

Relationship between Employee Empowerment and Organizational Stress: A Research on Hospital Employees

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Abstract

Introduction: In parallel with the increasing importance of human resources, researches carried out on human resources and organizational behavior issues have increased. Issues of from which factors are employees' performance and efficient working affected have become the field of interest of many researchers. Employee empowerment and organizational stress are important concepts affecting the working life.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between employees' empowerment and organizational stress with the perspective of hospital employees.

Methods: A questionnaire was applied to 140 employees working in a public hospital in Turkey to accomplish this purpose. Scales used were rated between 1 and 5.

Results: As a result of the research, it was determined that participants' employee empowerment score was at a moderate level (2.717 ± 0.786) and organizational stress score was high (3.420). While employees were affected by "sources of stress regarding the production structure" (3.599 ± 0.863) at the most, they were affected by "sources of stress regarding the cultural structure" (2.923 ± 1.026) at the least. As a result of the correlation analysis performed, negative and significant relationships were found between employee empowerment and sources of stress regarding the duty structure, sources of stress regarding the authority structure, sources of stress regarding the production structure, sources of stress regarding the clustering structure, and sources of stress regarding the cultural structure.

Conclusion: The fact that employees do not have enough components of employee empowerment increases their stress levels. It is a known fact that the increasing stress level has negative impacts on both employees and the organization. Therefore, administrators should be aware of both concepts and try to create the necessary conditions strengthen their employees.

Key words: Empowerment, Hospital employees, Organizational stress

INTRODUCTION

Although it is important for organizations in each period, human resources have become more important especially in recent years. In parallel with the increasing importance of human resources, researches carried out on human resources and organizational behavior issues have

increased. Issues of from which factors are employees' performance and efficient working affected have become the field of interest of many researchers.

The concept of employee empowerment is among the concepts on which great emphasis has been laid in recent years. When the literature was analyzed, employee empowerment was observed to have various definitions. According to Besterfield *et al.*,¹ empowerment is "an environment in which people have the ability, the confidence, and the commitment to take responsibility and ownership to improve the process and initiate the necessary steps to satisfy customer requirements within well-defined boundaries in order to achieve organizational

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www.ijss-sn.com

Month of Submission : 01-2015
Month of Peer Review : 02-2016
Month of Acceptance : 02-2016
Month of Publishing : 03-2016

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values and goals.” According to Koçel,² empowerment refers to “practices and conditions in which employees feel themselves to be motivated, their confidence in knowledge and expertise increases, they feel desire to take action using initiative, they believe they can control events and which allow them to perform business that they find appropriate and meaningful in accordance with the objectives of the organization.”

It is necessary to provide some essential elements for the empowerment of employees in the organization. Teamwork, individual responsibility, directing to common goals, commitment, administration's support, open communication platform, flexibility in the work environment, training and development, giving feedback regarding the performance, praising employees, mutual trust, participation and decision-making authority, decreasing promotion, accessibility of resources, information accessibility, information sharing, innovation, change, motivation, etc., could be ranked among the factors in question.¹⁻⁵

When the literature was analyzed, it was understood that there were significant similarities between employee empowerment and concepts such as job enrichment, delegation of authority, participation. However, there are important differences between these concepts. Empowerment is generally associated with the perceptions of the employee. Reinforced employees can shape their own work and working conditions and thereby can affect the organizational activities. In job enrichment, characteristics of the business come into prominence, unlike the perceptions. In job enrichment, employee has the planning and decision-making powers, but this authority is not too broad to change jobs or working conditions. Besides, employees can feel themselves reinforced without job enrichment.⁵ In the devolution of authority, state of an administrator's temporal devolution of his/her authority to a subordinate is in question. Differently from this, the person who actually works becomes the owner of the business in empowerment.^{6,7} Briefly, the concept of employee empowerment is closely associated with the concepts such as job enrichment, devolution of authority, and participation; however, it includes broader meanings than these concepts.

