

# Does Emotional Intelligence Prevent Workplace Bullying? A Research on Sports Institution Employees

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## Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and workplace bullying in the Provincial Directorate of Youth Services and Sports. 309 (215 men, 94 women) Sports Provincial Directorate of Youth Services staff from seven different cities of Turkey participated as volunteers in the research. In the study, the personal information form prepared by the researcher, the “Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale” developed by Wong and Law (2002) and adapted to Turkish by Deniz (2012) were used. To determine the workplace bullying level, 21-question “Negative Behaviors Scale” developed by Einarsen (1996) and adapted to Turkish by Cemaloglu (2007) was used. A statistically significant difference was found between the groups according to the emotional intelligence level in the sub-dimension of evaluation of others’ emotions in terms of gender variables. No statistically significant difference was determined between the groups according to the gender variable in terms of workplace bullying. A statistically significant difference was found between the groups in terms of the duration of work, according to emotional intelligence levels and workplace bullying. When the relationship between emotional intelligence and workplace bullying was examined, it was found that there were negative significant correlations in some sub-dimensions. As the level of emotional intelligence of the employees increased, the cases of exposure to bullying decreased.

**Keywords:** Emotional intelligence, Workplace bullying, Sport institution

## 1. Introduction

For individuals who spend most of their time in the workplace, the relationships with employees and management in the work environment have an important place in terms of the efficiency and health of the individual. In this context, behavioral scientists are united in the view that being healthy and productive in personal or organizational life is possible by having good relations with others (Doubtfire, 1997). However, in the ever-changing world, humans also being renewable have created various problems (Çınar & Özyürek, 2015). One of the most important problems in recent years is workplace bullying. Workplace bullying is defined as harassment, insult, social exclusion, or a situation that has a negative effect on an employee’s performance in the workplace (Glasø & Notelaers, 2012). It is stated that the basic facts in the definition of bullying are the negative and undesirable nature of the behavior of bullying. Although the negative and undesirable nature of the behavior is essential for the concept of bullying, the important feature of the bullying behavior is not only the type of behaviors itself, but the pattern and permanence of these experiences (Einarsen & Hoel, 2008). From here, the subtler behaviors such as bullying at work, verbal abuse or harm threat within the organization, persistent criticism, humiliating words, intimidation, and punishment can be found, and also refusing to cooperate, not helping, preventing help, blocking someone’s performance and making their work difficult are also emphasized (Y. Çelik & S. Ş. Çelik, 2007; Guidroz et al., 2010; Hutchinson et al., 2010). It is stated that such bullying weakens the work performance by wearing down the people who are exposed to this behavior both physically and psychologically (Balducci, Alfano, & Fraccaroli, 2009; Glasø et al., 2009; Hogh, Mikkelsen, & Hansen, 2011; Rodríguez-Muñoz et al., 2009). Hutchinson et

al. (2013) state that bullying may be considered as emotional abuse Lovell and Lee (2011), suggest that concerns about reducing negative reactions from bullying can be investigated from emotional perspectives. When it comes to work-life, employees communicate and interact with many people, and emotions, goals, attitudes, and intentions show many verbal and non-verbal signs that provide important information about employee performance and group dynamics (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987; Sutton, 1991; Cote & Miners, 2006).

