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Dr. Mustafa Koray ERENTÜRK

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2827-7784>, korayerenturk@hotmail.com

MOBBING: REASONS, CONSEQUENCES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Abstract

Recently, the concept of employee safety has gained an increasing importance. When the topic is employee safety, most of the people only think of physical factors that are exposed in the working environment and psychosocial factors are ignored. One of the issues that should be addressed within the scope of employee safety is the concept of mobbing. Definitions of mobbing in the literature include not only physically aggressive behaviors, but also psychologically aggressive behaviors within the scope of violence. Mobbing can have serious negative consequences at individual, organizational and even social levels. So it is very important to understand the phenomenon of mobbing, to determine its causes and to develop measures. In this review, the concept of mobbing, which is a multidimensional series of social and psychological actions that are common in the workplace, its causes, consequences and measures that can be taken within the scope of mobbing are discussed.

Keywords: Mobbing, Psychological Harassment, Workplace Terror, Employee Safety.

MOBBING: NEDENLER, SONUÇLAR VE ÖNERİLER

Özet

Son zamanlarda, çalışan güvenliği kavramı giderek artan bir önem kazanmıştır. Konu çalışan güvenliği olduğunda çoğu kişi sadece çalışma ortamında maruz kalan fiziksel faktörleri düşünmekte ve psikososyal faktörler göz ardı edilmektedir. Çalışan güvenliği kapsamında ele alınması gereken konulardan birisi de mobbing

kavramıdır. Literatürdeki mobbing tanımları, şiddet kapsamında sadece fiziksel olarak saldırgan davranışları değil, aynı zamanda psikolojik olarak saldırgan davranışları da içermektedir. Mobbing, bireysel, örgütsel ve hatta toplumsal düzeyde ciddi olumsuz sonuçlara yol açabilmektedir. Bu yüzden mobbing olgusunu anlamak, nedenlerini belirlemek ve önlemler geliştirmek çok önemlidir. Bu çalışmada işyerlerinde yaygın olarak görülen çok boyutlu sosyal ve psikolojik eylemler dizisi olan mobbing kavramı, nedenleri, sonuçları ve mobbing kapsamında alınabilecek önlemler tartışılmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Mobbing, Psikolojik Taciz, İşyeri Terörü, Çalışan Güvenliği.

1. INTRODUCTION

Mobbing or psychological harassment in the workplace, is a complex, multidimensional and multidisciplinary subject that has been experienced since the existence of work life, but is avoided due to the necessity of human nature and almost ignored. It is a situation that can occur in all workplaces regardless of culture, and can be exposed to anyone regardless of gender, and the consequences are severe.

People who are targets of mobbing are exposed to working in an emotionally unhappy work environment. Mobbing affects the health of the victims and lowers their concentration. In addition, the presence of unpleasant relationships including communication and group work between employees, often negatively affects work productivity. It is very important to realize the phenomenon of mobbing, which can have serious negative consequences at individual, organizational and even social levels, to determine its causes and to develop measures.

2. MOBBING

2.1. Definition

The word "mobbing" comes from the root "mob". The word "mob" means an unlawful crowd that is related to excessive violence. The word derives from "mobile vulgus", which means "unstable crowd" in Latin. The word "mobbing" is used in the sense of encircling, attacking en masse or causing distress. (Yüçetürk, 2003, p.184)

It is known that the word "mobbing" was first used by biologists in the 19th century to describe the behavior of birds flying around the attacker to protect their nests. The same concept was later described by Konrad Lorenz in the 1960s, to express the behavior of small groups of animals attacking a stronger and lonely animal and drove it collectively; or to express the situation among birds of the same nest where other birds exclude the weakest bird by keeping it away from food and water, making it weak and eventually killing it with physical attacks and throwing it out of the group (Tınaz, 2016, p. 8).

It is known that the concept of mobbing was first used by the Swedish industrial psychologist Heinz Leymann in the early 80's. It is seen that he uses this concept as a result of his determinations regarding the existence of similar types of long-term hostile and aggressive behavior among employees. The concept of mobbing in the workplace includes meanings that refer to behaviors such as maltreatment, threats, violence, and humiliation that are

systematically applied to individuals in the workplace by their superiors, equal employees or subordinates (Tınaz, 2008, p. 8).

