



Experiencing mobbing as a moderator of the relationship between self-esteem and achievement motivation¹

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Abstract: *Introduction:* This empirical study aimed to examine the relationship between self-esteem and achievement motivation, to determine whether differences exist in self-esteem and achievement motivation levels between individuals who have experienced mobbing and those who have not, and to analyse whether experiencing mobbing moderates the relationship between achievement motivation and self-esteem. The findings of this study may be useful for designing employee support programmes, particularly for individuals experiencing reduced self-esteem and exposure to mobbing. The results of the analysis also highlight the need to implement preventive and intervention measures aimed at reducing the incidence of mobbing. *Methods:* The study involved 529 participants, of whom 107 were classified as individuals experiencing mobbing, based on their scores on the MDM Questionnaire. Self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (SES), while achievement motivation was assessed using the Achievement Goals Questionnaire (Wojdylo & Retowski, Polish adaptation). *Results:* The results of the correlational analyses indicated that higher self-esteem was associated with a higher intensity of mastery-approach motivation, whereas avoidance motivation was negatively correlated with self-esteem. The analyses of group differences revealed that individuals who experienced mobbing demonstrated significantly lower self-esteem and higher levels of avoidance motivation compared to those not exposed to mobbing. However, the moderation analyses did not confirm the hypothesis regarding the moderating role of mobbing. Experiencing mobbing did not significantly affect the strength or direction of the relationship between achievement motivation and self-esteem. Although the observed correlations were statistically significant, their effect sizes were relatively small, which may suggest the complexity of the psychological mechanisms linking self-esteem and achievement motivation. *Conclusions:* The results suggest that self-esteem may serve as a stable regulatory mechanism, operating independently of negative environmental influences. Nevertheless, mobbing itself exerts a detrimental impact on both self-esteem and motivation. The findings of this study emphasise the need for further, in-depth research on mediating and protective factors within the context of mobbing. Moreover, the results have important implications for human resource management practice, underscoring the role of managers in identifying manifestations of mobbing and implementing systemic measures aimed at safeguarding employees and fostering a supportive organisational climate.

Keywords: achievement motivation, mobbing, self-esteem,

1. Introduction

1.1. Mobbing

“According to the Labour Code, mobbing is defined as actions or behaviours concerning an employee or directed against an employee that involve persistent and prolonged harassment or intimidation. Such conduct results in a lowered assessment of the employee’s professional

competence and is intended to cause, or results in, humiliation, ridicule, isolation, or exclusion from the team of co-workers” (Państwowa Inspekcja Pracy, 2025).

Mobbing constitutes a violation of both labour and civil rights, adversely affecting mental health, professional relationships, and the overall psychological stability of the victim. The low rate of reporting such

¹ Article in Polish language: https://stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/fer/64P_szcz.pdf

incidents makes it difficult to accurately estimate the prevalence of this phenomenon. Nevertheless, numerous studies highlight its destructive consequences, which may lead to long-term or even permanent incapacity for work (Grotto-de-Souza et al., 2023).

Mobbing is defined as a continuous form of psychological violence within the work environment, characterized by prolonged and repeated harassment of an employee by supervisors or co-workers. It violates human dignity and represents a destructive organisational phenomenon, typically arising from inappropriate human resource management practices. According to Leymann, mobbing involves aggressive behaviours occurring at least once a week and persisting for a minimum of six months. Leymann identified five categories of mobbing. The first category includes behaviours that restrict communication between the targeted employee and other individuals in the workplace. These behaviours may involve verbal threats, silencing, insulting, mocking, or demeaning remarks. The second category comprises actions intended to socially isolate the victim, such as prohibiting communication with others, preventing contact with colleagues, or relocating the employee in a manner that results in enforced isolation. The third category includes behaviours that undermine the victim's reputation, such as gossiping, ridiculing, slandering, or otherwise damaging their good name. The fourth category comprises behaviours that diminish the victim's professional standing—for example, worsening working conditions, assigning tasks below the employee's qualifications, providing too few tasks, or applying exceptional procedures exclusively to the targeted individual. The final category consists of behaviours that expose the victim to risks to their physical well-being, such as assigning duties that are hazardous to their health or safety (Najda, 2015). Witnesses of mobbing may also experience a variety of adverse outcomes, including reduced psychological well-being, lower job satisfaction, and elevated levels of perceived stress. The impact of mobbing extends across the entire organisation; witnesses often feel powerless in the face of such behaviour, which may erode their sense of loyalty and impair their overall functioning within the workplace (Nielsen et al., 2024). Mobbing results in serious psychological,

