Research Article

EFFECT OF LONELINESS IN THE WORKPLACE ON EMPLOYEES' JOB PERFORMANCE: A STUDY FOR HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES

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Abstract: *Loneliness has become one of the most important problems of our time. Loneliness can be seen not only in daily life but also in the workplaces. Loneliness in the workplace has many negative effects on both employees and organizations. In this study, it was aimed to reveal the effect of loneliness in the workplace on the job performance of employees in terms of private hospitals. The study was held in Istanbul, Turkey from August 2019 to October 2019. The data of the study were collected from the employees of the private hospitals operating in Istanbul through the survey method. 393 valid questionnaires were collected for the study. When the study was completed, the loneliness levels of the participants in the workplace were found to be generally low and their job performances were to be high. As a result of the study, it was found that there is a statistically significant, negative and moderate relationship between all dimensions of loneliness in the workplace and the employees' job performance. Also, it was found that all dimensions of loneliness in the workplace negatively affect the job performance of employees. The results of this study indicate that loneliness in the workplace is a determinant for the employees' job performance According to the results of the study, hospital managements were suggested to carry out some studies in order to ensure that employees do not experience loneliness in the workplace and to improve their job performance.*

Keywords: *Loneliness, Workplace, Job, Performance*

1. Introduction

People need to interact and communicate with each other throughout their lives [1]. The social relationships and interactions to be established enable people to meet their psychosocial needs. Although people and communities have become closer to each other due to the impact of developments in communication and information technologies, they cannot meet their psychosocial needs because these technological developments lead people to establish virtual and superficial relationships instead of real social relations and interactions [2]. Besides, many factors such as changes in family structure, migrations, increase in urbanization, changes in working and living conditions and globalization prevent people from meeting their psychosocial needs. Failure to meet psychosocial needs has negative effects on people. One of these effects is that people become lonely.

Loneliness is defined as a disturbing psychological condition that a person is exposed to because of the inability to reach the desired level of social intercourse [3]. According to another definition, loneliness is a negative psychological state caused by the perception of the lack of satisfactory social relationships [4]. Loneliness, according to another definition, is a state of cognitive and sensory strain

that results from the mutual interaction of personal and environmental factors that causes people to suffer, disappoint them, and destroy their hopes [5]. Loneliness refers to a mental state and a state of mind originating from being away from mutual social interaction rather than physical distances from each other [6]. Loneliness can lead people to feel unhappy and insecure, to be depressed, to become more sensitive to threats and to exhibit hostile attitudes towards their environment, and may cause social adversity as it negatively affects the social interaction of people [7].

The phenomenon of loneliness is not only limited to the general life of the people but can also be seen in the workplace [3]. The concept of loneliness in the workplace, which has emerged with industrialization and creates awareness, has become a reality that is no longer ignored in today's working life [8]. Loneliness in the workplace has many negative effects on organizations. Employees' job performance is considered as one of these effects. In this study, it was aimed to reveal the effect of loneliness in the workplace on the employees' job performance in terms of private hospitals.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Loneliness in the Workplace

The concept of loneliness in the workplace refers to the emotional and social loneliness of an employee in the organization [9]. Unlike general loneliness, loneliness in the workplace is effective only in the working environment. In other words, an individual who has satisfactory and healthy relationships in daily life and does not experience loneliness may have problems in establishing and maintaining social relations in the workplace. This situation may lead an individual to experience loneliness in the workplace [10].

According to Wright et al. [11], loneliness in the workplace has two dimensions including emotional deprivation and social companionship. In the dimension of emotional deprivation, the employee has dominant thoughts of shutting himself/herself down to colleagues, avoiding sharing feelings and thoughts with them and not to be understood by them. Employees experiencing emotional deprivation in the workplace give the impression that they keep their colleagues at a distance, feel excluded from the group and experience a general feeling of emptiness. The social companionship dimension includes the fact that the employee does not participate in the social network in the organization and does not see himself or herself as a part of the social network in the organization. Employees who cannot communicate easily with their colleagues and do not participate in social activities may experience loneliness in the dimension of social companionship. Lack of communication is the most important reason for loneliness in this dimension [6].

