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The Predictive Role of Exposure to Dating Violence and Self-Efficacy in Attitudes Toward Seek Psychological Help

ABSTRACT

In this study, the predictive role of exposure to dating violence and self-efficacy on the attitude of seeking psychological help was examined. 508 students (371 female, 137 male) from a state university participated in the study. The data was collected online. This research was conducted using a correlational survey model. Dating Violence Experiences Scale, General Self-Efficacy Scale and Attitudes Towards Seeking Psychological Help Scale-Short Form were used in the study. Pearson Correlation Coefficient and Multiple Linear Regression analysis were used in data analysis. Multiple linear regression analysis revealed a significant relationship between self-efficacy and exposure to dating violence and the attitude towards seeking psychological help. According to the results of the analyses, as the level of exposure to dating violence increased, negative attitudes towards getting psychological help increased; as the level of self-efficacy increased, positive attitudes towards getting psychological help increased; and as the level of self-efficacy decreased, the risk of exposure to dating violence decreased. Accordingly, self-efficacy and exposure to dating violence were found to be significant predictors of attitudes towards seeking psychological help. The results of the study revealed the importance of self-efficacy and showed that psychological support services on campus should be improved. The research findings was discussed in line with the literature in the field.

Keywords: Exposure to dating violence, self-efficacy, attitude towards psychological help.

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Introduction

University years represent a critical stage for the period, covering the 18–29 age range and defined by Arnett (2000) as ‘emerging adulthood.’ This period, which marks the transition from adolescence to full adulthood, is characterised by identity exploration, relational intimacy, career-structural decisions, and increasing autonomy (Arnett, 2000). Also defined as a transition period, adolescence is a process in which most young people gain autonomy by moving away from their environment, form new social bonds, and face certain tasks and responsibilities associated with this period (Arnett et al., 2014). Additionally, studies have shown that during this transition period, there is an increased sensitivity to certain risk factors (academic pressure, financial difficulties, alcohol and substance use, dating violence, discrimination, etc.) have been identified in studies (Ertl et al., 2024; Guan et al., 2015; Lehrer et al., 2013; Otacıoğlu, 2016).

One of the most common risk factors is negative life events experienced within romantic relationships. Romantic relationships can play a constructive role in individuals' emotional development, but they can also harbour various risks (Lin & Guo, 2024). One such risk, dating violence, is a coercive life event that is becoming increasingly common among young adults but often goes unnoticed (Hossain et al., 2024). Dating violence is defined as a form of violence that can include physical, psychological, digital, sexual, economic, and stalking behaviours in romantic relationships and can seriously threaten an individual's mental health (İlyas & Sapmaz, 2023). Indeed, studies provide striking data on its prevalence. In fact, in a study conducted by Tarı-Selçuk et al. (2018) at a university, it was found that the rates of exposure to psychological, physical, and sexual violence in students' dating relationships were 39.5%, 8.5%, and 3.9%, respectively.

The rate of exposure to psychological violence was higher among females, while the rate of exposure to physical violence was higher among those who had previously

experienced violence in their dating relationships. Dating violence, which is commonly encountered in young adulthood, has negative consequences (loneliness, loss of self-confidence, post-traumatic stress symptoms, depression) that negatively affect university students' psychological well-being and increase their need for psychological help.

Seeking psychological help is defined as an individual's willingness to seek professional help to cope with problems, as well as cognitive, experiential, and behavioural tendencies towards seeking help (Kushner and Sher, 1991). The attitude towards seeking psychological help is shaped by various factors that influence coping strategies and beliefs about seeking psychological help. Studies have shown that the attitude toward seeking psychological help is associated with demographic and social factors such as gender (Çebi & Demir, 2020), age, educational level, and general health status. Additionally, it is stated that attitudes toward seeking psychological help are also influenced by factors such as individuals' perceptions of psychological disorders, fear of stigma (Vogel et al., 2009), and social norms. In this context, attitudes toward seeking psychological help are considered part of individuals' efforts to protect and improve their mental health (He et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the help-seeking behaviour of those exposed to dating violence may be limited due to various individual and social barriers (Apodaca, 2024; Hundt, 2024). Indeed, research shows that one-fifth (20.3%) of university students worldwide have experienced a psychological disorder in the past 12 months, but only 16 % have received mental health treatment (Auerbach et al., 2016). This suggests that low rates of mental health service utilisation may be related not only to the level of need but also to individual psychological characteristics. Research has revealed findings suggesting that individuals with low self-efficacy may experience inadequacy in changing the dynamics of their relationships, which could reduce their motivation to seek help, while high self-efficacy may facilitate the search for support (Nam et al., 2013).