social, and physical consequences, including stress, lowered self-esteem, depression, social and occupational exclusion, and even long-term deterioration of health (Kamińska, 2014; Ribeiro & Sani, 2024). Empirical findings also indicate that mobbing reduces job satisfaction and contributes to the emergence of negative emotional states (Skuzińska, 2025). In Skuzińska's study, perceived organisational support (POS) was found to moderate the negative effects of mobbing. The findings indicated that perceived support provided only limited protection: in situations involving high-intensity mobbing, it did not function as a protective factor, whereas under low-intensity mobbing it operated as a buffering mechanism that reduced the adverse impact of the mobbing experience (Skuzińska, 2025). Researchers also note that victims of mobbing often resort to silence as a coping strategy. However, active help-seeking and the reporting of mobbing incidents may be facilitated by membership in trade unions and by accessing support provided by assistance and advocacy organisations (Ho et al., 2024). One of the key domains most profoundly affected by mobbing is an individual's self-esteem. A person's sense of self-worth shapes how they respond to challenging experiences in the work environment and plays a central role in fostering psychological resilience and adaptive functioning. Research indicates that experiencing mobbing lowers self-esteem and perceived competence and contributes to reduced psychological well-being and diminished job satisfaction (Bernstein, 2016). Thus, mobbing affects not only employees' overall well-being but also directly undermines their sense of self-worth. To gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, it is necessary to examine the construct of self-esteem and its role in individual functioning.

1.2. Self-esteem

Self-esteem is regarded as a key concept and a foundational construct in psychology (Leary & MacDonald, 2003, as cited in Szpitalak & Polczyk, 2019). It encompasses issues not only related to emotions and gender differences but also features prominently in research within personality psychology and social psychology (Bushman et al., 2011). The term self-es-

teem is commonly understood as self-worth, a sense of personal value, or global self-evaluation (Szpitak & Polczyk, 2019). Self-esteem is conceptualised as arising from the discrepancy between one's actual self and ideal self (Pope et al., 1988, as cited in Szpitak & Polczyk, 2019). Within this framework, the magnitude of self-esteem reflects the degree of alignment between these two self-representations: greater congruence corresponds to higher self-esteem, whereas greater divergence is associated with lower self-esteem and an increased likelihood of negative affect (Higgins, 1987). Rosenberg (1965) further shaped the contemporary understanding of self-esteem by defining it as an individual's overall evaluative attitude toward the self. In his view, high self-esteem reflects the conviction that one is inherently worthy and of value. Crucially, Rosenberg emphasized that high self-esteem does not entail feelings of superiority over others. Individuals with high self-esteem tend to experience a higher quality of life, report greater life satisfaction, and are less likely to develop psychosomatic disorders. Consequently, the level of self-esteem affects not only psychological but also physical well-being (Czerwonka, 2014). Importantly, self-esteem does not operate as an isolated construct; rather, it is closely interconnected with other key psychological dimensions. One of the principal areas strongly associated with self-esteem is achievement motivation, which constitutes a core determinant of professional behaviour. Individuals with low self-esteem are more inclined to interpret achievement-related situations as threatening, as such contexts may highlight discrepancies between the real self and the ideal self. As a result, their actions may be oriented toward avoiding failure or criticism rather than pursuing success. Mobbing further lowers self-esteem, fosters defensive and avoidance-oriented patterns of behaviour, intensifies perceived threat, and reinforces avoidance mechanisms.

