

MOBBING AMONG EMPLOYEES IN BURSA, TURKEY: A CROSS-SECTIONAL SURVEY STUDY

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Özet

Türkiye, Bursa şehrindeki çalışan grubu örnekleminde raporlanan mobbing sıklığının ve mobbing olaylarının çalışanların sosyodemografik değişkenleri ve çalışma ortamı faktörleri ile bağlantısı değerlendirilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mobbing, İşyeri, Mesleki Ruh Sağlığı, Olumsuz Olaylar Ölçeği

Abstract

Aim: To assess the frequency of reported mobbing and the association of mobbing with employees' sociodemographic variables and working environment factors in a sample of employees in city of Bursa, Turkey.

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Method: We conducted a questionnaire survey using a validated self-reported questionnaire. This survey involved 192 employees in three companies, operating in different economic sectors located in the city of Bursa, Turkey. Two questionnaires were administered to the workers. Firstly, a semistructured questionnaire evaluated the employees' sociodemographic variables and working status. Secondly, the Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R) which is a standardized questionnaire evaluated mobbing and covered five major categories of mobbing behavior.

Results: On the basis of the given definition of the workplace bullying, the overwhelming majority (88.7%) of the employees participating in the research labeled themselves as victims of bullying at the workplace in the last 6 months. The most frequent types of mobbing behavior were intimidating behaviors such as finger-pointing, invasion of personal space, shoving, blocking/barring the way (84.5%) and being the subject of excessive teasing and sarcasm (80.3%). Reports of bullying did not vary by job status, educational status, marital status, occupational status, gender or age.

Conclusion: This study showed that around 88% of the population studied had been exposed to mobbing behavior within the last 6 months. This study also found that some economic activities would be at elevated risk for mobbing. We suggest that it is important to prevent the development of mobbing behaviors in the workplace in order to prevent the development of psychological problems that may lead to negative individual and organizational outcome.

Keywords: Mobbing, Workplace, Occupational Mental Health, Negative Acts Questionnaire

Introduction

In the last twenty years, there is an increasing interest about psychological and physical violence at the workplaces. Workplace mobbing (workplace bullying) is repetitive, unreasonable malicious behavior directed towards an employee or a group of employees, that creates risk to health and safety (Godin, 2004; Einarsen, 2000; Tinaz, 2006). It is known that good health means good work ability (European Agency for Safety and Health, 2002). Mobbing may present itself as behavior, words, acts, gestures, or writings that affect personality, dignity, physical, or psychological integrity (Godin, 2004; Houtman et al., 1999). The costs of psychological workplace violence are very high at all levels; individual, for the implication of violence for health and quality of life as well as organizational, for the increase of absenteeism, turnover and health care demands and claims (Godin, 2004; European Agency for Safety and Health, 2002). European Parliament, besides an increasing number of countries, has legislated to cut down on and prevent these occurrences (European Parliament, 2001a; Perimäki-Dietrich, 2002; European Parliament, 2001b).

Mobbing is mostly caused by deterioration in interpersonal relations and organizational dysfunction. It is characterized by repeated and enduring negative acts, and creates an atmosphere where communication becomes hostile, immoral, and unethical (Field, 2002). Employees' interactions with their supervisors, on whom they may be highly dependent for resources and rewards, can be important for well-being. A high level of justice in managerial treatment has been related to increased employee motivation and cooperation and decreased levels of psychological distress, negative emotions, and sickness absence (Kivimäki et al., 2005). However mobbing presents considerable methodological problems for research. The main approach is descriptive, epidemiological, and based on self reports. The wide variations observed across surveys and/or places is probably the expression of the difficulty in measuring bullying, and moreover, of the different interpretations from one context to another

one (Godin, 2004). More research is needed to validate instruments that measure mobbing.

Mobbing in the workplace seems to be an increasing phenomenon in Europe (Leymann, 1990; Godin, 2004). However self-reported mobbing shows wide variations across nations (Paoli and Merllie, 2001). The highest prevalence rates are found in services sector and in public health, social services and education. In the European states prevalence varies between 2% and 15%, women are more affected than man (Weber, Hörmann and Köllner, 2007).