International Labor Organization (ILO) to which Turkey is a member, identified mobbing as "to create a front against the targeted workers and to attack in hordes". Constant negative comments, criticism, isolation of a worker from social relations, gossiping about him or spreading false information were identified as massive attack as well. As can be understood, this definition of ILO not only includes physically aggressive behaviors, but also psychologically aggressive behaviors within the scope of violence. Thus, ILO accepts mobbing as an important problem both in individual and organizational terms, which is increasing all over the world and has a direct impact on working life (Karaca, 2009, p. 27).

Mobbing in the workplace includes the process of intimidation that begins when certain person or persons are exposed to harmful behaviors (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf & Cooper, 2003, p. 12). These aggressive behaviors towards the victim can turn into a campaign to victimize the person (Beasley & Rayner, 1997, p. 178). In other words, physical or verbal, undesirable behaviors that humiliate the person continuously and repeatedly are considered as mobbing in the workplace (Rayner, Hoel & Cooper, 2002, p. 8). Mobbing means repetitive aggressive behaviors and practices against one or more people that can hinder business performance, cause an uneasy work environment and causes humiliation, hurt or stress for the victim. Mobbing occurs when the victim is systematically angered by typical psychological harassment behaviors such as social isolation, exclusion, undervaluing his / her performance at work, teasing, japing, etc. (Einarsen, Matthiesen & Skogstad, 1998, p. 564).

However, the assumption emphasized in many definitions of mobbing is that typically a victim feels vulnerable. The victim is pushed to a hopeless and desperate position by such aggressive behaviors. The aim may be to destroy, expel, force to resign, punish, humiliate, or control the victim (Shallcross, Sheehan & Ramsay, 2007, p. 56). The fact that the members of the group are in solidarity due to their religious, ethnic, cultural, thought, belief and similar values and only want to exclude the victim, can also cause mobbing. In this sense, mobbing explicitly includes discriminatory purposes, including gender. (Şen, 2009, p. 49)

Actions such as taking office items of a person without permission and not replacing them, drawing the person into a constant environment of discussion, keeping some information from the person, making rumors about the person and gossiping, talking behind him, keeping him under constant criticism, not responding to his questions and requests, monitoring entry and exit hours, giving jobs under or above his/her capacity, not being invited to organizations can be given as examples of mobbing. (Tınaz, 2006; pp.16-17)

Considering the common points of all these definitions, mobbing is seen as repetitive behaviors (repeated several times in a certain period), continues over a certain period (lasting for at least 6 months), includes non-physical behaviors and aims humiliating the person (Lorho & Hilp, 2001, p. 7).

2.2. Sides, types and stages

There are three sides in the mobbing process in the workplaces. These are described as perpetrators (aggressors, harassers), victims (sufferers) and viewers. Everyone is a candidate to play a role in the concept of mobbing in the context of these roles in working life. Each of these

three groups, playing their own role, has its own characteristics and activity, and also affects each other (Tinaz, 2008, p. 57). The party exposed to mobbing in the workplace is called "victim". The terms "perpetrator", "aggressor", "harasser" or "bully" are used for the person who practices mobbing. Although mobbing is considered as a process between the victim and the abuser, the number of those involved to the process may increase over time. In the mobbing process, "viewers" means people who do not directly interfere with the process, but somehow perceive the process and experience its reflections. In the literature, these people are called "viewers", "audiences", "witnesses". These people are considered as viewers as soon as they become aware of the mobbing that occurs in the work environment (Güngör, 2008, p. 54).

Mobbing cases occur in three forms, vertical, horizontal and upended, depending on the formation process. The mobbing cases performed by those in the upper positions towards their subordinates are called "Vertical Mobbing". In the vertical mobbing type, superiors use their corporate power for crushing their subordinates and pushing them out of the organization. Perpetrators and victims of "Horizontal Mobbing" are colleagues in the same position with similar duties and similar opportunities. For example; the jealousy of employees in equal conditions, competition, conflict of interest and personal discontent can be described as horizontal mobbing. "Upended Mobbing" type is the employee's use of psychological violence against the manager. It is a rare condition. For example, employees' inability to accept the manager, loyalty to the former manager, and jealousy can be described as upended mobbing (TBMM, 2011, p. 6).

