

Loneliness as Mediator between Job Satisfaction and Intention to Leave: A Study on Prison Staff in Turkey

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Abstract

Job satisfaction has been of great interest in the field of organizational psychology. The primary goal of this study was to investigating the predictive relationship in between employee's job satisfaction and intention to leave. The mediating role of loneliness between job satisfaction and intention to leave was also investigated among prison staff. A total of 154 participants were employed at two different prisons in the city of Bursa, Turkey. Data were collected using the Intention to leave Scale, UCLA Loneliness Scale and Job Satisfaction Scale. As hypothesized, loneliness was found to significantly mediates the relationship between Job satisfaction and Intention to Leave ($p < .005$). Moreover, loneliness predicts intention to leave ($p < .005$). The results manifested that job satisfaction predicts intention to leave and loneliness ($p < .000$). The path also revealed that loneliness at work fully mediated the relationship between job satisfaction and intent to leave. The final model also showed a significant path from intent to leave through to job satisfaction and loneliness. The result of the Sobel test supported the significance of the mediating effect of loneliness ($p < .001$). The limitations of the study are considered and the implications of the results for increasing an individual's job satisfaction are discussed.

Keywords: Loneliness; Job satisfaction; Intent to leave; Mediator; Prison staff

Introduction

Loneliness is often assumed to be an occupational hazard for members of an organization. Loneliness is not the state when individuals want to be alone, but is an unfavorable state involving a low level of social relationships, feelings of high levels of stress and low life/job satisfaction.

Job satisfaction plays a key role in the physical and psychological well-being of employees and is a crucial factor in labor markets. Lawler defined job satisfaction as a person's affective reactions to his total work role. Oshagbemi referred to job satisfaction as an individual's positive emotional reactions to a particular job. Mueller and McCloskey defined job satisfaction as an affective feeling that depends on the interaction of employees, their personal characteristics, values and expectations with the work environment and the organization. Job satisfaction is a subjective, positive feeling or emotional state that a person perceives based on a variety of facets of the work itself and the work environment.

Job Satisfaction is defined in its simplest form as how happy an employee is with his work. Intention to Leave the Job is the expression of destructive and active events when an employee is not satisfied with the working conditions and under the influence of several factors, leads to leaving the job behavior. Loneliness is seen as a significant problem as several health problems associated with stress have been experienced by individuals and negative organizational implications have emerged. Loneliness is an unwanted, disturbing experience for the majority resulting from not having sufficiently removed the need to establish closeness with others. Loneliness in the workplace is expressed as remaining alone, isolation and the feeling of being alone, originating from several social environments. In addition from a physical and psychological aspect, individuals experience health problems such as fatigue, anxiety, irritability and depression and vulnerability to several diseases is expected. Consequently, all these negative conditions present a risk in terms of health and safety at work.

Sullivan [1] conceptualized loneliness as not having sufficiently

removed the need to establish intimacy with others, which mostly results in an unwanted, uncomfortable life. Loneliness is not only a problem outside work, but is also a physically, socially and psychologically discomforting feeling for people in the workplace. In a general sense, loneliness is an emotional state created by weak social interaction and personal relationships [2]. Loneliness in the workplace is expressed as remaining alone, isolation and the feeling of being alone, originating from several social environments [3].

According to Ernst and Cacioppo [2], loneliness has been 'associated with a variety of individual differences including depression, hostility, pessimism, social withdrawal, alienation, shyness and a low positive effect.' It is also 'a concomitant of more severe disorders such as clinical depression, borderline personality disorder, and schizophrenia' [2].

Several studies have been carried out on the subject of loneliness. Some studies have determined a relationship between feelings of loneliness experienced at work and several factors such as anxiety, anger, over-sensitivity, depression, shyness, negative self-perception and lack of social skills. In addition, loneliness has been defined as a life associated with unwanted negative emotions such as revenge, sadness and stress and in related studies there has been emphasis on the positive correlation between workload, perceived work stress, depression and anxiety [4]. On the other hand, a negative correlation has been found between loneliness in the workplace and job satisfaction and

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organisational attachment [5]. Literature on occupational stress also touches on isolation and loneliness as both a cause and a consequence of stress at work. Wright, Cohen [5,6] emphasized the positive effects of social relationships on an individual's health and highlighted the importance of relationship structures in the social area for physical health and a sense of well-being. Cacioppo et al. [7] reported that loneliness and social exclusion are indicators of social relationships. Kafetsios reported that loneliness in social environments originates from lack of social communication or mutual interest and from not being in a group taking part in activities [8].

