

# Exploring a Unique Dimension of Emotional Abuse in Young Women: A Qualitative Study on Dating Violence

## Genç Kadınlarda Duygusal İstismarın Farklı Bir Boyutu: Flört Şiddeti Üzerine Nitel Bir Çalışma

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** Emotional abuse within dating relationships among young people is increasingly prevalent, profoundly impacting the psychological well-being of young women. Often normalized due to societal gender roles, this issue remains underrecognized. This study aims to explore the multifaceted dimensions of emotional abuse experienced by young women in dating relationships and to foster societal awareness.

**Method:** The study employed a qualitative approach, conducting in-depth interviews with eleven young women in Turkey, aged 18 to 24, who had experienced emotional or physical violence in their dating relationships. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework.

**Results:** Participants reported initiating relationships through social media or mutual friends, driven by partners' initial affection. Over time, jealousy and controlling behaviors led to fear of relationship loss, contributing to the normalization of violence. Both physical violence, often tied to appearance or jealousy, and emotional violence, including insults and psychological pressure, were prevalent. These experiences resulted in emotional exhaustion, diminished self-esteem, and dependency, with some relationships marked by obsession and trauma bonding.

**Conclusion:** The findings underscore the severe psychological toll of emotional abuse in dating relationships among young women, exacerbated by gender norms and relational dependency. The study highlights the need for increased awareness, educational programs, and accessible psychological support to address dating violence. By illuminating these dynamics, the research contributes to policy development and intervention strategies to empower young women and promote healthier relationships.

**Keywords:** Dating violence, emotional abuse, gender roles, qualitative study, young women

### ÖZ

**Amaç:** Günümüzde gençler arasındaki flört ilişkilerinde duygusal istismar giderek yaygınlaşmakta ve özellikle genç kadınların psikolojik sağlığını derinden etkilemektedir. Toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri nedeniyle normalleştirilen bu durum, genellikle fark edilmeden kalmaktadır. Bu çalışma, genç kadınların flört ilişkilerinde karşılaştıkları duygusal istismarın farklı boyutlarını anlamayı ve toplumsal farkındalık oluşturmayı amaçlamaktadır.

**Yöntem:** Çalışma, Türkiye'de 18-24 yaş aralığında, flört ilişkilerinde duygusal veya fiziksel şiddete maruz kalmış on bir genç kadınla derinlemesine görüşmeler yapılarak gerçekleştirilmiştir. Veriler, yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yoluyla toplanmış ve Braun ve Clarke'ın (2006) tematik analiz çerçevesi kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir.

**Bulgular:** Katılımcılar, ilişkilerinin başlangıcında sosyal medya veya ortak arkadaşlar aracılığıyla tanıştıklarını ve partnerlerinin ilk etapta gösterdiği sevgi nedeniyle ilişkiye başladıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Zamanla, partnerlerinin kıskançlık ve kontrol edici davranışları nedeniyle ilişkiyi kaybetme korkusu yaşamışlar, bu da şiddetin normalleşmesine yol açmıştır. Fiziksel şiddet, genellikle dış görünüş veya kıskançlık nedeniyle yaşanırken; duygusal şiddet, hakaret, aşağılama ve psikolojik baskı şeklinde ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu deneyimler, duygusal tükenmişlik, düşük öz saygı ve bağımlılık gibi sonuçlar doğurmuş; bazı ilişkiler ise takıntı ve travma bağı ile karakterize olmuştur.

