Determining the Relationship Between Health-Related University Students' Attitudes Towards Gender Roles and Their Attitudes Towards Domestic Violence

Fatma Nur Duman [ID], Sena Akyüz [ID], Zehra Gölbaşı [ID]

Lokman Hekim University, Faculty of Health Science, Department of Nursing, Ankara, Turkiye.

ABSTRACT

Objective: The aim of the study is to determine the relationship between health-related university students' attitudes towards domestic violence and their attitudes towards gender roles.

Methods: This descriptive study was conducted with 500 students studying at a private university in Ankara. "Personal Information Form," "Domestic Violence Attitude Scale (DVAS)" and "The Gender Roles Attitude Scale (GRAS)" were used for data collection.

Results: A negative and weak correlation was found between the total mean scores of DVAS and GRAS among the students participating in the study ($p<.01$). Additionally, it was determined that 24% of the total variation in students' attitudes towards domestic violence was explained by their attitudes towards gender roles.

Conclusion: The results of the study show that students' attitudes towards gender roles affect their attitudes towards domestic violence. Students with an egalitarian gender perspective exhibit an attitude against domestic violence. Therefore, approaches to develop an egalitarian gender perspective in individuals can be effective in preventing domestic violence, which is an important problem in all societies.
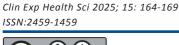
Keywords: Domestic violence, gender roles, university students, attitude.

1. INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence is a term encompassing all forms of violence that can occur among family members. However, those most frequently exposed to domestic violence are often women, children, and the elderly (1-3). A study conducted in Turkiye reported that 35.5% of women had been subjected to physical violence by family members at some point in their lives (4). Considering that this statistic only includes physical violence, the proportion of individuals exposed to all forms of violence within the family is likely much higher (2). While many factors influence the occurrence, frequency, type, and magnitude of domestic violence, it can be said that the primary source is fundamentally the asymmetrical power relations and gender inequality brought about by patriarchal society (5,6).

Gender inequality refers to discrimination between sexes in the use of opportunities, rights, and resources due to these roles assigned to men and women. This deprivation of rights, discrimination, and inequality restricts or completely eliminates individuals' ability to exercise their rights and freedoms in health, economic, political, cultural, and social domains (7-9). Policies aimed at preventing gender inequality and domestic violence, both in Turkiye

and globally, are structured within the framework of legal regulations, awareness-raising initiatives, and educational strategies. In Turkiye, the Law No. 6284 on the Protection of the Family and Prevention of Violence against Women serves as a critical legal instrument for safeguarding women from violence and promoting gender equality (10). Internationally, key frameworks include the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (5,11). Efforts to advance gender equality are further supported by programs aimed at enhancing women's participation in the workforce, broadening access to education, and addressing gender-based discrimination. These initiatives are often implemented through collaborative efforts involving civil society organizations, local governments, and the private sector. Despite these measures, gender inequality and domestic violence remain pressing social challenges, underscoring the need for inclusive and transformative approaches to address their root causes. The first area where these gender roles, inequalities, and

gender identities, which cause such discrimination among individuals, are produced and developed is the family, the smallest and strongest building block of society. The family emerges as a social institution where the hierarchy between men and women is first recognized and structured (6). One of the most basic problems brought about by inequality in these families is domestic violence. It is believed that individuals' attitudes towards domestic violence will be negative if they have negative attitudes towards gender roles and adopt traditional roles. Some studies in the literature report that students studying in the health field have attitudes towards gender roles that align with traditional roles, which negatively affects their attitudes towards domestic violence (12-15).

In the literature, both qualitative (6) and quantitative studies (8, 12-16) aim to evaluate university students' attitudes towards domestic violence and gender roles. It is believed that attitudes towards domestic violence and gender roles will vary across different segments of society, different age groups, and varying socioeconomic levels. Determining the attitudes of young individuals towards domestic violence is considered an important step in preventing domestic violence in the future (8-17).