In short, according to related literature, loneliness in the workplace is the cause and result of perceived work stress [5,9]. Previous studies have determined that workload has a strong positive relationship with stress, depression and anxiety [4] a negative relationship with job satisfaction and attachment to the organisation [5,10], is a predictor of social relationships [7], and is also effective on emotional well-being related to the job. It is thought that all of these create a psychosocial risk factor for the feeling of loneliness in respect of the health and safety at work of the employee. Psychosocial dangers have negative effects either directly or indirectly on the physical and social health of the employee. Several different psychosocial dangers occurring together can lead to work stress. Psychosocial dangers may cause work stress and work stress may cause physical and psychological illness.

This study aimed to examine the effects of perceived feelings of loneliness at work on job satisfaction and intent to leave of prison officers currently working in prisons.

The aim of this study, while examining the effect of job satisfaction on intention to leave the job of prison officers, was to determine the mediator effect of loneliness on their work life.

Methodology

Participants and procedure

The participants were recruited from two different types of prisons in Bursa, a major city in Turkey. The prepared questionnaire was firstly pre-tested on a selected group of 30 participants in one prison. The questionnaires with free return envelopes were distributed in sealed envelopes to all prison officers (n=207) by the prison psychologist. The completed forms were collected 3 days later. Anonymity was guaranteed, and information about the study was provided by the prison management. Incomplete questionnaires were not used in the data analysis. A total of 182 completed forms were received, giving a return rate 74%. Of these, 54 were excluded from the evaluation as the questionnaires had not been fully completed.

Therefore, the data of 154 participants were used in this research. Any items which were incomprehensible to the participants or of low reliability were removed and the questionnaire was revised to finally consist of 49 items in total. The questionnaire was applied to all the employees in groups during a 3-week period with the help of the prison psychologist in 2 prisons in the city of Bursa.

In this study, the mediator effect of perceived feelings of loneliness was examined in respect of the relationship between job satisfaction and intention to leave the job.

Instruments

The instruments that were used were as follows.

Demographic questions: Participants were asked to indicate their sex, age range, marital status, educational background, working years and their duty in the facility.

The Loneliness at Work Scale (LAWS): Loneliness was measured using the Wright, Burt, and Strongman [3] 16-item scale. This contains 2 dimensions with items referring to emotional deprivation (ED) (9 items) and lack of social companionship (LSC) (7 items) at work. This scale was tested for validity and reliability and adapted to Turkish literature by Doğan et al. [11].

Job Satisfaction Scale: (JSAT): To measure job satisfaction, the Camman, Fichman, Jenkins and Klesh [12] short job satisfaction scale was used. This measure is part of the Michigan Organizational assessment. The questionnaire (OAQ) uses 3 items to describe an employee's subjective response to working in his or her job and organization. This is a global indication of worker satisfaction with a job. The scale responses are obtained using a 7-point Likert-type scale where 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree.

Intention to Leave Scale. (IL): The employee's intention to leave was measured with 4 items translated into Turkish by Teoman [13] from the original questionnaire developed by Cook et al. [14]. These items were rated along a 1 = Never to 5 =Every Time Likert-type scale. Responses to the statements were totaled to determine turnover intention. The total scores were used in the present study, and high scores represented strong turnover intentions among employees.

All the scales were constructed and tested for reliability and factor structure on prison staff from a prison in the city of Bursa, Turkey.

Findings and Results

The average age of the participants was 40.89 ± 9.50 years (range, 24-58 years). All the participants were male and 85% were employed as a prison guard. The mean length of time in the current job was 13 ± 9.9 years.

Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations and internal consistency reliability values (coefficient alpha) are shown for all the study scales in Table 1.

According to Table 1, all scales had significant reliability.

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis of intent to leave, job satisfaction and loneliness at work are shown in Table 2. According to the findings shown in Table 2, there is a significant positive relationship between intent to leave (IL) and all the dimensions of the LAWS ($r = 0.408$, $p < 0.00$). On the other hand, LAWS is significantly negatively

| Scales | Mean | SD | C. Alpha |
|------------------------------------|-------|-------|----------|
| Loneliness (all) LAWS | 35.24 | 13.58 | .88 |
| Emotional deprivation (ED) | 18.33 | 8.22 | .85 |
| Lack Of Social Companionship (LSC) | 16.91 | 7.74 | .85 |
| Job Satisfaction (JS) | 10.77 | 3.81 | .55 |
| Intent to leave (IL) | 9.64 | 4.82 | .80 |

Table 1: Reliability Analysis of the Study Instruments.

