Impact of Covid-19 Fear on Employee Performance

Beyza ERER[1]

Abstract

Covid-19, also called a new type of coronavirus, emerged in Wuhan, China and spread rapidly to the world. Differing from other epidemics with its mortality rates and spreading rate, Covid-19 continues to exert its effects on psycho-social health as well as physical health and deeply affects human behavior. For, although many measures are taken to prevent the virus, it causes significant fear and anxiety in people's daily lives. These fears and worries also manifest themselves in business life, which covers a significant part of human life, and have negative impacts on many behaviors, from the way employees do business to their performance, and from their job satisfaction to quitting job. In this context, the study aims to determine the effect of Covid-19 fear on employee performance. For this purpose, "Covid-19 Fear Scale" and "Employee Performance Scale" were administered to 223 employees. The results obtained indicate that the employees have high levels of fear of Covid-19; It shows that there is a negative, moderate and significant correlation between fear of Covid-19 and employee performance. In addition, it was concluded that the fear of Covid-19 significantly predicted employee performance.

1. Introduction

Human history has witnessed great ruptures that have affected all societies in different periods of time. Depressions and crises such as wars, natural disasters (famine, earthquake, fire, climate irregularities, etc.), epidemics, economic crises, terrorist activities and political disputes have been indicated as the causes of these major ruptures and have caused radical changes by affecting all societies. Unfortunately, the current situation we are experiencing today, which has been caused by the Covid-19 epidemic, is a global depression and it is obvious that it will lead to large-scale ruptures. For epidemics, which have a history as old as human history, found new areas of spreading within a very short time due to the interaction of societies with each other, giving rise to many deaths (thousands or even millions) in areas they have never been seen before and caused the collapse of powerful states-empires (Yılmaz, 2007 : 27).

The virus, which was first seen in Wuhan, China in December 2019 and called "2019-nCoV", is known as Corona Virus or Coronavirus (BBC, 2020). This new type of coronavirus, which threatens the health of the whole world and has similar

[1] Corresponding Author. ORDID: 0000-0002-6966-517X. beyzaerer@selcuk.edu.tr

characteristics with previous coronavirus outbreaks (SARS & MERS) but has an unknown etiology, was named Covid-19 by The World Health Organization (WHO) on February 11, 2020 (Zhao et al., 2020 : 215). Covid-19 has been declared as a "pandemic", which means a global epidemic, after its rapid spread in the world (BBC, 2020).

The Covid-19 epidemic, which reached more than 200 countries, including our country, within a short time and caused millions of people to be infected and hundreds of thousands of people to die, has profoundly affected and continues to affect all areas and processes such as health, economy, education, political, legal, technological-digital, international relations and social life. Undoubtedly, one of the areas affected significantly by the epidemic is working life (Kavas and Develi, 2020: 86; Karakaş, 2020: 546). Although measures were taken to prevent the spread of the epidemic in working life (flexible and distance working model, downward trends in working hours, shift-based working system, virtual meetings and trainings, etc.), these measures have not been applicable to all sectors and all employees. In addition, the fact that an effective treatment method and vaccine for the epidemic has not been found yet has caused anxiety and fear in many employees by creating uncertainty about the direction of the process (Duman, 2020: 427).

Considering the current environment of fear and uncertainty, it is thought that this situation creates stress in employees and negatively affects their performance. The reason for this is that those who work under stress cannot devote themselves to their work and workplace because they feel unwell both physiologically and mentally. Therefore, it cannot be expected from a person working under stress with the fear of Covid-19 to exhibit high performance.

2. Purpose of the Research

With the epidemic not ending or even increasingly spreading, the ending of strict isolation measures and the lack of adequate measures indicate that the effect of the fear of Covid-19 on working life will persist and be even more extensive. For this reason, the present study aims to determine the Covid-19 fear level of employees and its effect on their performance. Accordingly, answers were sought to the following questions:

- What is the employees' level of fear of Covid-19?
- Is there a significant correlation between employees' level of fear of Covid-19 and their performance?
- Does the fear of Covid-19 predict performance level significantly?

