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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VIOLENCE TENDENCY AND DATING VIOLENCE ATTITUDE IN STUDENTS OF HEALTH SCIENCES

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The aim of this study was to determine the levels of violence tendency and dating violence attitudes of university students and the risk factors affecting violence tendency and dating violence attitudes.

Material and Methods: The study is a cross-sectional. University students between the ages of 18-25 who were studying at the faculty of health sciences and had at least one dating experience were included in the study and 365 students participated in the study. Data were collected face-to-face using the "Student Information Form", "Violence Tendency Scale" and "Dating Violence Attitude Scale". Violence tendency and dating violence attitudes were dependent variables of the study. Multivariate linear regression analysis was performed to predict sociocultural factors with tendency to violence and dating violence attitudes.

Results: University students studying at the faculty of health sciences have low violence tendencies and positive attitudes towards dating violence. Exposure to domestic violence (B = 1.393, 95% CI [0.111, 2.674], p = .013) and exposure to partner violence (B = 2.970, 95% CI [0.773, 5.167], p = .008) significantly increased violence tendency, while other variables showed no significant effects (R² = .145, Adj. R² = .129). Negative attitudes toward dating violence were significantly associated with being from a broken family (B = -0.166, 95% CI [-0.312, -0.020], p = .026), higher father's education level (B = 0.013, 95% CI [0.003, 0.024], p = .013), and exposure to partner violence (B = -0.279, 95% CI [-0.414, -0.143], p < .001) (R² = .190, Adj. R² = .174).

Conclusion: Family dynamics and exposure to violence can influence people's tendency to violence and their attitudes towards dating violence. In addition, women are more exposed to domestic violence and dating violence. This situation reveals gender inequality even among young individuals with high education levels. It is important to regularly screen young people for early detection of violent tendencies and to establish referral systems to ensure that victims of violence receive support.

Keywords: violence tendency, dating violence, dating violence attitude, health sciences students.

INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization defines violence as 'the use of physical force or threats against itself, another person, a particular community or group, which may result in injury, physical harm, developmental disorders, deprivation or death' (1). Individuals' feelings, thoughts and behaviors towards violence indicate a tendency towards violence (2). The tendency towards violence among young people is increasing and it is important to determine the levels of violence and dating violence among young people for healthy dating experiences. Dating

violence is defined as physical, emotional, psychological or sexual abuse that occurs in an unmarried dating relationship, including stalking, and includes all forms of violence that occur from the beginning of the relationship until cohabitation (3).

Dating violence is generally classified into three main categories: physical, psychological and sexual violence. Physical violence includes all violent behaviors that are consciously carried out to harm the partner by using physical force (3,4). Sexual violence, on the other hand, is forcing the partner to participate in sexual acts without their consent, and sexual contact in cases where the partner does not consent or cannot refuse. Sexual violence is also recognized as making unwanted sexual remarks; attempts to rape; spreading sexually explicit rumors about a partner (5).

Psychological violence is the use of verbal and non-verbal behaviors to gain control over a person, which may lead to psychological intimidation and damage to self-esteem. Psychological violence also includes name-calling, insulting, using inappropriate words, discouraging, threatening and shouting with the intention of demoralizing the partner (6). Studies show that psychological violence leads to eating disorders, causes self-neglect and isolates the individual (7,8). Dating violence is a psychosocial problem that is common among young people, affects their lives and requires effective prevention strategies. It is an important issue to identify the factors affecting young people's attitudes towards dating violence and to raise awareness of young people (9). Dating violence has been found to cause physical, mental, behavioral and financial health problems and exacerbate existing health problems, which negatively affects academic performance (10). In addition, dating violence is associated with increased depression, anxiety and stress disorders (11).

In studies conducted on university students' attitudes towards dating violence, it has been observed that female students' awareness of violence is higher than male students, and there is a significant relationship between being exposed to violence in the past, witnessing violence, being a child of indifferent parents, being abused, and violence against one's partner (12-14). It is known that people studying in health sciences are potential health service providers and will provide services to people who are exposed to/perpetrate dating violence in the future. It is necessary to determine the violence tendency and dating violence attitudes of students. In this context, understanding the violence tendency levels and dating violence attitudes of students studying in health sciences and the factors affecting them will be effective in preventing violence. The aim of this study was to determine the levels of violence tendency and dating violence attitudes of university students and the risk factors affecting violence tendency and dating violence attitudes.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study is a cross-sectional. Purposeful sampling method was used while calculating the sample. The sample was determined according to the Purposeful sampling method, which is one of the non-probability sampling methods. The population of the study consisted of all students (N= 2221) studying at Istanbul University Cerrahpaşa Faculty of Health Sciences between 2022-2023 academic years. The Raosoft Sample Size program was used to calculate the sample size of the population. Accordingly, the sample size was determined to be at least 328 with a 5% margin of error and 95% confidence interval. 365 university students with at least one dating experience were included in the study. A total of 1050 female and 614 male participants were included in the study. Based on previous research, it was determined that 26% of female participants and 15% of male participants experienced sexual or physical violence before the age of 18 (15). In this study, there were 273 female and 92 male participants. The obtained data were evaluated by taking into account the rates of violence experience in determining the sample size.

