Makale Türü: Araştırma Makalesi

The Role of Mobbing Behaviors on the Burnout of Graduate Students in Sport Science

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the effect of mobbing behaviors on the burnout of graduate students. The study focused on students in the field of sports sciences as a sample. Students who continued their postgraduate education in sports sciences at three universities in the western region of Turkey participated in the study. Two scales were used as measurement instruments: "Negative Acts Questionnaire–Student (NAQ–S)" developed by Yildiz (2020) to measure mobbing behaviors, and "Maslach Burnout Inventory–Student Survey (MBI–SS)" developed by Schaufeli et al. (2002) to measure burnout. The hypotheses of the study were tested by hierarchical regression analysis. Analysis results showed that mobbing has a significant and positive effect on student burnout (β=0.326; p<0.01).

Keywords: Mobbing, burnout, graduate student, university

Spor Bilimleri Alanında Öğrenim Gören Lisansüstü Öğrencilerinin Tükenmişliği Üzerinde Mobbingin Rolü

ÖZ

Bu çalışmanın amacı lisansüstü öğrencilerin tükenmişliği üzerinde mobbing davranışlarının etkisinin incelenmesidir. Çalışma spor bilimleri alanında lisansüstü öğrenim gören öğrencilere odaklanmıştır. Çalışmaya Türkiye'nin batı bölgesinde bulunan üç üniversitenin spor bilimleri alanında lisansüstü eğitimine devam eden öğrenciler katılmışlardır. Veri toplama aracı olarak iki ölçek kullanılmıştır: Mobbing davranışlarını ölçmek için, Yıldız (2020) tarafından geliştirilen "Negatif Davranışlar Ölçeği-Öğrenci", tükenmişliği ölçmek için Schaufeli ve diğerleri (2002) tarafından geliştirilen "Maslach Tükenmişlik Envanteri-Öğrenci Formu" kullanılmıştır. Çalışmanın hipotezleri hiyerarşik regresyon analizi ile test edilmiştir. Analiz sonuçları mobbingin öğrenci tükenmişliği üzerinde anlamlı ve pozitif etkisi olduğunu göstermiştir (β=0.326; p<0.01).

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mobbing, tükenmişlik, lisansüstü öğrenci, üniversite

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Introduction

Mobbing behaviors are a phenomenon that can occur in environments where people are together. Burnout is a syndrome that people experience under the influence of some stress factors. In recent years, mobbing and burnout issues in the workplace have started to attract a lot of attention in the academic field. The reason for this is that both phenomena have negative effects on employees. Reduced productivity, performance, and success can be given as examples of negative effects. In the context of education, the phenomenon of burnout has begun to be examined on students in higher education (Schaufeli et al., 2002) with the acceptance of students' participation in classes, and their efforts to fulfill the demands of homework and exams as a job (Schaufeli & Taris, 2005).

Mobbing is known as intentional behavior that a person performs for a long time and frequently with the aim of harming another person. Burnout, on the other hand, is a state of physical, mental and emotional exhaustion caused by the long effects of stressors. The International Labor Organization (ILO) reports that mobbing is an increasing phenomenon in the working environment, and that every individual, regardless of sector and gender, can potentially face this negative situation (www.ilo.org). The results of international research reveal that those who are exposed to mobbing are more likely to have other rights violation problems. While approximately 17% of employees in the USA are exposed to mobbing, this rate is around 11% in Europe (Kara, Kim, & Uysal, 2018). On the other hand, burnout is a phenomenon that closely concerns individuals in organizations. Organizations can be the source of some stressors based on their work activities, and as a result, individuals can experience burnout. At this point, it can be said that mobbing is among the most effective stressors (Yildiz, 2017). Regardless of the sectoral difference, there are individuals who experience burnout in almost every organization (Karık & Yildiz, 2015). The education sector is shown as one of the sectors where burnout syndrome is most common (Akın & Oğuz, 2010).

In recent years, although mobbing and burnout issues have been dealt with separately in studies conducted in educational organizations, studies examining the relationship between these two phenomena have also been conducted. On the other hand, it has been observed that research on the relationship between mobbing and student burnout, especially in higher education, is quite limited. For example, in one of the recent studies, the relationship between mobbing and burnout was examined at the undergraduate level (Yildiz, 2020). A similar study was conducted at the graduate level (Goodboy, Martin, & Johnson, 2015). However, the fact that both cases have not been adequately examined, especially at the graduate level, is considered as a deficiency. Therefore, in order to contribute to further clarification of the subject, this study focused on postgraduate students and aimed to examine the effect of instructor-induced mobbing behaviors on students' burnout.