According to the recent studies mobbing in the workplace seems to be an increasing phenomenon in Turkey (Tinaz, 2006; Solmus, 2005). However, mobbing as emotional harassment has not yet been recognized in Turkish workplaces as a cause for legal action. Consequently, there is no legislation covering psychological or emotional hazards in Turkish working life (Yuceturk and Oke, 2005). In Turkey, a major organizational restructuring (privatization, mergers, etc), as well as the introduction of new types of jobs, has contributed to turn mobbing from an occasional phenomenon into a social problem about which everyone is concerned (Solmus, 2005; Tinaz, 2006). Until today, no data had been available in Turkey to evaluate the prevalence of mobbing in the general working population and to examine the prevalence across economic activities and occupations. Identifying the high-risk activities and occupations for mobbing would help to prevent it at the workplace. Therefore we aimed to assess the extent and the types of self-reported mobbing and to explore the variation of the prevalence according to economic activities and occupations in three different Turkish workplaces.

Materials and methods

The data were collected between October and December 2007. A sample of employees from the textile, machine and automotive sectors was evaluated. The participation in the study was voluntary. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards laid down by the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical

Association, 1989). The ethical approval for this research was obtained from the appropriate research committee at the Uludag University. Informed consent was obtained from all participants in the study.

The participants were recruited from three workplaces belonging to three different companies, all located in the city of Bursa, western part of Turkey: One from each of the textile, machine and automotive sectors. The demographic data of the respondents are presented in Table 1.

Guidelines for inclusion into the study were the following: (i) The workplaces should preferably have around 100 employees to ensure that our requests of participation would generate a reasonably large number of responding participants at each workplace, (ii) a variety of branches should be represented. In order to be included in the survey, employees had to have worked for at least 3 months in their company.

An anonymous questionnaire was administered to all employees who were present on the evaluation days in the companies covered in the study. The first questionnaire collected information about the participants' age, sex, marital status, educational status, economical activity of company and occupations on the day of the survey. Occupations were coded using the Turkish classification of occupations (TCS), these codes corresponds roughly to the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) (Ganzeboom and Treiman, 1996). Participants completed a Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ) which asked whether they had experienced any of the 21 bullying behaviors from peers, senior staff, or managers in the past 6 months.

Questionnaires

Semistructured Sociodemographic Questionnaire

This anonymous questionnaire evaluated the employees' sociodemographic variables and working status. Demographic data consisted of age, gender,

educational status and marital status of employees; work-related information consisted of job sector, working hours, shifts including night shifts and job title of employees.

Mobbing Questionnaire: The Negative Acts Questionnaire—Revised (NAQ-R)

NAQ-R was used to measure perceived exposure to specific negative acts at the workplace. NAQ-R consists of 22 items formulated in behavioral terms, describing different kinds of aggressive behaviors typical for bullying (Nielsen and Einarsen 2007; Einarsen and Raknes, 1997; Hoel et al., 2001). The NAQ-R contains items referring to both direct (e.g., openly attacking the victim) and indirect (social isolation, slander) aggressive behaviors. It also contains two subscales referring to person related forms of aggression (13 items) as well as work-related forms of aggression (nine items). For each item the respondents were asked how often they had been exposed to the behavior at present workplace during the last 6 months. Response categories were coded from 1 to 5 with the alternatives "never", "now and then", "monthly", "weekly" and "daily". The Cronbach's alpha of NAQ was found to be 0.86, indicating a high internal stability (Nielsen and Einarsen 2007). In the present study, the Turkish translation of the NAQ-R was used. The good reliability and discriminative validity of the NAQ-R were confirmed for the Turkish translation in the normative sample (Atik et al., 2007).

Statistical analysis

Descriptive statistics were computed as frequencies. We used χ^2 test to assess the relationships between gender and age groups, educational status, marital status, economic activity and occupational status. The relation between NAQ questions and demographic variables was assessed by using χ^2 test. A P value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant. Statistical analyses were performed with Statistical Package for Social Sciences 11.5. (SPSS, Inc., Chicago, IL, USA).