The dependent and independent variables are as below:

Dependent variables: Violence Tendency Scale score, Dating Violence Attitude Scale score

Indpendent variables: Gender, age, current dating status, current dating duration, mother's education, father's education, family structure, exposure to domestic violence, and exposure to partner violence.

Measures

"Student Information Form", "Violence Tendency Scale" and "Dating Violence Attitude Scale" were used as data collection tools. The data were obtained face-to-face with the forms distributed to the students on the university campus.

Student Information Form: It consists of 19 questions created by the researchers in line with the literature (16,17). The form includes information on gender, age, current dating status, current dating duration, mother's education, father's education, family structure, exposure to domestic violence, and exposure to partner violence.

Violence Tendency Scale: This scale was developed by Haskan and Yıldırım (18) to measure the violence tendency levels of individuals. The scale consists of 20 items and is 3-point Likert type. It consists of four sub-dimensions: "feeling of violence", "violence through information technologies", "thoughts of harming others". A score of 20-60 is obtained from the Violence Tendency Scale and the higher the score, the higher the tendency towards violence. The reliability coefficient was reported as 0.83 by the researcher (18). According to the findings of this study, the reliability coefficient was found to be 0.86.

Dating Violence Attitude Scale: It was developed by Terzioğlu et al. (19) to determine university students' attitudes towards dating violence. The scale consists of 28 items and is 5-point Likert type. It consists of 5 sub-dimensions: "general violence", "physical violence", "emotional violence", "economic violence" and "sexual violence". As the score obtained from the scale approaches 5, it is interpreted that the individual has an attitude that does not support dating violence. The reliability coefficient was reported as 0.91 by the researcher (19). According to the findings of this study, the reliability coefficient was found to be 0.83.

Data Analysis
The data obtained in this study were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) for Windows 27.0 program. Number, percentage, median, standard deviation were used as descriptive statistical methods in the evaluation of the data. Pearson correlation analysis was used to determine the relationship between the scale scores. Multivariate linear regression model was performed to predict the relationship between violence tendency and dating violence attitudes and sociodemographic data. Reference values in the regression analysis were determined as follows: "male" for gender, "nuclear family" for family structure, "none" for exposure to domestic violence, and "none" for

exposure to partner violence. All tests were performed two-way and p value <0.05 was considered statistically significant.
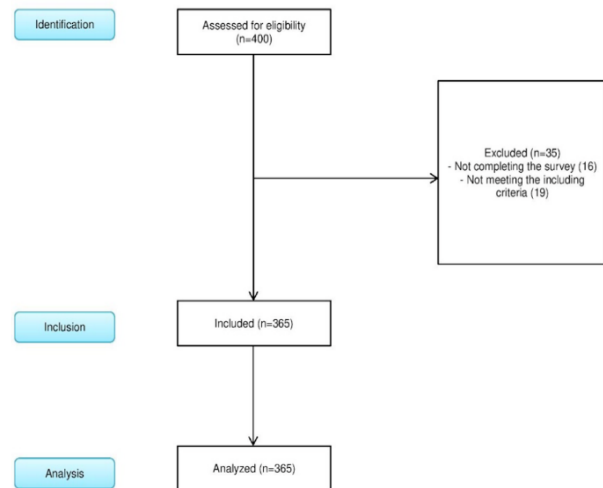

Figure 1. Strengthening the Reporting of Observational Studies in Epidemiology (STROBE) flow diagram

Table 1. Correlation between violence tendency and dating violence attitude

	Min	Max	Median
Violence Tendency Scale	21	58	29
Dating Violence Attitude Scale	3.04	5.00	4.57
r_s:-0.286 p <.001*			

Min: Minimum, Max: Maximum, SD: Standard deviation, r: Spearman's rho correlation. p < 0.05

Ethics
Before the research was conducted, permission was obtained from Istanbul University – Cerrahpasa Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Date: 06.12.2022, Decision Number: 2022/427) and institutional permission was obtained from Istanbul University – Cerrahpasa Faculty of Health Sciences Dean's Office. Permission to use the scales was obtained. The study process was explained to the university students who volunteered to participate in the study and their consent was obtained. Helsinki Declaration rules were followed in the study.

