnover intentions.

Hypothesis 4b: Person-related mobbing will mediate the relationship between leader–member exchange and turnover intentions.

Hypothesis 4c: Physically intimidating mobbing will mediate the relationship between leader–member exchange and turnover intentions.

Figure 1 summarises the hypothesised relationships. This model demonstrates the cause-and-effect relationship among variables: effect of the independent variable to the mediating variable, the independent variable to the dependent variable, and the mediating variable to the dependent variable. The focus of this conceptualisation is based on the relationship between independent and dependent variables when the effect of the mediating variable is controlled. If the relationship level is low and the significance continues, there is ‘partial mediation’; if the relationship has no significance, there is ‘full mediation’. On the other hand, the significance level between the mediating variable and dependent variable should be preserved (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

3. Method

3.1. Measurement instruments

Leader–member exchange. Although the literature contains various instruments developed to measure leader–member exchange, it has been reported that LMX-7 scale developed by Scandura and Graen (1984) is a unidimensional scale with the most appropriate psychometric properties (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Therefore, this scale has been most commonly used in the literature to assess leader–member exchange (Yukl, O’Donnell, & Taber, 2009). Since there appears to be a general consensus that LMX-7 scale captures the construct (Yildiz, 2011), we used this scale in our study. The participants responded to each question using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from ‘extremely ineffective’ to ‘extremely effective’. Some of the questions included on the scale asked participants to respond to questions such as ‘How would you characterise your working relationship with your manager?’ High-scale values indicated a high quality of leader–member exchange.

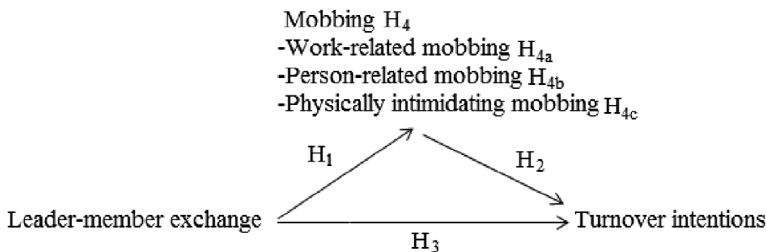


Figure 1. A model of relationships between leader–member exchange, mobbing, and turnover intentions. Source: Author’s pictorial conceptualization.

Mobbing. Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised was preferred to measure mobbing because it has appropriate psychometric properties and has been widely used by researchers (Linton & Power, 2015). Hence, this scale with the sub-dimensions of ‘work-related mobbing’, ‘person-related mobbing’, and ‘physically intimidating mobbing’ was used in order to measure mobbing behaviour in workplaces (Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaers, 2009). This scale included examples such as ‘being ignored or excluded’ and ‘pressure not to claim something to which by right you are entitled (e.g., sick leave, holiday entitlement, travel expenses)’. The statements were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (‘never’) to 5 (‘always’). High values indicated mobbing behaviours.

Turnover intentions. A 3-item turnover intentions scale developed by Landau and Hammer (1986) was used to measure employees’ turnover intentions. The instrument included questions such as ‘as soon as I can find a better job, I will leave’ and ‘I am seriously thinking about quitting my job’. The statements were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (‘strongly disagree’) to 7 (‘strongly agree’). High values indicated turnover intentions.

The back-translation method was used in this study. Back-translation is the most common and highly recommended approach for translation in cross-cultural research (Brislin, 1970). Within the framework of this method, each scale was translated from English into Turkish by translators and cross-checked and evaluated by field experts. After the necessary adjustments were made, the developed questionnaire was administered to the study participants.

3.2. Sample size and procedure

The sample was acquired from the employees ($N = 111$) of a major public organisation that provides sports and physical activity services with its 300 employees in Istanbul, the most populous city of Turkey. The organisation provides services related to Pilates, fitness, swimming, and various other services. First, written consent was obtained from the company to administer the survey to its employees. A strong emphasis was placed on the confidentiality of the results when asking for volunteers to complete the survey. Using the personal contact method, the researcher personally distributed 300 questionnaires to the employees and gave them 1 week to complete and return the surveys. A week later, 137 completed surveys were returned (45.6% response rate); 26 of these questionnaires had incomplete responses and, hence, were discarded from further analyses. Therefore, total of 111 questionnaires were used in the statistical analysis to test the hypothesised relationships. Although we emphasised the strict confidentiality, we believe that those who did not return the survey were worried about retaliation from their supervisors if they spoke up on this sensitive topic.