**Sonuç:** Bulgular, genç kadınların flört ilişkilerinde duygusal istismarın ciddi psikolojik etkilere yol açtığını ve bu durumun toplumsal cinsiyet normları ile ilişkisel bağımlılık tarafından ağırlaştırıldığını göstermektedir. Çalışma, flört şiddeti konusunda farkındalığı artırmak, eğitim programları geliştirmek ve psikolojik destek hizmetlerini erişilebilir kılmak gerektiğini vurgulamaktadır. Bu dinamikleri aydınlatarak, araştırma, genç kadınları güçlendirmek ve daha sağlıklı ilişkiler teşvik etmek için politika geliştirme ve müdahale stratejilerine katkıda bulunmaktadır.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Flört şiddeti, duygusal istismar, toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri, nitel çalışma, genç kadınlar

## Introduction

Today, the issue of emotional abuse and dating violence in relationships between young people is becoming increasingly important and is a common problem among young women. Young women are at risk for emotional abuse in dating relationships (Rubio-Garay et al. 2017). This can negatively impact young women's psychological

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and emotional health and become a societal problem (Abrams 2023).

Dating violence is a type of violence that occurs in romantic relationships between young people and often causes emotional, psychological, or physical harm (Taquette and Monteiro 2019). This type of violence can have a severe impact on the victim and can lead to long-term psychological problems. Young women, in particular, experience emotional abuse in dating relationships and have difficulty coping with the effects (National Institute of Justice 2018). Among adolescents, 51% of females and 43% of males have experienced at least one form of dating violence. Psychologists stress the importance of intervention and prevention efforts (Abrams 2023).

When young women's exposure to emotional abuse is analyzed in the context of gender roles and inequalities, it can be seen that they are more exposed to emotional abuse and violence. The perception of women as "emotional beings" can make them more vulnerable (Okçay 2018, Ministry of Health 2023). Young women are particularly vulnerable to emotional abuse in romantic relationships. Studies have shown that the rate of emotional abuse experienced by women is significantly higher than that experienced by men and tends to increase with age (Karakurt and Silver 2012). Furthermore, early traumatic experiences, including emotional abuse during childhood, are closely linked to substance use among women. For instance, emotional abuse has been associated with increased rates of cocaine use in female populations (Khoury et al. 2010). Additionally, young women working in emotionally demanding fields such as healthcare may face heightened vulnerability to harassment, partly due to societal expectations to demonstrate constant empathy and compassion in professions involving emotional labor (Ministry of Health 2023). These intersecting risk factors highlight the importance of addressing emotional abuse through a multidimensional lens that considers personal history, gender norms, and occupational contexts.

Emotional abuse is one of the four primary dimensions of child abuse and neglect, alongside physical abuse, sexual abuse, and general neglect. Among these forms, emotional abuse is particularly harmful to the psychological well-being of young women. It can lead to symptoms such as emotional distress, low self-esteem, and difficulties in establishing and maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships. In the long term, emotional abuse has been associated with the development of serious mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Shorey et al. 2011). According to a 2023 report by the American Psychological Association, the effects of emotional abuse can often be more enduring than those of physical or sexual abuse. These findings highlight the importance of early identification and intervention to reduce the long-term psychological impact of emotional abuse on vulnerable populations, particularly young women. In this context, studies on gender equality, preventive health services, and legal regulations are important to protect young women from emotional abuse and raise awareness (Ruglass et al. 2012). In this way, young women can be protected and supported from emotional abuse.

Although there are many quantitative studies on dating violence in the literature, qualitative studies that examine the individual experiences and emotional processes of young women in depth are quite limited (Karaboğa 2013, Yıldırım Terzioğlu 2018). This deficiency makes it difficult to adequately understand the complex structure of violence in dating relationships. In this context, this study aims to fill this gap in the literature and offers original contributions to the field by comprehensively revealing the emotional abuse processes experienced by young women.

The purpose of this study is to understand the various dimensions of emotional abuse that young women face in dating relationships and to develop effective strategies for protecting young women by raising social awareness of this issue. The findings will contribute to raising social awareness about dating violence and developing policy recommendations to support young women. In this context, examining dating violence through a qualitative study will allow for a deeper understanding of the issue and effective interventions. This study fills an important gap in the literature due to the limited qualitative research on dating violence. It deepens the understanding in this field by revealing how emotional abuse is internalized by social norms and relational dynamics through the individual narratives of young women. The study is based on the hypothesis that young women fail to recognize or normalize the emotional abuse they experience in dating relationships due to factors such as gender roles and relational dependency.