Theoretical Background

Mobbing

The concept of mobbing, which was first used by Lorenz (1963) in the animal world, was defined as "a group of animals targeting a single animal in various ways, scaring it, harming it". Later, Heinemann (1972) discussed this concept in the educational environment and expressed it as "one group of children harming another group of children". Leyman (1996) was the first to examine mobbing in the context of the organization. Leyman defined it as "hostile or immoral behavior in organizations that is systematically directed by one or a few people, usually against a single person, that pushes the person into a helpless and vulnerable situation".

The phenomenon of mobbing is also expressed with concepts such as "bullying, psychological harassment, psychological terror, intimidation, psychological violence, workplace terror" (Yildiz, 2017). All these concepts cover the behaviors against a person and eliminate him. Leymann (1996) classified 45 different mobbing behaviors he defined into five groups according to their characteristics. These can be summarized as: attacks on one's dignity (purpose; belittling, defamation, and discrediting), attacks on performance (purpose; degrading job performance), attacks on communication (purpose; breaking communication ties), attacks on social conditions (purpose; breaking social ties, isolating), and the threat of physical attack (purpose; affecting physical health) (Leymann, 1996). In organizations, one or more of these behaviors can be used to intimidate a person. In order to talk about mobbing in a workplace, bad behavior must be long-term and systematic (Leyman, 1996).

Studies have mentioned some negative effects of mobbing, which is accepted as antisocial behavior in organizations, on individuals (Vveinhardt, Fominiene, & Jeseviciute-Ufartiene, 2018). For example, it decreases the individual's performance and job satisfaction (Gün, 2016), decreases organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behavior (Yıldız, 2016), increases burnout (Taştan & Gökler, 2017) and increases the intention to leave the organization (Erdirençelebi & Filizöz, 2016).

Burnout

Maslach (2003) defined burnout as "a psychological syndrome that occurs with the long effects of stressors in the workplace". Maslach discussed burnout in three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. According to Maslach, these three dimensions, which seem to be different from each other, are fundamentally related to each other. Burnout begins with the first emotional exhaustion in the employee as a reaction to the stressors in the work environment. The emotionally worn-out person becomes insensitive to their work, co-workers, and customers. The person who becomes insensitive to his work and his environment feels a sense of decline in success because he cannot meet the job requirements in the work environment and cannot fully reflect his talent (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

In the context of education, students' participation in classes, and their efforts to fulfill the demands in homework and exams are considered as a job (Schaufeli & Taris, 2005). In this context, Schaufeli et al. (2002) examined burnout on students in higher education and discussed it in three dimensions: exhaustion, cynicism, and professional efficacy. Goodboy et al. (2015)

explained these dimensions as follows: Exhaustion is a lack of energy caused by the depletion of emotional resources due to stress. Cynicism refers to having a distant or indifferent attitude toward one's job. A lack of professional efficacy reflects reduced personal accomplishments and a lower success rate in work-related tasks. People with burnout face situations such as low energy, lack of motivation, negative feelings towards work and others, and avoidance of interpersonal interaction (Thomas & Lankau, 2009).

The relationship between mobbing and student burnout

In educational context, many variables affecting burnout are mentioned in the literature (Walburg, 2014). For example, low academic achievement is seen as one of the reasons that increase student burnout (Yang, 2004). Recent studies have shown that mobbing may also be a precursor to student burnout (Duyan, 2020; Goodboy et al., 2015). When the literature is reviewed, it is seen that studies examining the relationships between both phenomena in higher education in the context of students are quite limited. Some of them are research on undergraduate students (Duyan, 2020; Yıldız, 2020), and the other is on graduate students (Goodboy et al., 2015). The findings of these studies showed that there is a positive correlation between mobbing and student burnout. However, it is also clear that more studies should be done to clarify further the relationship between mobbing and student burnout at various higher education levels. From this point of view, in order to contribute to the literature, the following hypotheses have been developed for the relationship between the two cases.

H_1. Academic mobbing has a significant and positive effect on the burnout of graduate students.

H_2. Non-academic mobbing has a significant and positive effect on the burnout of graduate students.