Results

Of the 192 employees, 159 returned the completed questionnaires; the overall response rate was 82.8%. Six employees (3.7%) were excluded from the analysis because they had worked for less than 3 months in their company, and there were 12 (7.5%) inadequately completed questionnaires. Thus, the study was based on 141 employees, 81 men and 60 women, who had a mean age of 33.9 years (standard deviation 10.3), (age range, 18–71). Forty-three employees (30.5%) worked in automotive sector (mean age of 31.7 ± 10.5), 35 (24.8%) employees worked in machine industry (mean age of 33.6 ± 8.8) and 63 (44.7%) employees worked in textile industry (mean age of 35.6 ± 10.6) (Table 1). There was no significant difference in mean age between three economic activity groups ($p=0.151$).

Six percent (9%) of the participants were professional or managerial staff, 19% (27) white-collar employees, 47% (67) blue-collar employees, and 26% (38) other group employees. One hundred and twenty one (85.2%) employees worked on a full time basis (8 hours a day); 94 (66.2%) worked on shifts, including night shifts. Most respondents ($n = 100$) were single and/or separated/divorced/widowed (Table 1).

Significant differences were found with regard to education. There was a statistically significant relationship between economic activity and educational status of employees and gender. Women employees' educational status was lower compared to male employees' ($p=0.001$). Women employees' number was higher than male employees in automotive industry and number of male employees was higher than women employees in textile industry ($p=0.0001$). No significant difference was found with regards to age, marital and occupational status between men and women (Table 1).

Findings on respondents' experience of exposure to interpersonal aggression at work are displayed in Table 2. On the basis of the given definition of workplace

bullying, the overwhelming majority (88.7%) of the employees participating in the research labeled themselves as victims of bullying at the workplace in the last 6 months. Most respondents reported one or more types of mobbing behavior. The most frequent types of mobbing behavior were intimidating behavior such as finger-pointing, invasion of personal space, shoving, blocking/barring the way (84.5%) and being the subject of excessive teasing and sarcasm (80.3%). Pressure not to claim something which employees are entitled to (e.g. sick leave, holiday entitlement, travel expenses) (79.6%), insulting or offensive remarks (76.1%), allegations against employees (76.1%), exposing to an unmanageable workload (71.8%), practical jokes (71.1%) and hints or signals from others that employees should quit their job (70.4%) were the most frequently reported forms of remaining categories of mobbing behavior (Table 2).

The respondents who are exposed to the mobbing came from all companies. Reports of bullying did not vary by job status, educational status, marital status, gender or age. In textile industry the rate of "never" responses for "Being humiliated to do work below your level of competence" is lower than other groups ($p=0.015$). In automotive sector who gave "never" responses of "Having insulting or offensive remarks made about your person (i.e. habits and background), your attitudes or your private life" are higher than other groups ($p=0.001$). It is found that the rate of "never" response for "Intimidating behavior such as finger-pointing, invasion of personal space, shoving, blocking/barring the way" is lower at textile industry than other groups ($p=0.004$). The rate of "never" response for "Being ignored or facing a hostile reaction when you approach" is higher at automotive industry than other groups ($p=0.0001$). The rate of "never" response for "Having allegations made against you" is lower at textile industry than other groups ($p=0.002$). The rate of "never" response to "Pressure not to claim something which by right you are entitled to (e.g. sick leave, holiday entitlement, travel expenses" is lower at textile industry than other groups ($p=0.003$).

Discussion

This cross-sectional study was conducted for the purpose of determining the mobbing behaviors encountered by three groups of employees in Turkey. In this study 88% of employees reported being bullied in the last 6 months and textile employees were more likely to be bullied than others.

In the European countries prevalence varies between 2% and 15%. Leymann (1996) found a 12 month prevalence of bullying of 3.5% in a representative sample of 2,400 employees of the Swedish working population. Workplace bullying has been estimated to affect up to 50% of the United Kingdom's workforce at some time in their working lives, with annual prevalence of up to 38%, and is becoming increasingly identified as a major occupational stressor (Rayner, 1997). Other studies provided prevalence estimates of bullying varying from 3 to 24% using other instruments (Einarsen, 2000). However, differences in instruments to measure bullying, in time period used to calculate prevalence estimates, and in population studied make comparisons between studies difficult.

