



# Gaslighting and Interpersonal Relationships: Systematic Review

## *Gaslighting ve Kişilerarası İlişkiler: Sistematik Derleme Çalışması*

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### ÖZ

Gaslighting failin mağdurun aklından şüphe etmesini sağlayan, gerçeklik algısını sorgulatan ve kişinin delirdiğini düşündüren bir manipülasyon tekniğidir. Gaslighting'in bir evlilik sendromu olduğu düşünülse de gaslighting sadece evliliklerde değil bütün ilişkilerde ortaya çıkabilmektedir. Bu derleme çalışmasının amacı da gaslighting ve ilişkiler üzerine yapılan çalışmaları sistematik olarak derlemek, hangi tür ilişkilerde gaslighting görüldüğünü ve bunun çıktılarının neler olduğunu ortaya koymaktır. Araştırmada Scopus, PubMed, Cochrane Library, TRDizin ve Web of Science veri tabanları kullanılmıştır. Sistematik derleme PRISMA kriterlerine göre yürütülmüştür. Veri tabanlarında taratılmak üzere Türkçe ve İngilizce dilinde "gaslighting", "gaslight" "relationship/ilişkiler" terimleri anahtar kelime olarak kullanılmıştır. Veri tabanlarından 97 çalışmaya ulaşılmış, 31 çalışma görüntülenmiş ve bunların 17 tanesi çalışmaya dahil edilmiştir. Araştırmaların çoğu ABD kaynaklıdır. Çalışma bulguları gaslighting'in sağlık, politika, romantik ve sosyal ilişkiler gibi birçok farklı alanda ortaya çıkabildiğini göstermiştir. İlişkilerde mağdurun ve failin kişiliğinin, partner bağımlılığının ve ilişkideki güç dengesinin gaslighting'i etkileyen unsurlar olduğu görülmüştür. Ayrıca alanyazında, gaslighting ile ilgili araştırmaların çok sınırlı sayıda olduğu bulgusuna erişilmiştir. Özellikle Türkçe kaynaklarda, gaslighting'e maruz kalmış kişileri doğrudan konu alan nicel veya nitel çalışma bulgularına rastlanamamıştır. Bunun nedeninin, Türkiye'de henüz gaslighting konusunda ölçekli bir çalışma yapılmamış olmasıyla ilişkili olduğu düşünülmüştür.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Gaslighting, duygusal istismar, manipülasyon, kişilerarası ilişkiler

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## Introduction

Violence continues to increase day by day in Turkey and many parts of the world. It is seen that victims of domestic violence and divorces increase in Malaysia and China due to social isolation and mandatory home quarantines during the COVID-19 pandemic period (Ismail et al. 2021). In the report published by the World Health Organization (World Health Organization 2021) on violence against women, it has been reported that one out of every three women (30%) worldwide is the victim of physical and sexual violence, and those who are exposed to violence are generally close partners. In a study conducted by the Ministry of Family and Social Policies in Turkey in 2014, it was determined that 36% of married women were exposed to domestic physical violence and 12% to sexual violence. Besides the physical and sexual types of violence, there are also emotional,

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psychological and economic types. Again, according to the results of the same report, it is seen that the rate of emotional ( 44% ) and economic (30%) violence/abuse that women are exposed to at least once in their lives is high. It is also among the findings that these rates are quite similar when compared to the report published in 2008 (Kaptanoğlu et al. 2015). It is estimated that approximately half of married women in Turkey are exposed to domestic emotional violence, which may lead to serious psychological problems.

In emotional violence/abuse, tactics such as humiliation and ignoring the victim's will, needs and wishes, causing him/her to doubt his/her mind can be applied by the perpetrators (Lackhar 2001). Glaser (2002) claims that deep and hidden wounds may occur in people who are constantly exposed to emotional/psychological violence, and this may have psychological consequences for the victim. Gaslighting, one of the types of emotional violence/abuse manipulation, can also become a dangerous method that deeply affects the psychological health of the victims.

Gaslighting is a manipulation technique that makes the perpetrator doubt the mind of the victim, questions the perception of reality, and makes the person think that they are crazy (Calef and Weinschel 1981). The word derives its meaning from a play called *Gas Light* written by Patrick Hamilton in 1938. In the story that tells the story of Bella and Jack couple, Jack flirts with the staff at the house and mysteriously disappears from the house every day. He does not share with Bella where he is going and denies cheating on his wife. However, with each passing day, Jack begins to dim the light of the kerosene lamp. Even if Bella realizes this situation, Jack claims that there is no such thing, that Bella is dreaming and convinces Bella of this situation. Bella begins to doubt her psychological health. Jack, on the other hand, causes Bella to become addicted to herself day by day (Thomas 2018). Two other films were later produced which are directed by George Cukor in 1944 and Harold Jackson in 2022, and were also released with similar themes and processes. Towards the end of the 1960s, the term gaslight had been used in academic terms, as well as plays and movies (Barton and Whitehead 1969, Calef and Weinschel 1981, Gass and Nichols 1988).