H_3. Mobbing has a significant and positive effect on the burnout of graduate students.

Method

Sample size and procedure

In this study, the convenience sampling method was used. Such a method has been preferred in order to use time constraints and labor more economically. Students who continued their postgraduate education in the field of sports sciences in three universities in the western region of Turkey participated in the study. Questionnaires containing informative and scale items were distributed to students who accepted voluntary participation via electronic communication tools. After a week was given, the number of returned questionnaires was 85.

Measurement instruments

"Negative Acts Questionnaire–Student (NAQ–S)" developed by Yildiz (2020) was used to measure mobbing behaviors. This scale developed for students consists of 12 items and two sub-dimensions: Academic mobbing (includes items 1-4) and non-academic mobbing (includes

items 5-12). According to the analyzes in the original study, NAQ–S has high factor loads between 0.601-0.814 and strong model fit indices (CFI=0.928; GFI=0.918; AGFI=0.879; IFI=0.929; RMESA=0.076). In addition, Cronbach's alpha coefficient (α=0.831) of the scale is quite high.

To measure student burnout, the "Maslach Burnout Inventory–Student Survey (MBI–SS)", which is the transformation of the Maslach Burnout Inventory into a student version by Schaufeli et al. (2002), was used. This scale was adapted into Turkish by Yildiz (2020) with Brislin's (1970) back-translation method. MBI–SS consists of 15 items and three sub-dimensions: burnout (includes items 1-5), cynicism (includes items 6-9), professional effectiveness (includes items 10-15). According to the analyzes in the adapted study, MBI–SS has strong model fit indices (CFI=0.959; GFI=0.914; AGFI=0.881; IFI=0.960; RMESA=0.062). In addition, Cronbach's alpha coefficient (α=0.789) of the scale is quite high. Both scale items were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from "1=never, 2=rarely, 3=sometimes, 4=often, 5=ever time".

Statistical analysis

Descriptive statistics were used for the analysis of demographic variables. Correlation analysis was used to determine the relationships between the variables, and hierarchical regression analysis was used to test the hypothetical effects of mobbing on burnout.

Findings

Demographic properties

One third of the participants is male. The majority of the participants is master's students and most of the participants are in the second semester. The average age of the participants is 29.49 (Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic properties

Demographic variables		f	%
Gender	Male	64	75.3
	Female	21	24.7
Semester	First term	19	22.4
	Second term	20	23.5
	Third term	12	14.1
	Fourth term	9	10.6
	Fifth term	11	12.9
	Sixth term	14	16.5
Programme	Master's	53	62.4
	Doctorate	32	37.6
		X	**SS**
Age		29.49	5.26

Source. Yildiz, 2022

Correlation analysis

Correlation analysis shows that there is a significant and positive relationship between mobbing and burnout (r=0.340; p<0.01). While academic mobbing, one of the sub-dimensions of mobbing, has a significant and positive relationship at p<0.01 level (r=0.311), non-academic mobbing has a relationship at p<0.05 level (r=0.269). In general, it can be said that as mobbing behavior increases, burnout will also increase (Table 2).

Table 2. Results of correlation analysis

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender[a]	1						
2. Age[b]	.128	1					
3. Semester[c]	.005	.386**	1				
4. Programme[d]	.050	.332**	.385**	1			
5. Academic mobbing	-.286**	-.410**	-.101	-.253*	1		
6. Non–academic mobbing	.086	-.136	-.078	.138	.419**	1	
7. Mobbing	-.218*	-.386**	-.108	-.176	.967**	.637**	1
8. Burnout	-.033	-.210	-.086	.056	.311**	.269*	.340**

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.
Key. [a]Gender: 1=male, 2=female. [b]Age was measured from 23 to 47 years old. [c]Semester: 1=first semester student, 2=second semester student, 3=third semester student, 4=fourth semester student, 5=fifth semester student, 6=sixth semester student. [d]Programme: 1=master's, 2=doctorate
Source. Yildiz, 2022

Hierarchical regression analysis

In order to test the hypotheses, the effects of mobbing and its sub-dimensions (academic mobbing and non-academic mobbing) on burnout were evaluated with hierarchical regression analysis along with demographic variables. Here, together with demographic variables, mobbing and its sub-dimensions are considered independent variables, and burnout as dependent variables.

