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Victim Blaming in Crimes Against Transgender People: Turkish Sample

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Abstract

This study examined victim-blaming attitudes toward transgender individuals in Turkey by comparing perceptions of physical and sexual assault scenarios involving female, male, and transgender victims. Ninety-five participants (M = 27.81, SD = 12.45) evaluated six vignettes which depict either a physical or sexual assault with victim gender manipulated across conditions are used. Each scenario was followed by Likert-type items assessing perceived seriousness, traumatization, offender and victim responsibility, provocation, and preventability. Non-parametric analyses (Friedman and Wilcoxon signed-rank tests) revealed significant gender-based differences in perceived traumatization (χ^2(2, N = 95) = 51.71, p < .001), victim responsibility (χ^2(2) = 8.75, p < .05), and preventability (χ^2(2) = 39.74, p < .001). Transgender victims were perceived more similarly to female victims, with lower perceived ability to prevent physical assault (Md = 2.00) compared to male victims (Md = 3.00). Male participants attributed greater responsibility and provocation to transgender victims (U = 762.00, z = –2.77, p < .05). Although offenders were largely held responsible, findings indicate subtle transphobic and gendered biases shaping victim-blaming judgments. Results underscore the need for awareness efforts to reduce prejudice and support equitable treatment of transgender individuals in the justice system.

Keywords: *victim blaming, transgender, gender bias, crime seriousness*

Öz

Bu çalışma, Türkiye örnekleminde trans bireylere yönelik mağduru suçlama tutumlarını, kadın, erkek ve trans mağdurların yer aldığı fiziksel ve cinsel saldırı senaryoları üzerinden incelemiştir. Katılımcılar (N = 95; Ort = 27,81, SS = 12,45), altı kısa senaryoyu değerlendirerek olayların ciddiyeti, mağdur ve fail sorumluluğu, provokasyon ve önlenebilirlik düzeylerini 10'lu Likert tipi ölçeklerde puanlamıştır. Yapılan parametrik olmayan analizler (Friedman ve Wilcoxon işaretli sıra testleri), mağdur cinsiyetine göre travmatizasyon (χ^2(2, N = 95) = 51.71, p < .001), mağdur sorumluluğu (χ^2(2) = 8.75, p < .05) ve önlenebilirlik (χ^2(2) = 39.74, p < .001) değişkenlerinde anlamlı farklar göstermiştir. Trans mağdurlar, fiziksel saldırılarda kadın mağdurlara benzer şekilde daha fazla travmatize görülmüş (Ortanca = 2.00) ve erkek mağdurlara göre suçu önleyebilme olasılıkları daha düşük değerlendirilmiştir (Ortanca = 3.00). Erkek katılımcılar trans mağdurlara daha fazla sorumluluk ve provokasyon atfetmiştir (U = 762.00, z = –2.77, p < .05). Bulgular, failin daha çok sorumlu tutulmasına karşın, mağduru suçlamada toplumsal cinsiyet ve transfobik önyargıların sürdüğünü göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *mağduru suçlama, trans birey, toplumsal cinsiyet önyargısı, suç ciddiyeti*

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Introduction

Victimization, in the simplest terms, refers to the process of being victimized or becoming a victim. The scope of its definition, causes, consequences and prevention as well as its measurement, on the other hand, tend to be more complex. Victimological studies have been nourished by the contributions of different disciplines from a wide spectrum of approaches and addition of novel terms, concepts and perspectives. Victimization can thus be seen as a process and victim status can be told to be socially constructed. Some victims are perceived as ideal victims as they are considered innocent whereas some others can be blamed for their victimization (Daly, 2014). The prejudice against victims, for instance, refers to the perception that victims are somehow considered responsible for the criminal actions of perpetrators and is one of the recent topics of the area which re-emerged in the studies of crime (Eigenberg & Garland, 2018). Victim blaming stresses the entire or partial accusation of the victim of a wrongful act of any kind that befell on their own (CRCVC, 2009). The very nature of the concept brings along a certain hierarchy of victims as well as a perception of an idealized victim (McEvoy & McConnachie, 2012).

Ideal victim is considered as legitimate victim status that some victims are more likely to be accepted as the victim (Schwöbel-Patel, 2018). According to Christie (1986), there are five attributes that contribute to "ideal" victim. One of these factors is related to how much the victim can be blamed because of their acts. Researchers found that women are more likely to judges and blamed according to stereotypes that when they are perceived as nontraditional, they are blamed more (Capezza & Arriaga, 2008). Victims can be blamed because of their behaviors and actions which is behavioral blame and blame can be stable factors like personality which is called characterological blame (Janoff-Bulman, 1979). Studies showed that when the victims act against stereotypes, they are blamed more such that people attributed more behavioral blame on the male victims when they act in a unmasculine way (Davies & Rogers, 2006). Similarly, it is found that male victims more prone to behavioral blame whereas female victims faced more with characterological blame (Howard,