As mentioned in plays, movies and academic publications, the term gaslight is a manipulation method that works on the mind of victims (gaslightee), affects their ideas, questions their perception of reality, and ultimately causes them to change their thoughts and think that they are losing their mind (Calef and Weinschel 1981). There are not many studies published on gaslight in Turkey. In existing studies (Akiş and Öztürk 2021, Nazir and Özçiçek 2022), the English term gaslighting has been used. Although Nazir and Özçiçek (2022) express it as "gaslighting someone/a group", it is seen that there is a need for a Turkish word in this field since the concept is not fully Turkish. Since there is no Turkish equivalent yet, the concept of "gaslighting" is used in this study.

Gaslighting consists of two stages. In the first stage of manipulation, the perpetrator tries to establish control over the victim and transforms his or her thoughts into what he wants them to be. In the second stage, the perpetrator implements this manipulation and performs its professional manner. Unless the perpetrator is directly hostile, the victim may believe what the perpetrator says or doubt herself/himself without understanding how she/he is doing (Dorpat 1996). It is wondered why those exposed to gaslighting do not end their relationship and continue to be together. The reason for this may be that the victim cannot make sense of the extent of the violence of the relationship she is in. Or, the victim may not be aware that emotional violence is being committed by her partner, because the perpetrator is so convincingly and implicitly manipulating that the victim may lose her perception of reality and think she is unfair and blame herself.

Gass and Nichols (1988) observed the reactions of women in ongoing relationships based on their clinical experience. These reactions are in order of denial, thinking that I am losing my mind and grief/sadness. It is seen that the woman who learns or suspects the extramarital affair of the married man (husband) tends to deny it. The woman tries to convince herself that her husband will not cheat on her. In other words, the woman can blame herself for not showing enough attention to her husband and believes that this situation will disappear when she changes her behavior.

Another reaction is I'm losing my mind; unless the woman can prove the opposite of her husband's lies, she begins to doubt her sanity. While the thought of "one of us must have lost his mind" confuses her mind, the self-confident stance of the man confuses the woman more and she may think that she has lost her mental balance and that all of this is a product of imagination. However, the woman may be angry with herself because her paranoid thoughts lead to the deterioration of her relations with her husband (Gass and Nichols 1988).

Grief/sadness, another reaction of the woman, seems to be related to the ongoing uncertainty in the relationship. Coping with feelings of denial, guilt and anger, the woman continues to question. But he also wants to get rid of paranoid thoughts. The grief response expresses the deep sadness and depressive feelings

experienced by the woman who is tired of determining whether she will be the one to destroy or save the relationship (Gass and Nichols 1988).

The man, on the other hand, tries to rationalize his behavior and continues to blame the victim. For example, he can rationalize his cheating behavior by expressing that the woman is too cold in bed, does not dress elegantly at home, cannot cook good meals for her, or normalizes the situation by stating that every man can make a mistake once in his life. When the man is persuasive enough, the woman has to deal with depressive feelings as well as guilt. In addition, various psychological disorders such as anxiety, depression, and psychosis may occur in the victim (Dorpat 1996). In another study, Stern (2007) developed a similar approach to the effects on the victim and she stated that these reactions occur in three stages, the first being disbelief, the second being defensive and the last being depression.

According to Gass and Nichols (1988), although gaslighting is a marriage syndrome, some authors have stated that gaslighting can occur not only in marriages but also in all relationships. The underlying reasons for this are explained by the theories of micro-aggression (Johnson et al. 2021) and macro-aggression (Sweet 2019). According to the micro-aggression theory, individuals target people in the marginal/minority group and display hostile, insulting, negative and humiliating attitudes, both verbally and non-verbally, intentionally or unintentionally (Sue 2010). This may reveal relational problems and cause the person exposed to it to terminate the relationship. At the same time, microaggression may have a greater impact on psychological outcomes than direct discrimination (Er 2021). Johnson et al. (2021) state that micro-aggressors defend their perception of reality to such an extent that it causes the victims to doubt their minds, and therefore they argue that the term gaslighting is a kind of micro-aggression.

On the other hand, Sweet (2019) denies that gaslighting is a type of micro-aggression and defines it as macro-aggression. The reason for this is that she thinks that gaslighting occurs in a situation of social inequality based on gender, race, nationality and status. For this reason, she even claims that gaslighting has a male phenomenon. Briefly, Sweet argued that when social inequality occurs in close relationships, gaslighting will result from the exploitation of vulnerability. Similarly, Abramson (2014) claims that gaslighting is a malicious power tactic, whether done consciously or unconsciously. For this reason, it is a possible result that gaslighting can be seen in every institution or structure where there is a power relationship, such as boss-employee, parent-child, teacher-student, and administrator-citizen.

The aim of this study is to systematically compile the studies on gaslighting and relationships and to reveal which types of relationships use gaslighting tactics in studies and what their outputs are.

