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Workplace Violence Against Police Officers and The Effect of Workplace Violence on Mental Health

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ABSTRACT

Aim: The aim of the research is to reveal the prevalence of violence against police officers and to examine the effect of being subjected to violence on their mental health.

Methods: The sample of the research consists of 339 police officers working in different duty areas. Questionnaire technique was used to collect data in the study. The questionnaire form consists of two parts. In the first part of the questionnaire, there are questions to determine the demographic characteristics of the participants (age, gender, marital status, education level, working year, etc.). In the second part of the questionnaire, there are questions to measure workplace violence and the Depression-Anxiety-Stress Scale. SPSS 23.0 package program was used in the analysis of the research data. Frequency distribution, descriptive statistics and t-test were used in the analysis of the data.

Results: In the current study, it has been determined that 39.2% of police officers have been exposed to at least one type of workplace violence in the last 1 year. It was observed that the most common type of violence was verbal violence (28.9%). The results show that exposure to workplace violence negatively affects the stress and depression levels of police officers.

Conclusion: Research results show that workplace violence is an important risk factor for police officers. Being exposed to violence also negatively affects the mental health of police officers. These results show the importance of implementing policies to prevent violence against police officers.

Keywords: Police Officers, Workplace Violence, Stress, Depression And Anxiety

INTRODUCTION

Workplace violence, which is one of the concepts that is difficult to define¹, is expressed as any action or event aimed at causing physical or psychological harm to the employee². These violent behaviors are physical attacks, threats, abuse, mobbing/bullying, harassment, etc. and other forms of discrimination and oppression occurring within the boundaries of the workplace.

Workplace violence is recognized as one of the main occupational hazards that causes many negative consequences on victims and organizations³. Workplace violence has many negative effects on the health and safety of employees^{4,5}. Studies show that workplace violence causes mental health problems such as depression, anxiety and stress^{6,7,8} and burnout⁹. It is seen that skeletal injuries⁷ decrease job satisfaction and increase intention to leave the organization¹⁰ and decrease job performance¹¹.

On the other hand, due to its highly dynamic nature and composition, it is difficult to say that there is a universal consensus about the causes of violence in the workplace³. Studies on the predictors of workplace violence include situational and environmental (interpersonal conflict, perceived injustice, etc.) and personal factors (anger, history of aggression, self-confidence, negative mood, gender, alcohol use, etc.) shows that it is effective in workplace violence^{4,12}. In addition, studies show that the work and profession are very effective in being a victim and being exposed to violence¹³. In particular, health workers^{14,15} teachers¹⁶; social workers¹⁷ and customer service workers¹⁸ seem to be at high risk of being exposed to violence.

In addition, studies show that workplace violence is common in professions that provide public security such as private security workers, police, guards and soldiers^{4,8,19,20}. Police officers, in particular, are those charged with dealing with or dealing with violent people and situations²¹. However, although there are many studies on violence perpetrated by police officers^{22,23,24}, studies on workplace violence against police officers seem to be limited^{17,21,25}. In these studies, violence against police officers is mobbing/bullying²⁶, physical violence^{25,27}, sexual harassment²⁸.

On the other hand, studies show that police officers are at high risk of being exposed to violence. In the study of Leino (2013), it was determined that 67% of the police officers on patrol were verbally attacked and 44% physically attacked in the last month²⁹. Lawrence et al. (2018) found that 25% of police officers in Australia were subjected to physical assault³⁰. In addition, studies show that 260.8 out of every 1000 police officers are at risk of violence³¹.

Exposure to violence is likely to have adverse effects on the mental health of police officers, but the number of studies on this issue appears to be limited. For example, in the study conducted by Leino (2013), it is seen that exposure to unarmed physical violence and the anxiety of being exposed to violence have an effect on the psychological distress level of police officers²⁹. In this context, the aim of the research is to reveal the prevalence of violence that police officers are exposed to and to examine the effect of being subjected to violence on their mental health (stress, depression and anxiety).

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Participants: The sample of the research consists of 339 police officers working in different duty areas. The prepared questionnaire was applied to the volunteer participants by the researchers. Questionnaire forms distributed in sealed envelopes were collected back on the same day. Out of 400 distributed questionnaires, 350 were returned (return rate: 87.5%) and 11 questionnaires were excluded from the evaluation because they contained missing data. The age of the participants ranged from 23 to 53 years old (Mean=36.83 SD=5.20), with an average working year of 13.62 (SD=4.90).

Data Collection Tools: Questionnaire technique was used to collect data in the study. The questionnaire form consists of two parts. In the first part of the questionnaire, there are questions to determine the demographic characteristics of the participants (age, gender, marital status, education level, working year, etc.). In the second part of the questionnaire, there are questions to measure workplace violence and the Depression-Anxiety-Stress Scale.

