Dating Violence: A Review
Flört Şiddeti: Bir Gözden Geçirme

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Abstract
Dating violence, which is considered as a type of interpersonal violence, is defined as the use of physical, verbal or emotional violence to each other in the relationship and imposing social restrictions on their behavior. The aim of this article is to determine the risk factors that increase the severity of dating violence, which is a common problem nowadays, to investigate its effects and the effectiveness of the protection programs. For this purpose, Google Scholar, PsycArticles and PsycInfo databases were searched. Research shows that dating violence is affected by many different risk factors such as alcohol use, past domestic violence and peer interactions. Although dating violence is seen in both sexes, it is seen that women are more victims than men. This may have negative physical, psychological and social effects such as anxiety, depression, suicide risk, substance and alcohol use, and low self-esteem. When the effectiveness of the programs developed to prevent dating violence and protect the victims were examined, significant differences were found between the intervention groups and the control groups.

Keywords: Dating violence, risk factors, young people, protection programs

Öz

Anahtar sözcükler: Flört şiddeti, risk faktörleri, gençler, koruma programları

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**VIOLENCE**, which is a social problem, was declared by the World Health Organization (WHO 2002) as "Deliberate; threats or physical use that actually results in injury, death, psychological harm, interference or deprivation against themselves, the other individual or a group or community." At the same time, the violence directed by the individual is handled through three different classifications: violence against self, interpersonal violence, and collective violence. Physical violence against women still prevalent in most societies is based on a patriarchal ideology (Dobash and Dobash 1979). This ideology and the social order it creates brought economic, legal, and religious power to men. Until the 1970s, this power brought by the order that generally resulted in physical violence was not questioned, but today domestic violence has been brought to the fore as a social problem and has become the subject of research.

Researches on violence reveal that violence in pre-marital dating relationships is at least as common as in marriage (Makepeace 1981). According to the results of Sugarman and Hotaling (1989), although the researches show different results, the rate of encountering violence in the university sample is approximately 30%, similar to marriage. In addition, it is observed that women who are found to be physically abused in marriage often experience similar violence in their pre-marital relationships (Roscoe and Bemaske 1985). Although it is generally known that women are victims of violence in relationships (Steinmetz 1978, Straus 1980), this study examines the intensity of dating violence towards both men and women. While violence can traditionally be understood in the context of male social supremacy, in which men are given the right to control women with physical power supremacy, processes, and features that can help us understand not only male violence but also women's violence are considered to be necessary. The purpose of this article is to determine the risk factors that increase the severity of dating violence, which has become a common problem today, to investigate the effects and to examine the effectiveness of the applied protection programs. For this purpose, Google Scholar, PsychArticles, and PsychInfo databases have been searched with the keywords of dating violence, risk factors, youth, protection programs, and attitude.

**Definition**

Contrary to a friendly, warm, and romantic sharing image, dating seems to have become physical targets during times of anger bursts, emotional crises, and jealousy (Henton et al. 1983). Dating violence, which is considered as a type of interpersonal violence, is defined as the partners' physical, verbal or emotional violence practices and putting social restrictions on their behavior in the relationship (Aslan et al. 2008). Another definition is that aggression, intimidation, and oppression in romantic relationships in young adulthood, including swearing or violent behavior, such as threats, pushing or slapping, beating, forced sexual intercourse (Foshee et al. 1996, Lewis and Fremouw 2001).

Dating violence is studied in three types, similar to other forms of violence. These are physical, psychological/emotional, and sexual violence. Physical violence includes dimensions such as beating, injuries (slapping, scratching), or using weapons (Offenhauer and Buchalter 2011). For researchers, although focusing clearly on physical aggression has advantages such as being the most easily detectable and included in the content of the most commonly used assessment tools, this narrow focus can cause to neglect other types of aggressive and compelling behavior that are often functionally similar to physical violence in dating relationships. (Lewis and Fremouw 2001).
The psychological/emotional dimension of dating violence creates behaviors such as disdain, scolding, threatening, and humiliation (Offenhauer and Buchalter 2011). Unlike physically violent behavior, where the intention is to cause bodily harm, emotional abuse can create fear and dependence on the partner by threatening the personal integrity and self-worth of victims (Hanley and O’Neill 1997, Smith and Donnelly 2001). In a study conducted with women exposed to violence, the participants stated that psychological violence harms them more than physical violence and is the most troublesome factor in the relationship (Follingstad et al. 1990).