RESULTS
A total of 365 university students were included in this study. The median age of the participants was 21 years. The rate of current dating was 39.5% (n = 144)

Table 2. Multivariate linear regression model for the association between sociodemographic data with violence tendency

Violence Tendency	B	95 % CI for B		SE B	β	p value	R²	Adj. R²
		Lower Bound	Upper Bound					
Model							.145	.129
Constant	29.206	27.456	30.955	.890		<.001*		
Extended family	-.953	-2.652	.746	.864	-.058	.271		
Broken family	-.184	-2.555	2.187	1.206	-.008	.879		
Mother's education	.095	-.077	.267	.088	.070	.279		
Father's education	-.129	-.301	.043	.087	-.094	.141		
Exposure to domestic violence	1.393	.111	2.674	.652	.113	.013*		
Exposure to partner violence	2.970	.773	5.167	1.117	.142	.008*		

B: Unstandardized beta, 95% CI: 95% confidence interval, SE: Standard error, β: Beta, R2: R-squared, coefficient of determination Adj. R2: Adjusted R-squared, p < 0.05

Table 3. Multivariate linear regression model for the association between sociodemographic data with dating violence attitude

Dating Violence Attitude	B	95 % CI for B
		Lower Bound
Model		
Constant	4,445	4,337
Extended family	-.023	-.128
Broken family	-.166	-.312
Mother's education	-.001	-.012
Father's education	.013	.003
Exposure to domestic violence	-.022	-.101
Exposure to partner violence	-.279	-.414

B: Unstandardized beta, 95% CI: 95% confidence interval, SE: Standard error, β: Beta, R2: R-squared, coefficient of determination Adj. R2: Adjusted R-squared, p < 0.05

and the median duration of dating was 7.5 months. The majority of the participants were female (n = 273, 74.8%). Median mother's education was 8 years and the median father's education was 12 years. 77.8% (n = 284) of the participants lived in nuclear families. Among the participants, 34.5% (n = 126) reported having experienced domestic violence at least once and 8.5% (n = 31) reported having experienced dating violence at least once. 79.4% (n = 100) of those who had experienced domestic violence and 71% (n = 22) of those who had experienced dating violence were women.

There was a statistically significant, weakly negative linear relationship between violent tendency and dating violence attitudes (r_s = -0.286, p < 0.001) (Table 1).

Multivariate linear regression analysis was performed to predict gender, family structure, mother's and father's education levels, exposure to domestic violence, exposure to partner violence and tendency to violence. As a result of the analysis, the model was found to be statistically significant $F_{(6,358)}$ = 2.781, p = 0.012. Among the variables included in the model, exposure to domestic violence and exposure to partner violence were found to be statistically significant predictors of tendency to violence (p < 0.05). Accordingly, being exposed to domestic violence and being exposed to partner violence increase the tendency to violence (Table 2).

Multiple linear regression analysis was performed to predict gender, family structure, mother's and father's education levels, exposure to domestic violence, exposure to partner violence and dating violence attitudes. As a result of the analysis, the model was found to be statistically significant $F_{(6,358)}$ = 5.882, p < 0.001. Among the variables included in the model, family structure, father's education level and exposure to partner violence were found to be statistically significant predictors of dating violence attitudes (p < 0.05). Accordingly, having a high level of father's education increased the attitude towards dating violence, while having a broken family

structure and being exposed to partner violence decreased the attitude towards dating violence (Table 3).

DISCUSSION

A total of 365 university students participated in the study. The participants scored an average of 29.34 ± 5.86 points on the Violence Tendency Scale and 4.52 ± 0.37 points on the Dating Violence Attitude Scale. Considering the scores obtained, it is seen that the university students participating in the study have a low tendency to violence and do not support dating violence. Young people, the demographic group in which the research was conducted, are particularly susceptible to problems such as violence and dating violence due to their critical developmental stages (20). It is suggested that dating violence is linked to other health risks in young people's relationships, especially risky sexual behaviors. The combination of risks associated with dating violence and sexual risk behaviors is particularly serious for young women (21).

