MOBBING, WORKPLACE INCIVILITY, AND WORK-RELATED STALKING: COMPARISON IN CONTENT AND EFFECTS

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Abstract

In recent years, rapid developments, progress, and change in technology have contributed positive outcomes to work-life but also reflected some problems. These problems include negative and harassing behaviors in the workplace. Among these behaviors, mobbing, workplace incivility, and work-related stalking behavior are often confused conceptually, and there is a lack of information at workplaces whether a negative behavior can be considered or classified as harassment or crime. It is observed that many employees who are exposed to negative behaviors at the workplace evaluate behaviors as mobbing even though it's not mobbing, or contrary, they fail to realize that they have become victims of mobbing since they consider the negative behaviors they have been exposed to as usual. This lack of information makes it difficult for employees to notice and analyze the physical and psychological results caused by these negative and harassing behaviors and to seek their rights accordingly. As descriptive research, based on the literature review, this study presents a conceptual explanation of three behaviors, discusses similarities and distinctive features between them. It is observed that the common feature of three behaviors is that both affect the physical and psychological health, quality of life, and efficiency of the target negatively and threatens professionalism at the workplace. The effects of the behaviors are problems such as job stress, an increase in intention to quit, a decrease in job satisfaction, difficulties in concentration on work that affect efficiency and productivity negatively. In addition, since the target may lose, quit the job, or be forced to seek new job opportunities, there may be financial losses. For this reason, it is concluded that it is essential and critical for all employees, especially managers and Human Resources departments to have and raise awareness to take necessary precautions and act by knowing the differences between behaviors.

Keywords: mobbing, workplace incivility, work-related stalking, negative behaviors at the workplace, violence at work.

MOBBİNG, İŞYERİ NEZAKETSİZLİĞİ, İŞYERİNDE STALKİNG: İÇERİK VE ETKİLERİ ÜZERİNE KARŞILAŞTIRMA

Özet

Son yıllarda yaşanan hızlı gelişmeler, teknolojik ilerleme ve değişim, iş hayatına çeşitli katkılar yanında bazı sorunlar da yansıtmıştır. Sorunlar arasında, işyerinde karşılaşılan olumsuz ve taciz edici davranışlar bulunmaktadır. Bu davranışlardan mobbing (işyerinde psikolojik taciz), işyeri nezaketsizliği ve işyerinde stalking (ısrarlı takip) davranışlarını inceleyerek, bu üç davranış arasındaki benzerlik ve farklılıklar üzerine yapılmış bir çalışmaya rastlanmamıştır. Bununla birlikte, karşılaşılan olumsuz davranışların, taciz olup olmadığı, suç teşkil edip etmediği konusunda iş hayatında bilgi eksikliği bulunmaktadır. Maruz kalınan davranışı mobbing olmamasına rağmen mobbing olarak değerlendiren veya tam tersi maruz kaldığı nezaketsiz davranışları olağan kabul edip mobbinge uğradığını fark etmeyen birçok çalışana rastlanmıştır. Taciz edici davranışlar ile sürecin mobbing veya stalking olup olmadığını tespit etme noktasında bilgi eksikliği izlenimi edinilmke. Bu çalışma, betimsel bir araştırma olup, literatür taraması yapılarak, iş hayatında karşılaşılan üç olumsuz ve taciz edici davranışın kavramsal olarak anlatımı, davranışların benzer ve ayırt edici özelliklerini

sunmaktadır. Üç davranışın ortak özelliği, hedef alınan kişinin fiziksel veya psikolojik olarak sağlığını, yaşam kalitesini ve etkinliğini olumsuz yönde etkilemesi, işyerinde profesyonelliği tehdit etmesidir. Davranışların sonucunda stres, ayrılma niyetinde artış, iş tatmininde düşüş, işe odaklanma problemleri gibi verimliliği ve üretkenliği olumsuz yönde etkileyen sonuçlar görülmektedir. Bu davranışlar hedef alınan kişinin iş kaybına, işten ayrılmasına, yeni iş olanakları aramak zorunda kalmasına yol açabilmekte olup maddi kayıplara neden olabildikleri söylenebilir. Bu nedenle, örgütlerde özellikle yöneticiler ve İnsan Kaynakları olmak üzere tüm çalışanların farkındalık ve bilgi sahibi olunmasının gerekli ve önemli olduğu, davranışlar arasındaki farkları bilerek gerekli önemlerin alınması ve harekete geçilmesi gerektiği düşünülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: mobbing, işyeri nezaketsizliği, işyerinde stalking, işyerinde olumsuz davranışlar, işyerinde şiddet.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, rapid developments, progress, and change in technology have contributed positive outcomes to work-life but also reflected some problems. These problems include negative, harassing behaviors and violence at the workplace.