## Method

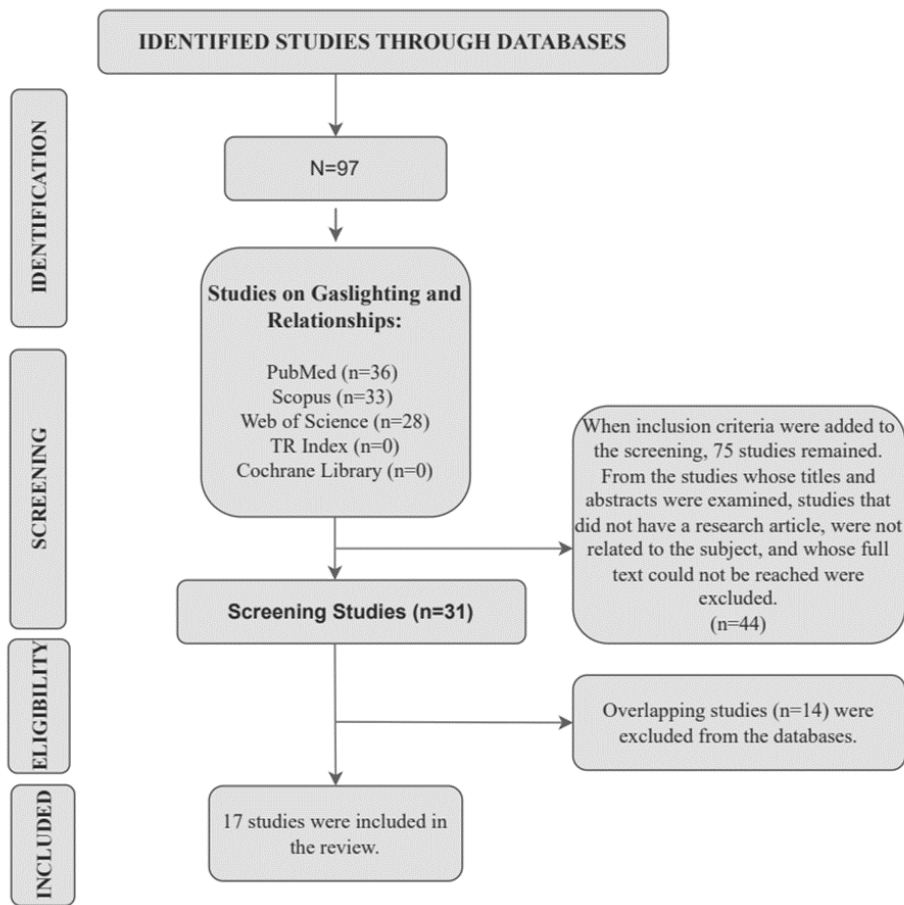
The literature review was carried out retrospectively from 10 May 2023. Scopus, PubMed, Cochrane Library, TRDizin, and Web of Science databases were used in the research. The systematic review was tried to be carried out according to the PRISMA criteria (Moher et al. 2009). The terms "gaslighting", "gaslight" and "relationship" were used as keywords in Turkish and English to be scanned in databases.

Inclusion criteria are (a) studies being research articles, (b) written in English and Turkish, and (c) access to the full text. As exclusion criteria, (a) studies should include reviews, book chapters, discussions, news articles, etc. (b) being written in languages other than English and Turkish, and (c) accessing only the abstract or the title. The flow chart of the literature review of the systematic review is given in Figure 1.

## Results

For the systematic review, when keywords are screened in databases, a total of 97 studies have been achieved. According to the inclusion criteria, this number has dropped to 75. In 75 studies whose titles and abstracts were examined, 44 studies that did not have research articles, were not related to gaslighting, and whose full text could not be reached were excluded. Of the 31 studies viewed, 14 overlap in the PubMed, Scopus, and Web of Science databases. After eliminating these studies, a total of 17 studies were included in the review. 11 of the existing studies are qualitative, 3 of them are quantitative, and 3 of them are both quantitative and qualitative studies. Most of the studies were conducted in the USA (n=9), and one study each from Italy, Australia and Pakistan, India, Egypt, Montenegro, and the United Kingdom was reached. The country in which one of the studies was conducted is not specified in the study. It was determined that there were a total of 2835 participants in the studies, most of them women. Families were evaluated in 3 case studies by Riggs and Bartholomaeus (2018). For this reason, it is not included in the total number of participants. In the study conducted by Shane

et al. (2022), social media data were examined, and a total of 11,910 data were included in the study. Likewise, in the study of Kim et al. (2023), 300 social media (Reddit) posts were analyzed. The table regarding the findings of the research is given in Table.1. According to the study findings, gaslighting has emerged in the health sector, romantic relationships, parent-child relationships, and social and political structures.



**Figure 1. Flow chart of screening**

## Gaslighting Behaviors in Medicine

Studies conducted with people who have experienced COVID-19 symptoms for a long time have revealed that doctors and other healthcare professionals apply gaslighting to patients (Au et al. 2022). The findings showed that medical professionals accuse their patients of protracted COVID-19 symptoms of being dramatic and anxious. When patients did not listened enough, their symptoms and complaints were not taken into account, and different diagnoses and treatments were applied, they experienced feelings of disappointment, exclusion and felt unsupported. As a result, the patients tried to convince themselves that they had overestimated everything in their minds and that they might have gone crazy Russell et al (2022) also reached similar findings as a result of interviews with patients who showed symptoms of COVID-19 for an average of 232 days. Three themes emerged at the end of the study; unpredictable symptoms, frustration, and social support. Patients have experienced great disappointment as a result of gaslighting applied by healthcare professionals in the face of unpredictable symptoms. Chatting with people who had the same experiences on various social media sites and sharing the same feelings reduced the negative effects of gaslighting experiences that people were exposed to. Another study revealing the gaslighting behaviors practiced by healthcare professionals was conducted by Vargas and Mahalingam (2020). In the study, although a patient said that the epidural did not work, the doctors did not believe her and began to cut her body, and the patient was left screaming. The disease of another patient was not understood, and the doctors accused the patient of distracting the health workers in vain and tried to convince her that she had nothing to do with it. However, when the patient went to another hospital, she learned that she needed emergency surgery. Fielding-Singh and Dmowska (2022) also reached four themes regarding the gaslighting techniques that doctors and nurses apply to mothers in their interviews with mothers who have experienced traumatic birth, about their prenatal, postpartum, and postnatal experiences. In the first theme,

health workers deny the humanity of their mothers; in the second, they invalidate the mothers' knowledge; in the third, it was concluded that the mothers rejected their logical judgments, and in the fourth, they did not see the mothers' feelings as legitimate.