On the other hand, sexual violence is defined as the pressure of one partner to engage in sexual intercourse or other sexual acts, or forced to participate at a higher rate than her consent (Smith and Donnelly 2001, Cornelius and Ressengie 2007). When emotional or physically violent behavior occurs in the dating relationship, it is also likely that sexual oppression will occur, which will serve as a function that can affect the balance in the relationship (Smith and Donnelly 2001). Many studies suggest that different forms of violence are interrelated, and verbal violence often precedes physical violence (Hyden and Ryan 1995, Jackson 1999).

**Risk factors**

It seems that there are many different factors in the occurrence of dating violence. To understand the reasons for the problem of increased dating violence, researchers have started to define empirically the risk factors that increase the vulnerability to violence. The first one is based on the social learning theory (Bandura 1986) and suggests that adolescents learn to apply violence to their partners by observing the positive results of others’ behavior (parents, friends, role models). Since the perpetrators are thought to be able to observe more positive results than the victims, this theory is mostly used to understand the perpetrators. However, learning can occur even in the absence of external positive results (Bandura 1986).

Similarly, the theory of interdependence (Thibaut and Kelley 1959) suggests that the immediate environment affects the behavior of adolescents. According to this theory, behaviors are influenced by beliefs about how a relationship should be. These beliefs are often influenced by the relationships that young people observe in their environment, as their own experience is few and new.

In this context, the first risk factor is the tendency of individuals exposed to violence in the family to continue these models learned in childhood as well in adulthood (O’Keefe 2005). When children grow up in families with violence, they can show more aggressive behavior during adulthood due to the lack of learning to regulate and control their emotions (Cüceloğlu 1991). At the same time, the severity of dating violence is increased in children who are punished by their parents in childhood (Temple et al. 2018) and behaved indifferently (Earnest and Brady 2016). Men who have been exposed to sexual violence during childhood have higher rates of committing sexual violence (Debowska et al. 2017).

According to another study, a positive correlation was found between the probability of committing violence or exposure to violence among young women and exposure to domestic violence (Choi and Temple 2016). The family’s education level and low social-economic levels also increase the likelihood of dating violence (Black et al. 2015).”

Another risk factor is the meaning attributed to the existing cultural structure and
gender roles (Smith-Darden et al. 2015, Qu et al. 2018). Considering the impact of culture on violence in our country, especially in violence against women, men engage in physical violence with the desire to control women, to exert pressure, to punish, and demonstrate power (Page and İnce 2008). Patriarchal family structure, the isolation of women from the environment, a conflict between couples at educational levels, and low social investments are seen as factors that create violence at the community level (Heise 1998). Culturally, these societies are defined as environments where unemployment and poverty are high, men's autonomy is higher than women, and women have low levels of education (WHO 2012). There are findings that women who adopt gender inequality are exposed to a higher rate of dating violence. When gender-related norms increase for both men and women (for example, associating the concept of femininity with passivity and subtlety and the concept of masculinity with domination), violence at the community level increases (WHO 2012). For example, women who perceive the demand of the man as an order more easily accept punishment. Similarly, men who adopt the traditional patriarchal structure tend to normalize violence (Gressard et al. 2015). At the same time, men are more sensitive to threats to sexist norms (Kilmartin and McDermott 2016). This situation is reinforced if the social environment of men legitimizing violence (Heise 1998).

Although the view that parents can shape children's behavior is quite clear, peers can be a more robust source of influence, especially on aggressive behavior (Harris 1995). Studies conducted in the university sample reveal a positive relationship between the inclusion of peers in dating violence and the increase in dating violence (Gwartney-Gibbs et al. 1987). Additionally, peers have a significant impact on men's sexual aggression (DeKeseredy and Kelly 1995).

Another important risk factor is alcohol and substance use among young people. The study of Van Ouytsel et al. (2017) found that exposure to dating violence increased with early cannabis and alcohol use. Similarly, alcohol use increases exposure to dating violence and promoting violence among young people (Parker et al. 2016, Mulawa et al. 2018).

Prevalence

Makepeace published the first report on dating violence in 1981 and found that one of the five university student pairs was involved in relationships, including dating violence (Makepeace 1981). Unfortunately, current epidemiological reports show that this type of violence is increasing. A consistent finding in the university-age dating violence literature is that rates of violence are equal or similar between girls and boys (Laner and Thompson 1982, Pirog-Good and Stets 1989, Sugarman and Hotaling 1989). Research results of Makepeace (1981) show that dating violence is more common among adolescents and young people. A reconstructed area during the young adulthood, where physical and psychological changes are experienced, and different responsibilities are imposed, are romantic relationships (Schumacher and Slep 2004). Even these changes bring innovations to individual's lives. It can also create negativities. In particular, adolescents can turn towards violent behavior when their needs are not adequately met, rejected, or deprived of love (Öztürk 1990).