International Labour Organization (2019) defines harassment and violence at work as "a range of unacceptable behaviors and practices, or threats thereof, whether a single occurrence or repeated, that aim at, result in, or are likely to result in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm, and includes gender-based violence and harassment". Therefore, workplace harassment or violence is not limited to physical harms, it is a broad concept including non-physical and psychological actions and practices.

According to Workplace Bullying Institute (2014), in a survey conducted with nearly 137 million employees in the United States, it was concluded that 27% of employees had experienced harassment at work, 21% witnessed harassment at work and 72% were aware of harassment at work. Similarly, an online survey conducted by Employment and Social Development Canada (2017) reported that harassment was the most common negative behavior at the workplace and 60% of respondents experienced it.

Besides affecting the wellbeing of employees and organizations negatively (Bowling and Beehr, 2006), causing physical and psychological problems, decrease in job performance and motivation (Tınaz, 2013), negative and harassing behaviors at workplace have financial costs to firms and societies caused by absenteeism, labor turnover, compensation, labor cases and other issues (ILO, 2018).

It is also observed that many employees who are exposed to negative behaviors or harassment at workplace evaluate behaviors as mobbing even though it's not mobbing, or contrary, they fail to realize that they have become victims of mobbing since they consider the negative behaviors they have been exposed to as usual. This lack of information makes it difficult for employees to notice and analyze the physical and psychological results caused by these negative and harassing behaviors and to seek their rights accordingly.

In literature, there is no study on the similarities and differences between mobbing, workplace incivility, and work-related stalking. As a descriptive research, based on the literature review, this study aims to give a conceptual explanation of three behaviors, discuss similarities and distinctive features between them. It would be essential and critical for all employees, especially managers and Human Resources departments to have and raise awareness to take necessary precautions and act by knowing the differences between behaviors.

2. MOBBING, WORKPLACE INCIVILITY, WORK-RELATED STALKING

Mobbing is used with different terms by researchers and academicians such as bullying at the workplace (Einarsen and Raknes, 1997), emotional assault in the workplace (Davenport, Schwartz, and Elliott, 2003). The term is first used by Heinz Leymann (Tetik, 2010) who provided recognition of the concept. Leymann (1990) defined the concept as a psychological terror in which usually one employee becoming vulnerable and helpless as a result of hostile and unethical behaviors that are directed toward him/ her by one or more employees at the workplace. The behaviors are applied in a systematic, frequently repeated manner within a certain period.

To define a hostile behavior at work as mobbing, the first criterion is that the behaviors should take place at the workplace, it begins when an employee becomes a target of hostile, annoying disrespectful behaviors (Tınaz, 2013). These behaviors must be repeated and continuous, it is a systematic process, not a one-time encountered situation (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, and Cooper, 2011). According to Leymann (1990), the frequency of exposure to negative behaviors is at least once a week lasting at least 6 months. Another distinctive feature of mobbing is the inequality of power between the perpetrator and the target which results in the target having an inability to cope with the situation or feeling helpless (Pelit and Pelit, 2014; Solmuş, 2008). Mobbing may include spreading rumors, verbal threats, abuse, criticism of abilities, forcing to obey opposing tasks, dismissal, giving little or no feedback, lying, hiding or not giving important information, leaving alone, making inappropriate jokes, humiliation (Zapf, 1999; Namie and Namie, 2000; Okutan and Sütütemiz, 2015). The perpetrator or mobber may be an individual, a group (Davenport, Schwartz, and Elliott, 1999) or it may come out as an organizational strategy (Tınaz, 2011).

