

Emotional Abuse Perceived by Nursing Students and Risk Factors

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ABSTRACT

This descriptive study was conducted to determine the emotional abuse perceived by nursing students and the affecting factors. The population of the research consisted of students studying in the Department of Nursing in the spring semester of the 2021-2022 academic year. Sample selection was not made from the universe and the research was completed with 347 students. Descriptive Characteristics Form and Perceived Emotional Abuse Scale for Adults were used to collect data. Number and percentage calculations, arithmetic mean, Kolmogorov-Smirnov distribution test, Student's t test and one way ANOVA were used in the analysis of the data. It was found that the perception of emotional abuse of the nursing students participating in the study was moderate and living in an extended family, to like or dislike their own body a little, being treated for a psychiatric illness and experiencing at least one once depression symptom in their life were risk factors for perceived emotional abuse in students.

Keywords: Emotional abuse, nursing students, risk factor.

Hemşirelik Öğrencilerinin Algıladıkları Duygusal İstismar ve Risk Faktörleri

ÖZET

Tanımlayıcı türde olan bu araştırma hemşirelik öğrencilerinin algıladıkları duygusal istismarı ve etkileyen faktörleri belirlemek amacıyla yapılmıştır. Araştırmanın evrenini 2021-2022 eğitim-öğretim yılı bahar döneminde Hemşirelik Bölümünde okuyan araştırmaya gönüllü 347 öğrenciler oluşturmuştur. Evrenden örneklem seçimine gidilmemiş olup 347 öğrenci ile araştırma tamamlanmıştır. Verilerinin toplanmasında Tanımlayıcı Özellikler Formu ve Yetişkinler İçin Algılanan Duygusal İstismar Ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Verilerin analizinde sayı ve yüzdelik hesapları, aritmetik ortalama, Kolmogorov-Smirnov dağılım testi, Student t testi ve one way ANOVA kullanılmıştır. Araştırmaya katılan hemşirelik öğrencilerinin duygusal istismar algısı orta düzeyde olduğu ve geniş ailede yaşamak, kendi bedenini biraz beğenmek ve beğenmemek, psikiyatrik bir hastalık tedavisi görmek ve hayatında en az bir kez depresyon belirtisi yaşamamanın öğrencilerde algılanan duygusal istismar açısından risk faktörü oluşturduğu bulunmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Duygusal istismar, hemşirelik öğrencileri, risk faktörü.

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INTRODUCTION

The abuse is defined as using someone's goodwill in a bad and wrong way and presuming it (Öngün & Ünsal, 2018). Social sciences bring abuse forward more in verbal, physical, sexual, emotional and economic fields. However, abuse, which is expressed as an umbrella term, expands to cases such as injury, rape, exposure, humiliation, intimidation, not allowing work or taking money from them, along with gaining any benefit. Additionally, the term abuse is also divided into several categories such as the elder, child, partner, and financial abuse (Bilgin, 2018).

Emotional abuse refers to particularly repetitive behavioral patterns that make a person feel worthless, unloved, unwanted, or valuable only if they meet the needs of others (Gülaçtı & Çetinkaya, 2018a). Characteristics of emotional abuse include constantly monitoring behaviors, not seeing family and friends, humiliating in front of others, and harming or threatening to harm oneself or others (Vidourek, 2017). Emotional abuse may result in attitudes that cover verbal abuse, intimidation, threatening or excessive orders, which will discontinue the psychological growth of individuals including children and adolescents, harm the identity of the children and adolescents by depriving them of the interest, love and care they need, and pave the way for them to develop misconducts (Toka et al., 2018). These attitudes can negatively affect the abused person and reduce their joy of life (Vidourek, 2017). It can also adversely affect a person's self-esteem, psychological resilience, and mindfulness (Lee et al., 2018; Seon et al., 2022).

Individuals exposed to emotional abuse may suffer from depression (Chen et al., 2021; Christ et al., 2019; Cui & Liu, 2020; Humphreys et al., 2020; Liu, 2017; Wu et al., 2018), vulnerability (Fasciano et al., 2020; Nar & Çakmak-Tolan, 2022; Xie et al., 2021), consume alcohol (Kisely et al., 2020), develop post-traumatic stress disorder (Gama et al., 2021; Hoeboer et al., 2021), and commit suicide (Angelakis et al., 2019; Demirkol et al., 2020) in the later stages of their lives.