3. Importance of the Research

Performance is the implementation, by an employee, of a job deemed appropriate for her/him in terms of skill and feature at the desired level. In other words, performance is a concept that shows quantitatively and qualitatively what a person doing a job has been able to achieve and attain in line with the planned target (Şehitoğlu and Zehir 2010: 144). An employee's individual performance in working life is the most important performance criterion for businesses, because a

business is only as successful as the performance of its employee (Tayfun & Çatır, 2013: 120).

Employee performance, which is so important for businesses, is affected by many factors. In this context, it is thought that the fear of Covid-19 that we experience today also creates stress in employees and negatively affects their performance. Therefore, the research is important in that it aims to provide information to studies that will increase the performance of employees in this period by revealing the state of fear that employees are in and evaluating its effect on their performance. In other words, this research is important in terms of both revealing the current situation and providing information for future studies.

4. Method

The model used in this research is the "survey model". Studies conducted according to the survey model are studies carried out to determine a past or a current situation. In the research, the relational survey model, which is one of the survey models and is under the category of general survey, was used. The model in question is constructed in the form of data pairs that allow a relational analysis (Karasar, 2020: 114).

People working in Turkey constitute the research population. The criterion sampling method, which is one of the non-probabilistic sampling methods, was used in the study. In this context, the sample of the study consists of the employees of the food products manufacturing (bakery and bakery products) sector in Konya. The number of questionnaires received from the respondents in the research is 230. However, 7 of these questionnaires were excluded because they were filled incompletely and were not suitable for the study, and thus a sample size of 223 people was determined.

The data used in the study were obtained from the participants as a result of the application of the survey technique on the internet. The questionnaire used in the study consists of two scales: Covid-19 fear and employee performance. For the Covid-19 fear scale, the scale developed by Ahorsu et al. (2020) and adapted into Turkish by Ladikli et al. (2020) was used. There are no reverse scored items in the Covid-19 fear scale, which consists of 7 questions and one dimension. Receiving a high score on the scale indicates that the Covid-19 fear level is "high". In the Turkish reliability and validity test of the scale, the Cronbach's Alpha value was found as (α = .86). In this study, the Cronbach Alpha value of the scale was determined as (α = .92). In order to measure employee performance, the employee performance scale developed by Kirkman and Rosen (1999) and adapted to Turkish by Çöl (2008) was used. There are no reverse scored items in the employee performance scale, which consists of 4 questions and one dimension. Higher scores on the scale indicate that the employee performance level is "high". The Cronbach Alpha value was found as (α = .82) in the Turkish reliability and validity test of the scale. In this study, on the other hand, the Cronbach Alpha value of the scale was determined as (α = .94). In addition, each of the statements in both scales was coded as "(1) Strongly Disagree; (5) I strongly agree" and prepared in the form of a 5-point Likert scale.

IBM SPSS Statistics 21 and IBM AMOS package programs were used to analyze the data collected in the study. In order to analyze the data, whether the relevant data set showed normal distribution or not was checked. Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) accept that the distribution is normal when the skewness and kurtosis values are within the range of ± 1.50. Since the skewness (.685) and kurtosis (-.586) values of the score belonging to the Covid-19 fear scale are within this range, one can say that the data set shows a normal distribution. Since the skewness (-.353) and kurtosis (-.621) values of the score of the employee performance scale are also within this range, this data set also shows a normal distribution. Accordingly, confirmatory factor (CFA) analysis was used to determine the validity of the research data, whereas Pearson correlation analysis was used to determine the direction and strength of the relationship between the variables, and regression analysis was used to determine the level of effect of the variables.