1.3. Achievement motivation

Both mobbing and self-esteem are directly related to another important psychological dimension—achievement motivation. This construct plays a critical role in shaping individuals' attitudes toward professional

challenges and in determining their characteristic ways of responding to failure and success. Achievement motivation has long been a central topic in research within motivational psychology, personality psychology, and career development.

It is defined as the need to perform tasks at the highest possible level, leading to the attainment or even surpassing of established standards (Bańska, 2016). In the literature, achievement motivation is conceptualised as a readiness to engage in activities that involve risk, sustained effort, and the possibility of both success and failure (Timoszyk-Tomczak, 2003; Boski, 1980). Achievement motivation is commonly described within the framework of the four-factor achievement goal model, which distinguishes the following types of achievement goals: 1) mastery-approach goals, 2) mastery-avoidance goals, 3) performance-approach goals, and 4) performance-avoidance goals. Mastery-oriented motivation is associated with the pursuit of personal growth and self-development, whereas its avoidance-oriented form reflects a fear of stagnation or of failing to realise one's potential. In contrast, performance-oriented motivation is grounded in social comparison-manifesting either as the desire to outperform others (approach orientation) or as the tendency to avoid performing worse than others (avoidance orientation) (Elliot & McGregor, 2001, as cited in Springer & Oleksa, 2017).

Achievement motivation reflects an individual's drive to attain high levels of performance, and its intensity influences both self-esteem and the tendency to engage in success-oriented behaviours. Achievement motivation is shaped by sociocultural values as well as by internal psychological needs, and it stems from a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivational sources, attributional style, and one's interpretations of and reactions to success and failure (Bańska, 2016). A 2017 study by Springer and Oleksa demonstrated a strong association between mastery-approach motivation and self-perceived competence, indicating that individuals characterized by a high level of development-oriented motivation tend to evaluate their abilities more positively. The findings further showed that achievement motivation is

a significant predictor of employees' sense of agency and their readiness to act autonomously (Springer, Oleksa, 2017).

A 2024 study examined the relationships between self-esteem, achievement motivation, and individuals' functioning in their professional and family roles among those experiencing mobbing. The findings showed that high self-esteem and achievement motivation—particularly mastery-approach motivation—serve as important psychological resources that facilitate coping with the consequences of mobbing. Individuals with higher self-esteem and strong intrinsic motivation were found to be more resilient to the effects of psychological violence in the workplace and more effective in fulfilling both their family and professional roles (Szczepanik-Paśnik, 2024).

The results of this study also suggest that mobbing may condition the strength of the relationship between achievement motivation and self-esteem, although it was not examined directly as a statistical moderator. Among individuals experiencing mobbing, positive achievement motivation was associated with higher self-esteem and better functioning in both family and occupational roles. This pattern may be interpreted as preliminary evidence of an interactional relationship between these variables under stress-inducing conditions (Szczepanik-Paśnik, 2024).

Although the moderating effect was not formally tested, these findings served as a starting point for further analyses and theoretical reflection. In the context of the present study, they provided the foundation for a more in-depth exploration and an empirical examination of whether mobbing may function as a moderator in the relationship between self-esteem and achievement motivation.

Such an analysis not only enables a deeper understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying the functioning of individuals who experience workplace violence but also offers a meaningful contribution to the development of effective psychopreventive strategies. Gaining a more comprehensive understanding of this relationship may, in turn, support the creation of more effective interventions for employees—both by strengthening their psychological resources and by fostering work environments that promote mental health and intrinsic motivation.