There are several reasons for the increase in the interests of organizations for employee empowerment in recent years. The most important benefit of employee empowerment is the increase of employee's confidence in the organization. Employees will have opinions about what are valuable in their institutions and the expectations of the administrators from them when they believe and trust in their organization so that employees' role ambiguity and role conflicts will

be reduced.³ Apart from this, employee empowerment has positive effects such as creating freedom in employees' behaviors, thereby increasing cooperation among employees,⁸ ensuring the creation of a customer-focused culture,³ increasing the individual and organizational performance,⁵ improving the quality and speed of services provided.⁹

Another concept associated with the employee empowerment is the stress. Stress is defined as “the fact that the person suffers behavioral and physical changes due to the physical or psychological effects caused by himself or surrounding, the power the psychological and physical effects of which are seen causing organisms to be affected.”¹⁰ Stress can be considered as individual and organizational. Organizationally, experienced stress arises if the employee's some expectations regarding the organization or business are not met. In short, the source of the stress experienced is the business or the business environment.¹¹

Factors causing organizational stress are addressed in various ways. Luthans¹² classified these factors into four groups including organizational policies, structural characteristics of the organization, physical conditions, and organizational processes. According to Price,¹³ role conflict, role ambiguity, and workload cause job stress. In their study carried out in health institutions in Australia, Rickard *et al.*¹⁴ set one of the most comprehensive models regarding the causes of organizational stress. According to this model, stress is a function of the outcomes regarding the business such as the factors outside the organization, structural characteristics of the organization, demands and resources regarding the business, job satisfaction, and employee transfer. As it can be seen, some factors causing organizational stress are among the elements of employee empowerment.

Stress created by the above-mentioned factors leads to various problems in the employee's health, family life, daily life, and business life.¹⁵ Decrease in the performance of employees, deterioration of relations with each other, formation of mental distress and anxiety disorders, and increase in occupational accidents are some of these problems.^{16,17} As the reflection of all these, problems of absenteeism and increase in the institution's staff turnover rate arise.¹⁸⁻²²

Stress is a problem with which employees working in all organizations including private and public face. The possibility of facing with intense stress is very high for employees working in the health sector which is especially a labor-intensive sector and has unique features. Because health sector is directly associated with the human life, it

is obvious that the fact that health workers are affected by this negative situation will have serious consequences.

Stress should be managed well in organizations to avoid such negative consequences mentioned above. Therefore, stress-related factors should be identified, and arrangements should be made in this respect. The aim of this study is to determine the relationship between the empowerment perceptions and organizational stress levels of employees working in the health sector.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between employee empowerment and organizational stress with the perspective of a hospital employee. Healthcare staff and administrative employee working in a public hospital operating in Turkey constituted the population of the research. There were a total of 212 personnel working actually under these titles at the hospital where the research was carried out. The sample was not selected and an attempt to reach all of the employees in question was made. The survey method was used in the collection of data regarding the research 140 of 212 surveys distributed were filled out, and the participation rate was 66% (Table 1).

The survey used consisted of three sections. The first section had the “organizational stress scale,” the reliability and validity studies of which were performed, which was prepared by Pehlivan²³ for the doctoral thesis on “sources of stress in education management.” This survey consisted of 6 dimensions and 35 items including sources of stress regarding the duty structure, authority structure, production structure, clustering structure, role structure, and cultural structure. In the second section of the data collection tool, “employee empowerment scale” with 16 items was included to measure the empowerment levels of hospital employees. A literature review was performed before the creation of the items of the scale, and 16 factors within the scope of employee empowerment were determined. An item was created for each factor. Both scales were rated as 5 point Likert. Questions about the personal and professional characteristics of employees were included in the last section of the survey.

Findings regarding the reliability of the survey used to collect data appear in Table 2. Although alpha reliability coefficient is recommended to be 0.7 and higher in the literature, it is stated that in the literature is a sufficient level to make comparisons between groups when it is 0.5 or higher.²⁴ Cronbach’s alpha coefficients of the dimensions of organizational stress scale used in the research were between 0.68 and 0.85. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of the overall organizational stress scale and employee

Table 1: Number of personnel at the hospital and level of participation in research

| Title | Those working actually | Those participated in the survey | Participation rate (%) |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|
| Doctor | 32 | 24 | 75 |
| Other healthcare staff | 148 | 89 | 60 |
| Administrative services personnel | 32 | 27 | 84 |
| Total | 212 | 140 | 66 |