The Workplace Violence Questionnaire, which was adapted into Turkish by Aytac et al. (2011), prepared by the World Health Organization and the International Labor Organization, was used to measure the workplace violence that the participants were exposed to⁶. The questionnaire measures whether the participants have been exposed to physical violence, mobbing and verbal violence in the last 1 year. Participants give their answers by choosing one of the options as "yes", "no" or "I don't know".

The DAS (Depression-Anxiety-Stress) Scale was developed by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995) and adapted into Turkish by Uncu, Bayram and Bilgel (2006) to measure the depression, anxiety and stress levels of the participants³². Consisting of 42 mood statements (within the last week), the scale measures depression, anxiety and stress symptoms. Each of the symptoms

in the scale is measured with fourteen items. Employees respond to the sentences about mood using four categories ranging from “never” to “always”.

Data Analyses: The study data were analyzed using the SPSS 23 package program; data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and t-test. The level of statistical significance was taken as $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the distribution of the participants according to their demographic characteristics.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	Category	N	%
Gender	Male	313	92.3
	Female	26	7.7
Marital Status	Married	313	92.3
	Single	26	7.7
Age	18-30	28	8.3
	31-40	241	71.1
	41 and above	70	20.7
Education Level	Middle School	7	2.1
	High Cschool	116	34.2
	Universite	216	63.7
Working Year	0-5	21	6.2
	6-10	54	15.9
	11 -15	182	53.7
	16 and above	82	24.2

According to Table 1, 92.3% of the participants are male and married. Looking at the age distribution of the participants, it is seen that 71.1% of them are between the ages of 31-40. In addition, while 63.7% of the participants are university graduates, 34.2% are high school graduates. Finally, when we look at the working years of the participants, it is seen that 53.7% of them have a working year of 11-15 years.

The extent to which the participants were exposed to any workplace violence and the distribution of the types of violence they were exposed to are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Exposure to Violence and Types of Violence in the Last 1 Year

Types of Violence	Exposed to Violence	Not Exposed to Violence
Physical violence	71(%20.9)	268 (%79.1)
Mobbing	72(%21.2)	267(%78.8)
Verbal violence	98 (%28.9)	241(%71.1)
Any of the types of violence	133(%39.2)	206 (%60.8)

According to Table 2, 39.2% of police officers have been exposed to at least one type of workplace violence in the last 1 year. Considering the distribution of the types of violence exposed, verbal violence (28.9%) comes first. This type of violence is followed by mobbing (21.2%) and physical violence (20.9%), respectively.

Table 3: The Effect of Violence on Police Officers' Stress, Depression and Anxiety Levels

Variables	Violence						t	p
	Exposed to Violence			Not Exposed to Violence				
	N	Mean	S.D	N	Mean	S.D		
Depression	133	1.69	.98	206	1.37	.79	-3.263	.001
Anxiety	133	1.83	1.18	206	1.63	1.04	-1.662	.097
Stress	133	1.58	.89	206	1.23	.65	-4.177	.000

($p < 0.05$); S.D: Standard deviation

The results regarding the effects of exposure to violence on the mental health of police officers are shown in Table 3.

According to Table 3, the depression and anxiety levels of police officers who were exposed to at least one type of violence were higher than those of police officers who were not exposed to violence. The difference between these two groups (exposed to violence and not exposed to violence) is statistically significant as well. ($p < 0.05$). On the other hand, although the anxiety levels of police officers who were exposed to violence (1.83) were higher than those of police officers who were not exposed to violence (1.63), no significant difference was found between the two groups ($p > 0.05$).

DISCUSSION

Workplace violence is an important workplace problem that negatively affects the health and safety of employees. Today, although there is a risk of exposure to workplace violence for employees of all professions, some occupational groups are at greater risk due to the nature of their work. Police officers are at the forefront of the groups at risk of being exposed to workplace violence.

In the current study, it has been determined that 39.2% of police officers have been exposed to at least one type of workplace violence in the last 1 year. It is seen that the most common type of violence is verbal violence (28.9%). On the other hand, the rate of physical violence against police officers is quite high at 20.9%. These results are very similar to other research results in the literature^{29,30}.

In addition, the effect of workplace violence on the mood of police officers was also examined in the present study. The results show that exposure to workplace violence negatively affects the stress and depression levels of police officers. It is a known fact that the work of police officers is a very stressful job due to its nature. Studies show that mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, stress, and post-traumatic stress disorder are common among police officers^{31,32,33}. However, it is seen that workplace violence increases this stress level even more.

CONCLUSION

Police officers are people tasked with dealing with or dealing with violent people and situations. Research results show that workplace violence is an important risk factor for police officers. Being exposed to violence also negatively affects the mental health of police officers. These results show the importance of implementing policies to prevent violence against police officers.

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