During adolescence, individuals develop physically, socially, cognitively, and emotionally. University students are considered to be in the last stage of adolescence. Young people are expected to display prosocial behaviors, which are beneficial first to themselves and then to their environment, to have high life satisfaction, and not to be exposed to physical, sexual, or emotional abuse (Gülaçtı & Çetinkaya, 2018a, 2018b). Nurses, whose main purpose is to improve individual, family, and community health to protect health and provide treatment, care, and rehabilitation for the sick, have an important role in helping individuals with a perception of emotional abuse. Because nurses, who are present at all stages of health care, can provide counseling in identifying risky individuals in terms of perceived emotional abuse and directing these individuals to health services. (Öngün & Ünsal, 2018). Nursing students, who are the nurses of the future, will have an important place in protecting the public health. It is important to determine the emotional abuse perceptions of the students in terms of contributing to both their own health and the public health. In this way, necessary precautions will be taken before starting the profession and emotionally healthier nurses will serve society. The number of studies on emotional abuse and risk factors in nursing students is limited. For all these reasons, this study was conducted to determine the emotional abuse perceived by nursing students and risk factors.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Study Type

The research is in a descriptive design.

Population and Sampling

The population of the research consisted of students studying in the Faculty of Health Sciences, Nursing Department of a university in the 2021-2022 academic year. No sample selection was made from the universe, and the research was completed with 347 volunteer students, who could be reached from 460 students. Inclusion criteria for nursing students were determined as follows; having no problem in communication and being aged 18 and over.

Data Collection Tools

The Descriptive Characteristics Form prepared by the researchers and the Emotional Abuse Perceived Scale for Adults were used to collect the data.

Descriptive Characteristics Form: It was prepared by the researchers and consists of 15 questions about the students' age, gender, grade, mother's educational background, and father's educational background (Ersanlı et al., 2013; Khaligova, 2019; Öngün & Ünsal, 2018).

Emotional Abuse Perceived Scale (EAPS): Emotional Abuse Perceived Scale was developed by Ersanlı et al. It consists of 61 items and is a 5-point Likert-type assessment tool. They are rated as (5) Strongly Agree, (4) Agree, (3) Undecided, (2) Disagree, and (1) Strongly Disagree. While 58 of the 61 items are negative statements, 3 items (items 8, 21, and 54) are positive statements. The lowest and highest scores of the scale are 61 and 305, respectively. Higher scores signify that the individual perceives a high level of emotional abuse. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the scale is 0.95 (Ersanlı et al., 2013). In this study, its Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient was found to be 0.974.

Data Collection

The data were collected "online" using the Google survey prepared by the researchers between March-April 2022.

Data Analysis

The data were assessed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) 23.0 statistical package program. In the data analysis, descriptive statistical methods such as number and percentage calculations, and arithmetic mean were employed. Kolmogorov-Smirnov distribution test was used to examine the normal distribution. Student's t-test and one-way ANOVA were used to compare the normally distributed variables between the groups. Bonferroni correction was applied to determine between which groups there was a significant difference. Continuous variables of the study were analyzed using Pearson correlation analysis. The results were accepted as statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level at the confidence interval of 95%.

Ethical Committee Approval

The ethics approval was obtained from the University's Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee (Date: 02.03.2022, No: E-18457941-050.99-41669). Consent was obtained from the participants online.

RESULTS

The mean age of the participants was 21.32 ± 10.03 (min. 18, max. 25). 70.9% of them were female and 34.3% were the first-year students. 80.7% of the students were non-smokers, 37.5% grew up in the Southeastern Anatolia region, 47.3% lived in the city center during their childhood and 66% had a nuclear family type. It was seen that 62.5% of the nursing students' mothers and 64% of fathers spent their childhood in the village, 68.6% of them were primary school graduates, 46.7% of them were secondary/high school graduates. Fathers of 86.5% of the students were employed, mothers of 91.4% were housewives, and 61.7% had an income equal to expenditures. When the characteristics of the students are questioned; 73.5% of them stayed in the dormitory during their education, 87.3% of them did not work in a job during their education, 57.6% liked their own body, 88.2% were not treated for any psychiatric illness, 68% of them reported that they experienced symptoms of depression at least once in their lifetime (Table 1).

