Adaptation Validity and Reliability Study of the Gaslighting Victim Scale: A Case of Women in Turkish[1]

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Abstract

Gaslighting is when a person deliberately distorts the facts and makes the victim think that he or she is mentally unstable. The gaslighting practitioner continually denies the facts, thus trying to influence the victim. It is estimated that there are women suffering from gaslighting all over the world and it is important to have a measurement tool in this context. Therefore, the aim of this study was to examine the psychometric properties of the Turkish version of the gaslighting victim scale. The study group consisted of 477 women over the age of 18. For the Turkish adaptation of the scale, linguistic validity, construct validity, reliability and convergent validity were analyzed. As a result of the factor analysis conducted to measure the construct validity of the scale, it was seen that the values obtained as a result of the factor analysis (x^2 /sd (CMIN/df) = 2.58, RMSEA = .058, NFI = .931, RFI = .901, CFI = .956, TLI = .937) showed excellent fit or good fit and the two-dimensional structure of the scale was acceptable. There are no reverse scored items in the scale. The Cronbach Alpha internal consistency reliability coefficient of the scale was found to be .88. The data obtained showed that the 14-item Gaslighting Victim Scale is a valid and reliable measurement tool for measuring the gaslighting victimization of adult women in Turkey. It is important to empower women around the world and to reduce the victimization they experience in society. Therefore, it is thought that this study will contribute to the awareness of Turkish women and the studies to be carried out for their development.

Keywords: Gaslighting, victim, women, manipulation, scale adaptation

Psikolojik Manipülasyon Kurban Ölçeği: Kadın Örneğinde Türkçeye Uyarlama, Geçerlik ve Güvenirlik Çalışması

Özet

Psikolojik manipülasyon, kişinin bilinçli olarak gerçekleri çarpıtması ve mağdura akli dengesinin bozulduğunu düşündürmesidir. Psikolojik manipülasyon uygulayıcısı devamı olarak gerçekleri inkar eder, böylece mağduru etkisi altına almaya çalışır. Dünyanın her yerinde psikolojik manipülasyona uğrayan kadınların olduğu tahmin edilmektedir ve bu bağlamda bir ölçüm aracının olması önem arz etmektedir. Bu nedenle, bu çalışmanın amacı psikolojik manipülasyon kurban ölçeğinin Türkçe formunun psikometrik özelliklerini incelemektir. Araştırmanın çalışma grubunu 18 yaş üstü 477 kadın oluşturmaktadır. Ölçeğin Türkçe uyarlaması için, dilsel geçerlilik, yapı

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geçerliliği ve güvenirlik ve uyum geçerliliği için ilgili analizler yapılmıştır. Ölçeğin yapı geçerliliğini ölçmek için yapılan faktör analizi sonucunda elde edilen değerlerin (x^2 /sd (CMIN/df)= 2.58, RMSEA = .058, NFI = .931, RFI = .901, CFI = .956, TLI = .937) mükemmel uyum veya iyi uyum sergilediği ve ölçeğin iki boyutlu yapısının kabul edilebilir olduğu görülmüştür. Ölçekte ters puanlanan madde yoktur. Ölçeğin Cronbach Alfa iç tutarlılık güvenirlik katsayısı .88 olarak bulunmuştur. Elde edilen veriler, 14 maddelik Psikolojik Manipülasyon Kurban Ölçeği'nin Türkiye'deki yetişkin kadınların psikolojik manipülasyon mağduriyetlerinin ölçülmesinde geçerli ve güvenilir bir ölçme aracı olduğunu göstermiştir. Dünya genelinde kadının güçlenmesi, toplum içerisinde yaşadığı mağduriyetlerin azaltılması önemlidir. Bu nedenle bu çalışmanın Türk kadınının farkındalığına ve gelişimi için yürütülecek çalışmalara katkı sağlayacağı düşünülmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Psikolojik manipülasyon, manipülasyon, kurban, ölçek uyarlama

1. INTRODUCTION

Gaslighting, as a concept describing a situation that many people encounter in their daily relationships, can be defined as the perpetrator deliberately distorting the experienced situations and making the victim feel mentally unstable. (Tormoen, 2019). Gaslighting, in one sense, is a brainwashing project carried out by the gaslighter (Dorpat, 1996). The gaslighting victim knows that their experiences are real and true, but the gaslighter constantly denies the victim's experiences, making them think they are starting to lose their mind. (Leve, 2017).