Leymann defined mobbing in four stages. In the first stage called "Critical Events", the triggering event is often a conflict. Mobbing can appear as a situation of increasing conflict. Not much is known about how a conflict turns into mobbing. At this stage, the conflict is not yet mobbing, but it can turn into mobbing behavior. In the second stage called "Mobbing and Stigma", behaviors that cannot be perceived as mobbing in daily life become continuous and systematic. These behaviors are exhibited in an aggressive and punitive way towards the target person after a while. Complaints about the target victim start to be sent to the management. In the third stage called "Business Management", management has a prejudice due to what was said about the target person previously. Managers accept the wrongful accusations and judgments made about the victim. The victim is stigmatized as a difficult person or a mentally ill person. This results in a serious violation of the rights of the victim in the application of labor laws. Because of these interpretation errors, the victim's colleagues and managers rely on personal factors rather than environmental factors in explaining the mobbing process. Managers do not want to take responsibility for the mobbing situation. In the last stage called "Leaving the Job", the person is dismissed or leaves the job voluntarily (Leymann, 1996, p. 172).

3. REASONS AND CONSEQUENCES

3.1. Reasons

The problem of mobbing in the workplace is an extensive and complex process that cannot be explained by a single reason. It is accepted that it emerges as a result of the interaction of personality traits, job position of the victim, organizational and socio-economic conditions (Özen, 2007, p. 1). Mobbing in the workplace occurs as a result of the interaction of more than one cause at the same time. In this interaction, the reasons may occur in a different order in each event. For example, while personality traits are triggers in an incident of mobbing, competition

and job insecurity may be triggers in another incident. In some cases, other reasons coexisting with the triggering reason may contribute to the continuation of the violence. The most important issue that should be underlined regarding the causes of psychological violence is to know that this problem is a comprehensive and complex process that cannot be explained based on a single cause (Özen, 2007, p. 21).

Personal characteristics are shown as one of the causes of mobbing. In some studies, it is stated that perpetrators of mobbing have a bad personality structure, that they deserve this because of being a manager, that they have an inflated self-centered and narcissistic personality structure, and these features can cause mobbing practice. However, it is stated that the perpetrators of mobbing, having a bad childhood, experiencing social and family pressure, or being the victim of various events that they cannot cope with, are also effective in their mobbing behaviors. According to Wyatt and Hare, harassment in the workplace is a copy of child abuse. Children who are exposed to domestic harassment can continue to experience this situation in their workplaces throughout their adulthood. Abusive families create workplaces where harassment exists, and this creates relapsing families. The resulting cycle causes the harassment to continue strengthening both in the family and in the workplace, thus the harassment behaviors are passed down from generation to generation (Wyatt & Hare, 1997, p. 12). Besides, mobbing victims are seen as generally honest, hardworking, self-confident, sociable, qualified, partially judgmental but not accusatory, and like to deal with thoughts rather than people and events. In most cases, victims are chosen as they pose a threat to those in higher positions. It is stated that people with high emotional intelligence, who are flexible, sensitive and able to review their own behaviors, feel the behaviors and emotions of others at a high level, produce new ideas, and interpret the world with different perspectives are more exposed to mobbing (Çukur, 2009, p. 11). On the other hand, there are studies suggesting that working conditions are the primary factor and personality traits are not effective on mobbing behaviours (Leymann, 1996, p. 166).

It is stated that another reason of mobbing is organizational factors. Leymann mentions four basic features that cause mobbing in organizations. These are uncertain job design, inadequate leader, the socially inadequate victim and low ethical values in the organization (Einersan, 1999, p. 17). Leadership style, mismanagement, organizational change, organizational culture and climate, job complexity and control, role conflict and uncertainty, stress, weakening of workplace participation mechanisms can also be stated as organizational causes of mobbing (Özen, 2007, p. 17). Tutar (2004, p. 95) states factors that cause mobbing in organizations as inadequacy in job design, inadequacy of organizational leadership, professional inadequacy of the victim, low organizational status of the victim and low morale standards in the organization. A hierarchical organizational structure often brings along an authoritarian management style and this situation creates a suitable environment for mobbing. On the other hand, hierarchical organization creates a suitable ground for the mobbing perpetrator to hide himself. Thus, mobbing can become a part of the management style in the long term (Tınaz, 2008, p. 37). In horizontal organization, since there is no vertical relation in the hierarchical organizational structure, there can be a wide flexibility. In some cases, the employee can work under more than one manager at the same time, so it is quite natural to have authority conflicts. More uncertainty prevails in such organizations than in hierarchical organizations. In horizontal organization, it is the uncertainty environment within the organization that prepares the ground for mobbing (Leymann, 1990, pp. 119-126). According to Vartia, mobbing has relationships with psychological work environment and organizational climate. Authoritarian attitude, poor flow

