

Evaluation of Exposure to Negative Acts and Levels of Burnout among White Collar Employees in a Social Security Center in İstanbul

İstanbul'da Bir Sosyal Güvenlik Merkezi'nde Çalışan Beyaz Yakalılarda Olumsuz Davranışlara Maruziyet ve Tükenmişlik Düzeyinin Değerlendirilmesi

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Öz

İş yeri zorbalığı; çalışanlar için pek çok olumsuz fiziksel ve duygusal problemlere yol açabilen sürekli ve tekrarlayıcı davranışlardır. Çalışanlar üzerinde iş yeri ile ilgili diğer tüm stres faktörlerinden daha yıkıcı sonuçlar ortaya çıkarabileceği düşünülmektedir. Bu çalışmada bir Sosyal Güvenlik Merkezi çalışanlarının iş yerinde olumsuz davranışlara maruziyet düzeyleri ve bunun tükenmişlik düzeyi üzerine etkisini değerlendirmek amaçlanmıştır. Kesitsel tipte olan bu çalışmanın evrenini toplam 350 kişiden oluşan İstanbul'daki bir Sosyal Güvenlik Merkezi çalışanları oluşturmaktadır. Çalışmada örneklem hesabı yapılmadan tüm evrene ulaşmak amaçlanmıştır. Araştırmanın verileri katılımcılar tarafından Ocak-Şubat 2019 tarihlerinde doldurulan veri toplama formu ile elde edilmiştir. Veri toplama formunda; sosyodemografik özelliklerle ilgili sorular, iş yerinde maruz kalınan olumsuz eylemleri değerlendirmek için kullanılan İş Yeri Zorbalığı Ölçeği (İYZÖ) ve iş yeri ve meslek yaşamından kaynaklı tükenmişliğin değerlendirilmesi için kullanılan Tükenmişlik Ölçeği-Kısa Formu (TÖ-KF) yer almaktaydı. Çalışmaya toplam 308 kişi (katılım oranı: %88) dahil oldu. Katılımcıların; %63.6'sı erkek, %68.2'si fakülte/yükseköğretim mezunuydu. Eğitim seviyesindeki artış hem İYZÖ hem de TÖ-KF puanları ile birlikte anlamlı olarak artış göstermekteydi (sırasıyla $p<0.001$ ve $p=0.004$). Kadınların TÖ-KF puanları erkeklerle göre anlamlı olarak daha yüksek bulundu ($p<0.001$). Çalışmamızda; katılımcıların İYZÖ puanları ile TÖ-KF puanları arasında pozitif yönde, orta düzeyde (Rho: 0.544) ve anlamlı ($p<0.01$) korelasyon saptandı.

Abstract

Workplace bullying is continuous and repetitive behavior that can lead to many negative physical and emotional consequences for employees. It is thought to be a problem that can cause more destructive consequences on employees than all other stress factors related to work. In this study, it is aimed to evaluate the levels of exposure to negative acts of and its effect on burnout level of employees in a Social Security Center. The population of this cross-sectional study consists of 350 people who work in a Social Security Center in İstanbul. The data of the study was obtained from a survey filled by the participants in January-February 2019. The survey includes questions about sociodemographic characteristics, the Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R) which is used to assess damaging behaviors at work, and the Burnout Measure-Short Version (BMS) to measure burnout caused by workplace and professional life. A total of 308 people (participation rate: 88%) were included in the study. Most of the participants were male (63.6%) and faculty/college graduates (68.2%). The increase in the level of education significantly increased the NAQ-R and the BMS scores ($p<0.001$ and $p=0.004$ respectively). The BMS scores of women was significantly higher than that of men ($p<0.001$). In our study, a positive, moderate (Rho: 0.544) and significant ($p<0.01$) correlation was found between the participants' NAQ-R scores and BMS scores.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İstismar, İş Yeri, Tükenmişlik, Zorbalık

Keywords: Abuse, Bullying, Burnout, Workplace

Introduction

Workplace bullying was described by Heinz Leymann as "systematic unethical and hostile

behavior by a person or group in the workplace against someone who cannot defend himself" in 1990 (1). Zapf and Gross describe workplace bullying as repressive, aggressive, scary, malicious or humiliating behavior that is repeatedly and repetitively done by a manager or colleague (2). The term workplace bullying is sometimes used by some researchers as 'mobbing', 'employee abuse' or 'workplace aggression' in the literature. Definitions of the term are various, but they all refer to hostile behavior in the workplace (3). Workplace bullying can manifest itself in several ways and characteristics. These include acts such as verbal or physical attacks, social isolation and exclusion in the workplace, mocking or humiliating in front of colleagues, gossiping, and belittling their opinions (4-6).