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## Method

### Sample

Participants in this study were recruited through a public announcement shared on social media platforms (Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook), in line with the voluntary and ethical framework of the research. The

announcement invited women who met the study's age and experience criteria to participate. Women who responded to the post were contacted individually, informed about the study's purpose, and provided with a consent form prior to the interviews. Sampling was conducted using a purposive strategy, supported by snowball sampling to reach additional participants. The study was conducted between December 2023 and January 2024 using the phenomenological design, one of the qualitative research methods, with Zoom link and face-to-face interview technique. The study was conducted with young female students studying at a state university in a metropolitan city located in western Turkey. The interviews (ÖT) were conducted by a researcher experienced in qualitative research methods, who maintained a neutral stance and created a safe environment for participants to express themselves freely. The inclusion criteria were: being female, aged between 18 and 24, currently or recently involved in a dating relationship, and having experienced at least one form of emotional or physical violence in that relationship. The exclusion criteria were: being under 18 or over 24 years old, not having any history of dating violence, being married, or unwilling to share personal experiences due to discomfort or safety concerns.

A total of 17 individuals initially responded to the study announcement. After preliminary screening, 6 participants were excluded: 3 were outside the age range, 2 had no experience of dating violence, and 1 declined to proceed after the consent process. The final sample included 11 participants who met all inclusion criteria and agreed to be interviewed. The sample consisted of eleven women who agreed to participate in the study on the specified dates. Participants were identified through snowball sampling, one of the purposive sampling methods.

## **Procedure**

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview form developed by the researchers in accordance with the literature. The interview form included 18 questions to determine the demographic characteristics of the young women and their views on violence. Women were asked nine semi-structured questions to determine "dating relationships, and attitudes toward violence." A preliminary interview was conducted with one woman to assess the applicability of the interview form, and the applicability of the form was evaluated. As a result of the interviews conducted with the eleven women included in the study, it was decided that there was no need to increase the sample size further as saturation had been reached, and no new codes could be created in accordance with the themes.

Ethical approval was obtained from the İstanbul Arel University Ethics Committee (Date: 15.12.2023/ Number: E52857131-050.06.04-455050), and verbal consent was obtained from women who volunteered to participate in the study. The women were informed that the interview could be stopped at any time and that no identifying information would be included in the data collection. The study was conducted in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted online at the time and date requested by the young women. Each interview lasted an average of 30 minutes. After the interviews were recorded in a Zoom environment, they were transcribed by listening to them repeatedly.

## **Statistical Analysis**

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data obtained in the study, following the six-phase framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). These phases include: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. All interview recordings and observational notes were transcribed and transferred into Word documents. In the initial phase, the data were read and re-read for deep familiarization. Coding was conducted in two stages: initially to exclude irrelevant content and subsequently to identify meaningful data units. These codes were then grouped into overarching themes and sub-themes. The coding process was carried out independently by the researchers and later compared to ensure consistency and reliability. The methodological procedures were guided by established qualitative research principles (Yıldırım Şimşek 2021), thereby enhancing the trustworthiness of the findings. A total of 20 pages of raw interview transcripts were analyzed. Each participant was assigned a coded identifier using the letter "O" followed by a number (e.g., O1, O2, ..., O11), based on the order of the interviews. The themes emerging from the analysis addressed issues such as the initiation of romantic relationships, problems experienced, exposure to violence, and the emotional responses of young women (Table 2).

Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum) were used to summarize demographic variables such as age and duration of relationship. All quantitative data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel. For the qualitative part, thematic analysis was conducted following the six-phase framework by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method included: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing the report. All transcripts were reviewed multiple times by the researchers, and initial coding was followed by consensus-based theme identification. No inferential statistical tests (e.g., t-test, ANOVA) were applied due to the qualitative nature of the study.