Studies investigating the situations in which the violence is experienced indicate that the rates of exposure to violence are quite high. Considering the studies conducted in our
country, 84% of women experienced sexual violence in a study conducted with 700 women (Kayı et al. 2000). In another study conducted with 624 university students, the rates of physical violence were 6.5% for women and 10.1% for men, while sexual violence rates were 1.6% for women and 14.4% for men (Aba 2008).

Looking at the last year, the rate of exposure to dating violence in girls is one fifth in the USA and one-tenth in boys (Vagi et al. 2015). The rates of being exposed to dating violence vary between 15% and 50% in high school students (Foshee et al. 2001, Alleyn-e-Green et al. 2012). In another study conducted with 910 university students, 53% of women and 27% of men experienced dating violence (Fork et al. 2008). When the results are evaluated, it is seen that dating violence is a mutually common process between partners, but the rate of violence is higher in women.

**Effects of dating violence**

Aggression in the context of dating relationships of adolescents and young adults is often associated with various harmful effects on individual partners in the relationship. People who have been subjected to physical and psychological abuse and who have been abused report lower self-esteem, lower self-perception, and higher self-blame, anger, and anxiety (Makepeace 1986, Jackson et al. 2000, Smith and Donnelly 2001). Individuals can demonstrate dysfunctional communication and problem-solving skills and may develop a perception that violence is a method one partner can apply to another. There are also findings that dating violence may be a precursor to marital violence in the future (Frieze 2000, Smith and Donnelly 2001).

When the relevant studies are examined, it can be seen that dating violence can cause eating disorders (Ackarda and Neumark-Sztainer 2002), smoking and substance use (Ackard et al. 2007), depression and anxiety levels (Callahan et al. 2003) to increase. The study conducted by Dikmen et al. (2018) with university students shows that women have higher rates of exposure to violence, and this raises their anxiety levels but does not have a significant effect on their hopelessness levels. In addition, dating violence has been associated with reduced emotional well-being (Ackarda and Neumark-Sztainer 2002). It can also increase suicidal thoughts and attempts (Ackard et al. 2007). The studies of Baker et al. (2015) with high school students in Hawaii show that dating violence is associated with suicidal and self-harming behavior in young people. Having a violent relationship in women causes an increase in risky sexual behaviors such as not using condoms (Kaukinen 2014, Rizzo et al. 2017).

**Protection programs for dating violence**

Today, various programs have been developed to prevent dating violence or to protect victims of dating violence. Protection programs are generally evaluated in two sub-dimensions. Primary prevention programs are usually prevention programs that are targeted to the entire population or individuals who are likely to experience violence. The goal is to prevent violence from occurring by informing on the determined risk factors (Foshee et al. 1996). Since dating relationships are known to be high in adolescents of high school age, primary prevention programs generally aim to increase appropriate attitudes and behaviors by targeting this age group (Sudermann et al. 1995). Secondary protection programs are focused on stopping violence that is already happening. Sometimes researchers develop programs that target both methods of protection and often
work towards adolescence and young adulthood in schools that dating violence is most common.

Avery-Leaf et al. (1997) implemented a five-session prevention program to change attitudes towards dating violence. The program is didactic and skill-based and designed for both sustaining and victimizing dating, which is applied with both male and female high school students. The primary objectives of the program included promoting equality in relationships by emphasizing the harmful effects of inequality, preventing violence from being considered as a problem-solving method, promoting healthy communication, and informing about the sources that victims of violence can use. Completed by 190 men and 190 women, the results show that both men and women have become less accepting of violence compared to the control group.

Wolfe et al. (2003) developed a prevention program that combines current theoretical insights in understanding the development of violence, randomized assignment to experimental groups, a more comprehensive outcome measure, and a 16-month repeated follow-up. Participants are individuals who have been ill-treated in their families, which may pose a risk for dating violence. Researchers hypothesized that young people included in the program would decrease their rates of being exposed to violence and become victims, their emotional distress will decrease, and their communication skills will be strengthened. The program consisted of 18 sessions and included an approach that encouraged healthy interaction by showing ways that could be an alternative to violence. In addition to using both skill and learning-based approaches, the intervention program addressed patriarchal values that are thought to increase the dating violence. The results of the program revealed that there were significant changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in the posttest and changes were observed to be preserved. The results differ between genders. Women showed more positive attitudes and more distinct behavioral changes than men. For men, undesirable changes were observed during the follow-up period. This situation has been interpreted by the researchers that men may have developed a defensive attitude towards prevention programs or that secondary prevention programs may be necessary due to the presence of violent dating relationships.