<b>Author /Year /Country</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Method/Measurements</b>	<b>Results</b>
Au et al. (2022) USA	N=334 75% women 22% male 3% other	M =42	Qualitative Method Open and closed-ended questions were asked to patients with long-term COVID-19, and some were interviewed.	21% of the responses are positive, 79% are negative. It has been found that medical professionals largely perform gaslighting on long-term COVID-19 patients.
Bashford and Leschziner, (2015)	N=1 male	67 age	Qualitative Method Case analysis was done. The case of a male client who was allegedly sleepwalking and talking in his sleep was analyzed.	It was concluded that the person whose physiological findings were not abnormal was gaslighted by his wife, and that his nightly conversations were fabricated by his wife.
Bhatti et al. (2023) Pakistan	Focus group n=8 Pilot study n=20 Main work N=150 100% female	M = 23.88 SD = 4.03 years	Qualitative and Quantitative Method Scale Development	Pilot study (35 items), Main study (15 items) 2 subscales: a) Peer disagreement, b) loss of self-confidence Total Cronbach alpha: a = 0,93, Peer conflict: a = 0,92, Loss of self-confidence: a = 0,85
Dickson et al. (2023) United Kingdom	N= 386 Male= 78 F=298	M=33.73 SD=13.7 4 years	Qualitative and Quantitative Method In the first study, a total of 50 articles from three different databases were examined and thematic analysis was performed. Scales: Gaslighting Behavior Scale, Aggression Scale, Multidimensional Emotional Abuse Scale	5 Themes (1) The content of gaslighting, (2) Gaslighting as a tool of abuse, (3) Perpetrators as damaged manipulators, (4) Victims' experience and character, (5) Institutional and racial gaslighting Victim's Risk Factors: Being a victim of emotional abuse and constant aggression Result: High anger and hostility scores For The Perpetrator; More gaslighting behavior, more anger, and verbal aggression with higher emotional abuse guilt.
Fielding-Singh and Dmowska (2022) USA	N= 46	Unspecified	Qualitative Method Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants who had a traumatic birth experience about the behaviors of health workers before, during and after birth. Interviews took 1-3 hours over the phone. Content analysis was done.	4 Themes (1) denying mothers' humanity, (2) invalidating mothers' knowledge, (3) rejecting mothers' logical judgments, (4) not legitimizing mothers' feelings
Graves and Samp (2021) USA	N=298 F= 72,5 % Male= 27,5 %	M = 19.48 SD= 1.33 years	Quantitative Method Online survey metrics The relationship between the power of commitment to the partner and gaslighting was examined.	Gaslighting and Relationship Individuals with low and high levels of addictive power experienced more gaslighting than those with moderate power.

Jones (2023) Montenegro	N=28 Male=3 F=25	25-45 years	Qualitative Method 30-month ethnographic study in a women's NGO based in Montenegro, semi-structured interviews were conducted.	Tactics Used by Government Representatives: Destroying evidence, talking about meetings that didn't happen, denying it, playing the victim as the perpetrator, trying to get away from the topic
Kim et al. (2023) USA	N=300 post	-	Qualitative Method The posts of people who were exposed to intimate partner violence during the pandemic period on the Reddit social media network published between January 1, 2020 and March 31, 2021 were examined. Quantitative content analysis was performed.	Most of the survivors stated that they were exposed to psychological aggression and physical violence, and 54.3% of psychological aggression was gaslighting.
Kukreja and Pandey (2023) India	1. Pre-test: n= 35 (42% female) 2. Exploratory Factor Analysis: n= 205 Working experience: 6-446 months 3. Confirmatory factor analysis: n=216 Working experience: 6 months-30 years 4. Three-time operation: n= 258 Working experience: M=65,6 months, SD = 36,6 months	1: M= 27 years 2: M = 30.96 SD = 8.032 years 3: M = 26.88 SD = 0.403 years 4: M=36.5 SD = 9.93 years	Quantitative Method In order to develop the "Workplace Gaslighting Scale" with individuals who have worked in an institution for at least 6 months, the study consisted of 6 stages in total. In the three-time study, there is a 3-day interval between times. The role conflict experienced by the participants in T1, gaslighting at work in T2, and job satisfaction in T3 were measured.	A 12-item Workplace Gaslighting Scale was developed. It has 2 sub-dimensions; trivialization and affliction. Relationship With Gaslighting: Positive > Role conflict, Negative > Job satisfaction
Li and Samp (2023), USA	N=365 LGBTQ+ Adults, Gay (45.75%), Lesbian (37.53%), Bisexual (16.71%).	M= 34.73 SD = 9.86 years	Quantitative and Qualitative Method Survey work, participants' identity development, gaslighting experiences, relational power and relationship satisfaction internalized problems, anxiety and depression levels, self-esteem, stress level and physical health levels were examined. The exposed gaslighting techniques were analyzed by coding method.	It is not related to race, age, education or income. Those with a homosexual orientation are more victims of gaslighting than those who are bisexual. Relationship with Gaslighting: Positive > Internalized sexual stigma, depression, perceived stress, Negative > Self-esteem, relationship satisfaction, and physical health Tactics: Trivialize, ignore, forget, hide, resist
Miano et al. (2021) Italy	N = 250 F (50,4 %) Male (49,6 %)	M = 22.99 SD = 3.02 years	Quantitative Method Survey Study Information on gaslight experiences of university students with a partner was obtained. Personality traits of both victims and perpetrators were examined.	Perpetrator consequences: Glamorous gaslighting, good-guy gaslighting, and intimidating gaslighting are positively associated with psychoticism. Victim Outcomes: Impulsivity is positively associated with three types of gaslighting behaviors.
Riggs and Bartholomew (2018)	3 clinical cases	-	Qualitative Method Case study	Gaslighting occurred in three ways in the parent-transgender child relationship of the three