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## Results

The mean age of the women who participated in the study was  $21.72 \pm 1.55$  years (min-max: 19-23). The mean duration of relationship with their last partner was  $2.45 \pm 1.69$  years (min-max: 1-6). All of the women were currently studying at university. All had completed at least high school education, with 54.4% reporting high school as their last completed level of education before university. None of the women were unemployed and 72.7% of them had an average income.

**Table 1. Participants' sociodemographic characteristics**

Case number	Age	Length of Dating (years)	Education status	Education level of the partner	Marital status	Employment status	Income status
1	21	6	University	University	Single	Not working	Middle
2	20	2	University	University	Single	Not working	Middle
3	23	5	University	High School	Single	Not working	Low
4	19	3	University	Secondary school	Single	Not working	Bad
5	22	2	University	High School	Single	Not working	Middle
6	22	3	University	High School	Single	Not working	Middle
7	19	2	University	High School	Single	Not working	Low
8	20	1	University	High School	Single	Not working	Middle
9	23	1	University	High School	Single	Not working	Middle
10	22	1	University	University	Single	Not working	Middle

The socioeconomic status of the participants was determined based on their self-reported evaluation of their household income and living standards. In this context, 72.7% of the participants described their income level as "middle," while the remainder reported it as "low." The term "low" is used to reflect a more accurate and appropriate academic categorization. Regarding the education level of the partners, 54.4% of the participants stated that their partners had completed only high school education.

The main themes and sub-themes identified after thematic analysis following the interviews are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Main themes and subthemes**

Main Themes	Subthemes
1. Initial Phase of the Relationship	1.1. Meeting 1.2. Love
2. Fear of Loss	2.1. Jealousy 2.2. Pressure
3. Perceived violence	3.1. Physical violence 3.2. Emotional violence
4. The current dimension of the relationship	4.1. Attrition 4.2. Obsession

### Initial Phase of the Relationship

Participants' experiences at the beginning of the relationship were categorized under two headings (meeting, love).

### Meeting

Young women generally reported that their emotional relationships began on social media or among friends.

O1. '*...Our relationship started through social media; after we met, we started seeing each other a lot, and after a few months, we became lovers; at first, he was the interested one, but he was more interested in me, and I was more reserved...*'

O5. '*...He wrote to me on Instagram, and then we met. I was very impressed, and then we started seeing each other. We were already lovers after the second date. So we both started intensely.*'

O7. '*...Our relationship started during high school. We got to know each other while chatting on a bench, and then our mutual friends brought us together, and it is still going on.*'

### Love

Women reported that they had a bond of love with their partners and were, therefore, able to ignore most negative experiences.

O2. '*... I mean, he was not bad all the time; there were times when he was good. Those times when he was good erased the times when he was bad from my mind, so I started to see the pros rather than the cons of him, and when I think about the positive things that he will add to my relationship, I honestly think that he loves me too.*'

O5. '*...Our relationship is good; we love each other, but sometimes he acts too restrictive towards me. I accept this; I think the reason I accept it is to show my love to him better.*'

O6. '*...My relationship actually started very well; everything was within the framework of respect and love, but after a while, due to his age, you know, men mature later, his respect for me started to decrease a little bit. Our relationship started as a summer romance, and I was very hopeful, but I could not leave it because I shared it with my family, I allocated a budget for him, and I tried to support him in every aspect.*'

O11. '*... It makes me feel bad, but on the other hand, you know, the feeling of being loved, of being owned. When it goes too far, I feel uncomfortable. . I think he has no right, but after experiencing certain things, I began to see it as his right.*'

### Fear of Loss

Participants' experiences that they defined as fear of losing their relationships were categorized under two headings (jealousy, pressure).