Similar to our study Nielsen and Einarsen (2007) using NAQ-R compared a convenience sample comprising support-seeking targets of workplace bullying with a representative sample of Norwegian targets of bullying. All respondents' labeled themselves as victims of bullying in their study. A workplace survey study ($N = 2215$) by Matthiesen and Einarsen (2007), using NAQ-R revealed that 8% of the employees claim to be targets of bullying at work in Norway. Also Yildirim, Yildirim and Timucin (2007), studied mobbing behaviors encountered by nursing school teaching staff in Turkey and reported that a large percentage (91%) of the nursing school employees reported that they had encountered mobbing behaviors in the work and 17% that they had been directly exposed to mobbing in the workplace.

In present study there was no significant difference between women and men with respect to the prevalence of bullying consistent with study of Appelberg et al. (1991). However this finding is not consistent with a study of university employees by Bjorkvist et al. (1994) and also with a Germany study that found women are more

affected than man (Weber et al., 2007). In present study there was no significant difference between age groups with respect to the prevalence of bullying in Appelberg et al. (1991) were found more conflicts in the younger age-groups. These differences in the results of present study and above referred studies may be explained with the differences in the sample sizes, and regional background of the subjects.

According to our findings we did not found difference in mobbing behaviors between occupations. However mobbing behaviors of “Being humiliated to do work below your level of competence”, “Intimidating behavior such as finger-pointing, invasion of personal space, shoving, blocking/barring the way”, “Being ignored or facing a hostile reaction when you approach”, “Having allegations made against you” and “Pressure not to claim something which by right you are entitled to (e.g. sick leave, holiday entitlement, travel expenses” were lower in employees of textile industry than other groups. Regarding differences in bullying prevalence between occupations and activities, two studies, American and British, did not find any differences between occupations or organizational status (Cole et al. 1997; Hoel et al. 2001). Another study by Mikkelsen and Einarsen (2001) also showed that the four organizations studied (two hospitals, a manufacturing company, and a department store) did not differ considerably from one another with respect to the prevalence of bullying. The Norwegian study by Einarsen and Skogstad (1996) showed that among 14 organizations, industrial workers, graphical workers, and hotel and restaurant workers had a higher prevalence of bullying. Appelberg et al. (1991) observed that white collar workers reported significantly more interpersonal conflicts at work than blue collar workers in both genders in Finland. Salin (2001) also found differences between occupational categories, as clerks and officials were more likely to be exposed to bullying than employees in managerial and expert positions in Finland.

Some explanations may be assumed to understand the differences in bullying prevalence between economic activities and occupations. Risk factors for bullying may be found in the psychosocial work environment and organizational climate (Cole et al. 1997; Einarsen, 2000), these risk factors being unequally distributed

amongst economic activities and occupations. Furthermore, various economic activities may be exposed to major organizational changes such as restructuring and downsizing, which may be prone to bullying (Salin 2001; Baron and Neuman 1996), such changes being also found to be associated with changes in psychosocial work exposures (Kivimaki et al. 2000).

Some caution must be exercised in the interpretation of the results from this study. Given that the data were cross-sectional, strictly speaking, we cannot draw conclusions about causal relationships. The study relied on self reports of bullying, and a higher response rate would have been desirable. This study attempted to determine the prevalence of workplace mobbing within a certain past period of time. Employees were asked about their memory of being mobbed in the previous 6 months, thus the estimated prevalence would have been subjected to recall bias (Nielsen and Einarsen, 2007). Despite the inclusion of a range of definitions for different types of workplace mobbing that attempts to be objective, subjective interpretation cannot be avoided. It is also possible that employees who returned the questionnaires were more likely to have been victims of workplace mobbing. A lot of economic activities were not included in the survey. Furthermore, as the survey took place in the western part of Turkey, its results may not be generalized at the national level.

Conclusion

This study revealed that around 88% of the population studied, and more women than men, had been exposed to mobbing within the last 6 months. These findings suggest that disturbingly high levels of mobbing and mistreatment exist in these workplaces. This study also found that some economic activities would be at elevated risk for mobbing. There is a need to heighten the awareness about the problem among employees, managers and the general public and to carry out further studies in this area in order to identify the problem with its all dimensions and establish measures to prevent mobbing behavior and associated problems in the workplaces.