1984). However only recent studies focused on victim gender in their studies. Study examining the interaction of binary gender and transgender statuses found that cisgender men are blamed more compared to cisgender women and transgender men for rape scenarios (Diamond-Welch, Hellwege & Mann, 2018). Study focusing on the victim gender and victim sexual orientation revealed that gay males are the most blamed group in comparison to heterosexual male and lesbian female victims (Davies, Rogers & Whitelegg, 2009). Positivist criminology searching for the causes of victimization is criticized by the feminist criminologists that their theories are gendered and people can benefit from cognitive biases, stereotypes to explain their own behavior and others behavior. Prejudices, biases play role in many psychological issue in between group interactions like hate crimes, isolating certain social group of people from the society (Green, McFalls & Smith, 2001). These beliefs and biases also contribute to "ideal victim" and attribution of the blame to victims.

Ryan (1971) was the first to conceptualize victim blaming in his book. He defined victim blaming as an ideological process for maintaining the status quo for certain groups. This occurs as an unintended process which is systematically motivated by distortions of reality. During the victim blaming process, people's belief systems and ideas serve to maintain the status quo for their group. The just-world fallacy is one of the predominant theories used to explain victim blaming. The just-world fallacy or just-world hypothesis proposes a relative causality regarding to victimization. People can rationalize victimization by believing that bad things happen to bad people and that victims are somewhat responsible for their acts (Hayes, Lorenz, & Bell, 2013). In other words, victims are regarded as responsible for their victimization because they are inherently bad or their behaviors are "bad" (Lerner & Miller, 1978). By this way, people feel that world is just, predictable and safe (Lodewijkx, Wildschut, Nijstad, Savenije, & Smit, 2001).

It is found that there are a number of beliefs and attitudes that contribute to justification of the violence. Blaming the female victims in sexual assault, for instance, is found to be related to interpersonal violence and belief in rape myths (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995). Studies comparing the crime types

and blaming attitudes found that victims are more blamed in sexual assault crimes compared to robbery crimes (Bieneck & Krahe, 2011). Even though gender role related beliefs play a role in victim blaming, for other crimes like robbery it is found that violation of gender roles did not correlate with it (Felson & Palmore, 2021). Another study controlling for the variables gender and crime type showed that rape victims are blamed more than any other group of victims. Besides, it is found that general biases (but not gender biases) explained the victim blaming (Felson & Palmore, 2018). However, another study related to victims' response to attempted robbery showed that people expected victims to act according to specific gender role; namely that resistance by female victims considered less favorable compared to resistance by the male victims (Marsh & Greenberg, 1996).

Another theory used to explain the victim blaming is attribution theory. Attribution theory propose that bias formed culture and individual aspects cause individuals to interpret the events differently that their attribution to blame changes according to biased interpretations (Grubb & Turner, 2012). Study results showed that perceived similarity to victim is negatively correlated with blaming attitude whereas perceived similarity to perpetrator positively correlated with blaming attitude. Researchers explained this differences by the defensive attribution theory that identification with the victim decrease attribution of blame towards the victim (Grubb & Harrower, 2009). Defensive attribution theory help to explain gender difference in victim blaming behavior that as females more likely to identify themselves with the victims that they blamed the victim lesser than the male participants (Gray, Palileo & Johnson, 2010). Study conducted with cisgender and transgender participants found that for rape crime against heterosexual female blamed by the transwomen, cisgender women, transmen and cisgender men lowest to highest degree respectively (Diamond-Welch, et al., 2018). Similarly study conducted with participants different gender and sexual orientation found that heterosexual males blamed the victims more than the other groups for rape scenario (Davies & Hudson, 2011).

Although most of the study conducted on victim blaming focus on female victims, there are little studies focusing on other gender victims. One of the study on transgender victim found that anti-trans prejudice play mediator role between the belief in the just world and victim blaming (Thomas, Amburgey & Ellis, 2006). Another study revealed that for rape scenario with six different victim sexuality (heterosexual, homosexual, cross-dresser, female-to-male transgender, and male-to-female transgender) heterosexual victims blamed less compared to other victim groups (Davie et al., 2011). Another study revealed that transgender victims of sexual assault scenario are more blamed than the female victims and even the results are not statistically significant crime is rated as less serious when the victim is transgender (Blackham, 2006). Based on the in-depth interviews with the workers of the sexual violence support organizations, LGBTQ specific services in Australia found that sexual violence against LGBTQ people are considered as less serious and minimized. LGBTQ survivors are blamed more for the crime. Believing the myths and beliefs like 'asking for it', having risky life contribute to the victim blaming process (Mortimer, Powell & Sandy, 2019).