#### Jealousy

Young women reported that their partners were usually jealous and that they acted unexpectedly in the relationship because they were jealous.

O7. '*...He is an extremely jealous person, but he says it is a protective instinct. We have more of a problem with I trust you and I do not trust the other person rather than jealousy. Jealousy ultimately leads to restriction, whether it is my clothes or my friends...*'

O10. '*...I cannot see some of my friends that I used to see because he is jealous. He interferes with my clothes. I cannot wear the clothes I want to wear. He interferes with the hours I can go out. It has affected me negatively in that way.*'

O3. '*...I try to solve the problem by talking, but that does not work either. I mean, this problem cannot be solved. I talk about it. He says, 'OK, I will not do it'. After a while, he starts doing the same things again, even more; he says he is jealous, but this is not jealousy. I mean, I mean, I have been exposed to a lot of violence." He constantly judges my physical appearance. He constantly says that he is better and more beautiful; he wants me to look more beautiful, and he tries to change something in me. It is always like that.*'

#### Pressure

Young women reported emotional pressure from their partners to accept their wishes and lifestyle.

O4. '*...When I felt pressured, when I felt that I had to do people's opinions instead of my own, or when I thought that I had to do things that I did not want to do, I realized that it was actually violence. I realized that I was*

*under psychological pressure. There were times when I called it a sacrifice for myself. You know, people make sacrifices for a relationship, and I thought I should do the same...'*

*O2.'...When he got angry, he insulted me personally. I took it in my stride. Then he started criticizing me constantly, insulting and swearing at me about my appearance and the way I dress. It still goes on. I feel under pressure, frankly.'*

*O9.'...Yes, I experience emotional violence when I say economic sexual violence... He also cannot accept my lifestyle. My family wants me to come home early, but he wants to go out at night and have fun with me. So, in these situations, we do not get along anymore. These things oppress me more...'*

## **Perceived Violence**

The experiences of the participants during their relationships, which they defined as violence, were categorized under two headings (physical violence and emotional violence).

### ***Physical Violence***

Some of the young women reported being physically abused by their partners as a result of their appearance, thoughts, or jealousy.

*O2.'...Especially recently, he has started telling me that I have gained weight, that he is not as excited as he used to be, and that my clothes do not suit me. Although he often interferes in my life, he says that I have no right to interfere in his and threatens to take my phone or use physical violence if I do not do what he wants...'*

*O6.'...I was physically abused once, and he told me that he was very angry and drank alcohol; honestly, I can never forget it, no matter how much he tries to make me forget it, I really saw from him what I never saw from my parents, so I cannot explain it.'*

*O11.'...There is psychological violence. For example, even in something I am sure of, he can put you under suspicion. There is never a sense of trust, and sometimes, when he pushes the limits, he can bring out the monster in him and use physical violence.'*

### ***Emotional Violence***

Young women reported that their partners behaved negatively, coerced, insulted, and humiliated them for various reasons.

*O1.'... I have been subjected to psychological violence and insults in my previous relationships, but not as intensely as in this one..... This is the first time I have been subjected to such psychological violence. I experience both psychological and economic violence in this relationship. I accept threats, insults, and deception because I am afraid of losing. Being subjected to violence makes me feel worthless, and I think I do not deserve it, but I still cannot leave it.'*

*O4.'....At first, I underestimated psychological violence, but over time I realized how harmful it truly was, but after a certain period, I think I was exposed to much violence, like sexual violence, social violence, people humiliating me.'*

*O6.'...Like I said, I was exposed to psychological violence like 'who are you talking to on your phone, who are you online with, who are you texting with? He asked for my password, but I never gave it to him because there was a so-called trust between us, but in fact there was none...'*

## **Current Dimension of the Relationship**

The emotions that the participants feel today as a result of all the experiences of their relationships with their partners are categorized under two headings (attrition and obsession).

### ***Attrition***

Young women reported feeling tired, drained, and withdrawn as a result of their experiences with their partners.