4. Analysis and results

The data were first analysed for incomplete and missing information. We then checked the distributional characteristics using a Kolmogorov–Smirnov test. The result of the analysis showed no significant P values of leader–member exchange ($P = 0.122$), mobbing ($P = 0.101$), and turnover intentions ($P = 0.215$) scales, and the data were assumed to be normally distributed.

4.1. Sample characteristics

We ran descriptive analyses to understand the sample profile. Table 1 shows that 56.8% of the participants were ‘male’, 57.7% ‘single’, and 55.9% ‘between 21 and 30 years old’. The majority of the sample had a ‘bachelor’s degree’ (84.7%), had been ‘working for 5 years or fewer’ (75.7%), and were ‘full-time employees’ (64%). Previous studies have indicated similar proportions (Yildiz, 2015), leading us to assume that the sample used in the study can be considered a representative sample of the broader population of the participants in Turkey.

4.2. Test for validity and reliability

A confirmatory factor analysis was used in order to confirm the one-dimensional structure of the leader–member exchange scale and three-dimensional structure of the mobbing scale. Strong model fit indexes were observed in the confirmatory factor analysis applied to the leader–member exchange scale ($\chi^2 = 14.691$, $df = 14$, $\chi^2/df = 1.04$; AGFI = 0.929; GFI = 0.964; CFI = 0.999; RMSEA = 0.021). Similarly, good levels of model fit indexes were observed as a result of the confirmatory factor analysis applied to the mobbing scale ($\chi^2 = 471.813$, $df = 206$, $\chi^2/df = 2.29$; AGFI = 0.898; GFI = 0.924; CFI = 0.965; RMSEA = 0.061). These model fit values meet the criteria suggested in the literature (Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Byrne, 2001). The exploratory factor analysis was also used to determine the dimensionality of the turnover intentions scale. Analysis results indicated that all items loaded on a single factor with high levels of factor loadings (i.e., 0.947, 0.926, 0.899), and the extracted variance was 85.379. The reliability analysis using the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient indicated a high reliability score of 0.900 for the leader–member exchange scale, 0.950 for the mobbing scale, and 0.912 for the turnover intentions scale. These values indicate that all scales are highly reliable.

4.3. Correlation analyses

Correlation analyses were carried out using the average values of the scale items for each instrument. As the scales had high reliabilities, averages can be used in the analysis to represent each construct. The literature provides information regarding the low, moderate, and

Table 1. Sample characteristics.

Variables	Categories	F	%
Gender	Male	63	56.8
	Female	48	43.2
Marital status	Married	47	42.3
	Single	64	57.7
Age	21–30	62	55.9
	31–40	35	31.5
	More than 41	14	12.6
Education	High school	17	15.3
	University	94	84.7
	Length of employment	Less than 5 years	84
6 to 10 years		13	11.7
11 to 15 years		7	6.3
16 to 20 years		3	2.7
More than 21 years		4	3.6
Employment status	Permanent staff	71	64
	Fixed-term contract	40	36

Source: Author’s calculations.

high levels of correlation levels among constructs. If the correlation is between 0.1 and 0.3, it is considered a low correlation, 0.3 to 0.5 is moderate correlation, and 0.5 to 0.7 is high correlation (Cohen, 1988). Table 2 shows that a moderate negative relation was detected between leader–member exchange and mobbing ($r = -0.472$; $P < 0.001$), whereas a low negative correlation was obtained between leader–member exchange and turnover intentions ($r = -0.289$; $P < 0.01$). In terms of the relationship between mobbing and turnover intentions, a moderate positive relation was detected ($r = 0.375$; $P < 0.001$). In addition, one of the control variables, educational status, was found to be significantly and negatively correlated with ‘mobbing’, ‘person-related mobbing’, and ‘physically intimidating mobbing’ ($P < 0.05$). On the other hand, age had a significant and negative correlation with ‘leader–member exchange’ ($P < 0.05$).

4.4. Hierarchical regression analysis

Table 3 shows the results of hierarchical regression analysis, where three different models were tested. In Model 1, we used the leader–member exchange as an independent variable and mobbing as the dependent variable. Leader–member exchange is used as an independent variable and turnover intentions as the dependent variable in Model 2. Finally, both the leader–member exchange and mobbing were used as independent variables and turnover intentions as the dependent variable in Model 3. The results in Table 3 show that the regression coefficient (β) of leader–member exchange decreases to -0.153 and the model significance is reduced in Model 3, whereas the coefficient value is -0.287 in Model 2. This decline in the value of the coefficient and the loss of significance is reversed when the mediating variable (i.e., mobbing) is introduced into the model. The significant results show that mobbing plays a full mediating role between leader–member exchange and turnover intentions (Table 3). Consequently, hypothesis 1, hypothesis 2, hypothesis 3, and hypothesis 4 are all confirmed according to the data.