The causes of mobbing can be various. According to Leymann (1990), four factors cause mobbing. These influential factors are deficiencies in work design, leadership, the vulnerability of victims and insufficient moral standards in the organization. Zapf (1999) grouped the causes into three as organizational (leadership, organizational culture, etc.), social group (hostility, envy, etc.) and individual factors (personality, social skills, etc.). Many researchers emphasize the individual factors of both perpetrator and victim. Narcissistic, paranoid, obsessive personality traits, search for pleasure caused by boredom, liking enmity (Davenport et al., 2003), aim to intimidate the victim or trying to dismiss the victim from work (Tınaz, 2013) are some of the factors included in perpetrator's personal factors. Low self-esteem, low social skills, superior characteristics, incompatibility to group norms (Zapf and Einersen, 2005) may be the factors that make the victim vulnerable.

The consequences of mobbing can be seen on both victim, victim's family, organization, and society (Tınaz 2013). Research shows victims experiencing physical and psychological problems, even dragging to suicide (Davenport et al., 2003). Losing a job, financial losses, negative mood, health problems may affect the family and close relationships of the victim (Akgeyik, Deren, and Uşen, 2013) and may also cause divorce (Tınaz, 2013). The decrease in productivity, motivation, organizational trust, commitment to work (Zapf, 1999; Seçkin, 2017), loss in reputation, increase in turnover, absenteeism has been shown as psychological and financial consequences on organizations in research. Due to a loss in productivity and efficiency, an increase in health expenses, insurances, and tendencies to early retirement have negative and indirect consequences on society (Tınaz, 2011; Mercanlıoğlu, 2010).

Workplace incivility was first introduced to literature by Andersson and Pearson in 1999 (Schilpzand, De Pater, and Erez, 2016) defined as "low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms

for mutual respect" (Andersson and Pearson, 1999). It is considered as a moderate form of negative behaviors that can act as a starting point to other violent actions at the workplace (Kanten, 2014). Porath and Pearson (2013) asserted that workplace incivility is common and rising, stated that 98% of the employees had faced uncivil behaviors in the workplace according to their research.

Behavioral examples would be "sending nasty and demeaning notes, giving colleagues the silent treatment, undermining a coworker's credibility, treating others as a child, taking credit for another's work, speaking condescendingly to others, avoiding to say "please" or "thank you", ignoring others" (Abid, Khan, Rafiq, and Ahmed, 2015), talking with a bad tone of voice, cursing, swearing, making provocative statements, listening to others' phone conversations (Kanten, 2014), dropping trash on the floor and leaving it for others crew to clean up, talking loudly on the phone about personal issues (Pearson, Andersson, and Porath, 2000).

With the increase in ambition, competition, stress, and overwork in business life, it is observed that the tendency to harm has increased in employees (Delen, 2010). In research by Pearson and Porath (2005), it is stated that employees claim that they have difficulty in finding time to be polite or nice. Individual and organizational factors can be influential on workplace incivility. Personality, gender, negative emotions, stress, anger, workload, change in working conditions, management style, leadership, informal work environment, organizational justice, conflict, organizational policies may be listed as causes (Baran, Karavelioğlu, and Ergun Özler, 2019; Öztürk, 2020; Işıkay, 2018).

Research shows that workplace incivility has both individual and organizational consequences. Pearson and Porath (2005) asserted that many organizations have difficulty in recognizing workplace incivility and deal with it. It has costs in subtle and pervasive ways. Individual consequences include a decrease in work effort, time on the job, concentration, productivity, increase in stress, anxiety, burnout, work-family conflict, sleeping problems (Abid et al., 2015; Kundu and Tuteja, 2020; Holm, Torkelson, and Backström, 2015). Increase in intention to leave work, job insecurity, decrease in job satisfaction, job performance, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship, sense of justice and formation of negative organizational culture can be listed as organizational consequences (Abid et al., 2015; Baran, Karavelioğlu, and Ergun Özler, 2019; Işıkay, 2018).

Stalking is defined as repeated and unwanted attempts to communicate or contact a person, (Mullen, Pathe, Purcell, and Stuart, 1999). These behaviors are intentional, may be disturbing, frightening, upsetting, or threatening, and against law (Robinson and Abrams, 2004), causing the victim feeling distressed and fear (Mullen et al., 1999) and affecting his/her well-being (Sheridan, North, and Scott, 2019). It can include behaviors that "if considered individually may seem inoffensive and not particularly threatening to the uninvolved observer" (Matthiesen and Einarsen, 2010). Work-related stalking may emerge as an extension of stalking in social life, or it can start at work (Robinson and Abrams, 2004). The target may be a colleague, co-worker (Pontus and Scherrer, 2011), superior, employer, any employee in a different profession such as a lawyer, healthcare professional (Robinson and Abrams, 2004), or an employee in another organization (Matthiesen and Einarsen, 2010). Research demonstrates that the duration of stalking may range from 4 weeks to 20 years (Mullen et al., 1999). In a study on work-related stalking, it was observed that 48.9% of victims had been exposed to work-related stalking behaviors for more than 2 years (Sheridan et al., 2019).