*O1.'...I think that this relationship has ruined my psychology. I feel that I have collapsed psychologically. I feel very tired and worn out from constantly trying to ingratiate myself with him, I feel constantly threatened, and I have a loss of self-confidence.'*

O7.'... It is difficult at the moment; we started to wear ourselves out from the beginning to the end of the relationship, but since we cannot get away from each other, we still go on somehow, even if we have fights, even if we get up from time to time, it still goes on somehow. We cannot separate.'

O5.'...At first, I was much happier, but then the problems started to wear me down. I did not want to participate in social life. I did not want to go to school. I did not want to see my friends. I did not want to do anything; I felt very tired.'

### **Obsession**

Some of the women stated that despite all their negative experiences with their partners, they did not want the relationship to end and that their relationship had turned into an obsession.

O1.'...He used to say that he just wanted me to be in his life. Over time, his interest in me decreased, and my interest in him increased. In a way, I became obsessed with him. Even though he said he still loved me, I could not feel it. He started treating me harshly, and he started threatening to break up with me all the time, so I became more attached to him. I live with the fear of losing him, and this is still going on now.'

O6.'...At the moment, it is all coercion. He knows I cannot leave; he is trying to make me do what he wants, and he knows I will do it. He is aware of my emotional dependence. I feel pressured, but unfortunately, I still love him despite all the psychological abuse..."

O8.'...I do not want to talk about my relationship in front of my friends anymore. Whenever I do, they expect a conclusion from me when I talk about the same topics and get the same reactions, but I can never reach that conclusion because our relationship has become an addiction. There is a connection, and maybe we have gone beyond love. I am aware that what we have for each other is no longer love. '

'O8: ... our relationship has now turned into an addiction. There is a bond, maybe we have passed love...'

This situation can be explained with some psychological concepts. In particular, 'relationship addiction' and 'trauma bond' are helpful concepts in understanding the inability of the person to break away from the relationship despite the negativities. In addition, the fact that the participants remained in the relationship despite the manipulative and threatening behaviours of their partners can also be associated with the concept of 'learned helplessness'. Some participant statements also reflect the partner's efforts to distort reality, which points to 'gaslighting' behaviour.

### **Discussion**

This study reveals that young women in dating relationships experience various forms of emotional and psychological abuse, often without initially recognizing them as violence. Such experiences are normalized, especially when linked to jealousy or possessive behavior, reflecting how emotional abuse can be masked by culturally romanticized ideals.

At the beginning of their relationships, most participants stated that they met their partners through social media or their circle of friends. These findings highlight the influential role of digital platforms in shaping social and romantic interactions among young people today. Participants reported that the interest and affection shown by their partners played a key role in their decision to enter these relationships, suggesting that emotional connection and mutual attention are important factors in relationship initiation. In addition to their role in the beginning of relationships, social media and other digital communication tools were found to support the development and maintenance of these connections. Several studies support this finding. For instance, Özkan and Siyez (2024) found that digital platforms play a facilitating role in romantic relationship formation and continuity. Similarly, Özkan and Diyez (2024) emphasized the importance of social media in initiating emotional connections, while Güleç (2018) reported that increasing social media addiction—particularly among young women—negatively affects emotional well-being. Kaplan and Öztürk (2018) also highlighted the role of digital communication as a primary space for initiating and understanding romantic relationships. These findings demonstrate that the nature of relationship formation has evolved with technological advancement, and the use of digital platforms in the early stages of romantic involvement deserves further academic attention.

