

# The effect on employees of violence climate in the workplace

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**Abstract.** Violent incidents in the workplace which negatively affect employees' health and safety present an important problem of health and safety at work. This study aimed to determine the effects of the violence prevention climate on employees' job satisfaction and stress by determining how they perceive the dimensions of the violence climate. The participants in this study were 240 employees in various sectors (health, service, etc.) in Turkey. The study used the 18 item Violence Prevention Climate scale developed by Kessler et al (2008) translated into Turkish. The mean age of the participants was 32.3±9.53, mean working years 9.1±8.02. According to the correlation analysis results, the violence prevention climate dimensions of policies, practices and pressure for unsafe practices were found to have a positive significant relationship with job satisfaction. A significant negative correlation was determined between policies and practices and depression. A significant negative correlation was determined between practices and stress. The stepwise regression analysis results determined a significant relationship between pressure and job satisfaction. The stepwise regression analysis results also determined a significant relationship between the dimension of practices and depression. However, the established regression model was found not to be statistically significant in terms of stress and anxiety dependent variables.

Keywords: Organizational aggression, Job satisfaction, Work related stress, Anxiety and depression

## 1. Introduction

Workplace violence, in terms of occupational health and safety, is one of the most important problems of working life. There are several definitions of workplace violence available in literature. Richards (2003) defined as "*Incidents where staff are abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances related to their work, including commuting to and from work, involving an explicit or implicit challenge to their safety, well-being or health*"[1]. Workplace violence includes not only physical but also non-physical violence. For example; workplace violence includes physical assault, homicide, robbery, verbal abuse, bullying/mobbing, swearing, shouting, sexual and racial harassment, name calling, threats, interfering with work tools and equipment [2,3].

Fletcher, Cavanaugh, & Brakel (2000) defined as a "work or workplace-related problem negatively affecting the production force or safety of the employees" [4]. Research has shown that violent behaviour in the workplace causes employees to experience stress, anxiety, burnout and depression. In addition, workplace violence is a reason for reduced job satisfaction, and a lower level of job involvement and organizational commitment [5-11].

Workplace violence negatively affects not only the direct victims of such behavior, but also those who witness such violence. To witness violence of any sort in the workplace may cause concern to workers that they themselves may face this type of violence in the future. Studies have shown that the fear of violence creates a negative relationship

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between emotional wellbeing and somatic health [12,13].

## 2. Organizational Climate, Safety Climate and Violence Climate

Despite many years of research on organizational climate, there is still no consensus on a common definition. Reichers & Scheneider (1990) says "Organizational climate is widely defined as the shared perception of organizational policies, practices, and procedures, both formal and informal" [14].

Safety climate, the provision of safety in the workplace is widely accepted as an important organizational factor.

Zohar (1980 as cited in Williamson et al. 1997) safety climate is defined as "a summary of the beliefs and perceptions of employees about safety in the workplace" [15]. Neal & Griffin (2002) stated that "*Safety climate* refers to perceptions of policies, procedures, and practices relating to safety in the workplace" [16]. Safety climate, , a special form of organizational climate and defined as individual perceptions of work around the security values [17,18].

Perceived violence climate is a manifestation of the idea of a safety climate. A positive violence climate will be perceived by employees when management emphasizes the control and elimination of violence by using of safety policies and procedures [19]. Kessler et al. (2008) says "A positive perceived violence climate may also focus employee attention on recognizing precursors to violence, making them more likely to anticipate escalating situations so that actions can be taken to avoid them. In short, it makes employees more knowledgeable about situations that can lead to violence and how to handle them"[20]. In the absence of clear and sufficiently organized policies, procedures and practices against workplace violence (eg, what kind of behaviour constitutes violence and what disciplinary measures will be taken in cases of such behaviour), there are perceptions that the organisation tolerates such behaviour. These perceptions lay the ground for the continuation of existing violence and allow new violent incidents to arise.

There is a relationship between the workplace violence prevention climate and the violence created. The only direct test of violence climate was conducted by Spector et al. (2007) [19]. Using a 7-item true-false violence climate scale, they found that violence climate predicted physical violence and verbal aggression among nurses. Additionally, violence climate predicted physical strain, psychological strain (anxiety and depression), and perceived workplace safety. Results from the Spector et al. (2007) study supported that violence climate has important implications for employee exposure to violence [19]. In addition, a supportive

working environment against workplace violence both reduces possible negative outcomes by exposing the violence and also plays a preventative role against new violence or the threat of such. A study by Emmerik, Euwema, & Bakker (2007) determined a direct relationship between an unsafe working climate and the threat of violence and a reverse relationship between social support and the threat of violence [21]. Cole et al. (1997) determined a negative correlation between the threat of workplace violence and harassment and support from colleagues [22]. On the other hand, several studies have shown the important role played by institutional support in reducing the negative effects arising from violence [23,13,24]. As can be seen from these studies, for the prevention of, or removing negative outcomes of violent incidents in the workplace the presence of a violence prevention climate is an important factor.

The research hypotheses can be predicted as follows.