Self-efficacy is a concept directly related to individuals' coping capacities in the face of challenging life events. Chavarría et al. (2021) divide self-efficacy into three components: situational expectations, outcome expectations, and perceived self-efficacy expectations. This classification reveals that an individual's beliefs about their own capacity can play a decisive role in the decisions they make during crises (Rivera Chavarría et al., 2021). An individual's belief in their capacity to change their situation can increase their motivation to seek help. The

literature shows that individuals with high levels of self-efficacy develop more active and effective strategies in problem-solving processes, have more confidence in managing their own situations, and are therefore more willing to seek professional support (McLaren et al., 2024). Individuals with high self-efficacy do not hesitate to seek psychological support thanks to their confidence in their personal competence, and this can have a positive effect on their overall well-being (Benight & Bandura, 2004). On the other hand, low self-efficacy levels can negatively affect individuals' attitudes toward seeking help, reducing their motivation to build a strong support network or seek professional help. This situation can lead to a deepening of the mental health issues the individual is experiencing, negatively affecting their mental well-being (Magalhães, et al., 2021).

Present Study

When reviewing the literature, it is observed that there are limited number of studies that examine the relationships between dating violence, self-efficacy, and attitudes towards seeking psychological help within a holistic framework. In this regard, it is believed that this study, which examines the aforementioned variables together, will contribute to an important gap in the relevant field. Understanding the impact of dating violence, which is frequently encountered during young adulthood, on individuals' attitudes toward seeking psychological help, and how self-efficacy plays a role in this context, enables a closer examination of the psycho-social mechanisms that shape individuals' help-seeking behaviours. In this context, the current study is expected not only to raise awareness but also to contribute to the planning of mental health services, the development of preventive intervention programmes, and the implementation of interventions against dating violence on campus. The aim of the study is to examine the predictive role of exposure to dating violence and self-efficacy on the attitude towards seeking psychological help.

In line with the aim of the research, the following hypotheses have been identified:

- 1: There is a significant relationship between exposure to dating violence, self-efficacy, and attitudes toward seeking psychological help.
2. The level of exposure to dating violence predicts attitudes toward seeking psychological help through self-efficacy.

Method

Research Model

This study was conducted using a correlational survey model (Büyüköztürk et al., 2019). The correlational survey model is a research design that aims to determine the relationship between two or more variables and explain the changes between them (Karasar, 2011). In this study, the correlational survey model was preferred because the aim was to examine the relationship between exposure to dating violence, self-efficacy, and attitude towards seeking psychological help among university students. Ethical approval for this study was obtained on 08.01.2025 from the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Iğdır University with decision number 2025/2 and letter number E-37077861-900-160079.

Participants

The participants of this research consist of students studying at a state university in the spring semester of the 2024-2025 academic year. Convenient sampling method was used as the sampling method. Convenient sampling method provides the researcher with practicality in terms of time, money and labour (Büyüköztürk et al., 2019). The sample of the study consists of 371 female and 137 male students, totalling 508 students. The average age of the participants was determined as 20.16. Of the participants, 268 (51.3%) were associate degree and 254 (48.7%) were bachelor's degree students; 173 (33.1%) were first year, 218 (41.8%) were second year, 55 (10.5%) were third year, 61 (2.9%) were fifth year students; 21 (4%) were married, 493 (94.4%) were single, 8 (1.5%) were divorced; 83 (15.9%) had low, 424 (81.2%) had medium, 15 (2.9%) had high socio-economic level.