It is very serious for women to fear losing a relationship because of their partner's jealousy and oppressive behavior. This can have a negative emotional and psychological impact on women. Jealousy and controlling behavior can limit women's freedom and upset the balance in the relationship. When women worry about their partner's behavior, they may find it difficult to maintain the relationship. One of the most important consequences of this situation is that women normalize the violence and continue the relationship. Women in

fear and anxiety may prefer to remain silent for fear of their partner's reaction. This can leave women emotionally exhausted and unable to express themselves. It can also set the stage for continued jealousy and oppressive behavior. It can be very difficult for women to deal with these situations. It is, therefore, important that women seek emotional support and take steps to protect themselves. Society and professionals need to raise awareness of this issue and support women in making their voices heard. It is also important to emphasize that jealousy and oppressive behavior are unacceptable and that steps should be taken to prevent such situations.

In conclusion, young women's fear of losing the relationship due to their partners' jealousy and oppressive behavior is a serious concern. This emotional dependency often leads to the normalization of violence, making it harder for women to leave abusive relationships. Research supports this, showing that fear of loss is a significant factor in young women's acceptance of dating violence. For instance, Uğur and Kılıç (2021) found that 60% of participants feared losing their partners, which increased their likelihood of experiencing physical violence. Similarly, Saraç and Erkan (2016) noted that fear of emotional abandonment or even marriage (gametophobia) can intensify anxiety in romantic relationships. Karabulut et al. (2017) also emphasized that this emotional attachment, driven by controlling behaviors, contributes to the internalization of violence. The participants in this study expressed similar experiences, revealing how fear and dependency can silence victims and perpetuate abusive dynamics.

Participants said that their partners were extremely jealous and restricted them because of that jealousy. For example, O7 said, *"He is an extremely jealous person, but he says it is a protective instinct. We have more of an "I trust you, and I do not trust the other person" problem than a jealousy problem. Jealousy ultimately leads to restriction, whether it is my clothes or my friends..."*. In addition, women also reported that their partners put pressure on them. O4 stated, *"When I felt oppressed, when I felt that I had to do people's opinions instead of my own, or when I thought that I had to do things that I did not want to do, I realized that it was actually violence, I realized that I was under psychological pressure"*. Women stated that they were afraid of losing the relationship because of their partner's jealousy and oppressive behavior, and this situation led them to normalize violence. O1 stated, *"I accept threats, insults, and cheating because I am afraid of losing the relationship; being exposed to violence makes me feel worthless, and I think I do not deserve it, but I still cannot leave it."* It can be seen that young women experience fear of losing the relationship due to jealousy and the oppressive behavior of their partners in dating relationships, and this situation leads them to normalize violence.

In terms of perceived violence, participants reported experiencing both physical and emotional abuse from their partners, which constitutes a serious violation of human rights. Such abuse must be addressed through national and international measures, including legislation, education, and awareness-raising efforts aimed at prevention and victim support. In this study, physical violence was often linked to issues such as jealousy and dissatisfaction with the woman's appearance. For example, O2 stated: *"He has recently started telling me that I've gained weight, that he's no longer as excited as before, and that my clothes don't suit me. Although he constantly interferes in my life, he says I have no right to interfere in his. He threatens to take my phone or resort to physical violence if I don't do what he wants."* Emotional violence, on the other hand, was experienced in the form of insults, humiliation, and psychological pressure. O1 explained: *"This is the first time I've been subjected to such intense psychological violence. I've experienced both emotional and economic abuse in this relationship."* These findings are supported by previous studies. For instance, the adaptation of the Cyber Obsessive Stalking Scale (COSS) and Cyber Dating Violence Scale (CDVS) into Turkish has enabled better assessment of digital forms of abuse in dating relationships (Uğur et al. 2022). Other research has shown that male university students tend to have more accepting attitudes toward both psychological and physical dating violence compared to females, reflecting underlying gender inequalities (Arslan 2023). Reports by institutions such as ILO Turkey Office (ILO 2021) also emphasize the significance of recognizing dating violence—especially psychological abuse—as a workplace and societal issue, further underscoring the need for comprehensive preventive strategies.