Studies conducted with Turkey sample also found similar results in line with the western literature. Researchers focusing on the victim blaming found believing the rape myths positively correlated with victim blaming (Çoklar, 2017). Most of the studies focusing on the victim blaming of the woman in rape cases found difference in the answers of the male participants' and woman participants that males blame female victims more (Üzümçeker & Fırat, 2018). However, this gender difference did not found in armed assault when the victim is transwoman. Experimental study compared the female victims with transwoman victims revealed that transwoman is blamed more. Besides woman participants are found to be more biased toward the transwoman yet this bias did not form difference in victim blaming attitude (Cingöz-Ulu, Türkoğlu & Sayılan, 2016). Benevolent sexism and hostile sexism correlated with the victim blaming for both males and females in Turkish population (Sakallı-Uğurlu, Yalçın & Glick, 2007). On the other hand, cultural difference found for victim blaming

in terms of honour tradition that for Turkey where honour culture is tradition victim blaming predicted by the honour where in dignity cultures rape myth acceptance found to be main predictor for victim blaming (Gul & Schuster, 2020).

The present literature stresses the role of gender when it comes to the process of victim blaming and the construction of a victim hierarchy, excluding non-heterosexual, non-binary and non-cisgender individuals from being "ideal victims". Therefore, the main of this study is to comprehend the victim blaming attitudes toward varying groups of genders and for different types of crimes.

Method

Research Model

This study is designed within a descriptive research model. Descriptive research aims to obtain a systematic portrayal of a phenomenon as it exists naturally, without attempting to establish causal relationships or test explanatory hypotheses (Grimes & Schulz, 2022). Within this descriptive framework, the study adopts a comparative descriptive approach, which allows for the systematic comparison of victim-blaming evaluations across different victim groups and crime contexts. Victim gender identity (female, male, transgender) and type of crime (physical assault, sexual assault) are treated as descriptive categories that structure participants' evaluations, rather than as independent variables in a causal model.

Participants

Convenience sampling method was used that study links shared through social media accounts of the researchers and by email to university students' whose study in researchers' affiliation. Participants were voluntarily attend the study and accept to participate to study. Total of 95 participants whose age ranged between 18-62 (M= 27,81, sd=12,45) participated the study. 31,1% of the participant was female, 67,4% was male and 1,1% was other. Majority of the participants were cis-gender (87,4%) and 4,3% of the participants were LGBTq+ members, 8,4% of the participants did not answer the question of gender. Participants 11,6% graduated from high school, 55,7% was university student, 38,4% was university graduate and 4,2% had Master's degree. 86,4% of the participants were living in the Istanbul and 12,5% of the participants were living in other cities of the Turkey.

Materials

Socio-demographic Questionnaire: Socio-demographic questions are designed to learn age, sex, gender, education level, job, their beliefs regarding to justice system and their experience if any regarding to justice system. Participants' belief regarding to justice are measured by 10- Likert type scale in which zero is used for ' I absolutely never trust to justice system' and ten is 'I absolutely trust the justice system'. The Belief regarding to justice system is measured by the questions 'Do you trust justice system?'.

Vignettes: Vignettes are adapted from the Wrede and Ask (2015) study with the permission. There were six vignettes for two different crime type and for three different victim gender. In vignettes type of the crime, gender of the victim without name and perpetrators regarding information is given. In vignettes Turkish words for female, male and transgender has been used. For transgender term explanation has been given in case of people not familiar with the word.

Physical Assault Vignette: 'A transgender person/a woman/a man is walking through a park to his home after grocery shopping. The transgender person/ woman/man, in his late twenties, passed by a group that was having a barbecue, and group members started yelling and insulting this transgender person. The transgender person/ woman/man provoked by the members of the group also started shouting at the group. Three members of the group get angry and start running towards the transgender person/ woman/man. After a short and heated argument, the transgender person/ woman/man is pushed to the ground and kicked several times. The transgender person/ woman/man, lying on the ground for a while with severe pain, finally manages to stand up and walks away from the scene.'

Sexual Assault Vignette: 'A transgender person/ woman/man is walking home from the gym. It is dark outside. The road passes through a sparsely populated settlement. After passing some bushes, the woman encounters a man who is acting strangely and is obviously under the influence of drugs. The transgender person/woman/man becomes uncomfortable with the situation and withdraws as the man approaches. The man leaps forward, grabs the transgender person/ woman/man and pulls her into the woods. The man threatens the woman with a knife and forces her to have oral sex. The threat lasts for about 5 minutes, after which the man disappears from the scene, leaving the transgender person/ woman/man in the woods.'

Participants rated the statements regarding to event through 10- Likert type scale in which 1= completely disagree and 10= completely agree. Following questions are asked to evaluate the participants' perception regarding to seriousness of event, victim responsibility and blaming the victim, offender responsibility, effect of the event on victim are asked with eight question. Following questions rated by the participant through 1 to 10 on the scale;

1. How seriously do you think the police should take this incident?
2. How much do you think this event traumatized the transgender person/woman/man?
3. To what extent do you think the group members are responsible for this event?
4. To what extent do you think the woman is responsible for this event?
5. Do you think the woman could be blamed for any behavior that caused this incident to happen to her?
6. How negatively do you think the woman's life has been affected after this incident?
7. What do you think is the probability of the woman preventing this event?
8. How much do you think the woman perpetrator provoked?