Data Collection

Permission was obtained for the use of measurement tools before the research data was collected. Subsequently, permission was obtained from the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Iğdır University. The research data was collected using Google forms prepared in an online environment. The research data consists of voluntary participants. Before data collection, participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the use of the data.

Data Collection Tools

Demographic Information Form

The demographic information form was prepared by the researchers and consists of questions about the demographic information (gender, education level, grade level, socio-economic level, marital status, etc.) of the participants.

General Self-Efficacy Scale

The original General Self-Efficacy Scale was developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995). The 20-item scale was later revised into a 10-item scale. Turkish adaptation of the scale was conducted by Aypay (2010). The scale is Likert type and consists of 10 items. Example items are "No matter what challenges I face, I can overcome them" and "If I put in the necessary effort, I can solve many problems." The scores obtained from the scale vary between 10 and 40. An increase in the score obtained from the scale is interpreted as high general self-efficacy. Cronbach Alpha of the scale was calculated as .83. In this study, Cronbach's Alpha was found to be .92.

Attitudes Towards Seeking Psychological Help Scale-Short Form

The original Attitudes Towards Seeking Psychological Help Scale was developed by Fischer and Farina (1995) and adapted to Turkish culture by Topkaya (2011). The original version of the scale has 29 items and the short form has a single-factor structure consisting of 10 items. Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale was determined as .84. Items 2, 8, 9 and 10 in the scale are reverse scored items. Scale items are scored between 0 and 3 and the scale scores vary between 0-30. Two example items are as follows: "If I feel anxious or sad for a long time, I would like to seek psychological help." and "I may want to seek psychological counselling in the future." The higher the score obtained from the scale is interpreted as the more positive attitudes towards receiving psychological help. Cronbach Alpha of the scale was calculated as .76 in the adapted version, and in this study, it was found to be .72.

Dating Violence Experiences Scale

The scale was developed by İlyas and Sapmaz (2013). Dating Violence Experiences Scale has 51 items and six factors. The factors of the scale are physical dating violence, psychological dating violence, digital dating violence, sexual dating violence, stalking and economic dating violence. The scale explains 69.45% of the total variance. The example items are "He hits me/hit me, He doesn't care about my opinions/didn't care about my opinions." The internal reliability coefficient of the scale was calculated as .95. The internal reliability coefficient in this study has been found to be .91. A high score on the scale is interpreted as being exposed to dating violence.

The ethical process in the study was as follows:

- Ethics committee approval was obtained from the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Iğdır University (Date: 08.01.2025, Number: E-37077861-900-160079).
- Informed consent was obtained from the participants.

Data Analysis

The research data were analysed using SPSS Statistics 27 software. Pearson's correlation coefficient and multiple regression analysis were used to calculate the correlations between variables (Büyüköztürk, 2012). To test the normal distribution of the data, skewness and kurtosis values were examined and found to be between -2 and +2 (George & Mallery, 2019). These values indicate that the data are normally distributed. The assumptions of regression analysis were tested. First, it was determined that there were no outliers in the data (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2014). The Durbin-Watson value was examined to investigate the autocorrelation of the data. The Durbin-Watson value was between 1 and 3, which met the assumption (Durbin & Watson, 1992). In this study, the presence of multicollinearity was examined, and the correlation coefficients between the variables being below .90, the VIF values being below 5, and the tolerance values being above .20 indicate that there is no multicollinearity problem (Field, 2013; Hair et al., 2019). Additionally, Cook's value should not exceed 1 (Cook, 1977). Based on these results, it was assumed that the data followed a normal distribution.

Results

In this study, first, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among the variables, followed by multiple regression analysis. The results of the Pearson correlation analysis regarding exposure to dating violence, self-efficacy, and attitudes toward seeking psychological help are presented in Table 1.