Other employees in the organization can identify employees who experience loneliness in the workplace as having problems in establishing social relations, with a low level of self-confidence, shy and misfit persons [2]. Many factors are effective in experiencing loneliness in the workplace. Personality characteristics of employees, working values, quality of work, working hours, workload, attitudes and behaviors of managers, organizational support, organizational culture, organizational climate, human resources policies are major factors [2-12].

Loneliness in the workplace has many negative effects on both employees and organizations. According to the studies in the literature, loneliness in the workplace leads to reduced life satisfaction and job satisfaction of employees, leader-member interaction [13], perceived manager support [14], organizational citizenship behavior [4], work performance and work efficiency [15]. On the other hand,

loneliness in the workplace can lead to increases in the intention of employees to quit [3-16], organizational cynicism [14] and organization alienation [17]. In addition, loneliness in the workplace can cause stress in employees [18] and impaired health [12]. Negative effects of loneliness in the workplace affect also the success of the organization and peace in the workplace [19].

2.2. Employees' Job Performance

In today's fierce competition environment, many factors are effective for organizations to gain competitive advantage and survive. One of these factors is the employees and especially the qualifications and performance of the employees have become very important for the organizations. Organizations need high-performing employees to achieve their goals and objectives, gain competitive advantage, and survive [20]. Employees with high job performance increase also the performance of organizations. The high performance of organizations increases the competitiveness level of organizations and ensures the sustainability of organizations [21].

Performance is demonstrating behaviors that meet the standards specified to achieve the goals or objectives and the level of achievement of the goals or objectives [22]. According to another definition, performance is the degree of planned activity to achieve the goals or objectives [23]. And employees' job performance is conceptualized as actions and behaviors that are under the control of employees and contribute to the realization of organizational goals and objectives [24]. Employees' job performance is defined as, besides their actions and efforts to accomplish their tasks, the degree of performing their tasks or achieve their goals and objectives as a result of these actions and efforts [25].

Borman and Motowidlo [26] consider the employees' job performance in two dimensions including task performance and contextual performance. Task performance is the success of employees in fulfilling the tasks specified in the job definition. The main determinants of task performance are the professional knowledge, skills, and experiences of the employee [27]. The contextual performance involves volunteering, helping other employees, and collaborating with other employees to complete other works in the organization during carrying out jobs not specified in the job definition [26].

Employees' job performance can be affected by many factors. When reviewing the studies in the literature, factors such as job satisfaction [28-29], organizational commitment [30], organizational citizenship behavior [31], perceived organization support [32-33], organizational trust [34], motivation [35], perception of ethical leadership [36] affect the employees' job performance in positive manner. Whereas factors such as work overload [31], organizational cynicism [37-38], mobbing [39] affect the employees' job performance negatively.

To keep the employees' job performance at the top level, organizations should constantly monitor the factors that affect job performance positively or negatively. Besides, a working environment should be created where employees find their job meaningful, feel themselves competent and comfortable, salaries should be fair, promotions should be made in a timely and correct manner, necessary rewards should be provided, social rights and opportunities should be provided, employees should be given close attention, employees' ideas and thoughts should be respected, ensure their participation in organizational decisions and establish a system for continuous improvement of performance [40-41].

2.3. Hypotheses of the Study

The negative effects of loneliness in the workplace on employees and organizations were mentioned above. Employees' job performance is considered one of the issues negatively affected by loneliness in the workplace. The hypotheses of the study developed by considering both this consideration and the objective of the study are as follows:

H1. There is a negative relationship between loneliness in the workplace and employees' job performance.

H2. Loneliness in the workplace negatively affects the employees' job performance.

3. Methods

The study was held in Istanbul, Turkey from August 2019 to October 2019. The data of the study were collected through the survey method. 393 valid ones of the collected questionnaire forms were used for statistical analysis purposes.

3.1. Sample

Most of the private hospitals are operated in Istanbul. Therefore, the study was held in Istanbul. The data of the study were collected from the employees of the private hospitals operating in Istanbul. The data of the study were collected from different professional groups including physicians, staff working in administrative units (accounting, human resources, patient admission, etc.), health personnel (midwives, nurses, labs, etc.), technical and support personnel (electric technicians, security, drivers, etc.). The sample size that can represent the population of the research was determined as 384 people in a 95% confidence interval [42]. 393 valid questionnaires were collected for the study.