We used a similar analysis for the sub-dimensions of mobbing discussed in the previous section. Contrary to our expectations, the regression analysis results illustrated in Table 4 show that ‘work-related mobbing’ did not have a full mediating effect between leader–member exchange and turnover intentions. The regression coefficient (β) value of leader–member exchange (-0.287 in Model 2) did not use its significance even though it decreased to -0.224 in Model 3 ($P < 0.05$). Accordingly, hypothesis 4_a was not supported. In other words, leader–member exchange directly affects turnover intentions when only ‘work-related mobbing’ is included in the model. On the other hand, ‘person-related mobbing’ had a full mediating effect between leader–member exchange and turnover intentions, as illustrated in Table 5. The β value of the leader–member exchange, which is -0.287 in Model 2, decreases to -0.179 in Model 3 and loses significance. Similarly, Table 6 shows that ‘physically intimidating mobbing’ has a full mediating effect between leader–member exchange and turnover intentions. The β value of the leader–member exchange, which is -0.287 in Model 2, decreases to -0.155 in Model 3 and loses significance. Therefore, hypotheses 4_b and 4_c are confirmed. Furthermore, the results showed that ‘employment status’ was the only demographical variable that had a significant and positive effect on turnover intentions when other variables are controlled. We can therefore infer that the contractual status of the employee elevates employees’ turnover intentions.

**Table 2.** Results of correlation analysis.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Gender	1										
2. Marital status	.086	1									
3. Age	-.084	-.422**	1								
4. Education	.068	.294**	-.403**	1							
5. Length of employment	.102	-.222*	.564**	-.255**	1						
6. Employment status	.216*	.036	.035	-.202*	-.147	1					
7. Leader-member exchange	-.019	.027	-.230*	.025	-.081	-.118	1				
8. Work-related mobbing	.036	-.099	.017	-.128	.106	.095	-.352**	1			
9. Person-related mobbing	-.053	-.066	.101	-.231*	.034	.209*	-.441**	.664**	1		
10. Physically intimidating mobbing	.141	-.049	.084	-.197*	.047	.233*	-.455**	.522**	.747**	1	
11. Mobbing	.032	-.083	.078	-.213*	.070	.202*	-.472**	.841**	.934**	.841**	1
12. Turnover intentions	.142	.151	-.125	.064	-.064	.383**	-.289**	.262**	.341**	.396**	.375**

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Source: Author's calculations.

Table 3. Hierarchical regression analysis with mobbing as a mediating variable.

Independent variable	Dependent variable		
	Mobbing	Turnover intentions	Turnover intentions
	<i>Model 1β</i>	<i>Model 2β</i>	<i>Model 3 B</i>
Gender	-0.012	0.013	0.016
Marital status	-0.079	0.058	0.080
Age	-0.216	-0.218	-0.159
Education	-0.213***	0.074	0.132
Length of employment	0.101	0.123	0.095
Employment status	0.128	0.384*	0.349*
Leader-member exchange	-0.492*	-0.287**	-0.153
Mobbing	-	-	0.272**
<i>F</i>	6.298	5.290	5.900
<i>R</i> ²	0.300	0.264	0.316
<i>Adjusted R</i> ²	0.252	0.214	0.263

Note: Standardised beta values used, * $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.05$.

Source: Author's calculations.

Table 4. Hierarchical regression analysis with work-related mobbing as a mediating variable.

Independent variable	Dependent variable		
	Work-related mobbing	Turnover intentions	Turnover intentions
	<i>Model 1β</i>	<i>Model 2β</i>	<i>Model 3 B</i>
Gender	-0.008	0.013	0.014
Marital status	-0.132	0.058	0.079
Age	-0.289*	-0.218	-0.171
Education	-0.135	0.074	0.096
Length of employment	0.185	0.123	0.093
Employment status	0.066	0.384*	0.374*
Leader-member exchange	-0.389*	-0.287**	-0.224***
Work-related mobbing	-	-	0.160
<i>F</i>	3.398	5.290	5.091
<i>R</i> ²	0.188	0.264	0.285
<i>Adjusted R</i> ²	0.132	0.214	0.229

Note: Standardised beta values used, * $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.05$.

