



**THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN
BULLYING AND
MENTAL
DISORDERS AT THE
WORKPLACE
“FOCUSES ON
GENDER
DIFFERENCES”**

ABSTRACT

The subject of workplace bullying has become a topic of study for both academics and businesses with an increasing interest in today's world. Even though the concepts of bullying and mobbing are often used interchangeably, it is important to consider bullying and mobbing as separate concepts and to consider the main differences when evaluating the phenomenon of violence in the workplace. Gender differences and gender issues are important variables in terms of both bullying and work-related mental disorders. This work is a conceptual analysis prepared to understand the relationship between workplace bullying and mental disorders and the variables that affect this relationship. The relationship between bullying and mental disorders will be discussed in the focus on gender differences.

Keywords: workplace bullying, workplace mental health, gender, sex.

IIINTRODUCTION

According to Leymann, workplace bullying consists of hostile acts, coercion, psychological or physical abuse, and repeated and persistent attacks on the individual, work, and personal identity to exclude him or her from the workgroup. At the same time, it is defined as the situation where the person who has been subjected to negative treatment has difficulty in defending himself against these actions and is constantly exposed to negative actions from one or more people. Workplace bullying has been identified as a major occupational stressor, affecting around 5% to 30% of the European workforce. It should not be forgotten that bullying and all kinds of acts of violence have an organizational and individual effect on working life and can be defined as an important psychosocial risk factor. Various studies have been conducted on gender differences in work-related mental disorders, and gender focus appears to be an important variable, even if the main differences in terms of gender are not visible in these studies. Gender expresses the meaning that the culture, values, traditions, customs, beliefs, norms, and production structure of the society impose on women and men (Çaha and Yılmaz, 2016). Gender in the relationship between workplace bullying and mental disorders should be addressed with general life stressors.

The Relationship between Bullying and Mental Disorders

Since the 1960s, it has been revealed that organizational and managerial practices affect the mental health of employees and this effect differs from institution to institution. However, the concern about the well-being of employees has recently started to cause changes in management practices and occupational health and safety practices. Traditional approaches to occupational health and organizational psychology are being questioned by the new social and economic contexts that reveal the perspective of positive organizational behavior that supports the meaning of the profession and the well-being potential of people. The first studies in the field of psychological well-being and health changed direction from "how pre-existing mental disorders affect organizational productivity" to "understanding the positive and negative effects of work on human psychology". The endpoint of the nature of work with the increase of cultural diversity and technological developments brings the focus of research to "health and job satisfaction, performance management, organizational effectiveness, job insecurity and unemployment, presenteeism (the problem of absence at work), and absenteeism (work absenteeism)".

In addition, more importance has been given to the positive aspects of the mental health, health, and psychological well-being of the employees and the protection of the organizational factors that play a role in their development. From the ILO perspective, mental health protection at work is much more effective when focused on preventive strategies. Studies on occupational health and the importance of health in the workplace can contribute to reducing the risk of mental health disorders by supporting the mental health and psychological well-being of women and men in the workplace. To prevent work-related stress and work-related mental disorders, psychosocial risk assessment and occupational health practice through risk management are required. The most common psychological disorders in the workplace are depression, anxiety, stress, and post-traumatic stress.

Nolfe et al. (2014), states that the most common work-related psychiatric disorders observed regarding the psychopathological effects of work are depressive disorders, anxiety and adjustment disorders, as well as symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. In Nolfe et al.'s (2009) study, *The Relationship Between Bullying and Mental Disorders at Work: Gender Differences in the Italian People*, three aspects of the relationship between psychosocial stress at work and the onset of mental and psychosomatic disorders were discussed. These relationships are (a) the organizational characteristics of the business; (b) job insecurity and disadvantaged socioeconomic status; (c) refers to three main areas as interpersonal conflicts and ill-treatment (mobbing, workplace bullying).

Many studies have shown that workplace bullying has detrimental effects on the health and well-being of victims. Observed individual outcomes included psychosomatic and psychological symptoms such as social isolation, social maladjustment, low self-esteem, sleep problems, difficulty concentrating, chronic fatigue, depression, helplessness, anger, compulsions, anxiety, and hopelessness. In a Norwegian sample of blue-collar and white-collar workers, bullying alone explained 13% of the variance in psychological complaints, 6% of the variance in musculoskeletal problems, and 8% of the variance in psychosomatic health complaints. A widely reviewed meta-analysis of the consequences of being bullied showed robust evidence of the negative consequences of workplace bullying, for example, on mental health. Bullying in the workplace is a powerful psychosocial stressor.

Gender and Gender Differences

Hutchinson and Eveline (2010) argue that in most of the influential publications on bullying, the gender factor is either not discussed at all or they briefly state that bullying affects both men and women in approximately equal proportions, thus it is argued, either explicitly or implicitly, that gender is not a fundamental problem. Similarly, in the same study, policymakers and organization representatives evaluate bullying regardless of gender and claim that the "gender space" is already within the scope of sexual harassment policies. A number of studies investigating gender differences in bullying behavior have generally focused on gender differences in prevalence rates, preferred bullying tactics, and reported health effects. A study by Salin(2011) drew attention to these issues in bullying research.

Based on the case definitions of bullying, this study showed that the gender of the observer, the victim, and the perpetrator interact and influence whether a case is labeled as bullying. In addition, women expect more negative consequences for the organization, which shows that women see this as a more serious problem.

In the same study by Nolfé et al. (2014), data evaluated with standardized clinical and diagnostic criteria showed that depressive disorders were strongly associated with higher levels of bullying, regardless of gender, and in line with previous studies, our results showed that workplace bullying is a predictor of psychiatric disorders, revealed that it is more important among male employees than female employees. Considering adjustment disorders, significant gender differences were found. The study, which hypothesizes that adjustment disorders may have a multifactorial explanation among the female group, stated that various life events stressors play an important role in addition to workplace bullying. Gender differences are defined differently in male and female employees, and it is possible that this situation can be associated with gender roles.

Drawing attention to gender roles, the ILO has defined psychosocial hazards that may be more common and more specific in women as follows:

- Different/dual roles at work and home,
- The impact of gender roles and social expectations,
- Risk of sexual harassment or domestic violence at work,
- Gender-based discrimination with heavier work requirements for lower wages.

As can be seen from these definitions, gender-related general life stress factors and care burdens of women come to the fore in the evaluation of gender differences in the workplace.

DISCUSSION

Workplace bullying is an important risk factor for work-related mental disorders. Bullying can be the source or trigger of many work-related mental disorders. Anti-bullying policies to be created in the workplaces are an important factor that can be addressed within the scope of the health and well-being of the employees. Even though there are different research results in terms of gender-related factors, the issue of gender emerges as an important determinant of both work-related stress and mental disorders that may develop as a result of workplace bullying. In mental disorders caused by bullying, additional life stress factors seem to come to the fore among female employees. While we can clearly define the relationship between bullying and mental disorders, there is a need for large-scale and longitudinal studies to understand the effect of the gender variable.

There is a need for more work in this gender-focused field, as well as a re-evaluation of bullying and risk factors in today's society and up-to-date assessments on risk factors.

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