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
|--|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| (1) Emotional deprivation ED | - | | | |
| (2) Lack of social companionship (LSC) | .448** | - | | |
| (3) Intent to Leave (IL) | .378** | .315** | - | |
| (4) Job Satisfaction (JS) | -.179* | -.157 | -.167 | - |
| (5) Loneliness(LAWS) | .860** | .841** | .408** | -.198* |

*Correlation is significant at the level of 0.00. * $p < 0.00$

**Correlation is significant at the level of 0.01 (2-tailed). ** $p < 0.01$

Table 2: Pearson's Correlation Coefficients.

correlated with Job satisfaction ($r = -0.198, p < 0.01$)

Analytic procedure

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to test the models in the present study. SEM is a multivariate strategy including measurement and structural models. A measurement model was created for Loneliness based on the two indicators described earlier: emotional deprivation and lack of social companionship. Furthermore, the raw scores of the Job Satisfaction and Intent to Leave Scale items were used. Before the structural models are tested, the measurement model, which is a base for all the models, should provide an acceptable fit for the data.

In order to test that Loneliness mediated the link between job satisfaction with structural equation modeling, Baron and Kenny's recommendations were followed. According to their recommendations, first, a significant relationship between the independent variable and the hypothesized mediating variable is required. Second, a significant relationship between the hypothesized mediating variable and the dependent variable is required. Third, a significant relationship between the independent variable and dependent variable is needed. Finally, the coefficient relating the independent variable to the dependent variable should be larger (in absolute value) than the coefficient relating the independent variable to the dependent variable in the structural model, with both the independent variable and the mediating variable predicting the dependent variable.

The mediation mode in Figure 1 was used to determine the mediation role of Loneliness in the relationship between Job satisfaction and Intent to leave.

Various goodness of fit indexes are used for the assessment of structural equation modeling and measurement modeling. First of all, the ratio between chi-square and its degree of freedom less than five is considered an acceptable fit, whereas less than two is a good fit to the data. Secondly, the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) and Comparative Fit Index (CFI) were used. CFI and GFI values between 0.90 and 0.95 show that they are at acceptable limits, and values above 0.95 point are a good fit. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was the other statistic, with values less than 0.08, indicating reasonable fit of the model to the data, whereas 0.05 indicated a good fit. The same criterion for reasonable fit is valid for the other goodness of fit index, the Standardized Root Mean Square (SRMR).

To be able to define the extent of the research model and the significance level of the decrease in the beta values, it is necessary to examine significance using the Sobel direct effect test.

The Med Graph program, a customized version of the Sobel test was used to generate the sobel z value and the significance of the mediation role of loneliness on the relationship between job satisfaction and intent to leave. The results are shown in Table 1 and Figure 1 correspondingly.

Measurement model

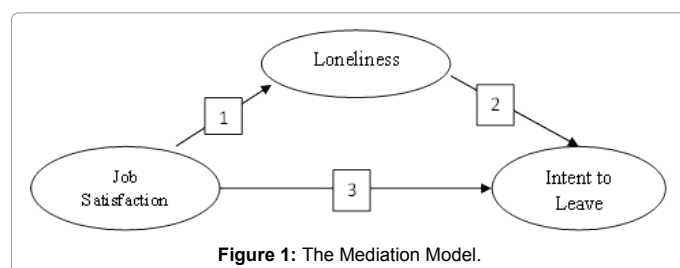


Figure 1: The Mediation Model.

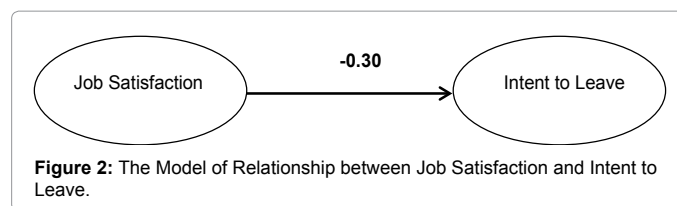


Figure 2: The Model of Relationship between Job Satisfaction and Intent to Leave.

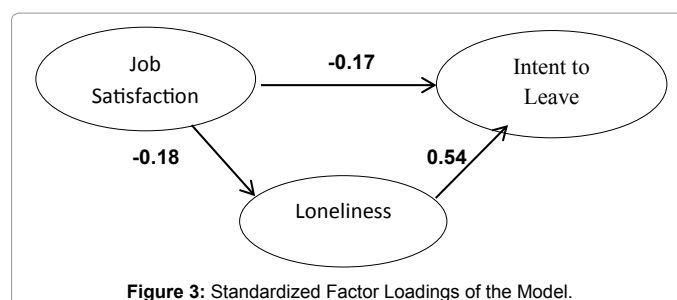


Figure 3: Standardized Factor Loadings of the Model.