*Hypothesis 1:* Violence prevention climate will be positively related to job satisfaction.

*Hypothesis 2:* Violence prevention climate will be negatively related to depression.

*Hypothesis 3:* Violence prevention climate will be negatively related to anxiety.

*Hypothesis 4:* Violence prevention climate will be negatively related to stress.

*Hypothesis 5:* Policies and procedures in place to prevent workplace violence increase employee job satisfaction.

*Hypothesis 6:* Training and practices to prevent workplace violence decrease depression stress and anxiety levels in employees.

*Hypothesis 7:* Lack of pressure to enforce safe practices to prevent workplace violence increase levels of stress, depression and anxiety for employees.

## 3. Method

### 3.1. Participants

The participants in this study were 240 employees in various sectors (health, service, etc.) in Turkey. Questionnaires, with free return envelopes, were distributed to voluntary participants selected by random sampling. 154 questionnaires (64%) were returned. The sample of the study included 42 (27.3%) males and 112 (72.7%) females. The mean age of the participants was 32.3±9.53, mean working years 9.1±8.02.

### 3.2. Measures

- *Personal information form:* 7 questions regarding employee age, gender, marital status, education level and years of work.

- *Violence prevention climate scale:* The violence climate scale is an 18-item measure that

assesses three dimensions of climate. This was developed by Kessler et al. (2008) and adapted by us for use in Turkey. Questions 1-6 measure the first dimension of policies and procedures. For example, a statement such as "Management encourages employees to report physical violence" in this section measures the policies and procedures observed in the organisation against violent incidents. Cronbach's alpha for policies and procedures = .88.

Questions 7-12 measure the second dimension of practices and response. For example, statements such as "In my unit, employees are informed about potential violence hazards" evaluate the information and training given by the organisation on the subject of workplace violence prevention and how these practices are perceived by the employees. Violence prevention climate scales internal consistency reliabilities (coefficient alpha) were found for practices and response = .88.

Questions 13-18 measure the final dimension of pressure for unsafe practices. Statements such as "In my unit, in order to get the work done, one must ignore some violence prevention policies" measure the priority given by the organisation to workplace violence prevention. Cronbach's alpha of this scale was .83. In this scale, questions 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18 were reverse coded questions. The higher points obtained indicate a climate oriented to decreasing violence and aggression. This scale was 1 = completely agree to 6 = completely disagree.

• *Job satisfaction scale*: Job satisfaction was assessed with the 5-item scale developed by Brayfield & Rothe (1951). A five-point agree scale was used with choices ranging from "1 = Completely Disagree" to "5 = Completely

Agree." High scores represent high satisfaction [25]. The coefficient alpha was .75.

• *DASS (Depression-Anxiety-Stress) scale*, The Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS) is a promising 42-item self-reporting measure of depression, anxiety, and stress. In this study to assess depression (14 items), anxiety (14 items), and stress (14 items) as aspects of psychological strain, three subscales which were developed by Lovibond & Lovibond (1995) were used. This scale was translated into Turkish by Uncu, Bayram, & Bilgel (2006). The symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress are measured by 42 statements related to emotional state within the last week. For example, items include "I get angry" for stress, "I feel nervous" for anxiety, and "I felt sad and depressed" for depression. The response choices range from 1 (never or a little) to 4 (most of the time) [26]. The alpha for the current scale was .92 for Depression and .91 for Anxiety and .90 for stress.

### 3.3. Procedures

The questionnaire in a sealed envelope was distributed to 240 voluntary participants selected by random sampling. Two days later the completed questionnaires were returned to the researchers by participants.

## 4. Results

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

Table 1  
Reliability analysis of the study instruments

Scales	Number of items	N*	Mean	S.D.	C. Alpha**
Job Satisfaction (JS)	5	152	19.40	3.41	0.75
DASS Totally	42				
Depression	14	141	7.56	6.74	0.92
Anxiety	14	136	8.72	7.05	0.91
Stress	14	138	12.59	7.28	0.90
VPCS	18				
Policies and Procedures	6	152	24.81	6.48	0.88 (0.95)
Practices and Response	6	148	23.56	6.63	0.88 (0.90)
Pressure for Unsafe Practices	6	151	23.10	5.98	0.83 (0.90)

N values are different because of missing data..

\* Figures in parentheses indicate the values of the scale reliability of the original.

The correlation analyses for the study are shown in Table 2.

Table 2  
Correlation analysis among all variables

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
(1) Policies						
(2) Practices	.474(**)					
(3) Pressure (R)	.038	-.012				
(4) Job satisfaction	.199(*)	.225(**)	.276(**)			
(5) Stress	-.058	-.183(*)	-.038	-.261(**)		
(6) Anxiety	-.108	-.158	-.081	-.142	.763(**)	
(7) Depression	-.225(**)	-.338(**)	-.028	-.313(**)	.809(**)	.770(**)

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

(R): Reversed

According to the correlation analysis results (Table 2), the violence prevention climate dimensions of policies, practices and pressure for unsafe practices were found to have a positive significant relationship with job satisfaction. This result supports Hypothesis 1. While the strongest relationship is seen between the dimension of pressure to perform unsafe practices ( $r=.276$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) and job satisfaction, the weakest relationship can be observed between policies and procedures and job satisfaction ( $r=.199$ ;  $p<0.05$ ).