People with high emotional intelligence can use this information for high task performance, it is also emphasized that they can change the organizational climate by perceiving others' emotional states correctly, demonstrating the ability of colleagues to provide interpersonal communication and increase performance (Law, Wong, & Song, 2004). It has also been reported in the literature that the person exposed to bullying at work can trigger positive or negative emotions depending on how he or she evaluates this situation (Brotheridge & Lee, 2010). Based on these approaches, Muchinsky (2000) states that emotions have an important place to understand the reactions of people in the workplace. Although there are many studies and models in the field of emotional intelligence (Cherniss et al., 2006), Mayer et al. (1997), who have an important place in this area, have four basic skills that define emotional intelligence; to perceive the emotions of oneself and others correctly, the ability to use emotions to facilitate thinking, the ability to understand emotions, emotional language and the signals that emotions convey and the ability to manage emotions to achieve specific goals (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004; Soylu, Ayan, & Salman, 2017), stated that employees who have high emotional intelligence can be more successful in managing their emotions, analyzing emotional problems and managing stress, and have more constructive and positive reactions in social relations in addition to the ability to increase work performance by motivating themselves. The area in which managers and people working in the field of human resources expect to bring to the optimal level is known as work performance. Emotional intelligence is therefore defined as an effective ability for organizational success. At the same time, coping with bullying also indicates that the emotional intelligence skills that managers often use can reduce the negative impact of bullying on job performance against the workplace bullying that employees may be exposed to Ashraf and Khan (2014). In previous studies, it was reported that managers were inclined to behave harsh and rude, that workers could not react appropriately to the bullying behavior they were exposed to because they could not fully read their feelings Sheehan and Jordon (2000) and they were directed towards bullying behavior as a result of low emotional intelligence. For the people exposed to bullying, considering that people with high emotional intelligence use life skills more effectively and balanced, it is stated that the negative psychological effects that occur as a result of bullying (Fineman, 2004; Giorgi, 2010) can be solved by using the psychologically adaptable ability of emotionally intelligent people, when they are considered to be proficient in emotional management (Fernandez-Berrocal et al., 2006).

Considering the relationship between psychological violence and emotional intelligence, the aim of this study is to examine the relationship between the levels of bullying and emotional intelligence of individuals working in the Provincial Directorate of Youth Services and Sports.

## 2. Method

In this study, the relational screening model was used to examine the relationship between the emotional intelligence and workplace bullying of the personnel working in the Provincial Directorate of Youth Services and Sports. The relational survey model is a research model that aims to determine the presence and/or degree of coexistence between two or more variables (Karasar, 2013).

### 2.1 Participants

In this study, the deliberate (judicial) sampling method Sekaran (1992) from non-random sampling methods Black (2009) was used. In this method, the people who form the sample group are composed of the people who the researcher believes will answer the research problem. The criterion in determining the sample group is considered to be the judgment of the researcher. The sample of the study consisted of 94 women and 215 men working in Provincial Directorate of Youth Services and Sports in 12 different cities. When the sample group is examined by title status, it consists of workers (Hogh, Mikkelsen & Hansen, 2011), civil servants (138) and coaches (123). When examined according to the work year variable, it is seen that there are 95 people with working year in the range of 1-5 years and 214 people with working year 6 and more.

### 2.2 Procedures

This research was carried out using the “Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale” and the “Negative Acts Scale”

#### 2.2.1 Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale

Emotional intelligence scale was developed by Wong and Law (2002) and Turkish adaptation was done by Deniz (2011). Law, Wong, and Song (2004) conducted the validity study of the scale in the field of management. The scale consisted of four dimensions and, included in the original scale of the scale, 1 to 4 items were to be able to assess their own feelings, 5 to 8 items were to assess the feelings of others, 9 to 12 items were to utilization of emotions, 13 to 16 items were the size of emotion control. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient was .91 for ‘to assess one’s own emotions’ sub-dimension, the Cronbach Alpha coefficient was .85 for to assess others’ emotions’ sub-dimension, the Cronbach Alpha coefficient was .82 for ‘to utilize one’s emotions’ sub-dimension, and the Cronbach Alpha coefficient was .91 for ‘the control of emotions’ sub-dimension.

#### 2.2.2 Negative Acts Scale

The Turkish Version of the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ), developed by Einarsen and Raknes (1997), was conducted by Cemaloglu (2007). The scale is used as one-dimensional. In this study, the Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the scale was .94.

