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Understanding Attitudes Towards Dating Violence Among Adolescents: A High School Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Violence is a long-standing public health issue that negatively impacts physical, psychological, and social development. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to violence due to their inexperience and psychosocial immaturity. This study aimed to examine high school students' attitudes toward dating violence and their exposure to it. **Materials and Methods:** The sample included 118 female and 50 male students in the 10th, 11th, and 12th grades. Data were collected using a demographic form and the Dating Violence Attitude Scale and analyzed with Mann-Whitney U, Kruskal-Wallis, and Chi-Square tests in SPSS. **Results:** Findings revealed that over 50% of students did not view accountability, jealousy, or men paying the bill as violence. Additionally, 14% of students reported experiencing domestic violence, and 8% reported violence in intimate relationships, though none sought support. Gender differences were found in attitudes toward violence, with female students scoring higher on the violence attitude scale ($p<0.05$). Differences were also observed across high school types, with Science High School students showing less support for violence ($p<0.05$). However, no correlation was found between academic achievement, exposure to family violence, current experiences of violence, and attitudes toward dating violence. **Conclusion:** This study highlights gender and school-type differences in attitudes toward dating violence among high school students, emphasizing boys' permissive attitudes and science high schools' less supportive stances. Findings suggest that tailored interventions promoting healthy relationships across diverse educational environments are essential.

Keywords: Violence, Dating Violence, Adolescents, High School.

Ergenlerin Flört Şiddetine Yönelik Tutumlarının Anlaşılması: Bir Lise Perspektifi

ÖZ

Amaç: Şiddet, fiziksel, psikolojik ve sosyal gelişimi olumsuz etkileyen, uzun süredir devam eden bir halk sağlığı sorunudur. Ergenler, deneyimsizlikleri ve psiko-sosyal olgunlaşmamışlıkları nedeniyle şiddete karşı özellikle savunmasızdır. Bu çalışma, lise öğrencilerinin flört şiddetine yönelik tutumlarını ve bu şiddete maruz kalma durumlarını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. **Gereç ve Yöntem:** Örneklem, 10., 11. ve 12. sınıflarda okuyan 118 kız ve 50 erkek öğrenciden oluşmuştur. Veriler, demografik form ve Flört Şiddeti Tutum Ölçeği kullanılarak toplanmış ve SPSS programında Mann-Whitney U, Kruskal-Wallis ve Ki-Kare testleri ile analiz edilmiştir. **Bulgular:** Bulgular, öğrencilerin %50'den fazlasının hesap sorulmasını, kıskançlığı veya hesabı erkeğin ödemesini şiddet olarak görmediğini ortaya koymuştur. Ayrıca, öğrencilerin %14'ü aile içi şiddete, %8'i ise yakın ilişkilerinde şiddete maruz kaldığını bildirmiş, ancak hiçbirisi destek aramamıştır. Şiddete yönelik tutumlarda cinsiyet farklılıkları bulunmuş, kız öğrenciler Flört Şiddeti Tutum Ölçeği'nde daha yüksek puan almıştır ($p<0.05$). Lise türleri arasında da farklılık gözlemlenmiş, Fen Lisesi öğrencilerinin şiddeti daha az desteklediği belirlenmiştir ($p<0.05$). Bununla birlikte, akademik başarı, aile içi şiddete maruz kalma, mevcut şiddet deneyimleri ile flört şiddetine yönelik tutumlar arasında herhangi bir ilişki bulunamamıştır. **Sonuç:** Bu çalışma, lise öğrencileri arasında flört şiddetine yönelik tutumlarda cinsiyet ve okul türüne bağlı farklılıkları vurgulamakta, erkek öğrencilerin şiddete karşı daha müsamahakar tutum sergilediğini ve Fen Liselerinin şiddeti daha az desteklediğini ortaya koymaktadır. Bulgular, farklı eğitim ortamlarında sağlıklı ilişkileri teşvik eden, ihtiyaca yönelik müdahalelerin gerekliliğine işaret etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Şiddet, Flört Şiddeti, Ergenler, Lise.