Australia				cases examined; (1) delayed action, (2) deliberate forgetting, and (3) placing an emotional burden on the child.
Rodrigues et al. (2021) USA	6 focus group N=15 Colored people	Unspecified	Qualitative Method Six focus group participants were selected from black participants who held high positions in universities. A thematic analysis of gaslighting experiences was made.	Themes (1) Rude behavior, (2) Sexual harassment, (3) Racial harassment Result: Social isolation Protective Factor: Social support
Russell et al. (2022) USA	N=20 F= 80 %, Male= 15 %, Others= 5 %	M= 42.0 SD = 12.4 years	Qualitative Method Participants over the age of 18 were selected from online groups. Interviews were conducted by phone and video-conference for an average of 36 minutes. Participants showed symptoms of COVID-19 for an average of 232 days. Thematic analysis was made.	3 Themes (1) Unpredictable symptoms, (2) Disappointments, (3) Social support In the face of long-lasting vague symptoms, healthcare professionals found the patients anxious, exaggerated, and accused them of not finding them believable. Protective Factor: Social support
Shane et al. (2022) USA	Twitter (n = 10,491), 4chan's (n = 1,419) The post has been reviewed.	-	Qualitative Method Epistemological Study Research from social media sites about the term gaslighting.	An increasing use of gaslighting on both platforms between January 1, 2020 and 2021, gaslighting was effective in spreading and resonating the conspiracy theories in election provocations.
Shousha (2023) Egypt	N=27 Relationship Duration: M = 6.44 years, SD = 6.05 years	M = 35.55 SD = 8.33 years	Qualitative Method Thematic analysis was carried out as a result of semi-structured interviews. Participants were selected from Facebook groups such as "Victims of Narcissists". The interviews were conducted online in Arabic, lasting 40-60 minutes. Three rounds of face-to-face interviews were conducted.	Most of the women have been exposed to gaslighting. 4 Theme: (1) The abuse experiences of the woman, (2) The perception of the narcissist as an abusive partner, (3) The negative social and psychological effect of the narcissistic relationship on the woman, (4) The woman's sources of resilience after separation Protective Factors: Psycho-social support and spirituality
Vargas and Mahalingam, (2020) USA	N=173 Male=66 F=107	M= 36.53 SD= 10.61 years	Qualitative Method The patients were asked questions about their previous experiences in the hospital, which we can call rude and disrespectful. The interpretative phenomenological analysis method was used to identify the main themes.	About the rude behavior of healthcare workers towards patients Themes Insensitivity, (2) Identity stigma (3) Gaslighting, (4) Childhood, (5) Ignoring, (6) Poor communication

F= Females M = Mean, N= Total Number of Participants, n= Sample Size, SD= Standard Deviation

### Gaslighting Behaviors in Political Structures

Another area where gaslighting is applied is the political area. Shane et al. (2022), who analyzed the social media data of 11,910 (Twitter (n = 10,491), 4chan's (n = 1,419) in total), mentioned that there was a huge gaslighting repercussion in social media after the election results in which Trump and Biden are rivals were announced. While Twitter users spread distorted or correct information on Trump's rhetoric, 4chan users shared in ways that defended him and blamed the other side.

Jones (2023), who conducted a 30-month ethnographic study in Montenegro, 11 months of whom were observers-participants in the field, conveyed her and other participants' gaslighting experiences to theorize the

gender-based corrupt order between the government and NGOs. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a total of 28 people, 25 women, and 3 men. As a result of observations and interviews, it was seen that government representatives had corrupt thoughts toward NGO advocates on issues such as gender inequality and violence against women. Representatives denied the opinions of NGO advocates, ignored them and changed the subject, talked about meetings that did not take place, and tried to destroy the evidence. Government representatives tried to play the role of victim as perpetrator with the gaslighting techniques they applied. Briefly, the research revealed gaslighting behaviors in structures with gender inequality and power imbalance.