Procedure

Data is collected through online survey tool Google Forms, anonymously. Answers were collected in same order for all participants. Vignette and questions are divided into section for each victim gender and crime type that participants did not see the previous answers they have given.

Analysis

Analysis conducted in SPSS 26. Because the assumptions of repeated measures of ANOVA are not meet for normality and sphericity for that reason non-parametric analysis; Friedman's test and Wilcoxon-signed ranked test are used for analysis. Interaction effect of independent variables gender and crime type could not be measured.

Findings

Descriptive statistics are used to explore participants' ratings of the statement regarding to physical assault. Participants rated higher for the crime seriousness, traumatization level of the victim, responsibility of the offender, and negativity of the event on the victims' lives. On the other hand, responsibility of the victim, victims' act as a cause of the crime and provocation of the victim rates are found to have lower means (Table 1).

Participants' answers were compared in terms of the gender of the victim which are female, male and transgender in different crimes. According to Friedman's test, there was a significant difference among the ratings of how much the police should take the crime serious ($\chi2(2) = 6,156$, $p < .05$). Post hoc analysis with Wilcoxon signed-rank tests was conducted with a Bonferroni correction applied could not find any difference among the groups (Table 1).

According to Friedman's test, there was a significant difference among the ratings of the amount of perceived traumatization of the victim as a result of the crime of physical assault ($\chi^2(2$, N = 95) = 51,71, $p < .01$.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of Physical Assault Crime

	N	Female Victim			Male Victim			Trans Victim		
		M	Sd	Mdn	M	Sd	Mdn	M	Sd	Mdn
Police should take serious	95	9,49	1,14	10,00	9,44	1,15	10,00	9,59	1,15	10,00
Traumatization of the victim	95	9,35	1,07	10,00	8,03	1,94	8,00	9,13	1,55	10,00
Responsibility of the offender	95	9,74	0,64	10,00	9,58	1,14	10,00	9,18	1,98	10,00
Responsibility of the victim	95	2,39	2,05	2,00	2,58	2,18	2,00	2,40	2,29	1,00
Victim could prevent the crime	95	3,61	2,61	3,00	3,89	2,55	3,00	2,67	2,22	2,00
Behaviour of victim as a cause of crime	95	1,92	1,67	1,00	2,23	2,19	1,00	2,25	2,3	1,00
Provocation of the victim	95	3,05	2,64	2,00	2,68	2,26	2,00	2,68	2,37	2,00
Negatively effect the life of the victim	95	8,32	1,75	9,00	6,80	2,44	7,00	8,49	1,82	9,00

M = mean, Mdn = median, Sd = standard deviation

Post hoc analysis with Wilcoxon signed-rank tests was conducted with a Bonferroni correction applied, resulting in a significant difference for transgendered victims and male victims (p=.000). There was also a statistically significant difference between female and male victims predicted traumatization levels because of the physical assault (Table 1).

Participants' ratings for responsibility of group members who conducted crime showed significant difference according to Friedman's test ($\chi^2(2) = 9,97$, $p < .05$). Post hoc analysis did found any significant difference among the groups.

Victim responsibility for the physical assault crime showed statistically significant difference among the female, male and transgender victim group ($\chi^2(2) = 8,75$, $p < .05$) Even male blamed more than the transgender victims and transgender victims blamed more than the female victims, Wilcoxon signed-rank test with Bonferroni correction used as post hoc analysis did not found any significant difference among the groups.

In addition, statistically significant difference found among gender of the victim according to victims' probability to prevent the crime of physical assault ($\chi^2 (2)=39,74$, $p< 0.001$). Follow-up pairwise comparisons were conducted using a Wilcoxon test with Bonferroni correction found that there was a statistically significant difference between the transgender victims and female victims ($p < 0.001$); that transgender victims had a lower median. Transgender victims also had a lower median compared to male victims ($p< 0.001$) (Table 1).

For the crime of physical assault, participants' answers to the crime's negative effect on victims' lives showed a statistically significant change according to gender of the victim ($\chi^2 (2)=54,42$, $p<$ 0.001). Post hoc analysis with Wilcoxon signed-rank test was conducted with a Bonferroni correction is applied to find the group differences. Results showed that the perceived negative effect on male victims' lives as a result of the crime had statistically significantly lower ratings compared to the predicted amount of negative effect on female ($p<0.001$) and transgender victims' ($p<0.001$) lives.

Friedmans' test results were not significant for other two items which are ratings of provocation of the victim ($\chi^2(2) = 4,188$, ns) and how much can be victim blamed for the crime ($\chi^2(2) = 2,465$, ns).