2. Method

The present study aimed to address the following research question: Does experiencing mobbing moderate the relationship between self-esteem and achievement motivation? Based on this research question and the relevant literature, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- Hypothesis 1: There is a relationship between self-esteem and achievement motivation.
- Hypothesis 2: The levels of achievement motivation and self-esteem differ between individuals who experience mobbing and those who do not.
- Hypothesis 3: Experiencing mobbing moderates the relationship between self-esteem and achievement motivation.

2.1. Participants

The study included 529 participants, comprising 326 women and 203 men, aged 21 to 74 years ($M = 40$). The majority held higher education degrees (54.51%), followed by participants with secondary education (19.39%), vocational education (14.97%), incomplete higher education (9.98%), and primary education (1.15%). Regarding place of residence, most participants lived in cities with more than 51,000 inhabitants (36.05%), followed by rural areas (33.78%), towns with 21,000–50,000 inhabitants (16.51%), and towns with 6,000–20,000 inhabitants (13.66%). The MDM Questionnaire was used as a diagnostic instrument to identify individuals experiencing mobbing. A cut-off score of ≥ 2 was applied, which resulted in 107 participants being classified as having experienced mobbing. Among them, 60.75% reported experiencing mobbing for more than one year, 10.28% for 6–12 months, 4.67% for 3–6 months, and 24.30% for up to 3 months.

2.2. Research tools

Three instruments and a demographic questionnaire were used in the study. The MDM Questionnaire (Mobbing, Bullying, Harassment) developed by

Mościcka, Drabek, and Merecz at the Department of Work Psychology of the Nofer Institute of Occupational Medicine (Mościcka & Drabek, 2010; Mościcka-Teske, Drabek, & Pyżalski, 2014) was used to identify individuals experiencing workplace mobbing.

The Achievement Goal Questionnaire (KCO) by K. Wojdyło and S. Retowski (2012) was employed to assess achievement motivation at work.

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (SES), in the Polish adaptation by M. Łaguna, K. Lachowicz-Tabaczek, and I. Dzwonkowska (2007), was used to measure self-esteem. Participants also completed a demographic sheet that included questions about sociodemographic variables.

MDM Questionnaire

The MDM Questionnaire (Mościcka, Drabek, 2010; Mościcka-Teske, Drabek, Pyżalski, 2014) consists of 32 diagnostic items and 24 supplementary items, divided into two subscales assessing behaviours directed at the respondent by supervisors (MDM-Supervisor) and by co-workers (MDM-Colleagues). Responses are rated on a six-point frequency scale (0–never, 1–less than once every six months, 2–once every six months, 3–once every three months, 4–once a month, 5–at least once a week). Respondents then indicate the duration of the behaviours using a four-point scale (1–up to 3 months, 2–3–6 months, 3–6–12 months, 4–more than one year).

Based on the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated for the MDM-Supervisor subscale was 0.973, with item-subscale correlations ranging from 0.71 to 0.92 and factor loadings between 0.67 and 0.91. For the MDM-Colleagues subscale, Cronbach's alpha was 0.920, item-subscale correlations ranged from 0.64 to 0.77, and factor loadings ranged from 0.60 to 0.82. For the full scale, the total Cronbach's alpha reached 0.965. Item-total correlations (reflecting item discrimination) ranged from 0.48 to 0.86. The MDM Questionnaire served as the diagnostic measure used to classify individuals as experiencing mobbing, based on a quantitative threshold of a minimum score of 2 points.

Achievement Goals Questionnaire (KCO)

The Achievement Goals Questionnaire (Kwestionariusz Celów związanych z Osiągnięciami; KCO) by K. Wojdyło & S. Retowski (2012) comprises 20 items and assesses the intensity of four types of achievement-related goals: 1) Mastery-approach goals, 2) Mastery-avoidance goals, 3) Performance-approach goals, 4) Performance-avoidance goals. In the present sample, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.890, indicating high internal consistency.