3.2. Data Collection Tool

The questionnaire used to collect data for the study consists of three sections. The first section of the questionnaire contains questions to determine the demographic characteristics of the participants. The second section includes questions to determine the level of loneliness in the workplace. In the second section, the Loneliness at Work Scale – LAWS prepared by Wright et al [11] was used. The scale consists of two dimensions and 16 items including emotional deprivation (9 items) and social companionship (7 items). Turkish validity and reliability study of the scale was conducted by Doğan et al. [10]. The third section includes expressions to determine the employees' job performance. The "Performance Scale" prepared by Tayfun and Çatır [43] and consisting of 6 expressions was used in the third section.

The expressions used in the scales were measured with 5-point Likert-type scale options. When an average score to be obtained from the "Loneliness at Work Scale" approaching 5 indicates that the loneliness in the workplace is high and the average score to be obtained from the "Performance Scale" approaching 5 indicates that the employees' job performance is high. Cronbach's Alpha coefficients calculated to determine the reliability level of the scales used in the study are shown in Table 1. The results in Table 1 show that both scales are reliable.

Table 1. Reliability Analysis

Dimensions	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Emotional Deprivation	9	0.88
Social Companionship	7	0.85
Loneliness in the Workplace	**16**	**0.92**
Employees' Job Performance	**6**	**0.69**

3.3. Data Analysis

SPSS 23.0 statistical program suite was used for the analysis of the data collected for the study. Descriptive statistics were calculated to determine the level of loneliness and the job performance of the participants in the workplace. Correlation analysis and multiple linear regression analyses were performed to determine the relationships between loneliness in the workplace and employees' job performance. The results obtained from the analyses were evaluated at a 95% confidence interval and a 5% significance level.

4. Results

Findings obtained as a result of data analyses are as follows.

Table 2. Demographics Characteristics of Participants

Demographic Variables		Frequency (n=393)	%
Gender	Female	291	74.0
	Male	102	26.0
Age	≤ 25	160	40.7
	26-35	150	38.2
	≥ 36	83	21.1
Education Status	High School	74	18.8
	Associate Degree	120	30.5
	Undergraduate Degree	147	37.4
	Graduate Degree	52	13.2
Position	Administrative Personnel	202	51.4
	Health Personnel	135	34.4
	Physician	16	4.1
	Technical or Support Staff	40	10.2
Working time in the Hospital	≤ 5 Years	295	75.1
	6-10 Years	61	15.5
	≥ 11 Years	37	9.4

Table 2 shows the demographic characteristics of the participants. Of the participants, 291 (74.0%) are female while 102 (26.0%) are male. Participants include 160 people (40.7%) in the 25 or

below age range, 150 people (38.2%) in the 26-35 age range and 83 people (21.1%) in the 36 or above age range. Of the participants, 74 (18.8%) have a high school degree, 120 (30.5%) have associated degrees, 147 (37.4%) undergraduate degrees and 52 (13.2%) have a graduate degree. The tasks of the participants were classified under four titles. Of the participants, 202 (51.4%) were administrative personnel, 135 (34.4%) were health personnel, 16 (4.1%) were physicians and 40 (10.2%) were technical or support staff. Of the participants, 295 (75.1%) have a working time of 5 years or less, 61 (15.5%) have a working time of 6 to 10 years and 37 (9.4%) have a working time of 11 years and more.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics

Variables	n	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Emotional Deprivation	393	2.26	0.71	0.51	0.13
Social Companionship	393	2.25	0.73	0.70	0.69
Loneliness in the Workplace	**393**	**2.25**	**0.67**	**0.63**	**0.51**
Employees' Job Performance	**393**	**4.07**	**0.54**	**-0.40**	**1.02**

M= Mean, SD= Std. Deviation

According to Table 3, the level of loneliness of the participants regarding the emotional deprivation *(M= 2.26, SD=0.71)* and social companionship *(M= 2.25, SD=0.73)* dimensions as well as loneliness in the workplace in general *(M= 2.25, SD=0.67)* was found to below. Also, according to the Table, the participants' job performance *(M=4.07, SD=0.54)* was found to be high.