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INTRODUCTION

Violence is a long-standing public health issue, causing countless deaths and significantly impacting psychological and social development (Rutherford et al., 2007). The World Health Organization (WHO) defines violence as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or a group, resulting in or likely to result in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation" (WHO, 2002). In this context, violence encompasses not only physical harm but also emotional and psychological damage, often involving neglect and omission.

Intimate partner violence (IPV) affects one-third of women and 3–20% of men globally, yet it remains significantly underreported (Gabster et al., 2022). Dating violence, a form of IPV, involves abuse between individuals in romantic relationships and can include verbal, emotional, digital, physical, sexual, or economical violence (Turk et al., 2020; Özdere & Kürtül, 2018). Emotional abuse, often harder to recognize, inflicts psychological harm comparable to physical violence (Aslan et al., 2008; Fidan and Yeşil, 2018).

Besides, intimate partner violence is a significant global public health issue affecting individuals across all age groups. Adolescents, however, are particularly vulnerable to dating violence due to their ongoing psychosocial development, inexperience, and increased susceptibility to harmful influences (Heinze et al., 2021). Globally, 30% of women with partners report lifetime exposure to IPV, with similar rates observed among adolescents (WHO, 2013; 2015). Studies indicate that 1–66.5% of youth experience dating violence worldwide, with prevalence rates in Turkey ranging from 11–45.8% (Wincentak et al., 2017).

The high school years represent a critical period within adolescence, marked by the formation of romantic relationships and increasing independence, which can elevate the risk of experiencing or perpetrating dating violence. The rise of dating violence among high school students is alarming, mirroring trends observed in the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean (CDC, 2024; Gabster et al., 2022). In the U.S., one in twelve high school students experiences physical or sexual dating violence (Basile et al., 2020), while in Latin America, rates reach 24.1% for boys and 21.0% for girls (Gabster et al., 2022). In Turkey, adolescent exposure to dating violence ranges between 15–50% (Türk et al., 2020; Toplu-Demirtaş & Aracı-İyiyaydın, 2021; Kumcağız et al., 2022).

The consequences of dating violence are severe, including mental health issues, suicidal tendencies, and increased risk of homicide (Baiden et al., 2021; Heinze et al., 2021; Taquette & Monteiro, 2019). Victims are prone to developing eating disorders, substance abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts (Baiden et al., 2021; Luft et al., 2022; Avşar et al., 2017). Risk factors include witnessing

parental violence, accepting gender-based stereotypes, and prior abuse or neglect (Foshee et al., 2013; Türk et al., 2020).

Notably, adolescents may fail to recognize dating violence due to inexperience or emotional attachment to their partners, making them less likely to seek help (Aslan et al., 2008). Awareness and education are crucial in addressing this issue. For example, some U.S. states provide dating violence prevention training as part of school curricula, covering healthy relationships and recognizing abuse (Arizona State Legislature, 2014).

While dating violence has been widely studied, there is a noticeable gap in literature regarding its prevalence among high school students. Therefore, the primary aim of this study is to raise awareness among adolescents, addressing the issue of dating violence early in their development. Increasing awareness among young people, whether they experience or perpetrate such violence knowingly or unknowingly, may help reduce both its occurrence and impact. This study seeks to assess high school students' experiences as both perpetrators and victims of dating violence.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study type

This quantitative study was prepared as a cross-sectional and descriptive design to examine the relationship between dating violence and high school students' demographic data.

Study group

The population of the study consisted of 10th, 11th, and 12th-grade students who were studying in high school in Turkey during the 2022-2023 academic year and who were in a close relationship. Ninth-grade students were not included in the study because they are in the initial phase of high school and are generally still in the process of adjusting to the new academic and social environment. At this stage, many have limited experience with romantic relationships, which may affect the relevance and accuracy of their responses regarding dating violence. G-power analysis was used to calculate a minimum required sample size based on the following parameters: anticipated effect size (Cohen's d): (0.5), statistical power of 0.8, probability level of 0.05. A minimum sample size of 102 volunteer high school students was determined (Soper, 2022). The study was conducted using an online survey distributed through snowball sampling and participants were recruited through peer sharing and social networks. Rather than being limited to a specific province, this approach allowed us to reach high school students from various regions.