Self-Esteem Scale (SES)

Self-Esteem Scale (SES) by M. Rosenberg in Polish adaptation (Skala Samooceny SES) by M. Łaguna, K. Lachowicz-Tabaczek, & I. Dzwonkowska (2007) consists of 10 statements, each rated on a four-point Likert scale: 1-strongly agree, 2-agree, 3-disagree, 4-strongly disagree. Total scores range from 10 to 40, with the following interpretative thresholds: 10–27-low self-esteem, 28–32-moderate self-esteem, 33–40-high self-esteem. For the current sample, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.826, indicating good reliability.

3. Results

The distribution of the scores was examined using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, which revealed no significant deviations from normality. Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1. Subsequently, Student's t-tests were conducted to assess the significance of group differences, and effect sizes were calculated using Cohen's d. Correlational analyses were performed using Pearson's r, and moderation effects were tested through hierarchical regression analyses.

To verify Hypothesis 1 (i.e., that self-esteem is associated with achievement motivation), a Pearson's r correlation analysis was conducted. As shown in Table 2, statistically significant associations were observed between self-esteem and several dimensions of achievement motivation. Avoidance-oriented goals—both mastery-avoidance and performance-avoid-

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for the Variables Under Study

	M	Me	Sk	Kurt	Min	Maks	KS	p
Self-Esteem	30.96	31.00	-0.381	0.654	11.0	40.0	0.09	<0.001
Mastery-approach goal	31.66	33.00	-0.998	1.221	2.0	42.0	0.05	0.002
Mastery-avoidance goal	19.40	19.00	-0.108	-0.237	2.0	35.0	0.05	0.005
Performance-approach goal	20.71	21.00	-0.178	-0.405	5.0	35.0	0.06	<0.001
Performance-avoidance goal	16.46	17.00	-0.162	-0.477	3.0	28.0	0.06	<0.001

Legend: M-Mean, SD-Standard Deviation, Me-Median, Sk-Skewness, Kurt-Kurtosis, Min-Minimum value, Maks-Maximum value, KS-Kolmogorov-Smirnov test statistic, p-significance level for normality test

Table 2. Association Between Self-Esteem and Achievement Motivation

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Mastery-approach goal	-				
2. Mastery-avoidance goal	0.260***	-			
3. Performance-approach goal	0.410***	0.409***	-		
4. Performance-avoidance goal	0.242***	0.635***	0.566***	-	
5. Self-Esteem	0.294***	-0.184***	0.075	-0.180***	-

***p<0,001, **p<0,01, *p<0,05

Table 3. Differences in Achievement Motivation and Self-Esteem Between Mobbing Victims and Non-Victims

Dependent Variable	No mobbing (n=422)		Mobbing (n=107)		t	p	95% CI		d
	M	SD	M	SD			LL	UL	
Self-Esteem	31.3	4.7	29.5	4.8	3.58	<0.001	0.8	2.8	0.39
Mastery-approach goal	31.9	7.1	30.9	8.3	1.16*	0.249	-0.7	2.8	0.14
Mastery-avoidance goal	19.1	6.3	20.6	6.3	-2.19	0.029	-2.8	-0.2	0.24
Performance-approach goal	20.5	6.4	21.3	7.4	-1.11	0.270	-2.2	0.6	0.12
Performance-avoidance goal	16.3	5.1	17.1	5.7	-1.51	0.132	-2.0	0.3	0.16

Legend: t- Student's t-test statistic; * -Welch's test statistic; p- significance level; d- Cohen's d effect size; M- mean; SD- standard deviation

ance-were negatively associated with self-esteem, whereas mastery-approach goals were positively associated with higher self-esteem. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported only for mastery-approach, mastery-avoidance, and performance-avoidance goals. No significant association was identified between self-esteem and performance-approach goals.