Foshee et al. (1998) tested the effectiveness of the Safe Dates program developed for dating violence. Safe Dates program consists of school and community activities. School activities included primary protection programs, while community activities included secondary protection programs. School activities included a theater show by peers, a 10-session curriculum and a poster contest. Community activities provided services for adolescents in distressed relationships (e.g., support groups, orientation for parents). Compared to the control group, there was less psychological and sexual abuse against their partners in the group that took intervention during the follow-up period. There was less tendency to initiate psychological abuse in the group without dating violence. The effectiveness of the program has been associated with the change in dating violence norms and gender bias and increased knowledge of available resources.

Attitudes and perceptions towards dating violence

There are findings that gender affects perceptions of dating violence (Aizenman and Georgette 1988, Aslan et al. 2008, Lee et al. 2014). The study of Kepir-Savoly et al. (2015) shows that there is a significant difference between the levels of violence acceptance of women and men. Acceptance levels of men are higher than women. Karatay
et al. (2018) stated that female students are more conscious of violence. Especially neglect, jealousy, restricting social life, and deceiving are not seen as violent behaviors by men. In another study, most women define only physical violence as a form of violence. This description suggests that when they are exposed to other forms of violence, such as psychological violence, they may not be aware of it. In patriarchal societies that adopt male domination, women who are exposed to violence tend to blame themselves for not fulfilling their wishes. This situation may prevent the request for help to intervene in violence (Efe and Ayaz 2010). The results show the importance of considering cultural effects in attitudes and perceptions towards violence.

The research of Karabacak and Kodan-Çetinkaya (2015) found a significant difference between perceived social support and levels of accepting violence. As perceived social support increases, levels of accepting violent behavior decrease. At the same time, experiencing violence in the family increase their acceptance of violence in their relationships.

According to the Molidor and Tolman (1998) study, for women, dating violence causes physical and psychological harm. Men, on the other hand, do not see violence as a damaging factor and the reason for ending the relationship. At the same time, the results of the study show that women generally use violence as a method of protecting themselves from physical or sexual violence. While 37% of women state that they use violence as a method of protection, this rate is 6% for men.

The work of Fidan and Yeşil (2018) shows that characterizing the relationship of dating with "having" and "ownership" rather than private friendship influences maintaining the dating violence. When individuals perceive the dating relationship as ownership during the relationship, they perceive the protection interventions that may come from outside negatively and tend to continue the relationship.

**Conclusion**

Violence is one of the most important facts that continue to exist in the world and in our country and should be addressed in social life. In addition to domestic and child violence, dating violence is a common problem, especially in adolescents and young adults. Although there is dating violence in both sexes, women are more victims of dating violence. Researches show that dating violence is affected by many different risk factors such as alcohol use, domestic violence experienced in the past, peer interactions, and cultural factors. This situation may have adverse physical, psychological, and social effects such as anxiety, depression, suicide risk, substance and alcohol use, and low self-esteem.

Given the possible physical, psychological and social consequences of violence, resources should be increased to prevent and improve this situation. As young people and adolescents become the focus of not only victims but also perpetrators of violence, clinicians are responsible for preventing and responding to dysfunctional behavior patterns. When studies on protection against dating violence programs are examined, no effectiveness study conducted in our country has been found.

Based on reported prevalence rates of dating violence, there are differences in the level of youth perception and acceptance of violence (Kepir-Savoly et al. 2014). Research shows that primary protection methods are effective in raising awareness. Raising awareness draws attention to the importance of the need for increased interventions and re-
search on violence in our country. Informing about the dating violence will help prevent future violent behavior and allow the youth to protect themselves by raising their awareness. In this context, it seems essential to identify risk groups, especially in young people. To address the issue, regulation of policies on dating violence, developing intervention programs, and organizing various activities that students may involve, can prevent violence by changing the perception of violence. There is a difference between genders in attitudes and perceptions of violence. For this reason, it may be essential to focus on differences based on gender in training.

References


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