Table 2: Reliability of the data collection tool

| Scale | Number of Questions | Cronbach's Alpha Value |
|-------------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| Employee empowerment scale | 16 | 0.92 |
| Overall organizational stress scale | 35 | 0.92 |
| Stress regarding the duty structure | 9 | 0.71 |
| Stress regarding the authority structure | 8 | 0.85 |
| Stress regarding the production structure | 5 | 0.71 |
| Stress regarding the clustering structure | 7 | 0.82 |
| Stress regarding the role structure | 2 | 0.68 |
| Stress regarding the cultural structure | 4 | 0.79 |

empowerment scale was 0.92. It is seen that these values are above the acceptability limit. Data collected in accordance with the purpose of the research were analyzed using SPSS program (15.0) and appropriate test methods.

FINDINGS

A total of 140 people participated in the research conducted in a public hospital in Turkey, and the distribution of personal and professional characteristics of participants is given in Table 3.

Regarding the research participants, 17.1% of them were doctors, 63.6% of them were healthcare staff, and 19.3% of them were administrative services employee. 62.9% of the participants were female and 60.0% of them were married. When their ages were analyzed, it was seen that 25.0% of them were aged 25 and below, 35.7% of them were between 26 and 35, and 39.3% of them were aged 36 and above. While the majority of the survey respondents (40.0%) had graduate degree, 18.6% of them graduated from a post-graduate program. When the participants’ working times at the hospital where they were still working were analyzed, it was understood that 57.9% of participants had been working for <6 years at the same place. The majority of survey respondents (57.9%) had working time of 45 h or less per week. The ratio of working in night shift was 38.6%.

Average, standard deviation and levels of participants’ assessments regarding the employee empowerment and

organizational stress scales appear in Table 4. While determining level, first the range coefficient calculated for evaluation range of arithmetic mean ($5-1 = 4$) and then option ranges ($4/5 = 0.80$) were determined. Accordingly, “1.00-1.79” range was leveled as “very low,” “1.80-2.59” range was leveled as “low,” “2.60-3.39” range was leveled

as “moderate,” “3.40-4.19” range was leveled as “high,” and “4.20-5.00” range was leveled as “very high.”

Table 3: Personal and professional characteristics of participants

| Variables | n (%) |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------|
| Profession | |
| Doctor | 24 (17.1) |
| Healthcare staff (out of doctors) | 89 (63.6) |
| Administrative services personnel | 27 (19.3) |
| Gender | |
| Female | 88 (62.9) |
| Male | 52 (37.1) |
| Age (years) | |
| 25 | 35 (25.0) |
| 26-35 | 50 (35.7) |
| 36+ | 55 (39.3) |
| Marital status | |
| Married | 84 (60.0) |
| Not married | 56 (40.0) |
| Educational status | |
| High school | 27 (19.3) |
| Associate degree | 31 (22.1) |
| License | 56 (40.0) |
| Post-graduate | 26 (18.6) |
| Service time in the institution (years) | |
| 1-5 | 81 (57.9) |
| 6-10 | 29 (20.7) |
| 11-15 | 17 (12.1) |
| 16 and above | 13 (9.3) |
| Weekly working time (h) | |
| 45 and below | 81 (57.9) |
| 46-50 | 42 (30.0) |
| 51 and above | 17 (12.1) |
| Night work status | |
| Yes | 54 (38.6) |
| No | 86 (61.4) |

Table 4: Average standard deviation and levels of participants' assessments regarding the employee empowerment and organizational stress scales

| Variables | Score range | Mean±SD | Level |
|-------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|----------|
| Employee empowerment | 1-5 | 2.717±0.786 | Moderate |
| Overall organizational stress | 1-5 | 3.420±0.890 | High |
| Stress regarding the duty structure | 1-5 | 3.530±0.710 | High |
| Stress regarding the authority structure | 1-5 | 3.522±0.886 | High |
| Stress regarding the production structure | 1-5 | 3.599±0.863 | High |
| Stress regarding the clustering structure | 1-5 | 3.416±0.904 | High |
| Stress regarding the role structure | 1-5 | 3.079±1.118 | Moderate |
| Stress regarding the cultural structure | 1-5 | 2.923±1.026 | Moderate |

SD: Standard deviation

According to the findings, participants' employee empowerment levels are at moderate level (2.717 ± 0.786), and their overall stress levels are high (3.420). When stress factors were analyzed by grouping under dimensions, it was seen that “sources of stress regarding the production structure” affected the participants at the most (3.599 ± 0.863), and “sources of stress regarding the cultural structure” affected them at the least (2.923 ± 1.026).