### **Gaslighting Behaviors in Romantic Relationships**

In romantic relationships, the situation is as follows; When the posts published on Reddit by people who were exposed to intimate partner violence were examined, it was found that most of the survivors were exposed to psychological and physical violence, and 54.3% of psychological aggression consisted of gaslighting behaviors (Kim et al. 2023). Shousha (2023) conducted semi-structured interviews with 27 women who lived with a narcissistic partner and had an average relationship duration of 6.44 years. The interviews continued for 40-60 minutes. It has been revealed that women who claim to be victims of their narcissists are subject to gaslighting. Victims stated that they turned to spirituality and tried to provide psycho-social support in order to protect their psychological resilience. In the case analysis presented by Bashford and Leschziner (2015), an example of gaslighting, it emerged when a 67-year-old male client applied to the clinic with a sleep talking problem. Physiological findings of the person, who is claimed by his wife, who constantly talks during sleep at night and tells about his old relationships, are normal. At the same time, it was said that their speech continued despite the continuation of the drugs given. Since the doctors did not see a problem, the husband allegedly speaking had put a camera in his bedroom, and it was seen that the woman dragged her husband into this situation for financial gain and tried to convince her husband of an untrue situation.

Graves and Samp (2021), who think that gaslighting may have a relationship with addiction, conducted a quantitative study with 298 participants and compared the power of addiction to their partners and the levels of gaslighting. According to the findings of this study, individuals with moderate addiction had a healthier relationship, while participants with low and high levels of addiction experienced more gaslighting. Another study examined the pathological personality traits of gaslightee and gaslighter young adults (Miano et al. 2021). Five personality traits were identified in the study. These are negative affect, detachment, antagonism, disinhibition, and psychoticism. The findings of the study showed that there was no significant effect of gender and age in gaslighting. However, looking at the results of the gaslighter, the psychotic personality trait of the perpetrator was found to be associated with all types of gaslighting. These types are glamorous gaslighting, good-guy gaslighting, and intimidator gaslighting. In addition, impulsivity was positively associated with good-guy gaslighting, and detachment was positively associated with glamorous gaslighting. In victim outcomes, impulsivity was associated with all three types of gaslighting, while hostility was positively associated with glamorous and good-guy gaslighting, and psychoticism with intimidator gaslighting. In another study (Dickson et al. 2023), which was evaluated separately in terms of victim and perpetrator, 50 articles were first examined and some themes emerged. Then, a quantitative study was conducted with 386 people. The results found that gaslighting can occur in relationships with close friends and co-workers as well as in intimate partner relationships. As a result of studies, it has been revealed that those who are exposed to emotional abuse and constant aggression may also be exposed to gaslighting. It was concluded that while the victims showed high anger and hostility, the perpetrators of those with high emotional abuse showed more gaslighting behaviors, high anger and verbal aggression behaviors.

### **Gaslighting Behaviors at Work**

In a study conducted with individuals who have worked in an institution for at least 6 months on gaslighting behaviors seen in the workplace; first, a scale development study was conducted, and then the relationship between role conflict and job satisfaction was examined by controlling gender, age and education level. The results revealed that gaslighting at work was positively associated with role conflict and negatively associated with job satisfaction (Kukreja and Pandey 2023). Another study conducted with black women working in high positions (tenured professors, etc.) at universities stated that these women were subjected to harassment and rude behavior based on their gender, and race. They are tried to be persuaded that the discourses they are defending are not true, and they are accused of exaggerating or misunderstanding the events. Although the participants stated that these were generally applied by non-allied whites, they also claimed that white allies could do it from time to time, and their support could be superficial. It has been observed that black female professors exposed to gaslighting experience a lot of social isolation, but especially the social support of people



from their own race create conscious awareness and reduces the negative effect of gaslighting (Rodrigues et al. 2021). Gaslighting Behaviors Related to Gender and Sexual Orientation

In a study examining gaslighting experiences of LGBTQ+ adults, it was found that race, age, financial income and education were not associated with gaslighting. However, homosexual people were found to be more victims of gaslighting than bisexual people. While 365 adults with a mean age of 34.73 years were exposed to gaslighting behaviors and identity uncertainty, identity dissatisfaction, motivation to hide, going through a difficult process and stigmatization were found to be positively related; a negative relationship was found between gaslighting and identity superiority and relational power. At the same time, when the psychological health of people exposed to gaslighting was examined, internalized sexual stigma, depression levels and perceived stress levels were found to be high; self-esteem, relationship satisfaction and physical health were found to be low. It has been revealed that the vast majority of perpetrators are heterosexual individuals and parents. In particular, the findings regarding the exposure of fathers to gaslighting were emphasized in the study. Most of the participants describe the perpetrator as a "bad guy gaslighter" and describe their tactics as trivializing, ignoring, forgetting, hiding and resisting, respectively (Li and Samp 2023).

Riggs and Bartholomaeus (2018) also examined some types of gaslighting (postponement, forgetting, mispronunciation, emotional exploitation, etc.) applied by parents who applied to therapy regarding their children's desire to change gender. In the aforementioned study, the genders of their children were conveyed through the approved genders, not the assigned genders. All parents approve of these decisions of their children. In the first case, there is an 8-year-old girl. This child demands that the school uniform be suitable for her and that her name be changed. Despite the willingness of the family, they postponed these demands of their child. In the second case, an 11-year-old boy came to therapy because of his desire to prevent or delay puberty. The family deliberately did not come to the appointments, and they missed the appointments of the psychiatrist. The third case is about the 13-year-old girl's strategies to share her transgender identity with her extended family. Their parents were overly concerned about this and unintentionally misrepresented their child's gender. Parents constantly talk about their sadness and place an emotional burden on their daughters by not being empathetic enough.