According to the results of the regression analysis, academic mobbing has a significant and positive effect on burnout (β=0.324; p<0.01) (Table 3). Similarly, non-academic mobbing has a significant and positive effect on burnout (β=0.228; p<0.05) (Table 4). In general, mobbing has a significant and positive effect on burnout (β=0.326; p<0.01) (Table 5). On the other hand, demographic variables do not have any effect on burnout. According to these results, all three hypotheses of the research were confirmed.

Table 3. Hierarchical regression analysis results on the effect of academic mobbing on burnout

Independent variables	Dependent variable	
	Burnout	
	Step 1	Step 2
1. Gender	-.010	.065
2. Age	-.240	-.122
3. Semester	-.053	-.087
4. Programme	.157	.208
5. Academic mobbing	-	.324**
F	1.372	2.639
R^2	0.64	.143
Adjusted R^2	0.17	.089

Note. Standardized beta values were used, **p <0.01
Source. Yildiz, 2022

Table 4. Hierarchical regression analysis results on the effect of non-academic mobbing on burnout

Independent variables	Dependent variable	
	Burnout	
	Step 1	Step 2
1. Gender	-.010	-.032
2. Age	-.240	-.197
3. Semester	-.053	-.032
4. Programme	.157	.104
5. Non-academic mobbing	-	.228[*]
F	1.372	2.001
R^2	0.64	.112
Adjusted R^2	0.17	0.56

Note. Standardized beta values were used, [*]$p < 0.05$
Source. Yildiz, 2022

Table 5. Hierarchical regression analysis results on the effect of mobbing on burnout

Independent variables	Dependent variable	
	Burnout	
	Step 1	Step 2
1. Gender	-.010	.045
2. Age	-.240	-.121
3. Semester	-.053	-.073
4. Programme	.157	.180
5. Mobbing	-	.326[**]
F	1.372	2.813
R^2	.064	.151
Adjusted R^2	.017	.097

Note. Standardized beta values were used, [**]$p < 0.01$
Source. Yildiz, 2022

Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, it was aimed to examine the effect of instructor-induced mobbing behaviors on students' burnout by focusing on graduate students. The findings of the study showed that mobbing has a significant and positive effect on the burnout levels of graduate students. Similarly, both academic and non-academic mobbing, which are sub-dimensions of mobbing, significantly and positively affected students' burnout. In the literature, few studies have been found in the higher education setting. In the study conducted by Yildiz (2020) on undergraduate students, a positive relationship was found between mobbing and burnout. Similarly, in the study conducted by Goodboy et al. (2015) on graduate students, a positive relationship was found between mobbing and burnout. The findings in both studies are similar to the results of our study.

Goodboy et al. (2015) emphasize that burnout caused by mobbing creates serious problems in students. In the researches, the following problems were observed in students experiencing burnout: Decreased interest and seriousness towards lessons, decreased social participation, alienation from school, and loss of sense of belonging (Cooke, Sims, & Peyrefitte, 1995; Daugherty & Lane, 1999). Therefore, it is clear that mobbing, which causes burnout, is an issue that needs to be taken into account. The institutional attractiveness of higher education institutions may be adversely affected because students with intense burnout transfer their

experiences in educational institutions to others through word-of-mouth communication (Amani, 2022).

Lewis (2004) states that if mobbing behavior occurs at any level in an educational institution, the education process of students may be interrupted. Nielsen and Einarsen (2012) emphasize that burnout caused by mobbing will have a devastating effect on students. Students who cannot handle their workload in the face of unfavorable situations will experience failure in the lessons, and they will be able to drop out of school, especially if they cannot eliminate the effects of mobbing. This means a waste of both money and time and effort. Therefore, it is clear that situations that can disrupt relationships between people and lead to practices and behaviors that can be described as mobbing in the workplace should be prevented (Pheko, 2018).

As a result, mobbing and burnout are among the important issues that should be taken into account by school administrations. It can be said that the student who is exposed to mobbing by the instructor in the educational environment is in a way vulnerable. For this reason, school administrations should first diagnose the situation and then seek solutions. For this, on the one hand, students should be provided with training that will raise awareness, and on the other hand, the message that this situation will not be welcomed at any level should be given to those who engage in mobbing behaviors. Information, psychological and social support should be provided for students who experience emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a decrease in achievement. Thus, the individual success of the students will increase thanks to the decreasing burnout.

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