For the crime of sexual assault, descriptive statistics showed that participants believed that police should indeed take the crime seriously. Besides, participants rated the responsibility of the offender is higher than the victim for all gender groups. Negative impact of the crime on the victim's life and traumatization of the victim were rated higher in comparison to other types of crime by the participants. Provocation of the victim and the statement that an act of victim as the cause of the crime rated lower. Participants disagreed with the statement that victims could have prevented the crime (Table 2).

Participants' ratings for victim possibility to prevent the sexual assault were compared by Friedman's test. Results showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the genders of the victims ($\chi^2(2)=43,172$, $p< 0.001$). Post hoc analysis with Wilcoxon signed-rank tests was conducted with a Bonferroni correction, and it was found that there was a statistically significant difference for male victims and other two group which are female victims and transgender victim ($p < 0.05$). Participants rated that the male victims

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Sexual Assault

	N	Female Victim			Male Victim			Transgender Victim		
		M	Sd	Mdn	M	Sd	Mdn	M	Sd	Mdn
Police should take the crime seriously	95	9,86	0,72	10,00	9,77	1,11	10,00	9,79	1,06	10,00
Traumatization of the victim	95	9,92	0,43	10,00	9,52	1,39	10,00	9,61	1,19	10,00
Responsibility of the offender	95	9,11	2,65	10,00	8,62	3,20	10,00	8,72	3,00	10,00
Responsibility of the victim	95	1,15	0,70	1,00	1,44	1,58	1,00	1,46	1,67	1,00
Victim could have prevented the crime	95	1,86	1,79	1,00	2,91	2,62	2,00	2,09	2,03	1,00
Behavior of victim as a cause of crime	95	1,37	1,38	1,00	1,55	1,89	1,00	1,54	1,64	1,00
Provocation of the victim	95	1,32	1,22	1,00	1,25	1,15	1,00	1,57	1,90	1,00
Negative effect on the victim's life	95	9,75	0,67	10,00	9,34	1,23	10,00	9,37	1,50	10,00

Note: M = mean, Mdn = median, Sd = standard deviation

have higher possibility to prevent to crime compared to female and transgender victims (Table 2).

Participants rating for how much victim would be traumatized showed statically significant difference according to Friedman's test ($\chi^2(2)$=14,893, p< 0.001). However, pairwise comparison done by Wilcoxon signed ranked test did not found any statistical significant difference among the groups.

Friedman's test results were significant for negative impact of the event on victim life ($\chi^2(2)$=16,074, p< 0.001). Wilcoxon signed ranked test with Bonferroni correction did not found any statistically significant difference among the groups.

For other items rated Friedman's test results was not significant that there were no differences for gender of the victim for other items; police should take the crime seriously ($\chi^2(2)$= 0,231, ns), responsibility of the offender ($\chi^2(2)$=3,862, ns), responsibility of the victim ($\chi^2(2)$=4,161, ns), behavior of the victim can cause the crime ($\chi^2(2)$=1,719, ns) and provocation of the victim ($\chi^2(2)$=1,263, ns).

Participants' answers in regard to transgender victims were compared for different crime types which are physical assault and sexual assault. A Wilcoxon signed-rank test indicated that there is a statistically significant difference for victim's responsibility for crime (T=894,00, z=4,31, p<.001). Participant rated higher on the responsibility of the victim for physical assault (Table 1 and Table 2). However, responsibility of the offender for different crime types did not statistically differ from each other (T= 236,00, z=-,803, p> 0.05).

Wilcoxon signed-rank test results showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the beliefs of participants regarding to victims' possibility to prevent the crime (T= 355,50, z= -3,26, p<0.001). Descriptive statistics showed that

participants rated the degree of the possibility to prevent the physical assault higher (Table 1 and Table 2). Besides there was a statistically significant difference regarding to perception of provocation of the victim (T= 1187,5, z=4,58, p< 0.001). Participants rated the provocation level higher for physical assault (Table 1 and Table 2).

Participants' ratings for the statements are compared by the Mann-Whitney U test in terms of participants' sex revealed a statistically significant difference for the probability of the transgender victim to prevent the physical assault (U=(N_{female}=64, N_{male}=30)=651,00, z=-2,62, p<0.05) and for negativity of the event on victims' lives (U=(N_{female}=63, N_{male}=30)=1191,00, z=2,12, p<0.05). Male participants rated a higher probability for transgender victims to prevent the crime (Table 3).