Participants' mean scores for Emotional Abuse Perceived Scale for Adults were found to be 139.10 ± 40.83 . When the EAPS mean scores of the students were examined according to their socio-demographic characteristics, it was found that there was no significant difference between the age, gender, grade, smoking status, current residence region and residence place during childhood, and EAPS. The students having an extended family structure had a statistically significant higher EAPS

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scores than those with nuclear family ($p=0.042$). EAPS scores of the students who worked in a job during their education process were significantly higher than those who did not work ($p=0.007$). There was a statistically significant difference between the students' EAPS scores in terms of status of liking their own body. In the pairwise comparison made as a result of Bonferroni correction, it was determined that the students who liked their own body had significantly lower EAPS scores than the students who liked their own body slightly and did not like. The EAPS scores of the students who received treatment for a psychiatric illness ($p<0.001$) and felt depressed at least once throughout their lifetime ($p<0.001$) were significantly higher (Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of the Students' EAPS Mean Scores According to Their Socio-Demographic Characteristics (n=347)

Characteristics		Mean±SD	p
Total EAPS Score	-	139.10±40.83	-
Gender			
Female	246 (70.9)	140.19±41.33	0.436
Male	101 (29.1)	136.43±39.67	
Grade			
First year	119 (34.3)	144.24±44.75	
Second year	82 (23.6)	143.91±38.36	0.057
Third year	113 (32.6)	133.78±36.93	
Fourth year	33 (9.5)	126.81±41.63	
Smoking			
Yes	67 (19.3)	146.85±40.85	0.084
No	280 (80.7)	137.25±40.68	
Current Residence Region			
Marmara region	14 (4.0)	138.57±34.50	0.925
Aegean region	6 (1.7)	149.66±61.26	
Mediterranean region	29 (8.4)	139.37±39.42	
Southeastern Anatolia region	130 (37.5)	138.23±39.72	
Central Anatolia region	22 (6.3)	148.27±45.26	
Eastern Anatolia region	11 (31.7)	139.09±42.40	
Black Sea region	36 (10.4)	134.88±39.05	
Where you spent your childhood			
City center	164 (47.3)	135.23±40.33	0.249
District center	100 (28.8)	142.62±42.68	
Village	83 (23.9)	142.50±39.31	
Family type			
Nuclear	229 (66.0)	135.90±39.31	0.042
Extended	118 (34.0)	142.30±43.13	
Where the mother spent her childhood			
City center	78 (22.5)	133.29±43.55	0.167
District center	52 (15.0)	134.46±40.59	
Village	217 (62.5)	142.30±39.72	
Where the father spent her childhood			
City center	75 (21.6)	136.01±45.36	0.480
District center	50 (14.4)	134.94±41.10	
Village	222 (64.0)	141.08±39.19	
Mother's educational background			
Primary school and lower	238 (68.6)	138.47±37.82	0.307
Secondary/High school	97 (28.0)	138.44±44.56	
University and higher	12 (3.5)	156.91±62.76	
Father's educational background			
Primary school and lower	144 (41.5)	141.59±39.64	0.059
Secondary/High school	162 (46.7)	134.20±40.04	
University and higher	41 (11.8)	149.70±46.01	

Table 1. Distribution of the Students' EAPS Mean Scores According to Their Socio-Demographic Characteristics (n=347) (continued)

Mother's occupation	317 (91.4)	138.96±40.24	0.703
Housewife	30 (8.6)	157.00±48.08	
Employed			
Father's occupation			
Retired	47 (13.5)	136.55±36.66	0.346
Employed	300 (86.5)	139.10±40.83	
Family income			
Income less than expenditure	118 (34.0)	145.37±41.84	0.106
Income equal to expenditure	214 (61.7)	135.55±39.16	
Income more than expenditure	15 (4.3)	141.20±52.04	
Current residence place			
With family	54 (15.6)	143.34±45.17	0.356
Alone at home	6 (1.7)	166.50±51.55	
With friends at home	32 (9.2)	131.68±37.78	
At dormitory	255 (73.5)	138.39±40.32	
Employment during their education			
Yes	44 (12.7)	154.61±53.70	0.007
No	303 (87.3)	136.85±38.2	
Liking their own body			
Yes ¹	200 (57.6)	129.42±37.76	<0.001
Slightly ²	114 (32.9)	149.64±40.62	3>1, 2>1
No ³	33 (9.5)	161.33±42.96	
Receiving treatment for a psychiatric disease			
Yes	41 (11.8)	161.56±49.09	<0.001
No	306 (88.2)	136.09±38.71	
Feeling depressed at least once throughout their life			
Yes	236 (68.0)	144.73±40.71	<0.001
No	111 (32.0)	127.12±38.62	
Age	21.32± 10.03	r: 0.078	p: 0.146