of information, not being able to discuss duties and goals mutually can increase mobbing. In a workplace with such working conditions, not only victims but also other employees who witness mobbing are negatively affected (Vartia, 1996, p. 203). In the workplace, “people with power cannot control their primitive motives and resort to mobbing to strengthen their position by discouraging a more successful employee from the workplace” (Crawford, 1997, p. 220). In organizations where mobbing behaviors are observed, being sick can be perceived as opposing the organization, so sick leave can cause managers to engage in other harassment behaviors. The organization increases its control power by threatening the trust of its employees. Thus, the organization does not include employees who do not comply with their goals in their personal development plans, and creates a discipline factor on employees by threatening that their jobs are in danger if they do not work better (Dawn, Cowie & Ananiadou, 2003, p. 495).

3.2. Consequences

In the mobbing process, the victim himself sees the greatest damage. These damages can be economical, such as the expenses made for the treatment of the mental and physical health of the individual and the loss of a regular earnings as a result of the individual's leaving the job. The consequences such as the loss of place in the social environment and family environment of the individual who was excluded from the workplace and lost his professional identity are among the social effects of mobbing (Tınaz, 2006, pp. 17-18). Fears and excitements, high blood pressure, tachycardia, inability to concentrate, sweating and trembling of hands, feeling of hot flashes or chills, tremors, headaches, back pain, weakness of the immune system, gastrointestinal disorders, abandonment feelings, anorexia, loss of appetite, skin rashes and itching are expressed as psycho-somatic personal effects of mobbing (Leymann, 1990, p. 120; Einersan & Skogstad, 1996, p. 187). It is emphasized that mobbing sufferers also have cognitive symptoms such as loss of concentration and memory impairment in addition to physical symptoms. It is stated that people who have experienced mobbing also experience high stress, clinical anxiety and depression similarly. It has been determined that mobbing victims have low self-esteem and high levels of anxiety (Lewis, 2003, p. 66). After prolonged attacks of mobbing, most victims may experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This situation resembles the psychological situations experienced by soldiers participating in war, victims of torture or rape, or people after major disasters (Davenport, Schwartz & Elliott, 2003, p. 72). In addition to these health problems, the victim's job performance and desire to work decrease, and some negativities arise in his / her relationships with other people (Lorho & Hilp, 2001, p. 13). In addition, these behaviors do not only affect the individual. The "ripple effect" of mobbing (Rayner & Hoel, 1997, p. 185) affects people outside the workplace, friends and family like a wave. It can cause problems within the family and eventually even break up of the family. (Stebbing et al, 2004, p. 93). As a result of the extension of the mobbing phenomenon in the workplace to the private life of the person, it is also an expected result that the relationship between husband-wife or parent-child; and the psychological development of children will be negatively affected (Tınaz, 2008, p. 173). Families, like individuals, have to pay high costs both psychologically and economically. Desperation, separation, divorce, conflict, and the negativities experienced by children cause unbearable pressure on families (Çobanoğlu, 2005, p. 99).