Work-related stalking may be grouped into two groups: on-the-job surveillance and on-the-job harassment (Sheridan et al., 2019). One of the striking examples in the

literature about a tourist bus driver in Norway. The driver was harassed by a female tourist with thousands of letters and phone calls for years. Despite many warnings, the harassment ended with the stalker imprisoning (Matthiesen and Einarsen, 2010). Some of the behavioral examples listed in a study by Sheridan et al. (2019) are "looking through the windows of the victim's workplace, numerous phone calls, watching, spying, following, harassment via social networking sites, phone calls, damage to possessions or property, stealing personal property, threatening to hurt, sexually assault and others, posting information about the victim on the internet".

The focus on the causes of work-related stalking is on the stalker's characteristics and perception (Bağ, 2012). Love, envy, anger, revenge, negative emotions, need for power, and control over another person come out as prevalent causes (Guldimann, Stieglitz, Meloy, Habermeyer, and Ermer, 2015). The trigger is usually a situation or conflict at the workplace between the stalker and the victim, it can also be resentment, admiration, intimacy seeking, or expectations from the victim (Purcell, Pathe, and Mullen, 2001). The outcomes are focused on the victim's psychological, behavioral, and work-related consequences such as a panic attack, fear, depression, decrease in energy, sleep problems, feeling of vulnerability, helplessness, changing the name, appearance, increase in absenteeism, resigning, dismissal or quitting the job because of the harassments of a stalker on the other employees or employers (Sheridan et al., 2019; Pathe and Mullen, 1997; Abrams and Robinson, 2002).

3. DISCUSSION

There are similarities and differences between mobbing, workplace incivility, and work-related stalking. Evaluation of similarities and distinctive features are discussed in terms of main features, parties, intent, environment, frequency, duration, severity, causes, and results. Table 1 demonstrates a brief comparison between three behaviors.

Table 1

Criteria	Mobbing	Workplace Incivility	Work-related Stalking
Target	Specific	Not specific	Not specific
Perpetrator	Individual / Group / Institutional	Individual	Individual
Requirement of working in the same organization	Required	Required	Not required
Intention	Intentional	Ambiguous	Intentional
Environment	Workplace	Workplace	Workplace and/or out of workplace
Observability	May / May not be observable	Observable	Observable
Frequency	Specified	Not specified	Not specified
Duration	Specified	Not specified	Not clear
Severity / Intensity	Severe / violent	Low	Severe / violent
Condition of power inequity	Required	Not required	Not required
Victimization	Existent	Nonexistent	Existent
Criminalization	Existent	Nonexistent	Existent

Note. Reprinted from *Negative and harassing behaviors at workplace*, by Madi (2020).

When the parties are examined, in both behaviors the parties are well defined. The terms to define parties in mobbing and work-related staking are "mobber, stalker, bully" and "victim". In workplace incivility, the parties are generally stated as "perpetrator" and "target". It can be interpreted that in mobbing and work-related

stalking, the terms are associated with a more severe, violent, damaging situation in which the "victim" is hurt, indefensible, or lost.

When the target and perpetrator are examined, in mobbing and work-related stalking, the target is specific, negative behaviors are exposed toward a specific individual, however in workplace incivility, the target may be ambiguous, the perpetrator may demonstrate rude behaviors towards everyone at work or exposed ones may differ in time. In terms or perpetrator, both of three behaviors are interpersonal, however, mobbing may come out as a corporate strategy or applied by a group of employees. Therefore, mobbing differs in the party of the perpetrator. Besides, it may be beneficial to note that workplace incivility has the risk of becoming an organizational culture, but the organization is not considered as a party. In mobbing and workplace incivility, there is another party which is observers or witnesses, in work-related stalking, a definition of the third party has not been mentioned.