Researchers' interest in the concept of workplace bullying has increased over the years and it has been shown that this situation can have

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serious negative consequences for both institutions and individuals. Employees' decreased productivity and commitment, increased number of resignations, and constant change of employees are the negative consequences of bullying at work (3, 7). In addition to this, it was found that symptoms such as anxiety, sleep disturbance, burnout, loss of concentration, depression, and panic attacks were more common in individuals who experienced workplace bullying (8-11).

The concept of burnout syndrome was first described in 1974 in two articles; one by Herbert Freudenberger and the other by Sigmund Ginsburg (12,13). The German-based psychiatrist Freudenberger popularized this concept by the studies he conducted in following years and became the founding father of the concept (14). In his article, Freudenberger defined burnout as "exhaustion as a result of an overload on one's energy, strength and resources". According to Freudenberger, burnout is characterized by weakness, fatigue, common headaches, and physical symptoms such as gastrointestinal disorders, insomnia and dyspnea. In addition, Freudenberger stated that burnout syndrome is more likely to occur in individuals who are determined and committed to work (12). According to Maslach, burnout is a psychological syndrome that rises as a response to chronic stressors at work. Three basic dimensions of this response are [1] an overwhelming exhaustion, [2] feelings of depersonalization and thoughts of resignation, and [3] a sense of inadequacy and lack of success (15).

Burnout occurs in conditions that require a high level of emotional work and empathy, personal participation, and inner motivation (12). In fact, studies on burnout syndrome have focused on health, education, social services, and finance sector employees. In this study, it is aimed to examine the exposure to negative acts of white-collar workers in a Social Security Center in Istanbul, and its effect to their levels of burnout.

Material and Method

The ethics committee approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Marmara University School of Medicine on January 2019 (Protocol Code: 09.2019.056). Our research was designed as cross-sectional study. The population of the research consists of employees of a Social Security Center in Istanbul with 350 white-collar employees. The study aims to reach the whole population; therefore, a sample was not selected. The data of the study was collected by a questionnaire including 3 sections filled by the participants in January-February 2019. In the first part of the questionnaire, there was a 6-question personal information form which was formed according to literature review, and the questions were about

sociodemographic characteristics of the participants, which were thought to be related to bullying and burnout. In this section, the participants answered various questions about their gender, age, marital status, education level, current work unit, and the number of years they had worked in this institution.

The Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised containing 22-items developed by Einarsen and Hoel (2001) was used to measure the bullying exposure of the participants (16). The Turkish validity and reliability study of the questionnaire was conducted by Aydın and Öcel (17). The participants were asked how often (1: Never, 2: Now and then, 3: Monthly, 4: Weekly, 5: Daily) they were exposed to negative acts at work during the last six months. The Cronbach's alpha value of the scale was found to be 0.88 in the study of Aydın and Öcel, while it was 0.861 in our study (17).

The BMS was used to evaluate the burnout levels of the participants due to workplace and professional life. The Burnout Measure was developed by Pines and Aronson (18). Pines then developed a short version of the measure which consists of 10 questions (19). The Turkish validity and reliability study of the measure was conducted by Tümkaya et al. (20). With this measure, burnout from workplace and professional life was interrogated and the participants were asked to answer a questionnaire on the incidence of negative moods and score each one from 1 (Never) to 7 (Always). Cronbach's alpha value of the measure was found to be 0.91 in the study of Tümkaya et al. (20). In the study of Burhan Çapri, it was found to be 0.91, whereas in our study it was found to be 0.909 (21).