Based on this premise, the aim of this study is to determine the relationship between health-related university students' attitudes towards domestic violence and their attitudes towards gender roles and to contribute quantitative and concrete findings to the literature on this relationship.

2. METHODS

2.1. Design and sample

This descriptive study was conducted between January 15 and July 31, 2023, at a private university in Ankara. The study population consisted of all students enrolled at the university, totaling 2922 students. The sample size was calculated using the sample size formula for known populations, resulting in a target sample of 340 students. The study was completed with 500 students. Post hoc analysis conducted after the completion of the study indicated that with an error margin of .05 and an effect size of .29, the power of the sample was found to be 99%. The analyses were performed using the G Power 3.1.9.2 software package.

2.2. Data collection tools

Personal Information Form: This form was developed by the researchers by reviewing the literature and consists of 5 questions regarding the sociodemographic characteristics of the university students (7,12).

Domestic Violence Attitude Scale (DVAS): Developed by Şahin and Dişsiz (2009), this five-point Likert scale ranges from 13 to 65 points. Higher scores indicate a more positive attitude towards domestic violence. The scale comprises four sub-dimensions: "normalization of violence," "generalization of violence," "rationalization of violence," and "concealment of violence," with a total of 13 items. The original Cronbach's alpha reliability

coefficient of the scale was .71 (17). In this study, the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was found to be .82.

The Gender Roles Attitude Scale (GRAS): Developed by Zeyneloğlu and Terzioğlu (2011) to determine university students' attitudes towards gender roles, this five-point Likert scale consists of five sub-dimensions: "egalitarian gender role," "female gender role," "gender role in marriage," "traditional gender role," and "male gender role," with a total of 38 items. Higher scores indicate a more egalitarian attitude towards gender roles, while lower scores indicate a more traditional attitude. The original Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was .92 (18). In this study, the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was found to be .93.

2.3. Ethical aspect of the research

Ethical approval was obtained from the scientific researchs ethics committee of Lokman Hekim University (Number: 2023/09), and institutional permission was obtained from the deans and directors of all faculties and schools of the university where the study was conducted. The individuals who agreed to participate in the study did so with the requisite informed consent. Throughout all stages, the principles of research and publication ethics and the Helsinki Declaration Principles were adhered to.

2.4. Data collection

Data were collected through face-to-face interviews after informing participants about the study.

2.5. Data analysis

Data were analyzed using the IBM SPSS 22.0 statistical software. Frequency and percentage analyses were used to determine descriptive characteristics, and mean and standard deviation statistics were used to evaluate scale scores. Kurtosis and Skewness values were examined to determine the homogeneity of the variables, indicating that the variables followed a normal distribution, and parametric tests were used in the analysis. Relationships between scales were determined using Pearson correlation and linear regression analysis.

3. RESULTS

The gender of 82.6% of the students was female, 76.6% were studying at the Faculty of Health Sciences, and 44.0% were in the first grade. Additionally, 33.8% of the students' mothers and 49.4% of the students' fathers have a university education (Table 1).

According to correlation analysis results, there was found negative and weak correlation between the mean total score of GRAS and the mean total score of DVAS of the students ($p<0.01$) (Table 2).

The regression analysis conducted to determine the cause and effect relationship between GRAS and DVAS was found significant ($F=158.413$; $p<.001$-$p<.05$). The total change in students' attitudes towards domestic violence is explained by their attitudes towards gender roles at a rate of 24% ($R^2= .240$). The level of attitude towards gender roles decreases the level of attitude towards domestic violence ($\beta= -.491$) (Table 3).