Answers of the participants for transgender victims with regard to sexual assault were compared by the Mann-Whitney U test for participants' statement on their sex, i.e. either female or male. The answers of female and male participants showed a statistically significant difference on the responsibility of the victim (U=(N_{female}=64, N_{male}=30)=762,00, z=-2,77, p<0.05) the probability of the victim to prevent the crime (U=(N_{female}=64, N_{male}=30)=643,00, z=-2,95, p<0.05), the provocation of the victim (U=(N_{female}=64, N_{male}=30)=791,00, z=-2,21, p<0.05) and the negative effect of the event on the victim's life (U=(N_{female}=64, N_{male}=30)=1167,50, z=2,71, p<0.05). Male participants rated higher scores for victim blaming, the probability of victim to prevent the crime and the provocation of the victim (Table 3).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics according to participants' sex

	Physical Assault						Sexual Assault					
	Female Participants (N=64)*			Male Participants (N=30)			Female Participants (N=64)			Male Participants (N=30)		
	M	Sd	Mdn	M	Sd	Mdn	M	Sd	Mdn	M	Sd	Mdn
Police should take the crime seriously	9,70	0,97	10,00	9,43	1,40	10	9,95	0,27	10,00	9,43	1,81	10,00
Traumatization of the victim	9,28	1,27	10,00	8,8	2,02	10	9,73	0,89	10,00	9,33	1,64	10,00
Responsibility of the offender	9,25	2,01	10,00	9,03	1,95	10	8,64	3,14	10,00	8,83	2,74	10,00
Responsibility of the victim	2,11	1,93	1,00	3,03	2,88	2	**1,18**	**1,03**	**1,00**	**2,03**	**2,48**	**1,00**
Victim could have prevented the crime	**2,20**	**1,74**	**2,00**	**3,66**	**2,79**	**2,5**	1,62	1,48	1,00	3,03	2,65	2,00
Behavior of victim as a cause of crime	2,39	2,5	1,00	1,93	1,81	1	1,43	1,48	1,00	1,76	1,95	1,00
Provocation of the victim	2,58	2,17	2,00	2,73	2,63	1,00	**1,34**	**1,58**	**1,00**	**2,06**	**2,42**	**1,00**
Negative effect on the victim's life	**8,86**	**1,46**	**9,00**	**7,76**	**2,28**	**8,00**	**9,64**	**0,99**	**10,00**	**8,83**	**2,13**	**10,00**

Note: M = mean, Mdn = median, Sd = standard deviation. N=63 for statement of a negative effect on the life of victim for physical assault vignette The values with a statistically significant difference are shown in bold.

Discussion

Studies on victim blaming mainly focusing on the female victims. Recent studies focus on the other gender victims. Similarly, studies conducted in Turkey on victim blaming mainly focused on woman victims of the rape. There is only one study that compare female victims with transwoman victims for victim blaming (Cingöz-Ulu et al., 2016). Studies reveal that approximately 40% of transgender individuals have been physically assaulted at least once in their lifetime, and 50% are victims of sexual assault (Stotzer, 2009). Apart from encountering various types of violence in daily life, the discrimination and transphobia they experience continue when they apply to justice to seek their rights (Testa et al, 2012). However, there is not enough scientific study or official data regarding to transgender people in the justice system. Transgender people in the justice system victimization is one of the area that is studied by the non-governmental organizations to advocate and protects transgender rights.

Victim blaming is another common approach to transgender people when they were victimized and a significant indicator of anti-transgender prejudice which is referred to as negative attitudes, beliefs, fear, and aversion for prejudice and discrimination against transgender people (Dexter, Amburgey and Ellis, 2016). Grubb and Turner (2012) underlined that victim-blaming cisgender literature attributes higher levels of blame to victims who violate traditional gender role stereotypes such as men being socialized as sexual initiators and women being sexually passive, conforming to them, and endorsing traditional gender roles. Living outside of hegemonic masculinity and/or heterosexism places the person in the category of morally questionable. In general, culturally institutionalized heterosexism causes a non-heterosexual identity to be framed as deviant and accusing victims of being abnormal and, in turn, blaming them and their bodies for the violence they were confronted (Williams, 2009; Lee & Kwan, 2014).

Davies and Hudson (2011) demonstrated that victim-blaming judgments toward transgender individuals vary systematically according to gender expression and perceived norm violation, with cross-dressers and transgender victims attributed higher blame than heterosexual victims by heterosexual male observers, despite no differences in perceived rape severity. These findings are particularly relevant to the present study, which similarly identified elevated mean responsibility attributions toward transgender victims, especially among male participants, even when overall group differences were not statistically significant. Consistent with this literature, prior research indicates that transgender victims are more likely to be blamed when their identities or living conditions are framed as risky or socially marginalized, including contexts where sex work is emphasized (Buist & Stone, 2014; Wood, Carrillo, & Monk-Turner, 2019). Together, these patterns suggest that transgender victims' perceived deviation from normative gender roles—rather than the severity of the assault itself—plays a central role in shaping victim-blaming judgments.

In our study, even the results are not statistically significant, means differ from each other that transgender victim is less likely to be blamed for

the physical assault crime compared to male victims and more likely to be blamed compared to female victims. The statistically group difference found for item traumatization of the victims showed that participants rated male victims lesser than the other two groups. Even there is no statistical significant for female victims and transgender victims in terms of traumatization level, participants rated traumatization level higher for the female victims. These results can be interpreted that transgender people are perceived more similarly to female victims. Because in question form gender identity of the trans individual is not specified as transwoman and transman, participants may assume that transgender person is female. Study conducted by Gazzola and Morrison (2014) showed that people perception regarding to transgender woman and transgender man are different that stereotypes regarding to transgender man are more negative. For future studies differentiating the victims' transgender identity as transgender woman and transgender man can be more explanatory for understanding victim blaming attitudes.