Descriptive data in this study are presented as frequency tables and means and standard deviation values. Scale scores were calculated according to the participants' answers to the NAQ-R and BMS items, and the scores were analyzed with the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was applied to decide as to whether distribution matches the characteristics of a normal distribution. Mann-Whitney U or Kruskal-Wallis test was applied to compare sociodemographic characteristics and scale scores. Correlation of the scores received from the scales was analyzed using the Spearman's rank order correlation test. The statistical analysis was done by using SPSS for Windows version 23.0.

After providing information on the research subject to the research population, they were asked to participate, and the study was carried out with those who volunteered to participate.

Results

A total of 308 participants were included in the study (participation rate: 88%). The sociodemographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1. Most of the participants were male (n=196, 63.6%). The mean age of the participants is 39.3±10.7 years, and the mean number of years worked in the current institution is 12.35±10.29. As for their educational status; 3.5% (n=11) left school after primary school or earlier, 13.3% (n=41) graduated from high school and equivalent school, 68.2% (n=210) were faculty/college graduates, and 14.9% (n=46) had a degree of master's and/or PhD. The Support unit provided the highest number of participants (n=141, 45.8%). In the analysis phase, participants were divided into three groups as shown in Table 1 in line with their frequency of age and working years.

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of the participants

		n	%
Gender	Female	112	36.4
	Male	196	63.6
WorkUnit	Human Resources	20	6.5
	Support	141	45.8
	Law	72	23.4
	Data Processing	8	2.6
	Performance	14	4.5
	Documentation	19	6.2
	Accounting	23	7.5
	Public Relations	11	3.6
Marital Status	Single	82	26.6
	Married	226	73.4
Educational Status	Primary School or below	11	3.5
	High School or Equivalent	41	13.3
	Faculty/College	210	68.2
	Master's/PhD	46	14.9
Age (years)	<33	103	33.4
	33-43	105	34.1
	>43	100	32.5
Worked in the Institution (years)	<6	114	37.0
	6-14	94	30.5
	>14	100	32.5

Table 2 shows the mean scores obtained from the NAQ-R analyzed with each participant's sex, unit of work, marital status, education level, age and working years. Accordingly, there was no statistically significant difference between their scores of the NAQ-R in terms of gender, unit of work, marital status, age and working years. There was a significant difference between the scores received from the NAQ-R when compared according to the participants' education levels ($p<0.001$, Kruskal-Wallis). The lowest score was obtained from participants who left school after primary school or earlier. The mean scores of the participants who were faculty/college graduates and those who had a degree of master's and/or PhD were close and the highest.

In the NAQ-R, participants gave the highest scores to the items "Being ordered to do work below your level of competence" (2.10 ± 1.18), "Having your opinions and views ignored" (2.01 ± 1.06), "Being exposed to an unmanageable workload" (1.96 ± 1.07) and "Spreading of gossip and rumors about you" (1.87 ± 0.94) while the lowest scores were given to the items "Threats of violence or physical abuse or actual abuse" (1.10 ± 0.33), "Being the subject of excessive teasing and sarcasm" (1.18 ± 0.40), "Practical jokes carried out by people you don't get on with" (1.21 ± 0.44) and "Intimidated behavior such as finger-pointing, invasion of personal space, shoving, blocking/barring the way" (1.21 ± 0.50).

Table 2. The negative acts questionnaire-revised (NAQ-R) scores of participants

		NAQ-R Scores		P Value
		Mean	Standard Deviation	
Gender	Female	32.64	8.12	0.91
	Male	32.81	8.18	
Work Unit	Human Resources	28.50	5.06	0.38
	Support	32.66	7.80	
	Law	32.21	6.22	
	Data Processing	34.25	6.76	
	Performance	34.86	11.02	
	Documentation	34.84	9.41	
	Accounting	36.17	13.73	
Marital Status	Single	33.91	9.90	0.43
	Married	32.33	7.38	
Educational Status	Primary School or below	26.00	0.88	<0.001
	High School or Equivalent	28.83	4.00	
	Faculty/College	33.76	8.21	
	Master's/PhD	33.26	9.66	
Age (years)	<33	33.22	8.06	0.08
	33-43	33.38	8.13	
	>43	31.60	8.20	
Worked in the Institution (years)	<6	32.50	6.48	0.15
	6-14	34.07	9.51	
	>14	31.79	8.37	