Comparison of participants' assessments regarding the employee empowerment and organizational stress scales in terms of gender, marital status, and night work is given in Table 5. Only the sections which were observed to be statistically significant were included in Table 5. Accordingly, female were further affected by the sources of stress regarding the cultural structure; married employees were further affected by the sources of stress regarding the authority structure; unmarried employees were further affected by the sources of stress regarding the cultural structure, and those working in night shifts were further affected by the sources of stress regarding the production structure. Participants' perceptions on employee empowerment did not show significant differences regarding the above-mentioned variables.

Table 5: Comparison of participants' assessments regarding the employee empowerment and organizational stress scales in terms of gender, marital status, and night work

| Stress scales | Mean±SD | t | P |
|------------------------------------------------------|-------------|--------|-------|
| Sources of stress regarding the cultural structure | | | |
| Gender | | -3.796 | 0.000 |
| Male | 2.514±1.142 | | |
| Female | 3.165±0.870 | | |
| Sources of stress regarding the authority structure | | | |
| Marital status | | 3.217 | 0.002 |
| Married | 3.713±0.874 | | |
| Not married | 3.237±0.831 | | |
| Sources of stress regarding the cultural structure | | | |
| Marital status | | -2.493 | 0.014 |
| Married | 2.750±1.028 | | |
| Not married | 3.183±0.974 | | |
| Sources of stress regarding the production structure | | | |
| Night work status | | 2.008 | 0.047 |
| Yes | 3.782±0.757 | | |
| No | 3.484±0.909 | | |

SD: Standard deviation

Table 6: Comparison of participants' assessments regarding the employee empowerment and organizational stress scales in terms of profession and age

| Stress scales | Mean±SD | F | P |
|----------------------------------------------------|-------------|--------|-------|
| Sources of stress regarding the cultural structure | | | |
| Profession | | 13.100 | 0.000 |
| Doctor | 2.115±0.770 | | |
| Other healthcare staff | 3.199±0.924 | | |
| Administrative personnel | 2.732±1.143 | | |
| Employee empowerment | | 5.976 | 0.003 |
| Profession | | | |
| Doctor | 3.203±0.523 | | |
| Other healthcare staff | 2.606±0.751 | | |
| Administrative personnel | 2.651±0.941 | | |
| Sources of stress regarding the cultural structure | | | |
| Age (years) | | 3.834 | 0.024 |
| 25 and below | 3.293±0.967 | | |
| 26-35 | 2.680±1.088 | | |
| 36 and above | 2.909±0.949 | | |

SD: Standard deviation

Table 7: Comparison of participants' assessments regarding the employee empowerment and organizational stress scales in terms of educational status and seniority

| Stress scales | Mean±SD | F | P |
|----------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------|-------|
| Sources of stress regarding the cultural structure | | | |
| Educational status | | 4.885 | 0.003 |
| High school | 3.056±0.974 | | |
| Associate degree | 3.024±1.135 | | |
| License | 3.112±0.966 | | |
| Post-graduate | 2.260±0.832 | | |
| Employee empowerment | | 6.535 | 0.000 |
| Educational status | | | |
| High school | 2.653±0.761 | | |
| Associate degree | 2.815±0.891 | | |
| License | 2.459±0.695 | | |
| Post-graduate | 3.224±0.618 | | |
| Sources of stress regarding the cultural structure | | | |
| Service time in the institution (years) | | 3.698 | 0.013 |
| 1-5 | 3.437±0.852 | | |
| 6-10 | 3.776±0.889 | | |
| 11-15 | 3.125±0.931 | | |
| 16 and above | 4.010±0.754 | | |

SD: Standard deviation

Comparison of participants' assessments regarding the employee empowerment and organizational stress scales in terms of profession and age appears in Table 6. Only the sections which were observed to be statistically significant were included in Table 6. Accordingly, other healthcare staff and employees who were aged below 26 were further affected by the sources of stress regarding the cultural structure. In addition, doctors' empowerment perceptions were higher than other employees.