### 2.3 Statistical Analysis

Data were collected by face-to-face interview method and paper-and-pencil test. It took approximately 25 minutes to fill the scales. SPSS v.21 statistics program was used to analyze

the data. For the analysis of the data, it was checked whether the variances were distributed homogeneously for the selection of the appropriate tests. When the Skewness and Kurtosis values were examined, it was determined that the variances ranged between -1.5 and +1.5 and the variances were homogeneous. According to this, independent samples T-Test was used to test the difference between the two groups and Pearson product-moment correlation test was used to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and workplace bullying.

### 3. Results

In this part of the research, data were interpreted by creating tables to measure the relation between the emotional intelligence and workplace bullying of the personnel working in the Provincial Directorates of Youth Services and Sports and to explain the relationship for different variables.

Table 1. T-Test results of Emotional Intelligence and Negative Acts Scale in terms of the gender variables of employees

	N (Female/Male)	X	SD	df	t	p
Self- Emotions Appraisal	94	4.16	.84	307	1.207	0.22
	215	4.03	.91			
Others- Emotions Appraisal	94	4.11	.64	307	2.499	0.01*
	215	3.86	.86			
Use of Emotion	94	4.01	.71	307	.977	0.32
	215	3.91	.86			
Regulations of Emotion	94	3.61	1.06	307	-.247	0.80
	215	3.65	.99			
WLEIS	94	3.97	.62	307	1.313	0.19
	215	3.86	.72			
Negative Acts	94	1.81	.69	307	-.726	0.46
	215	1.87	.67			

*Note.* \*  $p < 0.05$  statistically significant.

In Table 1, T-Test results are given according to the gender variable of the employees. According to the gender variable, there is a statistically significant difference between the groups in the sub-dimension of ‘to assess others’ emotions’ ( $p < 0.05$ ). Accordingly, it is determined that women have a higher emotional intelligence level in the sub-dimension of ‘to assess others’ emotions’ than men. There was no statistically significant difference between

the groups according to the scores of other Emotional Intelligence sub-dimensions and Negative Acts Scale ( $p > 0.05$ ).

Table 2. T-Test results by Emotional Intelligence and Negative Acts Scale scores of employees according to working time variable

	N (1-4 Years/5+)	X	SD	df	t	p
Self- Emotions Appraisal	95	4.09	.82	307	.254	0.79
	214	4.06	.92			
Others- Emotions Appraisal	95	3.82	.86	307	-1.691	0.09
	214	3.99	.78			
Use of Emotion	95	3.76	.82	307	-2.653	0.08*
	214	4.02	.81			
Regulations of Emotion	95	3.34	1.01	307	-3.431	0.00*
	214	3.77	.99			
WLEIS	95	3.75	.64	307	-2.447	0.01*
	214	3.96	.70			
Negative Acts	95	1.74	.62	307	-2.025	0.04*
	214	1.91	.70			

*Note.* \*  $p < 0.05$  statistically significant.

In Table 2, T-Test results of the employees according to the working time variable are given. There was a statistically significant difference between the groups according to working time variable for ‘to utilize one’s emotions’ and ‘the control of emotions’ sub-dimensions with the emotional intelligence general average and scores of Negative Acts evaluation scale ( $p < 0.05$ ). Accordingly, it is seen that people who have working time at the same workplace for 5 years and more have higher Emotional Intelligence level in ‘to utilize one’s emotions’, ‘the control of emotions’ sub-dimensions and ‘emotional intelligence average’ than people with working time of 1-4 years. According to the scores obtained from the Negative Acts evaluation scale, it is determined that people with working experience of 5 years and more are exposed to more bullying and mobbing behaviors than those with less working time.

Table 3. Correlation table for employee Emotional Intelligence and Negative Acts evaluation scale scores

	Self-Emotions Appraisal	Others-Emotions Appraisal	Use of Emotion	Regulations of Emotion	WLEIS
Negative Acts	-.237**	-.151**	-.033	-.123*	-.175**

*Note.* \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$  statistically significant.