Table 3 shows the comparison of the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants with their BMS mean scores. Statistically significant differences were found between the groups formed by gender, educational status, age and working years categories assessing their BMS scores. The BMS scores of female participants (3.26 ± 1.16) were higher than those of the male participants (2.48 ± 1.03) ($p<0.001$, Mann-Whitney U). When the BMS scores were compared according to their educational status, a significant difference was found between the groups ($p<0.01$, Kruskal-Wallis). Similar to the NAQ-R results, the highest mean scores were obtained from faculty/college graduate groups and those who got a degree of master's/PhD. In this scale, high school

graduates received the lowest scores among the educational status groups.

When the BMS scores were compared according to age groups, a significant difference was found between the groups ($p=0.001$, Kruskal-Wallis), and the highest level of burnout was observed in the participants between the ages of 33-43, followed by the participants younger than 33 years. In paired comparisons of the groups, the BMS scores of the participants aged 44 and older were significantly lower than those in the 33-43 age group ($p<0.001$, Mann-Whitney U) and those younger than 33 years ($p=0.02$, Mann-Whitney U). The comparison of the BMS scores according to the participants' years of working in the institution revealed that the scores of the participants who worked in the institution for 6 to 14 years were statistically higher than the participants who worked in the institution for less than 6 years ($p=0.002$, Mann-Whitney U) and the participants who worked in the institution for more than 14 years ($p<0.001$, Mann-Whitney U). In this category, the lowest mean scores belong to the participants who have been working in the institution for more than 14 years. There was no significant evidence that there is difference between the work units and marital status of the participants and the scores of the BMS.

Table 3. The burnout measure-short version (BMS) scores of participants

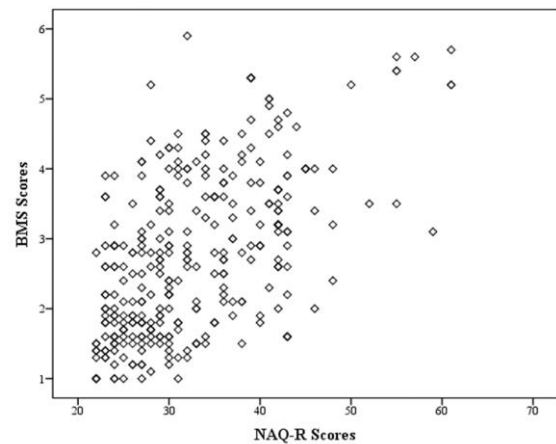
		BMS Scores		P Value
		Mean	Standard Deviation	
Gender	Female	3.26	1.16	<0.001
	Male	2.48	1.03	
Work Unit	Human Resources	2.36	0.82	0.20
	Support	2.62	0.96	
	Law	2.83	1.24	
	Data	3.49	1.35	
	Processing	3.16	1.60	
	Performance	2.77	1.15	
	Documentation	3.11	1.49	
	Accounting	3.23	1.07	
	Public Relations	2.68	1.06	
Marital Status	Single	2.68	1.06	0.52
	Married	2.80	1.17	
Educational Status	Primary School or below	2.51	1.02	0.004
	High School or Equivalent	2.24	1.12	
	Faculty/College	2.86	1.12	
	Master's/PhD	2.85	1.19	
Age (years)	<33	2.85	1.19	0.001
	33-43	2.78	1.09	
	>43	3.07	1.22	
Worked in the Institution (years)	<6	2.44	1.03	<0.001
	6-14	2.69	1.08	
	>14	3.20	1.20	

There was a positive, moderate (Spearman's rho: 0.544) and significant ($p<0.001$, Spearman's rank order correlation) correlation between the

NAQ-R and the BMS scores of the participants. Graph 1 shows the correlation between the variables.

Discussion

In our study, the relationship between workplace bullying, of which researchers have an increasing interest recently, and burnout syndrome, which is also a popular subject, were analyzed along with the descriptive characteristics of the participants. The mean NAQ-R score of the white-collar workers in the Social Security Center from which the participants were selected was



Graph 1. Correlation graph between the BMS Scores and the NAQ-R Scores of the participants

32.75±8.14. Using the same scale, Cemaloğlu got a mean score of 35.36±18.17 where he conducted the study with teachers; Tavşanlı et al. got a mean score as 34.78±5.53 with nurses; and Savaşan and Özgür, who also worked with nurses, found the mean score as 33.0±1.05, which was lower but close to the others (22-24).