Exposure to violence is thought to cause serious negative consequences, including homicides, and to be a predictor of intimate partner violence in adulthood (22). Dating violence is known to be very common among young people. According to the CDC report, one out of every 12 people states that they have been exposed to dating violence (3). Similarly, considering the results of this study, the rate of exposure to dating violence at least once is 8.5%. In the literature, it is seen that the victims of violence are often women and the perpetrators of violence are men. It is also known that women are frequently affected by exposure to violence (22,23). In our study, 79% of those who were exposed to domestic violence at least once and 71% of those who were exposed to partner violence were women. The study result is similar to the literature.

It is reported that the problem that frequently emerges in studies is due to gender inequality and that this situation is related to social roles. The fact that men are the perpetrators of violence points to patriarchy, which is understood as a hierarchical power system (24). Therefore, while perpetrators of violence legalize violence, those who are exposed to violence consider it normal to be exposed to physical abuse in dating relationships (9). In a systematic review of 16 studies, it was reported that men were frequently the perpetrators of dating violence. It is seen that traditional gender roles and concepts of male

superiority are the underlying causes of dating violence perpetrated by men against women. It is stated that dating violence is associated with negative childhood experiences, lack of interpersonal communication and conflict resolution skills, and alcohol use (25). In a study conducted in adolescents, it was reported that there were differences between genders in exposure to dating violence; males were significantly more likely to be victims of physical abuse and females were significantly more likely to be victims of sexual abuse (26). In another study, 61.9% of health sciences students experienced abusive behavior at least once in their relationships. Especially, men were found to show sexist attitudes that legitimize gender-based violence (27).

Factors such as exposure to childhood abuse, witnessing interparental violence, and the presence of beliefs that justify and accept violence seem to be effective in exposure to or perpetration of dating violence (28,29). A study shows that childhood trauma is associated with exposure to/perpetration of dating violence (30).

At the same time, exposure to intimate partner violence in childhood significantly increases the tendency towards dating violence in adulthood (31). In our study, similar to the literature, it was found that those who were exposed to domestic or intimate partner violence at least once had an increased tendency towards violence. In a study examining the exposure of women of reproductive age to dating violence, women's age, education level and family structure were found to be important determinants of exposure to dating violence. Accordingly, it is stated that exposure to dating violence is less in women with higher welfare and education levels and living in nuclear families (32).

Even though it was not possible to compare the exposure to dating violence according to educational level in our study group, which consisted entirely of university students, the fact that these students had higher attitudes towards dating violence may support the literature. Accordingly, the attitude towards dating violence is positively affected by higher education level. In addition, in our study, while father's education was not effective in violence tendency, it was found to affect the attitude towards dating violence. Accordingly, as the father's education level increased, the attitude towards dating violence was positively affected. In addition, attitudes towards dating violence were positively affected in young people with nuclear families.

Limitations

This study was conducted with university students studying at the faculty of health sciences of a university and the results of the study cannot be generalized. The fact that one of the probability sampling methods was not used prevents the generalizability of the results to the population. Since it was a cross-sectional study, it was not possible to determine the causal direction of the relationships found. In addition, the technique used to distribute the questionnaire to the students made it impossible to determine the non-response rate. In addition, due to the low number of male participants, it was not possible to conduct further analyses by gender. The study does not reflect the results of people diagnosed with violent tendencies and perpetrators of violence. In the study, health problems that may be seen in people exposed to dating violence were not questioned. Finally, regression analyses showed that the variance explained was relatively low. This finding may be a limitation of the study.

CONCLUSION

Dating violence is an important and common problem among young people. According to the results of the study, university students studying at the faculty of health sciences have low violence tendencies and positive attitudes towards dating violence. However, the rate of those exposed to domestic or dating violence is high. In addition, more than two thirds of the population exposed to violence are women. The results of the study reveal gender inequality even in young individuals with a high level of education. It may be recommended to implement prevention programs to educate young people about healthy interpersonal relationships. Health professionals have an important role to play in this. Regular screening of young people for early detection of violent tendencies and the establishment of referral systems to ensure that victims of violence receive the necessary support can be recommended.

In addition, health sciences students will be the ones who provide care/treatment to patients in their professional life. It is also a matter of curiosity whether the violence perceptions of these individuals will affect their professional experiences in the coming years. Future studies can be planned by considering these variables. Follow-up studies to be conducted for this purpose will facilitate the realization of the measures planned to be taken as a result of finding a place in the literature.

This study has the strength of being a research that includes a representative sample of health sciences students of both genders in the young age group. Therefore, it is a pioneering study that examines the relationship between health sciences students and violence before they become members of health professions in the future. In addition, the assessment of students' violence tendency and dating violence attitudes with a scale is one of the strengths of the study.

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