Procedures

The demographic questionnaire consisted of two sections and was developed in line with the existing literature. The first section focused on participants' socio-demographic characteristics, while the second aimed to assess their knowledge of dating violence. To better understand students' perspectives, the second

section was guided by a questionnaire from Hacettepe University Women's Research and Application Center, comprising 28 questions related to participants' dating experiences and their history of perpetrating or being exposed to violence in these relationships.

The original *Dating Violence Attitude Scale (DVAS)* was developed by Terzioğlu et al. (2016), with its validity and reliability established. The scale consists of 23 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale, designed to assess individuals' attitudes toward dating violence. Each item is scored between 1 and 5, with higher average scores indicating less tolerance for dating violence and more supportive attitudes toward healthy relationships.

Statistical analysis

After being transferred to digital format, the data collected through the scales used in this study were prepared for analysis. Statistical analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) (IBM, Version 25). Following data cleaning, missing data and outliers were examined, and descriptive statistics were applied to summarize the sample characteristics. Descriptive findings were presented through minimum/maximum values, mean, standard deviation, median, and quartiles. The data were assessed for normality, linearity, and homogeneity assumptions. A 5% margin of error and a 95% confidence interval were adopted, with the

significance level set at $p = 0.05$. To explore the relationships between independent variables and dating violence, nonparametric tests Mann Whitney U, Kruskal-Wallis and Chi Square were performed.

Ethical approval

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Kastamonu University Clinical Research Ethics Committee (Approval No: 2023-KAEK-20). Data were collected online through a survey platform, which took approximately 15 minutes to complete and could only be accessed once per IP address. Participation was voluntary, and students' information remained confidential throughout the data collection process, with informed consent obtained beforehand. As an incentive, participants had the opportunity to enter a raffle for a 200 TL bookstore gift card upon completing the survey.

RESULTS

The socio-demographic characteristics of the 168 high school students and their families are presented in Tables 1 and 2. In line with the data in Table 1, we can say that the majority of the sample consisted of girls ($n=118$, 70.2%), and mainly participants were studying at Anatolian High School ($n=126$, 75%) and 11th grade ($n=67$, 39.9%). While the average age of the students was 17, more than half (54.1%) evaluated their academic achievement as high (79-100).

Table 1. Distribution of socio-demographic characteristics of students ($n=168$).

Variables	Median (IQR)	
Age	17 (17)	
	n	%
High School		
Science School	23	13.7
Anatolian School	126	75
Religious School	19	11.3
Grade		
10 th grade	40	23.8
11 th grade	67	39.9
12 th grade	61	36.3
Gender		
Female	118	70.2
Male	50	29.8
Academic Achievement (GPA)		
Low (range 30-53)	5	3
Medium (range 53-79)	72	42.9
High (range 79-100)	91	54.1

When we look at the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants' families in Table 2, we see that most of them live in nuclear families ($n=150$, 89.3%), in the city ($n=132$, 78.6%), parents are alive and live together ($n=157$, 93.5%). In

addition, the educational level of most of the students' mothers was in primary school ($n=85$, 50.6%), and the job situation is described as that of a housewife ($n=117$, 69.6%). The educational level of their fathers was at primary school ($n=81$, 48.2%), and their job

situation is described as a officer (n=103, 61,3%). The total monthly income of 45.2% (n=76) was 15,000, which means the lower middle class.

Table 3 shows the gender distribution of the participant students and their smoking/alcohol consumption and exposure to violence. Accordingly,

17% of girls smoke cigarettes, and 7% consume alcohol, while 24% of boys smoke cigarettes and 16% consume alcohol. In addition, 14% of the girls stated that they were exposed to domestic violence, while this rate was 16% for boys. None of the participants indicated that they use drugs.