The mobbing process has negative effects on the organization as well as on the individual. Mobbing has many negative effects on businesses, primarily in terms of job satisfaction and productivity of employees. Since job satisfaction will be low in organizations where mobbing is dominant, individuals will increase reluctance to work and the productivity of employees will decrease. (Escatin et al, 2009; p. 197) The concrete negative consequences of mobbing can be seen, such as decreased productivity of employees, deterioration of harmony within the team, alienation from work, dismissal, absenteeism, and quitting. In this way, the organization can lose its relatively experienced employees, and it may lead to a decrease in organizational commitment and motivation due to the negative psychological effects it creates on those who remain (Özkul & Çarıkçı, 2010, p. 496). Organizations may lose important and necessary people within the organization due to mobbing, and they may experience an increase in labor turnover (Aytaç, 2008, p. 18). Not only the employees exposed to mobbing, but also other employees who witnessed the events in this process may lose their trust in the organization thinking that they may be exposed to mobbing in such a working environment one day. Due to this environment of insecurity, a significant decrease can be experienced in the loyalty attitude of all employees to work and the organization, and to this extent, organizational productivity. (Tınaz, 2006, pp.18-19) When the negative effects of mobbing on the economic quality of the organization are examined, it is seen that there is a financial loss in the budget of the organization due to new recruitment and training costs due to the resignation of experienced employees. (Tınaz, 2008, p.157) However, due to mobbing, it is seen that sick leave is often taken in the business. These sick leaves, which are accepted as escape from the workplace, increase costs and reduce productivity. It is an inevitable fact that the result of the legal struggle that those exposed to mobbing will attempt to prove that they have been forced to resign or have been dismissed and to obtain their rights will bring more financial burden on employers. (Kelly, 2006, p. 278)

Mobbing can also have social consequences. A business life with unhappy individuals and families, and a lack of work peace can be considered as a major social problem caused by mobbing. Health expenses of an individual who is a victim of mobbing puts a burden on both the employer and the state. As a result of mobbing, a society example emerges where psychologically exhausted individuals lost their professional competence (Tınaz, 2006, p. 20). With the increase in the number of unhappy individuals in the society, the unemployment and suicidal tendency increase, and thus the peace in the family and society deteriorates. On the other hand, health expenses paid from taxes, tax losses, increased demand for social aid organizations, increase in mental health problems and finally disabled retirement requests can affect society significantly (Çobanoğlu, 2005, p. 99). From the point of view of mobbing practitioners or harassers, the status of these people who rise up by abusing their ambitions and will, have gained in society due to their organizational roles may lead them to be taken as an role model. In addition, the increase in the number of such people who fit the type of harasser will be another negative result for the society (Budak, 2008, p. 398). Apart from the costs incurred by the employer for the consequences of mobbing in the workplace, the entire society has to bear medical and psychological treatment costs, early retirement and worker allowances (Lorho & Hilp, 2001, p. 14).

4. RECOMMENDATIONS ON PREVENTING MOBBING

The common point that all the research results at the international level converge is that the number of mobbing victims is much higher than the other victims of violence and abuse. While the number of studies on mobbing, in which its harmful effects are felt on individuals in all aspects of working life and social life, is increasing day by day, it is becoming increasingly important in many countries to increase awareness and struggle regarding the issue (Tınaz, 2006, p. 2).

The most important issue in preventing mobbing in the workplace is the awareness of the problem by the victim, employer, colleagues and finally the whole society. Everyone should do something and fight to stop mobbing in the workplace. But in order to struggle with something, one must first find out what it is. At this point, efforts should be made to raise awareness and increase the sensitivity of the public regarding the issue. It is very difficult for an individual to struggle alone, on his own, with the fear and anxiety he feels in the face of the unknown and despair. If people learn to recognize a phenomenon, they can evaluate their previous or current experiences with a much more realistic perspective. In addition, the severity of the fear arising from a phenomenon and the damage caused by this phenomenon will be greatly reduced if it is known what is encountered. Therefore the society should be tried to be informed about the issue with all its organs. Uncertainties on sensitive issues such as internal status and task distribution should not be existed, the definition of everything should be made clear so as not to cause dilemmas, and thus an environment that would prevent the emergence of mobbing should be created. Transparency in management should be ensured, importance should be given to participating in decisions to achieve this, and an environment where all employees participate in the decisions taken should be provided. Effectiveness of the communication process in the institution should be ensured. The principle of honesty should be accepted as the basic value for a well-functioning communication. It should not be forgotten that there will not be a correct and healthy flow of information in an institution lacking honesty. On the other hand, good communication will also prevent internal gossip. Care should be taken to ensure that the complaint and performance evaluation mechanisms work as healthy as possible. Thus, mobbing behaviours based on the belief that there is injustice can be prevented. While looking at the qualifications of candidates in recruitment processes, attention should be paid to personality traits and emotional intelligence, and attention should be paid to whether there are personality traits that may cause problems in the work environment (Atman, 2012, p. 171).