Results also found that victim possibility to prevent to physical assault less likely for transgender people compared to other groups. Participants may think that as the transgender people target of violence because of their gender. In Turkey, transphobia is so common and visible which makes transgender people vulnerable to hate-motivated crimes mostly in very brutal ways (Uluboy & Husnu, 2020). According to the report of an organization that monitors violence against transgender people around Europe, Turkey was ranked the first country where trans murders were committed among 47 countries in the Council of Europe (Ordek, 2012). Participant may reason that there is no possibility for transgender people to prevent the crime as their one of the targeted group in the society.

In the present study, transgender victims in sexual assault scenarios were perceived as similarly unable to prevent the crime as female victims, with both groups attributed significantly lower preventive capacity than male victims; female victims received the lowest preventability rankings overall. Although group differences in victim responsibility were not statistically significant, transgender

victims received the highest mean responsibility ratings, a pattern that was particularly pronounced among male participants. These findings indicate that, even in the absence of overt blame, transgender victims are subject to subtle attributional biases in sexual assault contexts. This pattern is consistent with prior research demonstrating that victim-blaming judgments are shaped by gender and sexuality, with heterosexual male observers showing a greater tendency to blame victims and minimize the severity of sexual assault (Davies & McCartney, 2003; Davies & Hudson, 2011).

In addition, when the rating has compared according to crime type, it is found that rating for the items; responsibility of the transgender victim for the crime, provocation of the transgender victim for the crime and possibility of the victim to prevent the crime statistically differ for two different crimes. Participants rated higher for the responsibility and provocation items for the physical assault. It is thought that transgender victim has higher possibility to prevent the physical assault compared to sexual assault. This result contradicts with the literature that rape victims compared to other crime types blamed more (Sizemore, 2012; Bieneck & Krahé, 2011). However, Felson and Palmer (2018) found that rape victims were not blamed more compared to other crime types indeed, participants avoided direct blame towards the rape victim. So, the reason for these results can be general biases or methodological.

While empirical findings on gender differences in victim blaming are not fully consistent, accumulating evidence indicates that biased evaluations toward different gender groups pose serious challenges to equity, impartiality, and procedural fairness within the justice system. Although many group differences in the present study did not reach statistical significance, the observed patterns—particularly the intermediate positioning of transgender victims between female and male victims—are consistent with theoretical accounts emphasizing that victim-blaming judgments are shaped more by gender norms and cognitive schemas than by objective indicators of harm. From this perspective, Christie's (1986) concept of the "ideal victim" provides a useful interpretive

framework. According to Christie, victims who are perceived as innocent, defenseless, and socially sympathetic—such as children, elderly individuals, and women conforming to traditional gender norms—are more readily granted victim legitimacy. In contrast, socially marginalized groups, including homeless individuals, illicit drug users, sex workers, and transgender people, remain structurally excluded from ideal victim status, rendering them more vulnerable to blame and diminished credibility.

Importantly, the patterns observed in the present study align with this framework. Transgender victims were neither fully delegitimized nor fully recognized as ideal victims, but rather occupied an ambiguous position within victim hierarchies. This ambiguity resonates with case-based evidence documented by civil society organizations. A 2015 report by the SPoD non-governmental organization indicates that sexual identity and gender identity have influenced judicial decisions, particularly through the acceptance of provocation claims raised by offenders. In several cases, victims' perceived sexual desire, refusal, or requests for sexual interaction were framed as provocation, leading to sentence reductions. Although such cases are limited and primarily documented by NGOs rather than systematic academic research, they illustrate how heteronormative assumptions and victim hierarchies can become embedded in legal reasoning, reinforcing victim-blaming logics within judicial outcomes. The absence of comprehensive empirical data on transgender individuals in the justice system further underscores their structural invisibility and the urgency of research-informed safeguards.

In this context, the present finding that transgender victims were perceived as less able to prevent physical assault and were attributed higher responsibility in certain scenarios underscores the need for judicial protections against implicit bias, including clearer jury instructions and judicial training focused on secondary victimization and stereotype-based reasoning (Garcia, 2023; Juli et al., 2023). At the investigative level, the perception of limited victim agency aligns with research demonstrating that confirmation bias and tunnel vision can shape how authorities interpret victim behavior and responsibility (Elaad, 2022), reinforcing the need for bias-awareness and procedural fairness training for law enforcement.