Finally, Bhatti et al. (2023), who claim that gaslighting is generally applied to women, conducted a scale development study with female participants in Pakistan. In order to reveal the scale items in the study, they first conducted a focus group study with the victims. Afterward, they conducted a pilot study to determine the factor loads of the items. The number of items, which was 35 in the pilot study, was reduced to 15 in the last study. It has been seen that people who are exposed to gaslighting generally disagree with these people about the accuracy and reality of the events, and the person's self-confidence is lost. In this sense, two sub-factors of the created scale emerged. The Cronbach's alpha values of the sub-factors and the total score were  $\alpha = 0.93$ , peer disagreement  $\alpha = 0.92$ , and loss of self-confidence 0.85.

## Discussion

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The current systematic review study aims to reach current research on gaslighting and relationships, to see in which contexts these relationships develop and to evaluate them systematically. Scopus, PubMed, Cochrane Library, TR Index, and Web of Science databases on the subject were searched and a total of 31 research articles published in English were displayed as a result of the inclusion criteria; 17 of them were included in the review. Despite the presence of the Turkish language in the inclusion criteria, no Turkish research articles were found. The research results were analyzed in depth and reported in the findings.

The findings showed that gaslighting can occur in many different scopes and contexts. Studies have shown that female participants are more likely than male participants, and women are more exposed to gaslighting. Many researchers, such as Gass and Nichols (1988), have generally defined the male role for the gaslighter and the female role for the gaslightee in gaslighting studies. It is thought that men use more emotional manipulation tactics than women (Anderson 2009). Bhatti et al. (2023) thought that men would do more gaslighting because violence against women is more common in countries such as Pakistan where patriarchal social structure is dominant, and they carried out their studies only with women (victims). It has also been claimed in other studies that women are exposed to more gaslighting (Jones 2023, Rodrigues et al. 2021, Shousha 2023). These results strengthen the claim of Abramson (2014) and Sweet (2019) that gaslighting has a sexist structure. On the other hand, Stern (2007) suggested that gaslighting may be a form of violence/abuse independent of gender norms. As a matter of fact, in a study included in the review (Bashford and Leschziner 2015), it was observed that a woman applied gaslighting to her husband. For this reason, it should not be overlooked that women can apply

gaslighting as much as men. Miano et al. (2021) found no significant difference in gaslighting behavior between male and female participants. Previous studies have also failed to find a gender-specific difference in violence perpetrated by young couples against their partners (Fortin et al. 2011). In this sense, it can be investigated whether gaslighting creates a gender difference in future studies.

Another issue that stands out in the findings is gaslighting practices based on sexual orientation and race. The fact that homosexual individuals are more exposed to gaslighting by heterosexual individuals and their parents may indicate that LGBTQ+ is not yet accepted both in society and in the family, even in the USA, where individualization and free thought are important. Or, it may reveal that it is not accepted implicitly even if it is verbally approved (Riggs and Bartholomaeus 2018). The relationships, and psychological and physical health of these people who are exposed to gaslighting are adversely affected (Li and Samp 2023). For this reason, being exposed to gaslighting prospectively can bring both financial and moral problems at the micro and macro levels. However, there are studies claiming that black people are exposed to a lot of harassment and gaslighting (Davis and Ernst 2019, Roberts and Andrews 2013, Rodrigues et al. 2021). On the other hand, Li and Samp (2023) found that race was not associated with exposure to gaslighting. Future studies may investigate whether the breed is effective in exposure to gaslighting.

Another controversial finding is the personality traits of gaslightee and gaslighter. Akiş and Öztürk (2021) argue that gaslighting is related to narcissistic personality disorder and is characterized by the power and control effort that the narcissistic individual tries to establish over his partner. Shousha (2023) also stated that women who are in a relationship with their narcissistic partner are exposed to gaslighting in support of this finding. However, Miano et al. (2021) found in their study that psychotic personality traits are mostly related to the perpetrator, not the antagonistic personality. From a psychodynamic point of view, the common points of schizoid and narcissistic people such as undeveloped superego and unresolved Oedipus complex may support the conclusions in this direction (Çakır and Bilge 2020). Another striking result is that the victim has an impulsive personality trait. In this sense, since people with this personality trait may enter into more dangerous relationships, they may not realize the danger of the gaslighting relationship and may continue the relationship.

Another factor affecting gaslighting in relationships is the dependency power of individuals on their partners (Graves and Samp 2021). Dependent partners are generally afraid of losing because they do not trust each other, but they do not want to get out of the relationship because they are also attached (Atak and Taştan 2012). In the study of Kemaloğlu (2021), addiction was found as a predictor of emotional abuse. In light of these findings, it is supported that addiction is a factor that ensures the formation and continuation of gaslighting.