Symptoms of mobbing in an organization can be revealed by making a 360-degree evaluation. Customer satisfaction increases when management constantly monitors the performance of subordinates. However, these results reaching the management may not always reflect the facts. Because in workplaces with fear-based management, employees may avoid talking about their superiors or colleagues (Crawford, 1999, p. 88). Organizations have to first confront the person or persons who commit these behaviors and then explain the economic and legal effects of psychological abuse on those person or persons. Training should also be given to “problem” people to bring about behavioral change (Sheehan, 1999, p. 64).

In cases of mobbing caused by conflict, managers can prepare a professional management plan and procedures (Nahavendi & Malekzadeh, 1999, p. 464). Restructuring the business is also one of the steps that can be taken to prevent mobbing. Well-designed jobs cause avoidance of problems such as mobbing, increase in production, and positive behaviors of employees in

organizations (Whetten & Cameron, 2005, p. 120). Some stress factors in organizations pave the way for emergencing of mobbing behaviors. The most common of these is role ambiguity. This situation may lead to emotional reactions in employees (Tosi & Hamner, 2002, p. 301). Some of the emotional reactions are mobbing behaviors such as attacking other colleagues, getting angry, and putting the blame on others. For these reasons, role definitions should be made well, and attention should be paid to whether the job is at a level that meets the expectations of the individual (Wagner & Hollenbeck, 2005, p.153).

One of the methods to prevent the mobbing process is to demonstrate appropriate leadership behavior. This includes management training, efforts to increase productivity and skills to reveal conflicts. Managers should be able to receive warning signals at the beginning of the mobbing process. (Resch & Schubinski, 1996, p.300). Although those who practice mobbing behaviors have psychological problems, managers can find solutions to such situations. They can recognize employees and use effective methods to help them correct their behavior (Tutar, 2004, p. 145). Managers need to be trained to recognize, manage and cope with mobbing in organizations at the first stage. The concepts related to psychological harassment, assault, and mobbing should be well defined in organizations, and it should be understood well which behaviors are mobbing (Einarson & Skogstad, 1996, p. 186). The most important address of preventing mobbing in the organization is educational programs. Mobbing prevention training in the organization is the most common intervention strategy. Because each of the intervention techniques includes a separate training such as leadership, vocational rehabilitation, conflict and stress training. With the development of knowledge and skills, negative behaviors that may occur in the organization can be prevented. Another purpose of education is to understand the reasons for these behaviors and to be able to manage those who encourage negative behaviors in the organization emotionally and behaviorally (Schat & Kelloway, 2006, p. 83).

In the fight against mobbing, human resources or personnel managers have an important role as well as senior management in organizations. The role of Human Resources Management (HRM) in the fight against mobbing is to provide technical support and to undertake a facilitating function (Budak, 2008, p. 402). Industrial unions were established to seek solutions to the problems of workers and employers arising from their labor relations, and to protect and develop common economic, social rights and interests. They can take part in different activities from lobbying to various campaigns in order to improve their working conditions even more. For this reason, unions are one of the organizations that should be most sensitive to mobbing behavior in workplaces. In order for unions to provide adequate support and help to their members in mobbing, they must first be aware of this phenomenon. Most of the time, the struggle with insidious mobbing acts is only possible with a high level of sensitivity and awareness (Yüçetürk, 2012, p. 52).

5. CONCLUSION

Mobbing is one of the problems that negatively affect employees and organizations in today's business life. The main objective of organizations is to have employees who are connected to the workplace, work efficiently and have a high degree of satisfaction and keep these people in their workplaces. Organisations are recommended to take various measures against mobbing to achieve this goal. In our country and even in the world, it seems quite difficult to find a solution on this issue, which has not even been agreed on and has not been studied much. Mobbing can occur in any organization or any kind of organization. As individuals may be involved in

mobbing behavior, they can also become a mobbing victim one day. For this reason, mobbing prevention, management and struggle methods should be applied by both the organization and the individuals. However, it will be useful to conduct researches on the reasons for the emergence of psychological mobbing and how it emerges using in-depth interview method. In addition, since the researches on the subject are mostly carried out on the employees, it will be useful to carry out studies that will reveal the point of view of the employers on the subject, in order to contribute to the literature.

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