DISCUSSION

Adolescence is known to be one of the important periods in which individuals develop physically, socially, cognitively, and emotionally. Undoubtedly, it is important for university students, who are the adults of our future, to be individuals who first exhibit prosocial behaviors that are beneficial to themselves and then to their environment, have high levels of sensitivity towards themselves and others, are far from physical, sexual, psychological and emotional abuse, and have high life satisfaction in order to become individuals who are a part of the future world of university students. In addition, it is a study that raises awareness in terms of helping individuals who abuse and are exposed to abuse and protecting and improving their own health, as members of the nursing profession, whose main purpose is to improve individual, family, and community health, protect health and provide treatment, care, and rehabilitation of patients; its findings are discussed with relevant literature.

The emotional abuse levels perceived by the students were found to be moderate. In the study conducted by Hürler, on university students, they determined that students' perceptions of emotional abuse were low (Hürler, 2018). In another study, it was found that university students had perceived emotional abuse at a moderate level (Özkebaççı, 2019). The findings of the study are similar and it is possible to say that there is emotional abuse in university students. The studies conducted in Turkey have been correlational and it is possible to say that there is a limited number of studies to determine the perceived emotional abuse in adults. Furthermore studies are needed to determine the perceived emotional abuse in order to contribute to the health of the youth.

In the study, it was determined that the socio-demographic characteristics of the students such as age, gender, grade, smoking status, residence region, and childhood place did not affect the perception of emotional abuse. When the studies were examined, it was concluded that age (Hürler, 2018; Özkebabçı, 2019), gender (Gülaçtı & Çetinkaya, 2018a; Hürler, 2018; Özkebabçı, 2019), grade (Hürler, 2018; Önal, 2021; Özkebabçı, 2019) support results of the present study. In this case, we can say that there is a possibility of encountering the phenomenon of abuse at any moment of life, regardless of age and gender. No significant difference was found between the parents' educational background, their profession, income status, the region where they lived and the place where they spent their childhood, and the perceived emotional abuse. In the literature, it was found that education background of mother (Gülaçtı & Çetinkaya, 2018a; Hürler, 2018; Toka et al., 2018) and father did not affect perception of emotional abuse (Gülaçtı & Çetinkaya, 2018b, 2018a). Other studies reported that as education level of father (Gülaçtı & Çetinkaya, 2018b; Hürler, 2018; Toka et al., 2018) and family income level increased (Hürler, 2018), perceived emotional abuse decreased. The research findings support our study and it can be said that the family characteristics of the students are not a risk factor for perceived emotional abuse. EAPS scores of students with extended family structure were found to be higher than their counterparts with nuclear family. The result of the study by Toka et al., supports this finding (Toka et al., 2018). Extended family structure may be a risk factor for perceived emotional abuse. More work is needed to support this finding.