To verify Hypothesis 2 (i.e., that there are differences in the levels of achievement motivation and self-esteem between individuals experiencing and not experiencing mobbing), an independent-samples t-test was conducted. The analysis revealed statisti-

cally significant differences between the groups in self-esteem and in one dimension of achievement motivation. Individuals who had not experienced mobbing obtained significantly higher self-esteem scores compared to those who had experienced it. The effect size, expressed as Cohen's $d = 0.39$, indicated a small to moderate effect. For mastery-avoidance motivation, individuals who had not experienced mobbing scored significantly lower than those who had. Cohen's d was 0.24, indicating a small effect size. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported only with respect

Table 4. Regression model parameters for the moderation analysis of the relationship between self-esteem and achievement motivation, considering the experience of mobbing

		Mastery-approach goal			Mastery-avoidance goal		
		B	SE	t	B	SE	t
Model 1	Intercept	17.49	2.12	8.25***	26.82	1.85	14.53***
	Mobbing	-0.1	0.39	-0.26	0.55	0.34	1.6
	Self-esteem	0.46	0.07	6.67***	-0.23	0.06	-3.86***
Model 2	Intercept	16.03	2.49	6.44***	26.9	2.17	12.39***
	Mobbing	-0.01	0.4	-0.03	0.54	0.35	1.55
	Self-Esteem	0.51	0.08	6.17***	-0.23	0.07	-3.25**
	Mobbing x Self-esteem	0.43	0.39	1.12	-0.03	0.34	-0.07
	R2	0.08	-	-	0.04	-	-
		Δ R2	0.08	-	0.03	-	-

***p<0,001, **p<0,01, *p<0,05

Table 5. Regression model parameters for the moderation analysis of the relationship between self-esteem and achievement motivation, considering the experience of mobbing

		Performance-approach goal			Performance-avoidance goal		
		B	SE	t	B	SE	t
Model 1	Intercept	17.32	1.97	8.79***	22.57	1.54	14.61***
	Mobbing	0.5	0.36	1.38	0.26	0.29	0.91
	Self-Esteem	0.12	0.06	1.87	-0.19	0.05	-3.86***
Model 2	Intercept	17.03	2.32	7.34***	21.75	1.82	11.98***
	Mobbing	0.52	0.37	1.4	0.31	0.29	1.07
	Self-Esteem	0.13	0.08	1.69	-0.16	0.06	-2.74**
	Mobbing x Self-esteem	0.09	0.36	0.24	0.24	0.28	0.86
	R2	0.01	-	-	0.03	-	-
		Δ R2	0.00	-	0.03	-	-

***p<0,001, **p<0,01, *p<0,05

to differences in self-esteem and mastery-avoidance motivation between individuals who experienced mobbing and those who did not.

To verify Hypothesis 3 (i.e., that experiencing mobbing moderates the relationship between self-esteem and the various dimensions of achievement motivation), four separate hierarchical regression analyses were conducted. Each analysis included the moderating variable (experience of mobbing), the independent variable (self-esteem), and the interaction term between these variables in predicting one of the four dimensions of achievement motivation: mastery-approach, mastery-avoidance, performance-approach, and performance-avoidance. Hypothesis 3

was not supported. Experiencing mobbing did not significantly moderate the relationship between self-esteem and any of the examined dimensions of achievement motivation. In all models in which self-esteem emerged as a statistically significant predictor, the addition of the interaction term did not result in an increase in the explained variance of the dependent variable.

4. Interpretation of results

The findings provide insights into several important relationships between self-esteem, achievement motivation, and the experience of mobbing, while also highlighting limitations of the model assuming a moderating role of mobbing. Two of the three hypotheses received partial support—specifically those concerning the relationships between self-esteem and mastery-approach, mastery-avoidance, and performance-avoidance motivation. However, no significant association was observed between self-esteem and performance-approach motivation, nor were significant differences found between individuals experiencing and not experiencing mobbing with regard to mastery-avoidance motivation. The effects observed were weaker than anticipated, suggesting that the psychological mechanisms linking these variables may be more complex than initially assumed.