There are two characteristics of gaslighting: the gaslighter (1) selects the victim and attempts to take control of their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors, and (2) the process of gaining control is carried out covertly. (Dorpat, 1996). Gaslighting involves manipulative behavior and is a form of abuse (Engelhardt, 2023). According to Abramson (2024), gaslighting is defined in two ways: "feeling like crazy" and "questioning your sanity". The common characteristic of gaslight victims is that they have idealized the gaslighting practitioner in their lives. Trust and well-being are especially important in close relationships. In this context, gaslighting is essential for the peace of the intimate relationship (Tager-Shafrir et al., 2024). Gaslighting practitioners are usually right and gaslight victims have to seek their approval (Stern, 2007). Gaslighting practitioners can exhibit behaviors similar to paranoid traits. However, unlike paranoid behaviors that are based on realistic anxieties or fears, gaslighting involves the practitioner having a distorted perception of reality and projecting their unique anxieties onto the victim through deviant thoughts (Calef and Weinshel, 1981).

Gaslighters try to take complete control of their victims' lives, blaming them for everything that happens and constantly remaining on the defensive. These defenses include direct denial (e.g., "You are just imagining it"), alloplastic defense (e.g., "It was your fault; I reacted the way I did because of you"), altruistic defense, and mediation defense (e.g., "My behavior is accepted by everyone") (Rakovec-Felser, 2014).

It is explained that emotional and psychological manipulation, which appears as the concept of gaslighting, is used very frequently in gender discrimination. In general, it is seen that women are exposed to gaslighting behaviors more than men in all cultures (Calef and Weinshel, 1981). The fact that women are more emotionally sensitive suggests that they act with their emotions in their social environment and that their decisions should be less important. As a result of this thinking, men become overconfident and feel that they have more say in their experiences. (Abramson, 2014). For women, there are various consequences of being gaslighted: Overstimulation or alertness, deterioration in relationships with other people in social environments, increased physical anxiety, body dissatisfaction, problems with sexuality and intimacy with a partner are examples of these problems. (Rakovec-Felser, 2014).

The points that victims of gaslighting can pay attention to in order not to be subjected to this abuse further can be stated as follows: (1) when an individual realizes that they are being gaslighted, they should not give in and stay there, even if the gaslighter is their lover, spouse, friend or employer (Spear, 2019), (2) distance themselves from people and avoid sexual or physical intimacy (Kelley, 2023), (3) victims should be confident and assertive; (4) they should feel comfortable expressing their feelings (Sengkey and Illahibaccus-Sona, 2024).

Women who recognize gaslighting and regain control can heal and thrive. As a result of this victory, the victim's psychological resilience and self-confidence increase, and self-confidence is restored. (Kelley, 2023). Likewise, different studies also suggest that increasing psychological resilience is an important concept in taking measures against gaslighting (Güleç and Özbay, 2024).

Gaslighting first appeared as a character in the 1944 film Gaslight, starring Ingrid Bergman (Berenstain, 2020). In the film, the character who practices gaslighting, Gregory, acts as if his wife Paula has lost her mind (Abramson, 2014). In this context, gaslighting is the perpetrator's deliberate distortion of events and making the victim feel that they are losing their sanity (Tormoen, 2019). Gaslighting is, in a sense, a brainwashing project carried out by the gaslighter (Dorpat, 1996). The victim of gaslighting knows that their experiences are real and true, but the gaslighter constantly denies the victim's experiences, making the victim believe that they are going mad (Leve, 2017). Following this film, Robert Stein addressed warning signs of gaslighting and characteristics of gaslighters in his 2007 book, The Gaslighting Effect. In 2018, he published a new version of the book, drawing attention to gaslighting's current oppressive behaviors and its place in close relationships (Sweet, 2019).

When the related concept was researched, it was realized that gaslighting has only recently started to be researched in the national literature and there is no tool to measure it. Although it is not possible to know the number of women exposed to gaslighting worldwide, it is estimated to be high. Therefore, it is important to have a measurement tool to determine women's exposure to gaslighting. Based on this situation, this study aimed to conduct a Turkish validity and reliability study of the gaslighting victim scale in order to close the gap in Turkey.