5. Findings

When Table 1, which includes demographic information is examined, it is seen that 58.3 % of the employees in the sample are men and 41.7 % are women. When the marital status of the sample was examined, it was found that 68.16 % of them were married and 31.84 % were single. When the age distribution is considered, it is seen that 60.08 % are in the 18-30 age range, 29.59 % in the 31-40 age range, 8.54 % in the 41-50 age range and 1.79 % in the age range of 51 and over. When the education levels of the participants are examined, it is seen that 42.15 % have primary education, 39.02 % high school education, 10.76 % associate degree education and 8.07 % undergraduate education. Finally, when the work experience of the sample is examined, it is seen that those working for 6-10 years constitute the majority with 45.75 %.

Table 1: Demographic Information (N=223)

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	130	58.3 %
	Female	93	41.7 %
Marital Status	Married	152	68.16 %
	Single	71	31.84 %
Age	18-30	134	60.08 %
	31-40	66	29.59 %
	41-50	19	8.54 %
	51 or more	4	1.79 %
Educational Level	Primary Education	94	42.15 %
	High School	87	39.02 %
	Associate Degree	24	10.76 %
	Undergraduate	18	8.07 %
Job Experience	Between 1-5 years	83	37.23 %
	Between 6-10 years	102	45.74 %
	Between 11-15 years	30	13.45 %
	16 year or more	8	3.58 %

Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to test the validity of the Covid-19 fear and employee performance scales. As a result of the analysis, it was seen that the single-factor structure of both scales was appropriate for the study sample.

Standardized factor loads are between 0.53-0.98. When the fit indices of the scales in Table 2 are examined, it is seen that the scales have values within the acceptable fit limits (Meydan & Şeşen, 2015). These values show that the model fit indices in the two scales used in the study are statistically significant and valid.

Table 2: Fit Indexes of the Scales

Variables	Covid-19 Fear	Employee Performance
CMIN/DF	4.881	3.356
GFI	0.921	0.993
CFI	0.939	0.997
RMR	0.418	0.521
RMSEA	0.072	0.083

Cross-sectional values based on Çankaya (2018) were used in the interpretation of the mean score of the scales. According to these values, the values between 1.0 and 2.33 represent low participation, whereas values between 2.34 and 3.66 represent moderate participation, and values between 3.67 and 5.00 represent high participation. In this context, when Table 3 is examined, the mean score the participants received from the fear of Covid-19 scale is 3.71 ± 1.05. This high score obtained indicated that the sample had "high" levels of Covid-19 fears. The mean score obtained from the employee performance scale is 2.48 ± 1.21, and it is possible to say that the performances of the participant group are at a "moderate" level.

Table 3: Descriptive analysis results of scales (N=223)

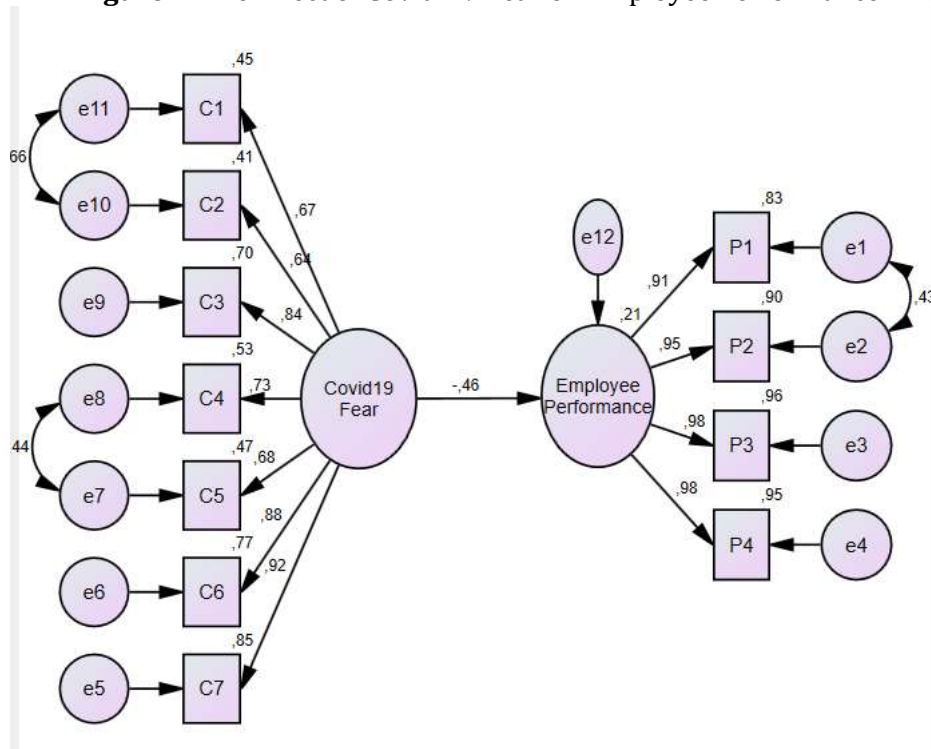|	Min-Max	X̄	Ss
Covid-19 Fear	1-5	3.71	1.05
Employee Performance	1-5	2.48	1.21