The correlations between self-esteem and the various dimensions of achievement motivation were statistically significant but weak in magnitude. The results indicate that higher self-esteem is linked to mastery-approach motivation, whereas lower self-esteem is associated with avoidance-oriented motivations (mastery-avoidance and performance-avoidance). Individuals with low self-esteem are not necessarily unmotivated to achieve; however, their motivation is more likely to take a defensive, less adaptive form-driven by the avoidance of failure or negative evaluation rather than the pursuit of success. This implies that low-self-esteem individuals may engage in task-related behaviour not out of intrinsic motivation or a genuine desire for self-development, but rather to reduce perceived psychological threat. Such a motivational profile is less adaptive in the long term, as it is accompanied by greater emotional costs.

Individuals who experienced mobbing demonstrated lower levels of self-esteem and higher levels of avoidance motivation compared to those who had not been exposed to mobbing. Although these differences were statistically significant, the effect sizes ranged from small to moderate. These findings align with previous research showing that mobbing can lower self-esteem and activate defensive motivational strategies. This suggests that bullied employees may

operate in a “survival mode,” in which their task engagement is directed more toward minimizing losses than achieving goals. Such a pattern may negatively affect work performance, job satisfaction, and overall psychological well-being, underscoring the critical importance of preventive and intervention strategies within organizational settings.

The moderation analyses did not confirm the hypothesized role of mobbing as a moderator of the relationship between self-esteem and achievement motivation. None of the tested models produced significant interaction effects. This indicates that the relationship between self-esteem and achievement motivation remains stable regardless of whether individuals have experienced mobbing. At the same time, the absence of a moderating effect does not imply that mobbing is psychologically neutral; as noted earlier, it directly contributes to reduced self-esteem and heightened avoidance motivation. It is possible that under conditions of chronic stress, defensive mechanisms (e.g., rationalization or repression) are activated, which may weaken or obscure potential interaction effects.

5. Discussion

The results of the study confirmed the hypotheses concerning the relationship between self-esteem and achievement motivation related to striving for mastery, avoiding mastery, and avoiding showing off. However, the relationship between self-esteem and striving for display and differences in self-esteem and avoidance of mastery between those who experience and those who do not experience mobbing was not confirmed. Most importantly, the key hypothesis regarding the moderating role of mobbing in the relationship between self-esteem and achievement motivation was not supported. Despite the high reliability of the applied measures, clear group differences, and a large sample size, the interaction effect was not statistically significant. This may indicate that self-esteem influences motivational processes independently of environmental stressors such as

mobbing. At the same time, the findings confirm that mobbing functions as a risk factor for reduced self-esteem and disruptions in motivational profiles.

The absence of evidence for the moderation hypothesis may be attributable to several factors. It is possible that the relationship between self-esteem and motivation is not altered by mobbing but rather unfolds in parallel-meaning that mobbing exerts independent effects on self-esteem and on motivational tendencies, without an interaction between these pathways. Although a highly reliable diagnostic tool (the MDM Questionnaire) was used, the adopted cut-off (≥ 2 points) may have resulted in the classification of a group heterogeneous in terms of the intensity and duration of mobbing experiences. Another possibility is that individuals who experienced severe mobbing may have left their workplace and were therefore not captured in the study sample. Additionally, a substantial proportion of participants held higher education degrees, which may correspond to greater psychological resources (e.g., self-efficacy, emotional intelligence) that buffer the negative effects of mobbing and potentially attenuate or mask the expected interaction effects.

6. Limitations

Despite its valuable findings, this study has several important limitations that should be taken into account. First, its cross-sectional design precludes any causal inferences. Second, the dichotomous operationalisation of mobbing (mobbing vs. no mobbing) does not reflect the full continuum of its intensity. The omission of factors such as frequency, duration, and specific forms of psychological aggression limits the precision and nuance of the analyses. Moreover, several contextual variables-such as leadership style, organisational culture, and social support-were not included, although they may moderate the effects of mobbing or act as protective buffers. All variables were assessed using self-report measures, which introduces the risk of cognitive biases, social desirability effects, and recall inaccuracies.