Finally, at the community level, prior research indicates that victim blaming operates as a form of secondary victimization that deepens social exclusion, particularly for gender-nonconforming individuals (Dyar et al., 2021; Juli et al., 2023). Community-based education initiatives and sustained collaboration with civil society organizations are therefore essential not only to challenge heteronormative stereotypes but also to promote more equitable institutional and social responses to transgender victims of violence.

Limitations

Several limitations of the present study should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings. These limitations primarily relate to the study design, sampling strategy, measurement approach, and operationalization of gender identity.

- *Scenario structure:* The physical assault vignette included active verbal engagement by the victim, which may have influenced attribution patterns and contributed to differences observed between physical and sexual assault scenarios.
- *Sample size and sampling method:* The relatively small, convenience-based sample limits the generalizability of the findings to broader populations.
- *Measurement approach*: The use of overt self-report measures may have elicited socially desirable responses, particularly given the sensitive nature of attitudes toward gender, sexuality, and violence.
- *Gender categorization:* The absence of differentiation between transgender women and transgender men may have shaped participant interpretations and obscured potential within-group differences.

Directions for Future Research

Building on these limitations, future research should aim to refine methodological approaches and expand the scope of inquiry to better capture

the complexity of victim-blaming attitudes toward transgender individuals.

- *Differentiating transgender identities*: Distinguishing between transgender women and transgender men would allow for a more nuanced examination of differential victim-blaming patterns.
- *Expanding sample diversity*: Employing larger and more diverse samples would enhance the generalizability of findings and allow for subgroup analyses.
- *Improving measurement strategies*: Utilizing implicit measures alongside self-report instruments may help reduce social desirability bias and capture less explicit forms of prejudice.
- *Cross-cultural perspectives*: Conducting cross-cultural comparative studies would facilitate understanding of how culturally embedded gender norms shape victim hierarchies and blame attribution processes.
- *Qualitative integration*: Integrating qualitative approaches could provide deeper insight into how transgender victims experience justice-seeking processes and secondary victimization.

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine victim-blaming attitudes toward transgender individuals in the Turkish context by comparing perceptions of physical and sexual assault scenarios involving female, male, and transgender victims. Addressing a significant gap in both international and national literature, the study contributes to victimology research by extending the analysis of victim blaming beyond cisgender female victims and incorporating transgender victims into comparative evaluation frameworks.

Overall, the findings indicate that while offenders were consistently held primarily responsible for both physical and sexual assault, gendered and transphobic biases persist in more subtle attributional judgments. Transgender victims were not uniformly blamed more than other victim groups; however, they occupied an intermediate posi-

tion between female and male victims across several evaluative dimensions. In particular, transgender victims were perceived as less capable of preventing physical assault compared to both female and male victims and were attributed higher levels of responsibility and provocation in certain contexts, especially by male participants. These patterns suggest that transgender victims are neither fully excluded from victim legitimacy nor fully recognized as "ideal victims," reflecting an ambivalent and conditional form of victim recognition.

The results further demonstrate that crime type interacts with victim gender in shaping blame attributions. Transgender victims were perceived as more responsible and provocative in physical assault scenarios than in sexual assault scenarios, a finding that partially diverges from earlier literature suggesting greater blame in sexual crimes. This divergence may reflect implicit biases, avoidance of overt blame in sexual assault cases, or methodological features of the vignettes, underscoring the complexity of attribution processes in victim-blaming judgments.

Importantly, the study highlights that participant gender remains a critical factor. Male participants consistently attributed greater responsibility, provocation, and preventability to transgender victims, aligning with prior research linking victim blaming to gender role beliefs, rape myth acceptance, and heteronormative assumptions. These findings reinforce the view that victim blaming functions not merely as an individual attitude but as a socially embedded process shaped by dominant gender norms and power relations.

Despite its contributions, the study has limitations. The relatively small and convenience-based sample limits generalizability, and the use of overt self-report measures may have elicited socially desirable responses. Additionally, the lack of differentiation between transgender women and transgender men in the vignettes may have influenced participant interpretations and attribution patterns.

In conclusion, this study provides empirical evidence that transgender victims face distinct and nuanced forms of victim blaming that differ from both female and male victim experiences. Given

the scarcity of systematic data on transgender individuals within the justice system in Turkey, these findings underscore the urgent need for further research, including larger samples, more refined operationalizations of gender identity, and cross-cultural comparisons. Advancing such research is essential not only for theoretical development in victimology but also for promoting fairer, more inclusive, and bias-aware responses to transgender victims within legal and social institutions.

Declarations

Funding: No funding was received for conducting this study.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval: This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Istanbul Arel University on October 14, 2022 (Decision No: 2022/20).

Informed Consent: Not applicable.

Data Availability: The data were collected anonymously via an online survey (Google Forms). The anonymized dataset may be made available by the corresponding author upon reasonable request (subject to ethical/confidentiality considerations).

AI Disclosure: Artificial intelligence tools (e.g., ChatGPT by OpenAI) were used solely for translation purposes. No AI tools were used for data analysis, interpretation, or substantive manuscript writing.

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