2. METHOD

In this section, the research model, the study group, the scales used in the research and the analysis method are explained.

2.1. Research Model

This research is a scale adaptation study. Therefore, it includes the steps of scale adaptation. Related analyses were conducted for linguistic validity, construct validity, reliability and internal consistency analyses, and convergent validity.

2.2. Working Group

The adaptation study of the gashlighting victim scale for women was conducted with women over the age of 18. The study group consisted of 477 women reached by snowball sampling method. In the snowball sampling method, a person is selected in relation to the research topic and other participants are reached with the guidance of this person (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981).

2.3. Data Collection Tools

2.3.1. Gaslighting Vvictim Acale

The scale developed by Bhatti, Shuja, Aqeel, Bokhari, Gulzar, Fatima, and Sama (2021) was designed to measure the gaslighting behaviors experienced by victims. The scale study was conducted with women living in Pakistan. The scale consists of two sub-dimensions: peer conflict and loss of self-confidence. The scale, which consists of 14 items in total, is a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1-Strongly Disagree to 5-Strongly Agree. The fit value of the scale was measured as $x2//df= 811.43$, RMSEA= .034. Cronbach's alpha value for the whole scale was .93, .92 for the peer conflict sub-dimension and .85 for the loss of self-confidence sub-dimension. As a result of the study, it was concluded that the scale was valid and reliable.

2.3.2. Distress Tolerance Scale

This scale was developed by Simons and Gaher (2005) to measure distress tolerance. The scale was adapted into Turkish by Sargın et al. (2012). The scale consists of three sub-dimensions and 15 items in total. It was formed as a 5-point Likert scale with 1 - Strongly Agree and 5 - Strongly Disagree. In the Turkish adaptation study, the first factor explained 32.56% of the variance with an eigenvalue of 4.88, the second factor explained 17.75% of the variance with an eigenvalue of 2.66, and the third factor explained 11.84% of the variance with an eigenvalue of 1.78. The sum of the factor dimensions of the scale explained 62.15% of the scale. The variables were formed according to three factors and there were nine variables in the first factor and three variables each in the second and third factors. The loadings of the scale items on the first factor ranged between .363 and .800, on the second factor between .338 and .854, and on the third factor between .301 and -.884. Finally, the factor common variance varied between .449 and .799. Cronbach's alpha values of the scale were .89 for the whole scale, .90 for the tolerance subscale, .80 for the regulation subscale and .64 for the self-efficacy subscale. As a result of the adaptation study, it was concluded that the scale was suitable for Turkish.

2.3.3. Self-Confidence Scale

This scale was developed by Akın (2007) to measure self-confidence. The scale was formed as two sub-dimensions: internal self-confidence and external self-confidence. The scale, which consists of 33 items in total, is a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1-Never to 5-Always. The fit values of the scale were measured as $x2=$ 700.41, df= 488, RMSEA= .044. Cronbach's alpha values of the scale were .94 for the whole scale, .97 for the internal self-confidence subscale and .87 for the external self-confidence subscale. As a result of the study, it was concluded that the scale was valid and reliable.

2.4. Data Analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis, reliability analysis and internal consistency analysis and correlation analysis for convergent validity were conducted for data analysis.

2.5. Research and Publication Ethics

In the study, all the rules specified in the "Directive on Scientific Research and Publication Ethics of Higher Education Institutions" were followed. None of the actions specified in the 2nd section of the Directive titled "Actions Contrary to Scientific Research and Publication Ethics" have been carried out.

2.5.1. Ethics committee permission

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3. FINDINGS

3.1. Linguistic Validity

While adapting the Gashlighting Victim Scale into Turkish, permission was first obtained from the responsible author Kanwar Hamza Shuja via e-mail. The original scale was translated by the researchers and five field experts who have a good command of both English and Turkish languages were asked to provide their opinions with the "Translation Evaluation Form". In two pilot applications with 50 participants, it was evaluated whether the scale items were clear and understandable.