When Table 1 is examined, a low-level, positive, and significant relationship is identified between exposure to dating violence and attitudes toward seeking psychological help ($r = .12, p < .01$). A low-level, negative relationship is found between self-efficacy and attitudes toward seeking psychological help ($r = -.10, p < .01$), as well as between self-efficacy and exposure to dating violence ($r = -.18, p < .01$), both of which are statistically significant. The results of the regression analysis conducted to

examine the predictive relationships among the variables are presented in Table 2.

Table 1.

Correlations and Descriptive Statistics Among Variables

Variable	1	2	3
Attitudes Toward Seeking Psychological Help	1		
Self-Efficacy	-.10*	1	
Exposure to Dating Violence	.12**	-.18**	1
Mean	22.85	30.79	59.05
Standard Deviation	3.608	6.133	11.346
Skewness	-.596	-.174	1.757
Kurtosis	.322	-.699	1.353

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 2.

Results of the Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Variables	B	Standard Error	β	t	p
Constant	-				
Exposure to Dating Violence	-.34	.015	-	-2.299	.022
Self-Efficacy	.15	.027	.025	.542	.018

When Table 2 is examined, the results of the multiple linear regression analysis indicate that self-efficacy and exposure to dating violence are significantly related to attitudes toward seeking psychological help ($F = 3.105, R^2 = .13, p < .01$). Accordingly, self-efficacy and exposure to dating violence together explain 13% of the variance in attitudes toward seeking psychological help. Considering the standardized β coefficients and t-values, it can be concluded that both self-efficacy and exposure to dating violence are significant predictors of attitudes toward seeking psychological help.

Discussion

The aim of this study is to examine whether exposure to dating violence and self-efficacy predict attitudes toward seeking psychological help among university students. The findings from the study revealed the negative impact of exposure to dating violence on attitudes toward seeking psychological help. This finding supports the conclusion, frequently highlighted in the literature, that exposure to dating violence hinders the process of seeking help

(Edwards et al., 2020; Sabina & Ho, 2014). These studies indicate that feelings of shame, fear, and guilt, which result from experiencing violence, serve as barriers to help-seeking behavior (Edwards et al., 2020; Ovesen, 2024; Pijlman et al., 2025). In addition to these individual barriers, there is evidence that societal norms also influence attitudes toward seeking psychological help (Murvartian et al., 2024). Research has shown that norms related to violence affect attitudes toward help-seeking, and in societies where violence is normalized, the likelihood of seeking help is significantly lower (Morrison et al., 2006). In light of these findings, it is clear that both individual and socio-cultural barriers should be considered together when assessing the factors shaping help-seeking attitudes among individuals exposed to dating violence.

Another finding of the current study is that a negative and significant relationship was identified between self-efficacy and attitudes toward seeking psychological help. The findings indicate that as the level of self-efficacy increases, individuals develop more positive attitudes toward seeking psychological help. These results are consistent with studies in the literature. Research has shown that individuals with high self-efficacy tend to make healthy decisions when coping with stressful life events and are more likely to seek both internal and external resources, with help-seeking behavior and positive attitudes being one of these tendencies (Luszczynska et al., 2005; McLaren et al., 2024; Nam et al., 2013). This finding aligns with the work of Benight and Bandura (2004). Indeed, they noted that individuals' belief in their ability to succeed in specific situations or complete a task, along with their motivation and steps taken in response to challenges, could encompass seeking professional support (Benight & Bandura, 2004). Additionally, individuals with high self-efficacy tend to use proactive coping strategies in response to problem situations or stressful life events (Greenglass et al., 2006), and view seeking psychological help as part of these strategies. This process reduces self-stigma (Corrigan, 2004) and increases perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 2002). On the other hand, individuals with low self-efficacy have "I can't do it" thoughts about their personal competence, which hinder their intention to seek help (Bodenhausen & Curtis, 2016). Indeed, stigma has been found to negatively affect help-seeking attitudes (Vogel et al., 2007). Similarly, Aras (2024) found that stigma negatively affects attitudes toward seeking psychological help and leads individuals to avoid seeking help. In light of these findings, the present study supports the literature's conclusion that self-efficacy positively contributes to help-seeking attitudes and

enhances attitudes toward seeking help by reducing self-stigma.