Source: Author's calculations.

Table 5. Hierarchical regression analysis with person-related mobbing as a mediating variable.

Independent variable	Dependent variable		
	Person-related mobbing	Turnover intentions	Turnover intentions
	<i>Model 1β</i>	<i>Model 2B</i>	<i>Model 3 B</i>
Gender	-0.091	0.013	0.035
Marital status	-0.038	0.058	0.067
Age	-0.146	-0.218	-0.183
Education	-0.221***	0.074	0.127
Length of employment	0.045	0.123	0.112
Employment status	0.144	0.384*	0.350*
Leader-member exchange	-0.449*	-0.287**	-0.179
Person-related mobbing	-	-	0.239***
<i>F</i>	5.523	5.290	5.623
<i>R</i> ²	0.273	0.264	0.306
<i>Adjusted R</i> ²	0.224	0.214	0.252

Note: Standardised beta values used, * $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.05$.

Source: Author's calculations.

Table 6. Hierarchical regression analysis with physically intimidating mobbing as a mediating variable.

Independent variable	Dependent variable		
	Physically intimidating mobbing	Turnover intentions	Turnover intentions
	<i>Model 1β</i>	<i>Model 2β</i>	<i>Model 3 B</i>
Gender	0.108	0.013	-0.018
Marital status	-0.039	0.058	0.069
Age	-0.133	-0.218	-0.180
Education	-0.201***	0.074	0.132
Length of employment	0.032	0.123	0.114
Employment status	0.125	0.384*	0.349*
Leader-member exchange	-0.460*	-0.287**	-0.155
Physically intimidating mobbing	-	-	0.286**
<i>F</i>	5.884	5.290	6.082
<i>R</i> ²	0.286	0.264	0.323
<i>Adjusted R</i> ²	0.237	0.214	0.270

Note: Standardised beta values used, * $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.05$.

Source: Author's calculations.

5. Discussion

The literature presents a number of studies that investigated the relationship among leader-member exchange, mobbing, and turnover intentions. However, most of the studies have focused primarily on the relationship between two constructs. Most researchers have examined the relationship between leader-member exchange and turnover intentions while few have concentrated on the relationship between mobbing and turnover intentions. To the best of our knowledge, no studies have examined the three-way relationship among these constructs. Therefore, this study was designed to investigate the relationships between leader-member exchange and turnover intentions by focusing on the mediating effect of mobbing and to empirically test the conceptualised relationships in the field of sports management.

The results of this study indicate that the variables of leader-member exchange, mobbing, and turnover intentions are interrelated. Leader-member exchange is significantly and negatively related to both mobbing and turnover intentions. As for mobbing, it is significantly and positively related to turnover intentions. Both the direction of the relationship and statistical significance found among these three constructs were also supported by the finding of research conducted in other service sectors. Furthermore, the strength of relationships observed among the variables tested were also similar to the relationships identified in other studies. For example, the limited relationship levels between leader-member exchange and turnover intentions were reported by Harris et al. (2005), Kim et al. (2010), and Morrow et al. (2005). Moderate relationship levels between mobbing and turnover intentions were reported by Davoudi et al. (2013) and Ocel and Aydin (2012). On the other hand, Foster (2012) observed in his research that the relationship between leader-member exchange quality and mobbing was strong, while the same relationship was found to be moderate in our research. According to Foster's (2012) research, low-quality leader-member exchange strongly increases leaders' mobbing behaviour toward subordinates. The reason for this discrepancy in findings might be related to the differences in sectors used to collect the data and test the conceptualised relationships.

Unlike studies conducted in other service fields, this study makes an important contribution by including mobbing as a mediating variable among the constructs tested. Our findings showed that mobbing had a full mediating effect between leader-member exchange