Correlation analysis was conducted to examine whether there was a relationship between the participants' fear of Covid-19 and their performance levels. Due to the fact that the groups exhibited normal distribution, Pearson correlation analysis was used. According to the result of the analysis, a negative, moderate (r = -0.475) and significant (p = 0.000) relationship was found between employees' fear of Covid-19 and their performance level (Table 4).

Table 4: Correlation analysis

		Employee Performance
Covid-19 Fear	Pearson Correlation	-0.475
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000

The effect level of the two variables (fear of COVID-19 and employee performance), which had a significant correlational relationship, was examined through regression analysis (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The Effect of Covid-19 Fear on Employee Performance

The results obtained (CMIN / DF = 3.681; RMSEA = .066; SRMR = .046; IFI = .966; CFI = .967) show that the model and the data present an acceptable fit. As a result of the regression analysis, it was determined that the fear of Covid-19 significantly predicted employee performance (= -0.46; p <0.001). In addition, the fear of Covid-19 explained a significant portion (21 %) of the variance in employee performance (Figure 1).

6. Conclusion

While issues such as globalization, terrorism, poverty, economic crises, natural disasters, capitalism, wars and the refugee problems it caused were being discussed in the first quarter of the 21st century, the Covid-19 epidemic unexpectedly took its place on the agenda of the whole world. Affecting all areas of life, from health to economy, and from politics to education and social life, the Covid-19 epidemic has left deep scars and continues to do so by causing many problems in all areas and sectors.

Although many measures have been taken to reduce the spread of the virus, these efforts have failed to a large extent, and the virus, continues to spread rapidly all over the world. As a consequence of this situation, the Covid-19 epidemic has caused great fear and anxiety. The continuing uncertainty, that is, the lack of an effective method to eradicate the virus or the lack of a vaccine, has increased the severity of the fear and anxiety in question. In this direction, even if people have not been infected, they continue their lives with fear of Covid-19, which negatively affects their psychology, which is reflected in their behavior. It is thought that people who do not have the opportunity to work from home, especially in business life, are more exposed to the fear of the Covid-19 outbreak. For this reason, the purpose of this study is to determine the Covid-19 fear levels of employees who

have to commute to work every day and who have been working together with their colleagues in the same environment for a long time during this period, and to measure the effect of Covid-19 fear on employee performance. For this purpose, a questionnaire was administered to the employees of bakeries and bakery product businesses in Konya and the data obtained were analyzed with the help of SPSS and AMOS package programs. As a result of the statistical analysis, it was determined that the employees' fear of Covid-19 was high and that there was a significant relationship between the fear of Covid-19 and employee performance. This is a negative and moderate level relationship. As a result of the regression analysis, it was determined that the fear of Covid-19 significantly predicted the employee performance level. In this direction, it is possible to say that 1 unit increase in Covid-19 fear reduces employee performance by 0.46 units. In addition, 21 % of the variation in employee performance was explained by the fear of Covid-19.