In the study, it was determined that the students who worked in a job during their education had significantly higher EAPS scores than those who did not. Accordingly, it can be asserted that the variable of working at a job during their education imposed a risk factor in perceived emotional abuse. Since the group working at a job during university years was not financially supported by their family, had weak family relations, and was more likely to be abused at work, it was an expected result that the perceived emotional abuse was high in this group and it is recommended that these students be identified and supported. Perceived emotional abuse was found to be correlated with the students' status of liking their own bodies and the students who liked their own bodies had significantly lower EAPS scores than students who liked their own bodies slightly and did not like them. Body image is defined as one's thoughts about how the body appears to other people, or his/her feelings and attitudes toward his own body. Body image is of great importance for creating identity. Criticism draws attention as one of the variables affecting body image. These criticisms can cause a profound effect. Criticisms harm self-confidence about body image and therefore self-concept (Khaligova, 2019). Some people may purposely hurt their peers' feelings by making fun of them, mocking them, or making negative remarks about their appearance. These are just a few examples. The reason why feedback is of great importance for the person is that he knows what the people in his circle think about his own body and he is aware of whether the person's bodily qualities are rejected or not. Non-verbal attitudes are as important as verbal ones in forming one's body image. Body language, eye contact, and tone of voice can also make the person feel accepted by the people around them (Khaligova, 2019). According to what is cited by Nar and Çakmak-Tolan when the negative impact of emotional abuse on the person's sense of self-worth and self-esteem is taken into account, it is expected that individuals exposed to emotional abuse have low mindfulness and self-acceptance (Nar & Çakmak-Tolan, 2022). The study conducted with high school students revealed that the self-esteem mean scores changed according to the level of abuse the students perceive from their families and their perceived body image. It was found that the self-esteem mean scores of the participants who stated that they did not like their own bodies at all, those who were undecided about liking their own bodies, and those who liked their own bodies considerably were higher (Önal, 2021). The literature and studies support the finding of the present study and students who did not like their own bodies were a risk factor for perceived emotional abuse and it is recommended to identify and support this group.

It was determined that students who received treatment for a psychiatric illness ($p < 0.001$) and felt depressed at least once throughout their lifetime ($p < 0.001$) had significantly higher EAPS scores. Emotional abuse is associated with many mental problems in the following years, and although 20-50% of abuse victims do not have psychiatric symptoms, psychiatric disorders such as anxiety,

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depression, substance abuse, suicidal behavior, borderline personality disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder may develop in the later periods (Öngün & Ünsal, 2018). In the study, psychological abuse is stated that depression has an important effect on self-esteem, their self is negatively affected by this, and they are more prone to depression (Bostan, 2018). Depression (Chen et al., 2021; Christ et al., 2019; Cui & Liu, 2020; Humphreys et al., 2020; Liu, 2017), alcohol use (Kisely et al., 2020) of individuals exposed to emotional abuse), post-traumatic stress disorder (Gama et al., 2021; Hoeboer et al., 2021), suicide (Angelakis et al., 2019; Demirkol et al., 2020). In a study conducted by Wu et al. (2018) on university students, it was stated that negative behaviors experienced in childhood cause depressive symptoms in adulthood (Wu et al., 2018). Other studies reported that emotional abuse was a factor that negatively affected one's self-evaluation, self-esteem, psychological resilience, and mindfulness (Lee et al., 2018; Seon et al., 2022) and exposure to emotional abuse may cause depression and vulnerability (Fasciano et al., 2020; Xie et al., 2021). The study results support the finding of the present study. It can be asserted that emotional abuse has a significant correlation with depression and psychological problems and it is an important risk factor in perceived emotional abuse.

CONCLUSIONS

It was found that students who had an extended family structure, worked in a job during their education, liked their own bodies slightly and did not like their own bodies, receive treatment for a psychiatric disease throughout their lives, and feel depressed at least once throughout their lives were at risk for perceived emotional abuse. In line with these results, it is recommended to raise awareness levels by giving lectures and seminars on abuse and neglect for students; expand psychological support programs and psychological counseling practices within the university so that they can cope with emotional abuse perceptions; inform parents living in extended families about child development, psychology and abuse; to follow the children of these families by primary care public health professionals, to identify students who have economic difficulties and therefore have to work in the education process by universities; and to provide more financial support by official institutions; to provide expert support for problem solving approach that will enable abused students to change themselves and to cope with the perception of emotional abuse; to realize trainings that will increase self-esteem in individuals who like their own bodies slightly and who do not like their own bodies; to provide guidance that will enable abused students to maintain a permanent and meaningful relationship with a positive peer or adult; and to examine more field studies with young adults on emotional abuse using different variables.

ETHICAL COMMITTEE APPROVAL

The ethics approval was obtained from the University's Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee (Date: 02.03.2022, No: E-18457941-050.99-41669).

AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

Idea/concept: SKT, DKB; Design: SKT, DKB; Consultancy: SKT, DKB; Data collection and/or Data processing: SKT, DKB; Analysis and/or interpretation: SKT, DKB; Literature review: SKT, DKB; Writing of the article: SKT, DKB; Critical review: SKT, DKB.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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