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A Study of the Prevalence and the Level of Alienation Among Emergency Service Healthcare Workers

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Abstract

Alienation is an emotional and social condition largely brought about by work life/working conditions. If a human being creating a specific value by its working activity/labour is forced to challenging, commoditizing working conditions, it is first alienated to its own labour, then to itself and its values (society) (the anomic condition). Previous works have commonly related alienation phenomenon primarily to work life/working conditions. When considered at an organizational level, alienation is considered to be brought about by both organizations and functional working conditions. This study was conducted using the survey method in the emergency departments of Başkent University Faculty of Medicine and Gazi University Faculty of Medicine after being approved by the local ethics committee. Emergency department workers (Physicians, nurses, emergency medical technicians) were asked to fill the questionnaire forms used for the study. The alienation scale used for the study was developed by Bayat (1996) and based on the theories and functional definitions of Johnson and Seaman. It is composed of 36 propositions and participants can score between 36 and 180 points. The categorical equivalents of these points are as follows: "0-36 points: no alienation; 36-72 points: low level of alienation; 73-109 points: moderate level of alienation; 110-156 points: high level of alienation; 157-180 points very high level of alienation." The study data were analyzed with SPSS 13.00 for Windows software package. Descriptive statistics were expressed as number, percentage, and mean. Categorical variables were compared with Chi-Square test. A p value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant. The study included a total of 148 subjects, with 102 (68.9%) subjects being male and 46 (31.1%) being female. The mean age of the study population was 27.7±6.06 years. Alienation level was low or moderate in nurses, high in EMTs, and moderate in physicians (p<0.001). The results of this study suggest that the prevalence and the level of alienation was relatively greater in physicians than other occupations. Alienation was mostly of moderate level in both public and private sector.

Keywords: Emergency department workers, Alienation, Performance

1.Introduction

Alienation is a concept that is a focus of extensive research and debate. It emerges as a condition that affects whole life starting from organizational life and results in adverse outcomes such as reduced work performance, as well as the sense of "meaningless of life" (1,2).

Alienation is a condition whereby a human being is forced to live in an inappropriate way for itself as a result of negativities and failures in its entire relationship spectrum (2).

It is a process that emerges as a result of a system functioning as a machine and that eliminates humane harmony, causing a human being to lose sensitivity to itself, other people, and its environment (3).

According to Marx, who perceptibly defined the alienation concept for the first time, alienation is an emotional and social condition largely brought about by work life/working conditions of a human being. A mechanical societal structure that functions as a machine and ignores the individual (labour relations system) is the primary cause and drive of alienation (2,3).

This study aimed to explore the prevalence and the level of the sense "alienation" in emergency department healthcare workers.

Materials and Method

This study was conducted using the survey method in the emergency departments of Başkent University Faculty of Medicine and Gazi University Faculty of Medicine after being approved by the local ethics committee. Emergency department workers (Physicians, nurses,

Emergency department workers (Physicians, nurses, emergency medical technicians) were asked to fill the questionnaire forms used for the study. The alienation scale used for the study was developed by Bayat (2) and based on the theories and functional definitions of Johnson and Seaman. It is composed of 36 propositions and participants can score between 36 and 180 points. The categorical equivalents of these points are as follows: “0-36 points: no alienation; 36-72 points: low level of alienation; 73-109 points: moderate level of alienation; 110-156 points: high level of alienation; 157-180 points very high level of alienation.” The study data were analyzed with SPSS 13.00 for Windows software package. Descriptive statistics were expressed as number, percentage, and mean. Categorical variables were compared with Chi-Square test. A p value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant. The equality of variances was tested by Levene’s test. Independent "t" test was used to compared the groups. A patients value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Results

The study included a total of 148 subjects, with 102 (68.9%) subjects being male and 46 (31.1%) being female. The mean age of the study population was 27.7±6.06 years. Alienation level by occupational groups were summarized on Table 1. According to the study results, there was no group without any level of alienation. In other words, all groups in the study population had varying levels of alienation.

Table 1: Level of Alienation

	n	Percentage
Low level of alienation	42	28.4
Moderate level of alienation	70	47.3
High level of alienation	30	20.3
Highest level of alienation	6	4.1
Total	148	100.0

The level of alienation of male emergency department workers was higher than that of female emergency department workers. (Table 2) (p<0,001). The level of alienation by occupational groups and sectors were summarized on Table 2.

Table 2: Alienation levels by gender and working sector

Variables	N	Mean±SD	t	p
Gender				
Female	46	76.78±25.8	-5.45	0.000
Male	102	95.54±30.6		
Sector				
Private Sector	74	96.32±28.4	3.81	0.000
Public Sector	74	83.10±31.0		

The level of alienation of the emergency medical technicians was higher than that of nurses (Table 3) (p<0.005). Table 3 summarizes alienation levels by occupations.

Table 3: Alienation levels by occupation

	N	Mean±SD	t	p
Nurse	68	77.12±23.6	3.45	0.001
EMT	64	95.53±37.2		
Physician	16	87.20±22.7	2.17	0.01
EMT	64	95.53±37.2		
Physician	16	87.20±22.7	15.7	0.12
Nurse	68	77.12±23.6		

EMT: Emergency medicine technician

Discussion

The results of this study strongly suggest the presence of alienation among the emergency department healthcare workers. Considering the personal and organizational consequences of alienation, the existence of the sense of alienation becomes remarkable. Our study results demonstrated that male emergency department workers were more alienated than their female counterparts. Our results also showed that the emergency medical technicians had a higher level of alienation than both physicians and nurses. There was, however, no difference between the physicians and the nurses with respect to level of alienation.

The “sector” variable was significantly effective on the level of alienation. That is, the alienation level of the private sector workers was higher than that of public sector workers. This is probably a result of challenging working conditions in private emergency departments.

In a study conducted in the health sector, Taştan et al demonstrated fairly close relationship between “organizational support, alienation, and organizational commitment”. As such, reduced organizational support leads to a decrease in organizational commitment (4).

Yetiş conducted a study entitled “Nurses Working in Public Hospitals and Alienation” in 2013 and found a high level of alienation in nurses, suggesting the working conditions be responsible for this occurrence (5).

Usul and Atan, in a study on alienation in health sector, found a high level of alienation in workers of health sector (6).Aygün et al reported similar results (7).

The above-mentioned results that support ours indicate the presence of a sense of alienation among healthcare workers. Although we only performed a descriptive study without exploring the relations between organizational variables and alienation, the evidence suggesting a relationship between working conditions and alienation is beyond debate. For instance, Dariyemez et al clearly demonstrated an example of the relationship between an organizational variable and the sense of alienation (8). Same observations have also been made in other sectors than healthcare sector. The results of the study “Alienation to Work” by Kaya and Serçeoğlu conducted in “Emotional Workers” also revealed similar results (9). As far as its understood, the level of alienation increases in parallel with difficulties in working conditions (unit workload and workload perception per worker). This was evidenced in our study by a high level of alienation in EMTs and physicians. Despite being at a relatively lower level (probably related to workload level per worker), the level of alienation in nurses was also remarkable.

Conclusion

Based on the results of our study, we may suggest that improving working conditions of emergency department workers is of utmost importance both in terms of personal psychological well being and the society (especially familial).

Limitations

This research is limited to “the answers of participants” and “the questionnaire for measurement of the level of alienation”. This research on alienation among emergency healthcare workers (nurses, physicians, and emergency medical technicians) was descriptive in nature.

Conflict Interest

The authors declare that they have no potential conflict of interest.

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