and turnover intentions. In other words, the relationship between leader–member exchange and turnover became much clearer when mobbing was used to mediate the relationship. When the different dimensions of mobbing were used to test the relationships, ‘work-related mobbing’ was found to have no significant mediating effect and turnover intentions was found to be directly related to leader–member exchange. However, both ‘person-related mobbing’ and ‘physically intimidating mobbing’ had full mediating effects, indicating that turnover intentions was indirectly influenced by the leader–member exchange when such mobbing behaviours were present. Perhaps the reason why ‘work-related mobbing’ did not have any mediating role between leader–member exchange and turnover intentions could be explained by the nature of such mobbing behaviours. In other words, subordinates subjected to mobbing were deprived of certain work-related information, they were assigned to tasks requiring lower competency levels, and their opinions were not taken into consideration (Einarsen et al., 2009; Eleanna & Nancy, 2013). Out-group subordinates in low-quality leader–member exchanges are already subjected to similar behaviours (Scandura & Graen, 1984). Thus, leader–member exchange directly and negatively affects turnover intentions due to its work-related content and leaders’ low-quality relationships with out-group subordinates. On the other hand, employees pay serious attention to attacks on their reputations by ‘person-related mobbing’ and attacks on their physical and psychological health by ‘physically intimidating mobbing’. This makes the effect of the two dimensions on turnover intentions overwhelming. Consequently, it can be said that low-quality leader–member exchange leads to ‘person-related mobbing’ and ‘physically intimidating mobbing’, causing the turnover intentions to increase. Finally, our results indicated that, among several control variables tested, ‘employment status’ was the only one found to have some effects on turnover intentions. This could be interpreted by the potential job security that different types of employment contracts might offer, influencing the outcome of the relationship tested: the lack of job security increases employees’ turnover intentions.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study reported that the leader–member exchange and mobbing are important variables affecting turnover intentions, and that the low-quality leader–member exchange can contribute to increased levels of mobbing behaviour toward employees, thereby increasing turnover intentions. Such turnover intentions could lead to negative consequences in the performance of today’s highly competitive service organisations. Organisations’ performances are directly affected by the consistent and committed high-performing employees of sports and physical activity organisations. Hence, leader–member exchange and mobbing need to be carefully examined and evaluated by the sports and physical activity organisation committed to reduce the turnover intentions and increase employee performance.

In high-performance organisations, management has to give priority to increasing employee performance by reducing their turnover intentions. To this end, leaders could maximise the number of in-group employees by enhancing the leader–member exchange quality, and creating an organisational culture where mobbing behaviour is discouraged. To maximise the number of in-group subordinates, managers could delegate tasks to different employees rather than concentrating them among a few favoured people, and get the subordinates included in the decision-making processes as much as possible. Furthermore,

collegial, civil, and friendly behaviours should be used at all times to cultivate the relationships. Management needs to understand that mobbing behaviours in the workplace bring serious harms directly to employees and indirectly to organisations (Sperry, 2009). Therefore, managers, particularly senior executives, should make all necessary efforts to create a more cooperative instead of a conflicting culture within their organisations. To this end, training programmes about mobbing, creating awareness about the subject, should prove to be beneficial. Such programmes should focus on explaining the costs of mobbing cases to the employees and the organisation, and emphasise the ethical and legal responsibilities of individuals involved in mobbing behaviour. Open communication channels between management and employees should be established to create a healthier work environment and stronger social bonds. Furthermore, well-mannered individuals should be recruited, and the conditions for forming social relationships should be developed to reduce mobbing behaviour. Managers should be very sensitive to the ethical and legal aspects of their behaviour when exercising their powers (e.g., rewards, legitimate, coercive, referent, experts; Rawen & French, 1958) to influence their subordinates. Finally, offering full-time employment contracts instead of part-time contracts could also prove to be beneficial in their pursuit of reducing turnover intentions.

Limitations and future research

This study focused on sports and physical activities organisations and tested hypotheses in that specific context. The findings of this study should be evaluated by taking into account some of its limitations. Accordingly, the results of this study should not be generalised to dissimilar populations, and interpretations of the results should consider the statistical limitations of the small sample size used in this study. Furthermore, the fact that the hypothesised relationships were tested using a single private company operating in the field of sports and physical activity will limit our ability to extend these results to other service sectors, such as sports academies, sports clubs, and sport and fitness centres. Further research is needed to test the relationships identified in this study in different contexts of sports and physical activity organisations. Testing these findings in different countries and cultures is also needed. Cultural differences could play an important moderating role of the relationships among the constructions tested in this study (Spector, Cooper, Sanchez, & O'Driscoll, 2002). For example, employees' turnover intentions can differ in different service sectors and in different cultural environments. Some Asian cultures have a lifetime employment philosophy, whereas frequent job opportunities available in Western economies/cultures could play an important role in turnover intentions and, hence, moderate the role of mobbing. Finally, the hierarchical versus flat nature of organisational structures should be incorporated as additional variables in future studies, as management is an important component of the relationship discussed in this study.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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