Table 1. Distribution of students by descriptive characteristics and scale mean scores

Characteristics	n	%
Gender		
Male	87	17.4
Female	413	82.6
Faculty/School		
Faculty of Health Sciences	383	76.6
Faculty of Pharmacy	47	9.4
Faculty of Medicine	47	9.4
Other*	23	4.6
Class		
Class 1	220	44.0
Class 2	84	16.8
Class 3	99	19.8
Class 4	78	15.6
Class 5	19	3.8
Mother's Education Status		
Primary School and Below	97	19.4
Middle School	78	15.6
High School	156	31.2
University	169	33.8
Father's Education Status		
Primary School and Below	37	7.4
Middle School	61	12.2
High School	155	31.0
University	247	49.4
	Mean	Sd
DVAS Total Score	18.78	5.89
GRAS Total Score	171.17	18.63

Other: Faculty of Dentistry, Faculty of Sports Sciences, Vocational School of Health Services

Table 2. Correlation analysis between total and subscale scores of DVAS and GRAS

		DVAS Total Score	Normalizing Violence	Generalizing Violence	Causalizing Violence	Hiding Violence
GRAS Total Score	r	-.49*	-.48*	-.42*	-.22*	-.40*
	p	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Egalitarian Gender Role	r	-.336*	-.332*	-.378*	-.130*	-.228*
	p	.000	.000	.000	.004	.000
Female Gender Role	r	-.439*	-.439*	-.315*	-.207*	-.400*
	p	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Gender Role in Marriage	r	-.418*	-.433*	-.382*	-.161*	-.328*
	p	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Traditional Gender Role	r	-.455*	-.428*	-.345*	-.233*	-.416*
	p	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Male Gender Role	r	-035*	-.342*	-.314*	-.161*	-.280*
	p	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

$p < .001$; Pearson Correlation Analysis

Table 3. The effect of the Gender Roles Attitude Scale on the Domestic Violence Attitude Scale

Independent Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	p	95% Confidence Interval	
	B	SE	β			Lower	Upper
Constant	45.361	2.124		21.354	.000	41.187	49.534
GRAS Total Score	-.155	.012	-.491	-12.586	**.000***	-.180	-.131
Dependent Variable =DVAS Total Score. *R=.491; R^2=.240; F=158.413; p=.000; Durbin Watson Value=1.947; *p<.001*							
Constant	45.525	2.515		18.102	.000	40.584	50.466
Egalitarian Gender Role	-.077	.060	-.065	-1.297	.195	-.194	.040
Female Gender Role	-.186	.073	-.161	-2.549	**.011****	-.329	-.043
Gender Role in Marriage	-.284	.096	-.170	-2.945	**.003***	-.473	-.094
Traditional Gender Role	-.259	.067	-.240	-3.877	**.000***	-.390	-.128
Male Gender Role	.082	.094	.051	.877	.381	-.102	.267
*Dependent Variable = DVAS Total Score. R=.505; R2=.247; F=33.823; p=.000; Durbin Watson Value=1.942; *p<.001; *p<.05*							

The regression analysis conducted to determine the cause and effect relationship between the sub-dimensions of "egalitarian gender role", "female gender role", "gender role in marriage", "traditional gender role", "male gender role" and the level of attitude towards domestic violence was found significant (F=33.823; p<.001-p< .05). The total change in students' attitudes towards domestic violence was explained by "egalitarian gender role", "female gender role", "gender role in marriage", "traditional gender role", "male gender role" at a rate of 24.7% (R^2=.247). While "egalitarian gender role" and "male gender role" do not affect the level of attitudes towards domestic violence (p>.05); "female gender role", "gender role in marriage" and "traditional gender role" sub-dimensions decrease the level of attitudes towards domestic violence (Table 3).

4. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to determine the relationship between health-related university students' attitudes towards domestic violence and their attitudes towards gender roles. The average score for students on DVAS was found to be 18.78 (Table 1). Considering that the scale ranges from a minimum of 13 to a maximum of 65, students generally exhibited a positive attitude against domestic violence (17). When examining the subscales, it was observed that students scored below average on normalizing violence, generalizing violence, rationalizing violence, and concealing violence, indicating a desired stance against domestic violence in these aspects as well. Similar findings were reported by Çal and Aydın Avcı (2020) and Arslan and Şahin (2019), who found that university students generally scored below average on the DVAS, suggesting a rejection of domestic violence (15,19). This finding in the current study may be attributed to the fact that students attend a health-related university and take various courses related to the topic. Additionally, living in a metropolitan city where they are frequently exposed to campaigns against violence and having parents with higher education levels could also contribute to their positive attitudes towards domestic violence prevention (20).

In this study, the average score for students on the GRAS was found to be 171.17, indicating that students generally hold egalitarian attitudes towards gender roles (Table 1). Upon examining the subscales of the scale, it was found that students had the highest attitude scores in marital gender roles and egalitarian gender roles, while their scores for male gender role, female gender role, and traditional gender role were above average. Similarly, Çal and Aydın Avcı (2020) reported that students held egalitarian attitudes, with the highest scores in marital and egalitarian gender roles (19). Likewise, Güven and Altay (2020) found in their study with midwifery students that students had egalitarian attitudes, with the highest scores in marital and egalitarian gender roles among the scale's subscales (21). It is noted in the literature that educational interventions on gender during university education increase students' motivation to identify and address gender-related issues (22). In the study,

it is thought that the reason for the high level of gender roles attitudes and egalitarian attitudes of the students is that the gender course is taught as a common elective course at the university where the students study. In addition, the fact that the education level of the parents of most of the students is at the undergraduate level and the gender of more than eighty per cent of the students is female also affects this situation (23). The results of the studies in the literature also indicate that women adopt a more egalitarian gender role (15, 19). The reason for this situation may be the gender roles adopted in the society. An understanding of education that will develop an egalitarian attitude towards traditional male and female roles and transfer this attitude to the society constitutes the key point to prevent this situation. The status and roles of women in a society are very important for the level of development of that society. With a qualified education, the status of women and thus the level of development of the society can be increased (24).

As a result of the study, similar to findings in the literature (19,24) a negative relationship was identified between the total score of GRAS and the total and subscale scores of DVAS (Table 2). This indicates that as students' scores on the GRAS increase, their scores on the DVAS decrease, suggesting that students exhibiting egalitarian attitudes towards gender roles tend to have more desirable attitudes towards domestic violence. Regression analysis conducted to determine the cause-effect relationship between GRAS and DVAS was found to be significant, indicating that 24% of the total variance in students' attitudes towards domestic violence can be explained by their attitudes towards gender roles (Table 3). This finding suggests that higher levels of egalitarian attitudes towards gender roles contribute to lower levels of acceptance of domestic violence attitudes (25, 26).

4.1. Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. The research was conducted at a foundation university located in Ankara. Therefore, the results are limited to the university where the study was conducted and may not be generalized to the broader population. It is important to conduct further research with larger sample sizes to enhance the generalizability of the findings. The study results provide information about the current status of the participants. The data collection tools used in the study relied on self-reporting by students, which could introduce bias into the responses. The students included in the sample are studying at a health-related university. In addition, most of the students have taken elective courses on gender and most of them are female. All these characteristics can be counted among the limitations as they are thought to affect the results of the study.

5. CONCLUSION

The research findings indicate that students' attitudes towards gender roles significantly influence their perspectives on domestic violence. Students with an egalitarian gender perspective tend to exhibit an attitude against domestic violence. Therefore, approaches aimed at fostering individuals' development of a perspective supportive of gender equality could also be effective in preventing a significant societal issue like domestic violence. To this end, integrating topics or courses in university curricula that address various dimensions of gender equality and aim to raise awareness among students is considered crucial. Such initiatives could play a vital role in preventing societal issues such as domestic violence. Additionally, it is recommended to plan projects and studies throughout university education aimed at raising awareness among students about preventing violence, understanding and internalizing the concept of gender equality. Encouraging students to participate in these activities could also be beneficial.

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