3.2. Construct Validity and Reliability

As a result of the confirmatory factor analysis, it was seen that the values obtained showed excellent fit or good fit ($x2$/sd (CMIN/df) = 2.91, RMSEA = .060, NFI = .916, CFI = .943, TLI = .923). In the modifications made in line with the suggestions given by the program, it was seen that the items were related to each other. The model is presented in Figure 1.
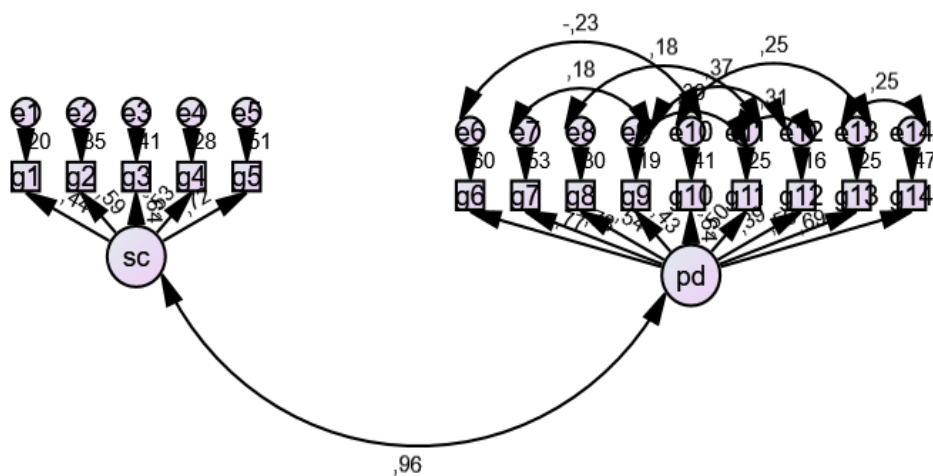

Figure 1.CFA Model

3.3. Internal Consistency Analysis

Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficients for the Gashlighting victim scale and its sub-dimensions are given in Table 1.

Table 1. *Cronbach alpha internal consistency analysis results for the Gashlighting Victim Scale and its sub-dimensions*

Sub Dimensions	Cronbach Alpha
Loss of Self-Trust	.721
Peer Disagreement	.841
Gashlighting Victim Scale	.880

When Table 1 is examined, it is seen that Cronbach alpha values are .721 for loss of self-confidence, .841 for peer conflict and .880 for the whole scale.

3.4. Item Analysis

In line with the item analysis of the Gashlighting victim scale, the correlation of the items belonging to the sub-dimensions of the inventory with those dimensions was examined. In this context, the item-total correlation for the sub-dimensions and Cronbach alpha coefficients when the item was removed are given in Table 2.

Table 2. *Item analysis for the Gashlighting victim scale*

Dimension	Item	Item Total Correlation	Cronbach's alpha Coefficient When the Item is Removed
Loss of Self-Trust	1	,439	.876
	2	.507	.874
	3	. 577	.870
	4	.462	.876
	5	.616	.868
Peer Disagreement	6	.666	.866
	7	.672	.865
	8	.526	.873
	9	.495	.874
	10	.565	.871
	11	.531	.873
	12	.461	.876
	13	.514	.873
	14	.651	.866

When Table 2 is examined, it is seen that there is no increase in the Cronbach alpha coefficient for the relevant dimension when the items are removed in general, so no item is removed from the scale.

3.5. Conformity Validity

For convergent validity, the Distress Resistance Scale (Sargın et al., 2012) and Self-Confidence Scale (Akın, 2007) were used. The Distress Tolerance Scale is a 15-item, five-point Likert-type scale. There are three sub-dimensions in the Turkish adaptation. The loadings of the scale items on the first factor ranged between .363 and .800, on the second factor between .338 and .854, and on the third factor between .301 and -.884. The Self-Confidence Scale consisted of 33 items and two sub-dimensions. When the scale was analyzed in terms of fit

values, x2= 700.41, df= 488 RMSEA= .044. Cronbach's alpha values of the scale were .94 for the whole scale, .97 for the internal self-confidence sub-dimension and .87 for the external self-confidence sub-dimension.

The correlations between the Gashlightinge scale and the distress tolerance scale and the self-confidence scale are given in the table below.