Table 8: Correlation analysis results regarding the employee empowerment and organizational stress relationship

| Organizational stress | Employee empowerment | |
|------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|-------|
| | r | P |
| Sources of stress regarding the duty structure | -0.276 | 0.001 |
| Sources of stress regarding the authority structure | -0.331 | 0.000 |
| Sources of stress regarding the production structure | -0.230 | 0.006 |
| Sources of stress regarding the clustering structure | -0.196 | 0.020 |
| Sources of stress regarding the role structure | -0.122 | 0.152 |
| Sources of stress regarding the cultural structure | -0.406 | 0.000 |

Comparison of participants' assessments regarding the employee empowerment and organizational stress scales in terms of educational status and seniority is presented in Table 7. Only the sections which were observed to be statistically significant were included in Table 7. Accordingly, employees with license degree were further affected by the sources of stress regarding the cultural structure, and employees with 16 years and above service time were further affected by sources of stress regarding the authority structure. In addition, empowerment perceptions of employees with license degree were higher than other employees.

Correlation analysis was performed to examine the relationship between the dimensions of organizational stress and the employee empowerment (Table 8). According to analysis results, there was a negative and low relationship between employee empowerment and sources of stress regarding the duty structure ($r = -0.276$), sources of stress regarding the production structure ($r = -0.230$), and sources of stress regarding the clustering structure ($r = -0.196$). There was a negative and moderate relationship between employee empowerment and sources of stress regarding the authority structure ($r = -0.331$) and sources of stress regarding the cultural structure ($r = -0.406$).

DISCUSSION

This research was carried out to examine the relationship between employee empowerment and organizational stress with the perspective of hospital employees. A questionnaire was applied to 140 staff working in a public hospital in Turkey to accomplish this aim. Scales used were rated between 1 and 5.

According to the findings, participants' overall perceptions regarding the employee empowerment were moderate (2.717 ± 0.786). When the literature was analyzed, it was seen that employee empowerment perceptions of

employees working in hospitals in Turkey were generally at moderate-high level. In this regard, employee empowerment levels were found to be higher in the study carried out in a private hospital in Turkey by Ekiyor and Karagül,²⁵ and in another study carried out in 11 state hospitals in Turkey by Altındış and Özutku.²⁶ In the study carried out in a research and application hospital by Adıgüzel and Altıparmak,²⁷ it was determined that the personnel had empowerment perceptions at moderate level. Similar results were also achieved in various studies conducted in different countries from Turkey.²⁸⁻³⁰

As a result of the research, overall stress point average was found to be 3.420. This result shows that employees' overall stress levels are high. When stress factors were analyzed by grouping under dimensions, it was seen that "sources of stress regarding the production structure" affected the participants at the most (3.599 ± 0.863), and "sources of stress regarding the cultural structure" affected them at the least (2.923 ± 1.026). When studies carried out at hospitals on stress were analyzed, it was seen that stress levels of health care staff were moderate/high. In this regard, parallel results were achieved in the study carried out at 4 hospitals by Özen,³¹ in the study carried out at dental hospital by Kıdak³² and in another study carried out at a training and research hospital by Tekingündüz *et al.*³³

As a result of the correlation analysis performed, negative and significant relationships were found between employee empowerment and sources of stress regarding the duty structure, sources of stress regarding the authority structure, sources of stress regarding the production structure, sources of stress regarding the clustering structure, and sources of stress regarding the cultural structure. Furthermore, various studies carried out in health institutions³⁴⁻³⁷ confirmed that there was a negative and significant relationship between employee empowerment and organizational stress. This situation shows that the results of the present study are consistent with the literature.

CONCLUSION

It can be said that employee empowerment and organizational stress are important concepts affecting the working life. The fact that employees do not have enough components of employee empowerment increases their stress levels. It is a known fact that the increasing stress level has negative impacts on both employees and the organization. Therefore, administrators should be aware of both concepts and try to create the necessary conditions strengthen their employees.

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How to cite this article: Demirkıran M, Tařkaya S. Relationship Between Employee Empowerment and Organizational Stress: A Research on Hospital Employees. Int J Sci Stud 2016;3(12):210-216.

Source of Support: Nil, **Conflict of Interest:** None declared.