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Table 1. Characteristics of 141 employees surveyed for mobbing

Characteristics of subjects	No. of respondents (n = 141)			P*
	total	men	women	
Age group (years):				
18-35	47 (58%)	34 (56.7%)	81 (57.4%)	0.965
36-45	24 (29.6%)	19 (31.7%)	43 (30.5%)	
>46	10 (12.3%)	7 (11.7%)	17 (12.1%)	
Marital status:				
married or cohabiting	21 (25.9%)	20 (33.3%)	41 (29.1%)	0.213
single	52 (64.2%)	30 (50%)	82 (58.2%)	
separated/divorced/widowed	8 (9.9%)	10 (16.7%)	18 (12.8%)	
Educational status:				
< 8 years	29 (35.8%)	38 (63.3%)	67 (47.5%)	0.001
8-12 years	42 (51.9%)	12 (20%)	54 (38.3%)	
>12	10 (12.3%)	10 (16.7%)	20 (14.2%)	
Occupational status				
professional staff	5 (6.2%)	4 (6.6%)	9 (6.3)	0.942
white collar	22 (27.5%)	20 (33.3%)	43 (30.4%)	
blue collar	53 (66.2%)	36 (60%)	89 (63.1%)	
Economic activities				
automotive sector (a)	6 (7.4%)	37 (61.7%)	43 (30.5%)	0.0001
machine industry (b)	26 (32.1%)	9 (15%)	35 (24.8%)	
textile industry (c)	49 (60.5%)	14 (23.3%)	63 (44.7%)	

* χ^2 test.

Table 2. Self-reported aspects of mobbing among 141 employees who reported to have experienced mobbing

Mobbing behavior	Never		Now and then		Monthly		Weekly		Daily	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1-Someone withholding information which affects your performance	89	62,7	32	22,5	12	8,5	5	3,5	4	2,8
2-Being humiliated to do work below your level of competence	95	66,9	27	19,0	11	7,7	6	4,2	3	2,1
3-Being ordered to do work below your level of competence	75	52,8	45	31,7	12	8,5	8	5,6	2	1,4
4-Having key areas of responsibility removed or replaced with more trivial or unpleasant tasks	88	62,0	34	23,9	8	5,6	7	4,9	5	3,5
5-Spreading of gossip and rumors about you	99	69,7	25	17,6	10	7,0	4	2,8	4	2,8
6-Being ignored, excluded or being 'sent to Coventry'	96	67,6	27	19,0	9	6,3	5	3,5	5	3,5
7-Having insulting or offensive remarks made about your person (i.e. habits and background), your attitudes or your private life	108	76,1	18	12,7	11	7,7	3	2,1	2	1,4
8-Being shouted at or being the target of spontaneous anger (or rage)	77	54,2	40	28,2	13	9,2	7	4,9	5	3,5
9-Intimidating behavior such as finger-pointing, invasion of personal space, shoving, blocking/barring the way	120	84,5	7	4,9	7	4,9	5	3,5	3	2,1
10-Hints or signals from others that you should quit your job	100	70,4	26	18,3	7	4,9	7	4,9	2	1,4
11-Repeated reminders of your errors or mistakes	78	54,9	42	29,6	15	10,6	4	2,8	3	2,1
12-Being ignored or facing a hostile reaction when you approach	93	65,5	28	19,7	13	9,2	6	4,2	2	1,4
13-Persistent criticism of your work and effort	87	61,3	35	24,6	10	7,0	6	4,2	4	2,8
14-Having your opinions and views ignored	71	50,0	42	29,6	20	14,1	4	2,8	5	3,5
15-Practical jokes carried out by people you don't get on with	101	71,1	23	16,2	11	7,7	6	4,2	1	,7
16-Being given tasks with unreasonable or impossible targets or deadlines	85	59,9	41	28,9	7	4,9	8	5,6	1	,7
17-Having allegations made against you	108	76,1	17	12,0	8	5,6	4	2,8	5	3,5
18-Excessive monitoring of your work	65	45,8	52	36,6	9	6,3	4	2,8	12	8,5
19-Pressure not to claim something which by right you are entitled to (e.g. sick leave, holiday entitlement, travel expenses)	113	79,6	16	11,3	5	3,5	4	2,8	4	2,8

20-Being the subject of excessive teasing and sarcasm	114	80,3	12	8,5	7	4,9	6	4,2	3	2,1
21-Being exposed to an unmanageable workload	102	71,8	22	15,5	11	7,7	4	2,8	3	2,1
22-Have you been bullied at work?	126	88,7	7	4,9	5	3,5	1	,7	3	2,1