The indispensable criterion of mobbing and workplace incivility is that the behaviors should take place at the workplace. In work-related stalking, the harassment may expend from the workplace and the stalker may be involved in the victim's personal life, threaten him/her at home in social life too. Therefore, it can be stated that work-related stalking has a wider influence area.

One of the features of mobbing is the inequality in power. This inequality may be due to the hierarchy between the mobber and victim, or the number of mobbers, differences in physical power, or traditional gender differences (Aşkın and Aşkın, 2018). In the other two behaviors, this feature does not exist, each employee has equal risk of being a perpetrator or target.

The focus of research in mobbing and work-related stalking is on the victim, perception of the victim, and consequences on the victim. Contrary, the focus of research in workplace incivility is on the perpetrator, perpetrator's behavior, and characteristics.

In mobbing and work-related stalking, research demonstrates that there are risky characteristics of victims that may make him/her vulnerable to be victimized. In workplace incivility, there is not a focus on the characteristics of the target which makes him/her open to be a target.

Research highlight the personality disorders or psychopathology of mobbers and stalkers. However, this issue is not much highlighted in workplace incivility, the focus is on the violation of social norms.

One of the salient distinctive features is the intention. The intention of harm or harassment is clear in mobbing and work-related stalking, however, in workplace incivility the target and intention are ambiguous. The most significant and distinctive part of the definition in workplace incivility is about ambiguity, the perpetrator may or may not be aware of his/her behavior, the behaviors may be deliberate or unconscious. The intention to harm, cause the target to quit job or alienate may or may not be found in workplace incivility, therefore it is critical not to define each uncivil behavior as hostile or malicious.

The behaviors of work-related stalking and workplace incivility are observable, they are direct, face-to-face actions and can be observed by others. Mobbing behaviors such as giving no feedback, hiding significant information may be passive and indirect, difficult to observe. Therefore, mobbing may or may not be observable.

Mobbing consists of repeated and systematic activities directed to a target. According to academicians and researchers, it should continue at least 6 months and at least one occurrence per week. Therefore, the frequency and duration are specified. In these criteria, mobbing differs from the other two behaviors.

When the severity is compared, mobbing and work-related stalking seem to include higher severity and intensity compared to workplace incivility. There is victimization, criminal acts, physical or sexual assaults or threats, and negative outcomes such as depression, suicidal attempts in mobbing, and work-related stalking. Mobbing is defined as psychological terror in which the harassing behaviors increase throughout time. In both mobbing and work-related stalking, one of the outcomes is the victim's feeling of vulnerability, helplessness, desperation, and the process can be ended at court. In contrast, workplace incivility is defined as low-intensity deviant behavior that doesn't end up at court with the target's vulnerable, helpless, or desperate situation.

When the causes are examined, both behaviors have influential individual factors such as the personality, characteristics, negative emotions of the perpetrator. In mobbing and workplace incivility, organizational factors such as managerial style, leadership, negative organizational culture come out as causes. In work-related stalking, there is a lack of focus on organizational factors that may cause or fail to manage the process and outcomes.

The consequences of both behaviors are negative. It can be concluded that mobbing and work-related stalking have serious physical, psychological, and financial costs on the victim. In contrast, the negative consequences of workplace incivility may not be interpreted at the same level as mobbing and work-related stalking. However, it may be critical to notice that workplace incivility may act as the inception of other negative, deviant, violent behaviors.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The common feature of the three behaviors is that the outcomes are negative in both. All three behaviors affect the target's physical and psychological health negatively, threaten professionalism at the workplace, and cause a loss in productivity and efficiency in the organization. The criteria in defining mobbing are clearer and the number is highest. There are similarities between the behaviors, therefore it is important to have information about the distinctive features to define and classify the behavior. This would be crucial in taking actions, managing the process, and seeking rights if necessary, accordingly.

It is suggested that all employees, especially managers and the Human Resources department should be aware of these negative and harassing behaviors. It is critical that the employees, the organization, and the managers have information about the destructive consequences and costs of these behaviors. Informative seminars, training, regular reminders with behavioral examples that can be sent via e-mail are recommended. The Code of ethics and construct should be reviewed and revised accordingly. It may also be effective to give informative seminars at universities to raise awareness among students who will be onboarded in business life soon.

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