Table 2. Distribution of socio-demographic characteristics of the families of students (n=168).

Variables	n	%
Family Type		
Nuclear family	150	89.3
Extended family	18	10.7
Parental Status		
At least one of the parents is not alive	1	0.6
Parents are alive and divorced	10	6
Parents are alive and together	157	93.5
Place of Residence		
Village	12	7.1
District	24	14.3
City	132	78.6
Monthly Family Income		
Under 8000 TL	27	16.1
8000 TL-15000 TL	65	38.7
15000TL and above	76	45.2
Mother's Education Level		
No literacy	3	1.8
Primary education	85	50.6
High School	56	33.3
University	22	13.1
Master's Degree/PhD	2	1.2
Father's Education Level		
No literacy	1	0.6
Primary education	81	48.2
High School	50	29.8
University	32	19
Master's Degree/PhD	4	2.4
Mother's Employment Status		
Housewife	117	69.6
Officer	43	25.6
Worker	3	1.8
Retired	5	3
Father's Employment Status		
Unemployed	6	3.6
Officer	103	61.3
Worker	38	22.6
Retired	21	12.5

Table 4 demonstrates the distribution of some of the students' views on dating relationship status and violence. More than half of girls and boys stated that they have an active dating relationship. While 82% of

the girls reported that this relationship lasted less than one year, and 9% of them reported being subjected to violence by their partner in this relationship; 88% of the boys have been in a relationship for 1-3 years, and

4% of them think that they have been subjected to violence by their partner in this relationship. For more than 50% of girls, all of the data except jealousy and having the man pay the bill were considered as violence. On the other hand, for more than 50% of

boys, only extreme indifference and sexual coercion were considered as violence. However, most male and female students (more than 50%) considered all the data except jealousy and expecting too much attention as behaviors that could harm the dating relationship.

Table 3. Gender distribution of students' exposure to violence, smoking and alcohol use.

Variables	Female (n=118)		Male (n=50)	
	n	%	n	%
Smoking				
Yes	20	17	12	24
No	98	83	38	76
Alcohol use				
Yes	8	7	8	16
No	110	93	42	84
Drug use				
No	118	100	50	100
Domestic Violence				
Yes	16	14	8	16
No	102	86	42	84

Table 4. Distribution of students' dating relationship and their views on violence.

Variables	Female (n=118)		Male (n=50)	
	n	%	n	%
Current Dating Relationship Status				
Yes	52	44	17	34
No	66	56	33	66
Duration of Last Dating Relationship				
Less than 1 year	97	82	6	12
1-3 years	21	18	44	88
Exposure to Violence				
Yes	11	9	2	4
No	107	91	48	96
Behaviors perceived as dating violence				
Interference in social life	70	59	24	48
Accountability, questioning	68	58	16	32
Jealousy	46	39	22	44
Sexual coercion	81	69	37	74
Extreme apathy	67	57	28	56
Man pays the bill	29	25	20	40
Behaviors that can harm a dating relationship				
Insecurity	99	84	42	84
Deception	105	89	47	94
Blasphemy-insult	95	81	45	90
Disrespect	93	79	39	78
Lack of understanding	85	72	32	64
Miscommunication	84	71	28	56
Restriction	77	65	27	54
Jealousy	50	42	22	44
Expecting too much attention	39	33	20	40

The distribution of the median scores of the students on the Dating Violence Attitude Scale (DVAS) according to gender is demonstrated in Table 5. Accordingly, statistically significant differences between genders were found in the subscales of economic ($p = 0.002$) and sexual ($p = 0.003$) violence and the overall total of dating violence ($p = 0.005$). Scale mean scores approaching five indicate that students' attitudes toward dating violence do not support dating violence. In this context, girls do not support dating violence at a higher rate than boys in economic violence (Median = 4.20), sexual violence (Median = 4.57), and total violence (Median = 4.43). Finally, the distribution of the median scores of the students according to some socio-demographic

characteristics is shown in Table 6. The total attitude towards violence shows a statistically significant difference only in terms of gender ($p = 0.005$; female $M=4.43$; male $M=4.23$) and school type ($p = 0.014$; Science high school $M=4.43$, Anatolian high school $M=4.32$; Religious high school $M=3.75$). In this case, it can be said that the current attitudes of science high school students and female students do not support violence. There was no significant relationship between academic achievement, being exposed to violence in the family, and thinking that they are currently exposed to violence and students' attitudes towards dating violence.