7. Theoretical and practical implications

The findings of this study have important implications for occupational psychology and human resource management. They demonstrate that mobbing significantly distorts an individual's motivational system, shifting it toward avoidance-oriented patterns, which can result in reduced performance, increased absenteeism, and a heightened risk of burnout. Another key conclusion is that individuals with low self-esteem are particularly vulnerable to organisational stressors. This underscores the need for preventive and developmental interventions-such as coaching, resilience training, and psychological competence enhancement programmes. Organisations should implement anti-mobbing policies not only on ethical grounds but also due to their direct impact on employee motivation and overall work quality. These conclusions are consistent with previous research (Ronha & Rodrigues, 2025), which highlights the importance of strengthening well-being and engagement at work, as these factors serve a protective function against the negative outcomes of mobbing. Managers should be actively responsible for monitoring interpersonal dynamics within teams and responding decisively to any manifestations of mobbing.

8. Practical implications for HR and managers

The findings of this study provide valuable practical guidance for human resource management and the development of preventive strategies within organisations. In particular, the following actions are recommended: Implement systemic anti-mobbing procedures. Organisations should introduce clear legal and organisational frameworks, such as formal anti-mobbing policies, anonymous reporting channels, external mediation options, and transparent investigation procedures (Jeong et al., 2024). Monitor organisational climate-Regular employee surveys and diagnostic assessments can help identify early warning signs of deteriorating well-being, increased interpersonal tension, and reduced self-esteem (Mehmood

et al., 2024). Early detection substantially increases the effectiveness of intervention. Provide leadership and managerial training-Managers should be trained to recognize early indicators of mobbing, respond appropriately to interpersonal conflicts, and provide support to employees with lower self-esteem, who may be more vulnerable to organisational stressors (Chang et al., 2025). Research shows that higher self-esteem is associated with better motivation, productivity, job satisfaction, and prosocial behaviour (Gómez-Jorge & Díaz-Garrido, 2024). Develop programmes that strengthen psychological resources-Workshops on resilience, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and stress management, as well as coaching and mentoring interventions, can enhance employee well-being and reduce vulnerability to workplace stress (Amoadu et al., 2024). Nevertheless, research emphasises that prevention and early intervention remain the most effective mechanisms for protecting employee mental health (Tsuno, 2022). Foster a supportive organisational culture-Promoting open communication, preventing social isolation, and rewarding prosocial behaviours help build a psychologically safe work environment (Kong et al., 2025). A lack of active response from management creates conditions that allow mobbing behaviours to escalate. This underscores the need for training programmes that enhance assertiveness, strengthen resilience, and promote adaptive coping strategies (João & Portelada, 2023). Address incivility as an early warning sign-Incivility often precedes more severe forms of workplace aggression. Ignoring minor but repeated acts of disrespect

may lead to the escalation of mobbing (Holm et al., 2022). Even low-intensity negative behaviours can gradually undermine employees' psychological well-being. Adjust motivational systems to support development rather than avoidance-Performance management systems should recognise not only results but also effort, engagement, and developmental progress. Rewarding learning-oriented behaviours contributes to a work environment that promotes growth and reduces avoidance tendencies among employees exposed to stressors. Recognition and appreciation mechanisms increase engagement, sense of belonging, and organisational loyalty (Imran et al., 2025).

Future research directions

To deepen the understanding of the mechanisms through which mobbing affects self-esteem and achievement motivation, longitudinal studies are recommended to track changes over time and to assess the impact of mobbing as a chronic factor. It is also worthwhile to use qualitative methods or a mixed-method approach to capture employees' subjective experiences and adaptive strategies. Future research should consider various forms and intensities of mobbing, as well as protective and risk factors such as the level of self-efficacy, social support, and coping strategies. It is also essential to take into account the organisational context, especially organisational culture and leadership styles.

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