Au et al. (2022) argued that another factor supporting the formation of gaslighting would be individual power differences. Sweet (2019) describes this as social inequality. Disagreements and gaslighting behaviors between government representatives and women NGO advocates may also be due to a power imbalance (Jones 2023). In addition, the power imbalance between men and women in romantic relationships can reveal gaslighting behavior or affect relationship satisfaction (Çaykuş 2020). Likewise, the systemic power imbalance between parent and child can be a factor that reveals gaslighting (Riggs and Bartholomaeus 2018). In the parent-child hierarchy, the parent's position at the top can cause children's wishes to be viewed as petty or unreasonable. Although parents of transgender children have accepted the change in children, behaving differently than they promised may serve as an example of gaslighting (Riggs and Bartholomaeus 2018). But parents do not do this willingly. As Abramson (2014) said, gaslighting can be an unconscious, well-intentioned situation. However, the perception of being heterosexual by society as a superior feature may create a power imbalance between LGBTQ+ individuals and heterosexual individuals. For this reason, gaslighting behaviors may occur. The fact that these practices, which cause people to doubt their minds, especially in schools, can bring about bigger problems (Wozolek 2018).

Another structure where there is an imbalance of power is the health sector. The power imbalance between healthcare professionals and patients can lead to patients being exposed to gaslighting. In the studies included in the review, the number of studies on gaslighting in the health sector stands out. As a matter of fact, the fact that the number is so high may reveal that the gaslighting behaviors that patients are exposed to are not uncommon at all. In fact, the popularity of "medical gaslighting" hashtags on social media can be seen as another factor that shows how widespread the situation is (Barnes 2023). Doctors do not consider patients' complaints, think that they exaggerate the symptoms, and do not take any action for treatment, which may cause patients to distrust doctors and medicine (Barnes 2023). In the opposite case, a patient who acts with the idea that "the doctors are always right" will trust his doctor, will believe that the cause of his illness is psychological and that they are making themselves sick, and will not take any action for treatment. As a result, it may be late for diseases that need to be treated promptly. In order to avoid such situations, healthcare professionals can receive

supervision from their expert colleagues for diseases whose causes cannot be understood. At the same time, compulsory training can be given to health workers at certain intervals so that they can approach patients more empathetically.

In addition, the findings revealed that gaslighting is not only a situation that can be reduced to romantic relationships, but can also be seen in close friendships, work friendships and family relationships. In these structures, besides the power imbalance, social inequalities can also come to the fore. As a matter of fact, in the study conducted by Rodrigues et al. (2021), it was seen that although the participants were selected from people in high positions in universities such as regular professors, their gender and race still caused them to be exposed to gaslighting.

Studies have also emphasized that gaslighting has an important place in the psychological and physical health of individuals. Especially if victims have a history of emotional abuse, trauma, low self-esteem, and depression, they may be more vulnerable to gaslighting (Dickson et al. 2023, Evans 2023). At the same time, as a result of gaslighting, disorders such as depression, anxiety, psychosis, substance use, suicide, lack of self-confidence, and identity crisis can be seen in victims (Dorbat 1996, Evans 2023, Gass and Nichols 1988, Li and Samp 2023). Rodrigues et al. (2021), Russell et al. (2022), and Shousha (2023) proved that social support is important in reducing the negative effects of gaslighting. If a person thinks that they have been exposed to gaslighting by their close partner, friend, colleague, boss, doctor, etc., they can get support from a spouse, friend, relative, friend or specialist who they think will approach them in an empathetic way. Thus, the person can observe the situation through the eyes of a third person, gain awareness about the event and make necessary interventions. It is also known that spirituality is important for psychological resilience (Shousha 2023). Victims should also evaluate this factor to protect themselves.

## Conclusion

The study findings showed that gaslighting can occur consciously or unconsciously in romantic relationships, parent-child relationships, social issues, politics and health. In addition, it is known that gaslighting arises from some micro and macro aggression situations. Power imbalance and social inequalities are a few of them. In addition, the personality of the individual and the level of dependence on his partner were also found as other factors affecting gaslighting. Within the scope of the study findings, it is thought that the personality traits, addiction levels and relationship dynamics of the individuals should be evaluated correctly to understand whether the person has been exposed to gaslighting. Being aware of one's self and one's partner's self can help individuals experience more relationship satisfaction and maintain their psychological resilience. In addition, it is thought that the more empathetic approach of clinicians to people who have been exposed to gaslighting will strengthen the client-therapist relationship, and the client will be able to get out of their position faster.

When the Turkish literature on gaslighting is examined, it is seen that there is no research study, the existing studies are in the form of book chapters and traditional reviews, and no systematic review studies have been found. In this sense, it is thought that this study will make important contributions to the Turkish literature. However, there are some limitations of systematic review. Only 5 databases were included in the study, and no conclusions could be drawn from two of them. In addition, although Turkish and English studies were included in the systematic review, only English publications were included in the study, since no Turkish research article was available. Future studies can browse research articles published in different languages, include different databases, and expand the scope of the research. In addition, most of the studies reached in the literature are related to intimate partner violence; very few studies have been reached on gaslighting, especially with quantitative methods. Three scale development studies were found in the included studies. One of them is in India and measures gaslighting behaviors at work, the other is in Pakistan for romantic relationships, and the third one is in the United Kingdom and measures gaslighting behaviors in romantic relationships, close friends and coworkers. In this context, it is striking that there is a lack of a scale that can be applied to both men and women in Turkish literature. In future studies, the development of a scale measuring gaslighting behaviors in romantic relationships and other contexts is thought to be important in terms of increasing the number of quantitative studies.

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