Table 5. Distribution of students' Dating Violence Attitude Scale scores by gender.

	Female		Male		z	p
	Median	Min-Max	Median	Min-Max		
General Violence	4.80	3-5	4.60	2-5	-0.93	0.35
Physical Violence	4.40	2-5	4.20	1-5	-1.68	0.92
Emotional Violence	4.33	2-5	4.17	1-5	-0.47	0.64
Economic Violence	4.20	2-5	3.80	2-5	-3.07	0.002*
Sexual Violence	4.57	2-5	4.29	3-5	-3.03	0.003*
Total Violence	4.43	2-5	4.23	2-5	-2.78	0.005*

* $p < 0.05$, Mann Whitney U test

Table 6. Distribution of students' DVAS scores by some socio-demographic characteristics.

Variables	Median	Min-Max	z/ χ^2	p
Gender				
Female	4.43	2-5	-2.78	0.005*
Male	4.23	2-5		
High School				
Science School	4.43	4-5	4.35	0.014*
Anatolian School	4.32	2-5		
Religious School	3.75	3-5		
Exposure of Dating Violence				
Yes	4.69	4-5	-1.69	0.09
No	4.36	2-5		
Domestic Violence				
Yes	4.39	2-5	-0.52	0.60
No	4.36	2-5		
Academic Achievement (GPA)				
Low (range 30-53)	4.11	2-4	3.71	0.15
Medium (range 53-79)	4.36	2-5		
High (range 79-100)	4.38	4-5		

* $p < 0.05$, Mann Whitney U test, Chi Square test

DISCUSSION

In the current study, we sought to explore high school students' knowledge and exposure to dating violence. A total of 168 students participated in the study, providing valuable data on their experiences and attitudes toward dating violence. The findings can be interpreted through two main conceptual lenses; (1) gender socialization theory and (2) the ecological systems model, which offer insight into how

individual, interpersonal, and contextual factors shape adolescents' views on dating violence. Consistent with gender socialization theory, which suggests that societal norms and expectations shape behaviors and attitudes differently for males and females (Carter, 2014), the current study's results revealed that male students held more permissive attitudes toward dating violence. This aligns with previous studies conducted in Turkey (Set, 2020;

Selçuk et al., 2018; Terzioğlu et al., 2016) and globally (Collibee et al., 2022; Spencer et al., 2021; Taquette & Monteiro, 2019), which also observed that boys tend to tolerate or normalize violence in romantic relationships more than girls. Interestingly, however, some studies (Gabster et al., 2022; Taylor et al., 2021) reported higher rates of dating violence victimization among boys, highlighting the complex interplay of gender norms, victimization, and masculinity constructs. This study findings suggesting that underlying cultural or social factors may contribute to more permissive attitudes toward dating violence among boys. These findings underscore the need to challenge harmful gender norms and promote gender-equitable relationship models during adolescence as it can significantly influence young people's understanding of healthy relationships.

The role of school environment was also examined. Although limited, existing literature suggests that academic context may influence students' attitudes toward violence. In line with social norms theory, which posits that behavior is shaped by perceptions of what is considered acceptable within a group (Berkowitz, 2004), students from science high schools in our study demonstrated less supportive attitudes toward dating violence. Similar findings were reported by Çelik and Demirli (2021) and Lesinskienė et al. (2023), who found that students in academically demanding environments tend to reject aggressive behaviors. This similarity suggests that students in academically rigorous environments may possess a heightened awareness of the implications of violence or perhaps benefit from a school culture that discourages aggressive behavior. These insights point to the value of considering school climate and peer influence when designing interventions. Further research should provide more insight into how academic environments and school culture shape students' attitudes toward dating violence.