In Table 3, emotional intelligence and negative acts evaluation scale scores correlation test results are given. It is seen that there is a significant negative relation for ‘to assess one’s emotions’, ‘to assess others’ emotions’, ‘the control of emotions’ and emotional intelligence average. It can be stated that as the emotional intelligence levels of people increase, the level of bullying in the workplace will decrease.

#### 4. Discussion

In developed and developing countries, bullying as a threat of workplace hazard and bullying at the workplace has reached alarming levels, and this situation is due to the deterioration of working conditions (Duffy & Sperry, 2007; Godin, 2004; Waters et al., 2005). Additionally, researchers Lee and Brotheridge (2006); Saunders et al. (2007) describe one of these conditions, bullying, as repeated, unreasonable, inappropriate behaviors that cause psychological, physical distress and harm to employees. According to the results of many studies in this field (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001; Cooper, Hoel, & Faragher, 2004; Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Topa, Depolo, & Morales, 2007; Gülle & Soyer, 2017), exposure to bullying in the workplace affects employees’ health, welfare, institutional performance and, moreover, in social context, brings serious and negative consequences. Researches in the field of Victimology (Janoff-Bulman, 1992) has shown that harassment in the workplace can be experienced as a trauma and therefore may produce severe emotional reactions such as fear, anxiety and shock, as well as reduce the positive emotions of the target. It was stated that along with the experience of bullying, feelings such as anxiety, fear, anger, helplessness and nervousness may emerge (Ayoko, Callan, & Hartel, 2003). As a result of organizational change and many other work-related experiences Mossholder et al. (2000), the interest in the role of emotions in the workplace has begun to gain importance Cartwright and Pappas (2008).

When the relationship between emotions, emotional intelligence and gender was examined, it was seen that there were various differences between men and women. Generally, the emotional dimension of life is associated with women more than men (Grossman & Wood, 1993), and in some views it is expressed in the sense that the woman is more emotional (Grewal & Salovey, 2005). Researchers Baron-Cohen (2009); Gur et al. (2002), biological areas of the brain in some areas dedicated to emotional processing of women may be larger than men’ stated. In this context, in the present study, it was observed that women employees have higher emotional intelligence than men in sub-dimension of ‘to assess others’ emotions’.



It is emphasized that women who interact more with the emotional world (Candela Agulló et al., 2002) are more interested in maintaining their relationships with other people in a positive way and building satisfactory social partnerships in order to conduct their relations with other people (Nolen-Hoeksema & Jackson, 2001). Additionally, it is also stated that different studies have different opinions. In fact, Goleman (1998) suggested that similarities between groups would be greater than differences when examining widescale groups like gender-specific groups. Many researchers supported (Soylu et al., 2016; Ayan et al., 2017; Soylu & Serin, 2017; Salman, Toros, & Soylu, 2018).

Different results have been revealed in the literature in order to determine whether there is a difference for bullying in the workplace between men and women. Salin (2005) stated that data on bullying and gender were inadequate and contradictory. Moreover, some studies have shown that men and women are equally exposed to bullying (Leymann, 1996; Vartia, 1996; Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Quine, 1999; Hoel & Cooper, 2000). This study showed that there was no difference in exposure to bullying according to gender. In the literature, it is observed that there are studies supporting the research result (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Dündar & Acar, 2008; Çelik & Peker, 2010; Ertürk & Cemaloğlu, 2014).

Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2000), who state that emotional intelligence has different characteristics than traditional intelligence, also expresses that emotional intelligence will evolve from childhood to early adulthood. In this study, it was found that there was a statistically significant difference between the groups according to the working time variable for 'to utilize one's emotions' and 'the control of emotions' sub-dimensions and emotional intelligence average and negative acts scale results. According to this, it was determined that people who have working time of 5 years or more have higher emotional intelligence level than those who have working time of 1-4 years in terms of 'to utilize one's emotions', 'the control of emotions' and 'emotional intelligence average'. According to the scores of the negative acts evaluation scale, it is determined that people who have 5 and more years of working experience are exposed to more bullying and mobbing behaviors than those with less working time. In this study, it was found that 57 people with working experience between 1-5 years of age were in the age group of 24-30 and 38 people were aged 31 and over. It has been found that 40 people with working experience of 6 years and more were 24-30 years old and 174 people were 31 years old or more. When the literature is reviewed, recent researches on emotional intelligence extend the adult age range to middle-aged and older adults (Chen, Peng & Fang, 2016) and these studies consistently show that older adults have significantly higher scores on emotional intelligence than younger adults (Tsaousis & Kazi, 2013; Gardner & Qualter, 2011; Chapman & Hayslip, 2006; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000). It is stated that there is a strong connection between emotional intelligence, age and work experience (Hur, Moon, & Han, 2014; Hergüner et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2008) stated that employees with high levels of emotional intelligence are more likely to exhibit realistic behaviors than superficial behaviors. For this reason, it is stated that emotional intelligence can be an important prerequisite for the employees who need to manage their emotions in order to exhibit the desirable emotions after getting older in the corporation (Hur, Moon, & Han, 2014). Karakurt and Silver (2013) stated that the level of emotional abuse was higher in



young participants, but this situation decreased with the increase in age.

Ashraf and Khan (2014) claim that individuals exposed to bullying in the workplace lack emotional intelligence. Considering the importance of emotions in performance (Wagner & Ilies, 2008), when a person with a high emotional intelligence is exposed to any form of bullying, it may be necessary for them to control their feelings positively in order not to affect their workplace performance in the short term (Ashraf & Khan, 2014). When the relationship between emotional intelligence and workplace bullying was examined, it was found that there was a significant negative relation in terms of ‘to assess one’s emotions’, ‘to assess others’ emotions’, ‘the control of emotions’ sub-dimensions and ‘emotional intelligence average’. According to this, it can be said that as people’s emotional intelligence levels increase, they will be less exposed to bullying in the workplace and they will be less affected by this bullying. Ashraf and Khan (2014) stated that people who are emotionally intelligent are considering being careful and prudent rather than being inconsiderate and hasty in the face of an event because they are more sensitive to emotions and feelings in interpersonal communication. Emotionally intelligent people, additionally, engage in behaviors that control emotion and increase work performance (Weisinger, 1988).

It is possible to say that people who are masters of emotion control are good in terms of psychological adaptation to negative events (Fernandez-Berrocal et al., 2006) and that they can prevent psychological damage caused by bullying (Fineman, 2004; Giorgi, 2010) with proper emotional management approach (Ashraf & Khan, 2014). From another point of view, when emotional intelligence plays a moderate role in aggressive behaviors and workplace stress (Slaski & Cartwright, 2003), it can be said that emotional intelligence plays an effective role in bullying in the workplace in terms of organizational climate, social relations and business performance.

## **5. Conclusion**

When the research results are examined, it can be seen that bullying is defined as a serious stress indicator in the workplace (Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Baillien, De Cuyper, & De Witte, 2011) and in this context, a number of factors, such as specific personal characteristics and personality structure (Djurkovic, McCormack, & Casimir, 2006; Glasø et al., 2007) or social support and a good organizational climate (Fairbrother & Warn, 2003; Muñoz et al., 2006; Giorgi, 2010), seem to play a preventive role between workplace bullying and psychological well-being (Arenas et al., 2015).

As a result, it can be said that emotional intelligence can increase the level of self-awareness of these adverse conditions and to understand the reasons behind the bullying behavior and that this could eliminate negative work, conflict, and low job performance, moreover, it can be said that perhaps more creative ideas can be created and increase the performance of the institution. In addition, the role of educational institutions that provide physical education should be emphasized in increasing this performance. Programs that take into account the emotional intelligence of young people preparing for the business world and raise awareness about bullying in the workplace should be organized in these educational institutions. Since sports institutions are an area where people from different fields of study are working, future

studies will shed light on whether the managers or employees coming from a culture other than sports culture will make a difference in terms of emotional intelligence and bullying in the workplace.

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