The measurement model specified the posited relationship of the observed variables to their underlying constructs, which were allowed to intercorrelate freely. Two latent variables were used in the structural equation model testing: job satisfaction and intent to leave. An initial test of the measurement model resulted in a good fit to the data, $\chi^2 / sd = 2.86$, RMSEA= 0.07, GFI=0.92, CFI=0.91, SRMR= 0.055.

Testing the model: Structural equation modeling procedures

In accordance with the recommendations of Baron and Kenny, it is firstly necessary to obtain evidence of the relationship of the variable of job satisfaction with both loneliness and the intention to leave the job. In addition, it should be shown that loneliness is related to intention to leave the job. In the examination of the measurement model to provide the said evidence (Figure 2), that the variable of loneliness plays a mediatory role in the relationship between job satisfaction and intention to leave the job ($\beta = -0.30, t = 16.86, p < .05$) can be used. Therefore, what needs to be done is that by testing the model which has the variable predicting the intention to leave the job with the predictive variables of job satisfaction and loneliness, the route from job satisfaction variable to intention to leave the job variable is expected to be not significant or the value of the route in question is lower than the first status ($\beta = -0.30, t = 16.86, p < .05$).

To examine the mediatory role of the loneliness variable in the relationship between job satisfaction and intention to leave the job, goodness of fit indexes obtained from the structural equivalence model show consistency at an acceptable level: $\chi^2 / sd = 4.53$, RMSEA= 0.058 (90% CI for RMSEA=0.056-0.061), GFI=0.90, CFI=0.93, SRMR=0.055.

The standardized coefficients related to the model are shown in Figure 3.

The results of the measurement model demonstrated that job satisfaction construal was negatively associated with intent to leave ($\beta = -0.30, t = 16.86, p < .05$). However, when job satisfaction and loneliness were taken together in the structural equation model, the significance of the relationship between job satisfaction and intent to leave ($\beta = -0.17, t = -2.31, p < .05$) decreased, yet the relationship between job satisfaction and intent to leave was significant. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), this result indicated a partial mediation. Therefore, it can be said that loneliness partially explains the relationship between job satisfaction and intent to leave. The results are presented in Figure 3.

The present model was tested using the Sobel Z test. The purpose of this test is to verify whether a mediator carries the influence of an interdependent variable to a dependent variable. The Sobel z test is characterized as being a restrictive test, and as such, assures that the verified results are not derived from collinearity issues. In the present study, the test value verified was $Z = -2.33190796$; $p = 0.01970553$.

In other words, the test statistic as a result of the Sobel test was calculated as -2.331 and the p value was below the desired level of 0.05 ($z = -2.33$, $p < 0.001$). These results support that there is a partial direct effect of loneliness on the relationship between job satisfaction and intention to leave the job.

In other words, the result of the Sobel test supported the significance of the mediating effect of loneliness

Discussion and Conclusion

Although the terms 'loneliness' and 'alone' are sometimes used with the same meaning in daily life, the actual meanings are different. Even when amongst other people, an individual can feel lonely. Whereas 'alone' denotes a physical state of not being in the company of others, 'lonely' expresses the emotional feeling of not being connected to others.

The results of this study showed a significant relationship between the feeling of loneliness and job satisfaction and emotional well-being related to work, which is consistent with previous reports in literature.

The feeling of loneliness, when considered as an organizational problem, is a condition where negative feelings of stress and isolation are experienced, which can affect the whole life of employees in the workplace, disturbing the individual physically, socially and psychologically and reducing productivity. In this study which examined the effects on job satisfaction and intention to leave the job of feelings of loneliness of prison officers, the results were seen to be consistent with those of previous studies.

Significant correlations were calculated by Doğan et al. [11] between perceived loneliness and job satisfaction at the level of -0.34 and organizational attachment at -0.29 [11]. In the current study, significant correlations were seen between perceived loneliness and job satisfaction at the level of -0.44 and intention to leave the job at 0.34 .

In conclusion, it can be said that to increase work performance in workplaces with extremely difficult working conditions, such as prisons, to increase the employees' attachment to work and raise job satisfaction, managers must comprehend the importance of this issue. Therefore, interviews with specialists to provide support in raising awareness should be encouraged for employees who feel emotionally and/or socially alone in the workplace to enable verbal expression rather than physical when tensions have not been noticed. In addition,

to improve relationships between employees and increase interaction, training can be arranged on topics such as 'conflict resolution skills' and 'communication skills.'

Limitations of the Study

The participants in this study were male prison officers. Due to time constraints and busy schedules of the prison officers it was difficult to interact with them completely so data were only collected through a questionnaire. The sample size was limited to only one prison in Turkey and responses may have been influenced by personal bias.

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