Contrary to previous research, this study did not find statistically significant associations between students' attitudes and demographic or lifestyle variables such as academic performance, parental education, substance use, or exposure to domestic violence. Studies from Turkey and other countries (Çakır Koçak & Öztürk Can, 2019; Türk et al., 2020; Gabster et al., 2022; Luft et al., 2022; Collibee et al., 2022; Taylor et al., 2021) have consistently shown that such factors contribute to shaping adolescents' attitudes toward dating violence. From the perspective of the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which emphasizes the interaction between individual behavior and multiple environmental systems (family, peers, school, society), these findings suggest that other unmeasured variables—perhaps within the mesosystem (e.g., peer relationships) or macrosystem (e.g., cultural values)—may be influencing attitudes in this sample. The lack of significance may also

reflect the characteristics of the online, self-selected sample or other unmeasured factors may substantially impact these attitudes. These discrepancies between this study's results and those of other studies (Çakır Koçak & Öztürk Can, 2019; Türk et al., 2020; Gabster et al., 2022; Luft et al., 2022; Collibee et al., 2022; Taylor et al., 2021) highlight the importance of context-sensitive approaches when examining adolescent dating violence. Cultural, regional, and institutional differences likely influenced the findings, emphasizing the need for future research with larger, more diverse samples across different provinces and school types in Turkey.

Study Limitations and Strengths

The current study has several limitations that should be considered. First, the use of a convenience sampling method limits the generalizability of the findings. While the sample was drawn from different types of high schools, it may not accurately reflect the attitudes and experiences of adolescents from different regions or cultural settings. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data introduces the potential for response bias, as participants may have underreported or overreported their experiences with dating violence or their attitudes toward it, leading to inaccuracies. The cross-sectional design of the study also means that it provides only a snapshot of students' attitudes and experiences at one point in time, limiting the ability to draw conclusions about causal relationships or changes in attitudes over time. The study's scope was also limited, as it focused primarily on high school students' exposure to dating violence without considering broader societal and familial factors that may influence its prevalence. Despite these limitations, the study has several strengths. It includes a diverse sample of students from different types of high schools, offering valuable insights into how academic and institutional environments may influence attitudes toward dating violence. Additionally, the study contributes to public health by addressing the prevalence and impact of dating violence among adolescents, providing a foundation for the development of targeted interventions. Finally, it adds to the growing body of literature on adolescent dating violence, especially within high school settings, offering valuable data for future research and intervention programs.

CONCLUSION

There is a notable lack of data on adolescents' dating experiences, particularly regarding common dating behaviors associated with violent or non-violent tendencies. Overall, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on adolescent dating violence by underscoring the need for targeted interventions that address gender norms and school environment in shaping attitudes. This study's findings support the need for targeted, evidence-based prevention educational programs tailored to high school students, particularly those that address

gender-based beliefs and cultivate healthy relationship models. Additionally, this study suggests that programs may need to be customized to fit various school environments' cultural and social dynamics. Incorporating theoretical frameworks into intervention design—such as gender socialization theory and ecological systems theory—may enhance the effectiveness and cultural relevance of such efforts. By addressing these factors, educators and policymakers can work toward reducing dating violence and can help foster safer, more equitable environments for all adolescents.

Despite societal criticism of adolescent dating, it remains a prevalent practice among high school students. However, this age group - still undergoing physical, emotional, and psychological development - is particularly vulnerable to dating violence, often without recognizing it or seeking support when exposed. Dating violence among high school students is a significant reality that demands attention. Ignoring or overlooking this issue only exacerbates students' struggles while leaving them without appropriate interventions. Therefore, raising awareness among students, parents, and school staff is crucial. Information on dating violence should be continuously updated in line with current literature, and proactive measures should be implemented to prevent its occurrence.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Author Contributions

Plan, design: NK, IY; **Material, methods, and data collection:** NK, IY; **Data analysis and comments:** NK, IY; **Writing and corrections:** NK.

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Ethical Approval

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