Table 4. The Relationship Between Loneliness in the Workplace and the Employees' Job Performance

Variables	1	2
(1) Emotional Deprivation		
(2) Social Companionship	.731**	
Employees' Job Performance	**-.422****	**-.482****

**p<0.01

According to the results of the correlation analysis in Table 4, there is a statistically significant relationship between all dimensions of loneliness in the workplace and the employees' job performance (p<0.01). According to the correlation coefficients, there is a negative and moderate relationship between the employees' job performance and the dimensions of emotional deprivation *(r = -0.422)* and social companionship *(r = -0.482)*.

Table 5. Effect of Loneliness in the Workplace on Employees' Job Performance

Independent Variables	β	t	p	Tolerance	VIF
Constant		59.48	0.00		
Emotional Deprivation	-0.15	-2.31	0.02	0.46	2.15
Social Companionship	-0.37	-5.77	0.00	0.46	2.15
	F=62.46 p=0.00 R^2= 0.243				

Dependent Variable: Employees' Job Performance

According to the results of the regression analysis shown in Table 5, both the emotional deprivation dimension *(β=-0.15, p<0.05)* and the social companionship dimension *(β=-0.37, p<0.05)* have a negative effect on the employees' job performance. It was determined that 24.3% of the change in the employees' job performance was explained by the loneliness in the workplace (R^2=0.243). The results of this study indicate that loneliness in the workplace is a determinant of the employees' job performance.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

When the study was completed, the loneliness levels of the participants in the workplace were found to be generally low *(M= 2.25, SD=0.67)*. Findings of a similar study conducted by Amarat et al. [44] for hospital employees support this result as well. The findings of the studies conducted for non-health sectors also support this result [3-13]. Because the health sector is a labor-intensive, functional commitment among the employees, teamwork is necessary, the quality of the relations and communication among the employees of the sector is of great importance for the successful delivery of medical services. The loneliness of hospital employees in the workplace may cause problems in relations and communication between employees. This may adversely affect the quality and quantity of health services, and consequently affect patients, employees, hospitals, and society. Therefore, a low degree of loneliness in the workplace is desirable for hospitals.

Another result of the study is that the job performances are high according to the participants *(M=4.07, SD=0.54)*. The findings of similar studies conducted for the health sector support this result [45-46-47]. The high job performance of employees is desirable for labor-intensive hospitals. The high job performance of the employees in the hospitals improves the quality of health services, ensures patient satisfaction, improves the performance of the institution and ensures the competitive advantage and its continuity.

Through this study, it was aimed to reveal the effect of loneliness in the workplace on the employees' job performance in terms of private hospitals. Two study hypotheses have been developed for this purpose. According to the results of the analysis made to test hypotheses, it was found that there is a statistically significant, negative and moderate relationship between all dimensions of loneliness in the workplace and the employees' job performance (Table 4). Also, it was found that all dimensions of loneliness in the workplace negatively affect the job performance of employees. (Table 5). According to these results, both H1 and H2 hypotheses were accepted. The findings of similar studies for hospital employees support these results as well [44-48].

The results of this study indicate that loneliness in the workplace is a determinant for the employees' job performance According to the results of the study; hospital management is suggested to carry out some studies to ensure that employees do not experience loneliness in the workplace and to improve their job performance. In order to ensure that employees do not experience loneliness in the workplace, the hospital managements are recommended within this scope to take into consideration the social and family lives of employees, to strength the communication and cooperation between employees, to organize social activities and provide employee participation in these activities, to provide psychological support to employees when necessary, to ensure good time during breaks and to be fair in working conditions and and organizational practices. Periodical measurement of the employees' job performance, carrying out the necessary works to remove the factors that negatively affect the

employees' job performance, creating a healthy working environment, providing an effective reward mechanism, promotions, ensuring the organizational justice, creating an organizational culture that will encourage the performance improvement of employees and implementing methods and activities to improve the performance of employees are further recommended.

Although it is a limitation that this study was conducted with less number of employees, it is important to reveal the effect of loneliness in the workplace on the employees' job performance and the relationship between these variables in terms of private hospitals. It is considered that it would be beneficial to conduct similar studies with more employees and by including employees in public hospitals.

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