Since the Covid-19 epidemic is a recent issue and researches are being conducted in this regard especially in the health sector, it is seen that the number of studies in the field of business is limited. When the national and international literature was examined, no study was found addressing the performance of employees and fear of Covid-19. Considering that the most important criterion of contemporary business is human resources, a factor that can affect the human resource performance to this extent in all circumstances must be expanded in its scope, examined, and studies must be conducted in different samples.

References

Ahorsu, D. K., Lin, C. Y., Imani, V., Saffari, M., Griffiths, M. D., & Pakpour, A. H. (2020). The fear of COVID-19 Scale: development and initial validation. International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction, 1-9.

BBC. (2020). Koronavirüs Nedir: Covid-19 Hastalığının Semptomları Neler, Hangi Önlemler Alınmalı?. https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-dunya-51177538, Erişim Tarihi: 26.10.2020.

Çankaya, M. (2018). Hastane çalışanlarının örgütsel sinizm düzeylerinin incelenmesi. MANAS Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi, 7(4), 287-306.

Çöl, G. (2008). Algılanan güçlendirmenin işgören performansı üzerine etkileri. Doğuş Üniversitesi Dergisi, 9(1), 35-46.

Duman, N. (2020). Üniversite öğrencilerinde COVID-19 korkusu ve belirsizliğe tahammülsüzlük. The Journal of Social Science, 4(8), 426-437.

Karakaş, M. (2020). Covid-19 salgınının çok boyutlu sosyolojisi ve yeni normal meselesi. İstanbul Üniversitesi Sosyoloji Dergisi, 40(1), 541–573.

Karasar, N. (2020). Bilimsel araştırma yöntemi kavramlar ilkeler teknikler. Ankara: Nobel.

Kavas, N.B., & Develi, A. (2020). Çalışma yaşamındaki sorunlar bağlamında Covid-19 pandemisinin kadın sağlık çalışanları üzerindeki etkisi. Uluslararası Anadolu Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi. 4(2), 84-112.

Kirkman, B. L., & Rosen, B. (1999). Beyond self-management: Antecedents and consequences of team empowerment. Academy of Management Journal, 42 (1), 58-74

Ladikli, N., Bahadır, E., Yumuşak, N.F., Akkuzu, H., Karaman, G., & Türkkan, Z. (2020). Kovid-19 korkusu ölçeği'nin türkçe güvenirlik ve geçerlik çalışması. Uluslararası Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi, 3(2), 71-80.

Meydan, H. C. & Şeşen, H. (2015). Yapısal Eşitlik Modellemesi Amos Uygulamaları. 2.Baskı, Ankara: Detay Yayıncılık.

Şehitoğlu Y., & Zehir C. (2010). Türk kamu kuruluşlarında çalışan performansının, çalışan sessizliği ve örgütsel vatandaşlık davranışı bağlamında incelenmesi. Amme İdaresi Dergisi, 43(4), 87-110.

Tabachnick, B. G., & Fidell, L. S. (2013). Using multivariate statistics (Sixth edition). United States: Pearson Education.

Tayfun, A., & Çatır, O. (2013). Örgütsel sessizlik ve çalışanların performansları arasındaki ilişki üzerine bir araştırma. İşletme Araştırmaları Dergisi, 5(3), 114-134.

Yılmaz, E. (2007). 1847-1848 kolera salgını ve Osmanlı coğrafyasındaki etkileri. Avrasya İncelemeleri Dergisi, 6(1), 23–55.

Zhao, S., Lin, Q., Ran, J., Musa, S. S., Yang, G., Wang, W., & Wang, M. H. (2020). Preliminary estimation of the basic reproduction number of novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) in China, from 2019 to 2020: A data-driven analysis in the early phase of the outbreak. International Journal of Infectious Diseases, 92, 214-217.

SRA Strategic Research Academy ©