Among the sociodemographic characteristics questioned in the study, it was found that the perception of bullying significantly changed only by educational status. The mean scores of faculty/college graduates and those who had a degree of master's/PhD were close to each other and were higher than those who left school after primary school or earlier and those who graduated from high school and equivalent schools. The fact that the two items with the highest mean score in the scale were "Being ordered to do work below your level of competence" and "Having your opinions and views ignored" reveals the reason for this result. Although there are publications proving that employees with low level of education are more exposed to bullying in the workplace (24,25), there are studies showing that employees with a successful and impressive educational background can also become the target of bullying (26) and they tend to perceive the behaviors of managers as bullying (27).

In our study, no significant difference was found between the participants' characteristics of age/working years and their bullying scores. However, bullying scores of the groups with the highest age and longest working time in the institution were found to be lower, although not statistically significant. There are studies showing that people with more experience are less likely to be exposed to workplace bullying (24,27). However, Turhan's study with secondary school teachers found that the perceived bullying score statistically increased significantly with age (28). In our study there was no significant relationship between the participants' gender, unit of study and marital status and their NAQ-R scores.

The mean BMS score of the participants were 2.77 ± 1.14 . This value is higher than the mean score found in Burhan Çapri's study with nurses, teachers and school administrators using the same measure (21). Significant differences were found between sociodemographic characteristics such as gender, educational background, age, and working years and the BMS scores. The BMS score of women was significantly higher than that of men. This finding is consistent with many studies in the literature (21, 29-31). In Turhan's study with secondary school teachers, no significant difference was found between the genders (28). Although there was no significant relationship between the participants' unit in the institution and BMS scores, it was observed that the employees in the Information Processing Unit and the Public Relations Unit had the highest BMS scores. At this point, it is concluded that employees who have more frequent one-on-one communication with people are more likely to have further perception of burnout.

The employees were divided into three groups of age and it was found that BMS scores in the middle group (33-43 years) were significantly higher than the younger (<33 years) and older (>43 years) groups. Similarly, three groups were formed according to their years of working, and the BMS scores of the middle group (6-14 years) were significantly higher than the groups that worked for a shorter time (<6 years) and longer time (> 14 years). There are studies which suggest that high expectations may induce burnout in those who have recently started their profession (32-34), while some studies show that the burnout level may increase with age (28). Additionally, this result might also be related to the fact that the middle-aged people in this population work in more intensive units which might be the real cause of burnout.

In our study, a positive, moderate and significant correlation was found between the participants' NAQ-R scores and BMS scores. This result shows that burnout level increases as bullying intensifies. Similarly, in many studies conducted with different populations and different scales, a

significant positive relationship has been found between exposure to mobbing in the workplace and burnout levels (28,31,34,35).

In the study, no significant differences were found in terms of marital status and work unit although these were thought to be related to bullying and burnout in the workplace. Whereas there are differences between the characteristics of the work units and burnout levels which may prove to be compatible with the literature, statistical significance could not be achieved. The fact that the number of groups in this variable is high and therefore there are not enough participants in some units is among the limitations of our study. Another limitation of our study was that the bullying and burnout levels of the participants were measured based on their own statements. However, the high participation rate of the study population is the strength of our study.

Workplace bullying is a phenomenon associated with many different negative consequences including burnout affecting individuals as well as institutions. In our study, the relationship between perceived workplace bullying and burnout levels was examined in a public institution providing social services, and results were found consistent with the literature. The occurrence of problems experienced by our participants at workplace was evaluated with the NAQ-R and found to be similar to the studies conducted in the health and education sector using the same scale. Additionally, it was found that perceived bullying level increased with education level, and burnout level was higher in women, those who have higher education level, and the middle group among the age and working year groups. Awareness trainings and informing the employees about the sources and consequences of their problems at work, ways of coping, and individual rights will contribute to solving the problem. Thus, productivity and success of institutions will increase along with employees' health and performance.

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