Table 3. *Correlations between gashlighting victim scale, distress tolerance scale and self-confidence scale*

	1.	2.	3.	4.
1. Peer Conflict sub-dimension	1	,706[**]	-,421[**]	-,373[**]
2. Loss of self-confidence sub-dimension		1	-,407**	-,449**
3. Distress tolerance scale			1	.376
4. Self-confidence scale				1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

When Table 3 is examined, it is seen that the peer conflict and distress tolerance sub-dimensions of the gashlighting victim scale exhibit negative and moderately significant relationships with the distress tolerance and self-confidence scales.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this study, the Turkish validity and reliability study of the gaslighting victim scale was conducted. In the first step of the three-step analysis, linguistic validity was examined. In the second step, construct validity and reliability, and finally, concurrent validity were examined.

The values obtained as a result of the factor analysis conducted to measure the construct validity of the scale ($x2$/sd (CMIN/df) = 2.58, RMSEA = .058, NFI = .931, RFI = .901, CFI = .956, TLI = .937) showed excellent fit or good fit and the two-dimensional structure of the scale was found to be acceptable (Hu and Bentler, 1999). According to the results of the internal consistency analysis, the Cronbach's Alpha value for loss of self-confidence was .721, the Cronbach's Alpha value for the peer conflict sub-dimension was .841, and the Cronbach's Alpha value for the whole scale was .880. According to Büyüköztürk (2017), a coefficient higher than .70 indicates that the inventory is a reliable measurement tool in general.

Item-total correlations of .30 and above indicate that the discrimination of the item is strong and the item is reliable (Büyüköztürk, 2017). Considering that the item-total correlation value for all items in the inventory is .30 and above, it can be said that the items in the inventory are discriminative and related to the dimension they are related to.

To assess the convergent validity, the relationships with the self-confidence and distress tolerance scales were evaluated. According to the findings, there is a strong positive relationship between the peer conflict sub-dimension of the gaslighting victim scale and the loss of self-confidence sub-dimension (r = .76). Additionally, a moderate negative relationship was found between peer conflict and endurance of distress (r = -.421), and between peer conflict and self-confidence (r = -.373). Furthermore, a moderate negative relationship was observed between the loss of self-confidence and enduring adversity (r = -.407) and between enduring distress and self-confidence (r = -.449). Based on these findings, it can be stated that as peer conflict and loss of self-confidence increase, distress tolerance and self-confidence decrease. When the relevant research is examined, there are studies in the literature showing that the concept of gaslighting is associated with a decrease in the self-confidence of individuals subjected to gaslighting (Aurangzeb et al., 2023; Clark, 2024; Çabuk and Kumova, 2024; Rietdijk, 2024). Additionally, in the context of the gaslighting literature, there are studies suggesting that gaslighting behaviors trigger the amygdala in the brains of victims (Imad, 2022), creating an environment of excessive stress (Aurangzeb et al., 2023), and leading to stress-related psychological issues (Golding, 1999; Sanghai, 2023).

In conclusion, the Turkish adaptation study of the gashlighting victimization scale for women showed that the scale is a valid and reliable instrument suitable for Turkish culture. In the scale scoring, high scores in each sub-dimension indicate high victimization for exposure to gashlighting. The loss of self-confidence sub-dimension of

the scale consists of five items (1, 2, 3, 4, 5). The peer conflict subscale consists of nine items (6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14). There are no reverse scored items in the scale.

When the scales used in relation to the concept of gaslighting in our country are examined, the Psychological Dating Violence Scale adapted by Bacıoğlu et al. (2024) and the Workplace Psychological Violence (Mobbing) and an Application Scale developed by Çay (2008) can be given as examples.

In future research, the utilization of the Gaslighting Victim Scale may serve as a valuable framework for enhancing the understanding of this phenomenon and for designing interventions aimed at equipping women with the necessary skills to mitigate their victimization. This is particularly significant in patriarchal societies such as Turkey, where empowering women and reducing their victimization within the community is imperative. The increased susceptibility of women to gaslighting can be attributed to their pronounced adherence to traditional gender roles in social contexts (Sweet, 2019) as well as a greater propensity for self-doubt (Abramson, 2014). Within this framework, constructs such as self-compassion, relationship satisfaction, anxiety, and personality traits are conceptually linked to gaslighting and warrant further investigation in future studies. Consequently, this study is expected to contribute meaningfully to raising awareness among Turkish women and to the development of targeted interventions to support their well-being.

5. STATEMENT

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