One further finding of the current study is that a negative and significant relationship was identified between exposure to dating violence and self-efficacy. The result obtained is consistent with studies in the field of self-efficacy and dating violence. It shows that low self-efficacy negatively affects the ability to set boundaries in relationships and makes it more difficult to establish such boundaries (Grych et al., 2015). This suggests that low self-efficacy is a factor that increases the likelihood of experiencing violence in relationships. Indeed, studies emphasize the importance of setting boundaries in interventions related to violence (Taylor et al., 2013). On the other hand, in the study by Grych et al. (2015) on boundary-setting skills, it was found that when individuals' awareness of their boundaries and rights in a relationship and their sense of competence in protecting them are weakened, the likelihood of rejecting boundary violations by their partner or recognizing early signs of violent behavior decreases. Similarly, in a study by Edison et al. (2023), it was shown that physical violence experienced by adolescents in dating relationships leads to a loss in their self-efficacy regarding rejection and a decrease in motivation to reject, which in turn creates a foundation for risky sexual behaviors.

When the findings of the current study are evaluated as a whole, a mutually interactive and multidimensional relationship structure emerges between exposure to dating violence, self-efficacy, and attitudes toward seeking psychological help. It has been observed that exposure to dating violence reduces an individual's self-efficacy level, and that a decrease in self-efficacy negatively affects the attitude toward seeking psychological help. These findings show that dating violence not only causes emotional or physical harm to the individual but also has indirect effects on the individual's self-perception, coping skills, and help-seeking behaviour. At this point, the experience of violence weakens the individuals' belief in their ability to set boundaries in the relationship and to effectively respond to threats, emotional regulation, and mobilising resources, thereby undermining self-efficacy; this, in turn, makes it more difficult for the individual to seek external help resources (Ne'eman-Haviv & Shafran, 2023; Overstreet & Quinn, 2013; Zhang et al., 2024). Indeed, the literature emphasises that dating violence inhibits help-seeking behaviour by increasing internal barriers such as shame, fear, and guilt in individuals (Moore et al., 2015; Padilla-Medina et al., 2022). In addition to such barriers, individuals with low self-efficacy may view seeking

professional support as a sign of 'failure' or 'inadequacy,' which can negatively shape their perceptions of the help-seeking process. On the other hand, individuals with high self-efficacy may view seeking help not as a sign of weakness or inadequacy, but as an effective way to solve problems, and may see seeking psychological support as one of their proactive coping strategies (Benight & Bandura, 2004; Greenglass et al., 2006).

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the present study examines the relationship between university students' exposure to dating violence, self-efficacy, and attitudes toward seeking psychological help. The current findings reveal that exposure to dating violence and self-efficacy have an impact on attitudes toward seeking psychological help. The research findings show that university students with low self-efficacy levels are at higher risk of dating violence and that this situation negatively affects their attitudes toward seeking psychological help. Additionally, it has been determined that dating violence has a direct negative effect on attitudes toward seeking psychological help. However, the limitations of this research should be considered when interpreting the results. The fact that the research was conducted only with university students may limit the generalisability of the results. New studies can be conducted with students at different educational levels. The results obtained from the measurement tools are based on the participants' statements. Future research may use data collection methods such as interviews, observations, peer evaluations, etc. Considering the limitations of the study, it is important to address these recommendations in future studies to overcome these constraints.

In addition to programmes that raise awareness of dating violence in universities, it is recommended to promote psycho-educational and intervention programmes that strengthen self-efficacy. It is important to make psychological support services more accessible and to develop practices that encourage seeking help. In addition, it is considered important to take into account the principle of confidentiality in the provision of such services and to ensure anonymity in applications in order to prevent stigmatisation. Future research could examine the relationship between exposure to dating violence, self-efficacy, and attitudes towards seeking psychological help in different cultural and socio-economic populations.

Ethics Committee Approval: Ethics committee approval was obtained from the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Iğdır University (Tarih: 08.01.2025, Sayı: E- E-37077861-900-160079).

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