It is alarming that the young women in this study felt emotionally worn out and worthless as a result of the violence they experienced. Despite these negative emotions, many participants found it difficult to end the relationship, which had turned into an emotional dependency. Participants often interpreted their partners' behaviors involving jealousy, pressure, and manipulation as signs of "love," "protection," or "efforts to maintain the relationship." This can be linked to the internalized norms surrounding gender roles, particularly among young women. In patriarchal cultures, women are often expected to "make sacrifices to keep the relationship," which creates a foundation for the normalization of abusive behaviors. In this context, the normalization of violence operates not only as an individual psychological mechanism but also as a cultural and societal construct. Similar findings are reported in the literature. For example, Karakurt and Silver (2013) emphasize that emotional abuse is often unrecognized or romanticized by women. Likewise, Abrams (2023) notes that young



women frequently interpret psychological abuse in dating relationships as “normal ups and downs,” contributing to its normalization. This study highlights the influence of these norms particularly in the themes of “attrition” and “obsession.” Many participants reported that they did not initially recognize the emotional abuse or that they trivialized it, which indicates the involvement of mechanisms such as learned helplessness, emotional dependency, and trauma bonding. Thus, the unique contribution of this study lies in demonstrating that violence in dating relationships is maintained not only through overt acts (e.g., physical or sexual violence), but also through distorted perceptions, suppression, and romanticization processes among young women. In this sense, the findings are consistent with the existing literature while also offering deeper insights into how young women in the Turkish context perceive and internalize dating violence.

This indicates a disruption in healthy relationship dynamics and suggests the need for psychological support. Behaviors such as manipulation and emotional harassment intensified the trauma. Previous research confirms these findings, showing that victims of dating violence often feel exhausted, vulnerable, and struggle with low self-esteem (Dardis et al. 2022). Some also experience compulsive attachment due to emotional dependency and fear of separation (Abrams 2023).

These findings align with psychological mechanisms such as relationship addiction, learned helplessness, and trauma bonding, which help explain why individuals may remain in harmful relationships. Furthermore, certain behaviors described by participants—such as manipulation, distortion of reality, and inducing self-doubt—are indicative of gaslighting, a form of emotional abuse that undermines the victim's perception and autonomy. These patterns show the importance of early intervention, psychological support, and raising public awareness about relationship addiction and emotional abuse.

This study has certain limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. The sample size was relatively small and limited to university-aged young women in Turkey, which restricts the generalizability of the results. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported data, which may be influenced by memory biases or social desirability. The qualitative nature of the research, while providing in-depth insights, does not allow for broad statistical generalizations. Furthermore, while the study explored the emotional and psychological impact of dating violence, it did not include data on whether the participants had received any formal psychiatric diagnoses. Such information could have enriched the analysis of psychological outcomes. However, participants were informed about available psychological support resources and were encouraged to seek professional help if needed. The lack of diagnostic data represents a limitation in fully assessing the clinical dimensions of the experiences shared. Future studies should include more diverse participant groups, including different age ranges, cultural backgrounds, and gender identities, and may benefit from incorporating mixed-method approaches.

## Conclusion

This study reveals that young women exposed to dating violence often experience serious psychological consequences such as low self-esteem, emotional exhaustion, and dependency. These outcomes are commonly linked to jealousy, controlling behaviors, and emotional manipulation by their partners. In light of these findings, several practical recommendations can be made to prevent or mitigate the psychological impact of dating violence. Educational programs that promote awareness of relationship violence should be introduced at the high school and university levels. Psychological counseling services must be made more accessible to young women through universities and youth centers. Public campaigns and school curricula should address gender norms and challenge harmful relationship dynamics. Additionally, young people should be informed about the risks associated with digital communication and social media-based relationships. Establishing peer support groups and safe spaces for open discussion can also help survivors recognize abuse and foster resilience. Through these efforts, it is possible to equip young individuals with the tools to build healthy relationships and to raise societal awareness about emotional abuse in dating contexts. This study aims to contribute to that awareness and to encourage further research and intervention in this area.

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