A significant negative correlation was determined between policies and practices and depression ( $p<0.01$ ). No significant relationship was found between pressure and depression ( $p>0.05$ ). According to this, while Hypothesis 2 is accepted with the dimensions of policies and

practices, it is rejected from the aspect of pressure dimension. No significant relationship was found between policies, practice, pressure and anxiety ( $p>0.05$ ). According to this, Hypothesis 3 is rejected. A significant negative correlation was determined between practices and stress ( $r=.276$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). No significant relationship was found between the policies and pressure and stress. In this regard, Hypothesis 4 is accepted with the dimensions practices, it is rejected from the aspect of policies and pressure dimension.

At this stage of the study stepwise regression analysis was performed to define the strength of relationships between the independent variables of the violence climate subdimensions of policies, practices and pressure and the dependent variables of job satisfaction, depression, anxiety and stress.

Table 3  
Result of Stepwise Multiple Regression Analyses

Independent variable	Dependent Variable	
	$\beta$	T
Violence Prevention Climate Dimensions (Constant)	13.321	9.307**
Pressure for Unsafe Practices and Response	.159	3.497**
	.100	2.468*
F	9.371**	
R <sup>2</sup>	.11	

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$

In the explanation of the dependent variable of job satisfaction, the subdimension of violence prevention climate stated as given priority by the organisation 'pressure to perform unsafe practices' was a significant subdimension ( $p<0.01$ ) and was

seen to explain 15% of the total variables (Table 3). In addition, the applications and the response variable is determined to have a significant impact on job satisfaction ( $\beta=.100$ ;  $p<0.05$ ).

Table 4  
Result of Stepwise Multiple Regression Analyses

Independent variable	Dependent Variable	
	$\beta$	t
Violence Prevention Climate Dimensions (Constant)	15.183	7.370**
Practices and Response	-.328	-3.898**
F	15.195**	
R <sup>2</sup>	.10	

\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Whereas the dependent variable of depression, had a significant negative effect on the subdimension 'practices and responses' which includes the information and training given by the organisation on the subject of workplace violence prevention as a subdimension of violence prevention climate, and the variables obtained were revealed to account for 10% of the total variables (Table 4).

The established regression model was found not to be statistically significant in terms of stress and anxiety dependent variables. The hypothesis 'Policies and procedures in place to prevent workplace violence increase employee job satisfaction' is rejected from the results of the regression model (Hypothesis 5). The hypothesis that 'Training and practices to prevent workplace violence decrease depression stress and anxiety levels in employees' (Hypothesis 6) is seen to be accepted in respect of the dependent variable of depression. However, as the anxiety and stress dependent variables were found not to be significant in the established regression analysis model, Hypothesis 7 was rejected in respect of these variables.

## 5. Discussion

Today, violence is commonly observed in all races and cultures. Violent incidents in the workplace which negatively affect employees' health and safety present an important problem of health and safety at work. Being exposed to violent incidents at work or being a witness to violence has a negative effect on employees' feelings towards their work and the organisation. Additionally these types of violent incidents can be a reason for negative outcomes in the workers' physical and psychological health.

Employees' perceptions of organisational policies, procedures and practices directed towards controlling and removing workplace violence and aggression, stated as violence prevention climate, is an important concept in the effect on workers' health caused by workplace violence. Organisational policies and procedures directed towards preventing and controlling workplace violence and aggression create a positive violence climate.

According to the results a significant relationship was determined between employee job satisfaction and the influence directed to the subdimensions of a violence prevention climate of policies, practices and unsafe practices. A study by Kessler et al. (2008) determined a significant relationship between job satisfaction and these three dimensions [20].

While a significant negative correlation was determined between depression and the subdimensions of violence prevention climate policies and practices, no significant relationship

was found between pressure for unsafe practices and depression. A significant negative correlation was determined between stress and the subdimensions of violence prevention climate practices, no significant relationship was found between policies and pressure for unsafe practices and depression. No significant relationship was found between violence prevention climate dimensions anxiety. In a study by Spector et al. (2007) a significant relationship was determined between the perceived violence climate and depression and anxiety [19]. While research by Kessler et al. (2008) showed a significant relationship between practices and pressure, no significant relationship was determined between policies and depression [20]. The same study determined a significant relationship between practices, pressure and anxiety.

Furthermore, the stepwise regression analysis results determined a significant relationship between practices and pressure for unsafe practices subdimensions and job satisfaction. According to this, organisational practices directed towards reducing violent incidents in the workplace (eg information and training on the subject of violence) and there being no pressures towards unsafe behaviour (eg violence prevention policies and procedures not being ignored) play a role in increasing job satisfaction. The stepwise regression analysis results also determined a significant relationship between the dimension of practices and depression. According to this result, the practice of the organisation giving information and training on workplace violence prevention is effective in reducing the rate of employee depression.

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