

# Intimate Partner Violence in University Students- A Qualitative Study

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## Abstract

Intimate partner violence is a major public health issue that has an impact on students' physical, mental and academic achievement. In order to define and understand the dating violence that students experience during the most productive times of their lives, it is necessary to examine the world they live in. This study was carried out in the phenomenology pattern of the qualitative study in order to examine the dating violence experiences of university students and the factors affecting them. The study was carried out with 30 students studying at a state university in Turkey. As a result of the data obtained as a result of the interviews with university students, 110 main codes, 6 sub-themes and two main themes as "direct violence" and "indirect violence" emerged. As a result of the study, while university students experience different forms of intimate partner violence, there are also more observed forms of violence than gender.

**Keywords:** Intimate partner violence, University students, Qualitative study

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## 1. Introduction

Violence and violence experienced by young people is a source of great concern for researchers, families, educators and school administrators who are trying to help young people be healthy and happy. Research on dating violence helps to understand the nature, context and dynamics of dating at the college level. It is estimated that dating violence varies between 10% and 50% among university students (Amar & Gennaro, 2005; Barrick et al., 2013; Kaukinen et al., 2012; Luo, 2021). Studies have stated that having violent and unhealthy relationships has negative effects on individuals' health, including physical injury, depression, low self-esteem, and anxiety (Kaura & Lohman, 2007; Kendra et al., 2012; Luo, 2021). Experiencing psychological, physical and sexual violence in close dating relationships has a significant impact on young people. Consequences of dating violence include decreased mental and physical health and decreased life satisfaction (Banyard & Cross, 2008). Dating violence with young people affects the psychological health of young people, and victimized youth is more likely to experience depression and suicidal behavior than non-victims (Black et al., 2010). Additionally, longitudinal studies have identified long-term consequences of intimate partner violence including depression, binge eating, substance use, and antisocial behavior (Reyes et al., 2015).

Unfortunately, despite the alarming results mentioned above, health professionals, researchers and educators are unable to carry out an effective fight to prevent these problems. If necessary, awareness should be created with university-based prevention programs and arrangements should be made in terms of program content, scope and quality (Espelage et al., 2013).

In order to understand those affected by violence and to provide them with the necessary support, it is necessary to know their environment and their experiences (Maselesele, 2017). Therefore, investigating the experiences of students who have been subjected to dating violence is very important for the identification, prevention and control of the phenomenon. Overall, the high prevalence and harmful short- and long-term consequences of intimate partner violence highlight the need for more research to inform prevention and intervention. Qualitative studies have been conducted on students' experiences of intimate partner violence in different parts of the world, but there is little evidence to explain the experiences of intimate partner violence by university students living in Turkey. This qualitative study was designed and conducted to understand the experiences of intimate partner violence among university students living in Turkey.

## 2. Materials And Methods

### 2.1. Aim

This study was conducted in the phenomenology pattern of qualitative study in order to examine the dating violence experiences of university students and the factors affecting them.

### 2.2. Research Population and Sample

This study was carried out with university students between January 20, 2020 - March 02, 2020. The sample of the study consisted of 30 university students who agreed to participate in the study with the maximum diversity

sampling technique at a state university in Turkey. The number of participants was determined according to the principle of "saturation with data", which is valid in qualitative research.

### *2.3. Data Collection Tools*

Research data were collected with an introductory information form (8 questions) and a semi-structured interview form (6 open-ended questions) that questioned the socio-demographic data of university students. In the collection of data, individual interview technique with semi-structured interview form was applied. In the interview, the data reported by the university students were noted in the interview form in detail and recorded with a voice recorder.

### *2.4. Data Collection Process*

The data were collected through interviews with university students included in the study, which lasted approximately 30-40 minutes and using a voice recorder. The interviews were terminated when the concepts that could answer the research questions started to be repeated. In order not to reveal the identity of the university students, their real names were not included in the research, and each participant was coded with a nickname to be determined by the participants.

### *2.5. Statistical analysis*

Audio recordings from each focus group were transcribed. The data obtained with the statements of the participants were analyzed in a descriptive phenomenology. The descriptive phenomenological approach will be useful in determining the students' IPV experiences and how IPV is interpreted by the society (Shosha, 2012). It can be said that the acceptance or rejection of the perception of IPV may differ individually and can be understood differently. It would be appropriate to design qualitative studies with a content analysis approach in order to specify and define the content of violence and to indicate possible risk factors (Babamohamadi et al., 2011).

MAXQDA, data analysis software for qualitative content analysis, has been used as an aid in organizing and analyzing data. This software allows the researcher to upload documents obtained from participants and converted into text for text analysis and to express themes on documents (Kuckartz, 2001). After data was loaded into MAXQDA, in vivo coding was used by participants to label repetitive phrases, words, and sentences. MAXQDA helped identify the most repetitive words and phrases under two predetermined categories. The themes to be specified under the categories were arranged later. Themes (for example: physical abuse) were not determined before analysis, they were determined under categories after in vivo coding (Baltacı, 2019). Another step was to assess the broad language patterns that emerged from the statements made in the focus groups. The stated expressions and the meanings to be derived from these expressions were analyzed in detail. The implicit meanings, repeated words and phrases in the expressions were examined. All emerging themes and patterns were evaluated extensively to define the category.

In order to evaluate the reliability of these data, the themes and codes and the research process were reviewed, discussed and discussed by two researchers. In addition to the collection of focus group data, the recorder, notes taken during the focus group sessions were evaluated. This additional data source was compared with focus group papers during coding to obtain consistent data. Overall, the two researchers stated that the findings were appropriate based on the data collected. For qualitative research, reliability should be understood as the extent to which the reported findings are consistent with the data (Çelik et al., 2020).

### *2.6. Ethical Aspect of Research*

Before the study, ethics committee approval and institutional permission were obtained from the relevant institution with the decision numbered 54674167-050.03.04/. Before collecting the study data, the aim of the study and the questionnaires to be used were introduced to the university students, they were informed about the audio recording, and their verbal consent was obtained by informing them that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time if they agree to participate in the study, that the data obtained will be kept confidential and will not be used outside the scope of the research. voluntary participation was provided.

## **3. Results**

Almost half of the participants (60%) are women. Ages of the participants ranged from 17 to 20, and the density was in the 17 to 18 age group (66%). Most of the participating university students stay in dormitories (66%) (Table 1.).

Table 1. Demographics of Focus Group Participants

Variable	n	%
Gender		
Male	12	40
Female	18	60
Age		
17	10	33
18	10	33
19	6	20
20	4	14
Living Place		
student hostel	20	66
family home	2	10
student house	8	24
Total	30	100

As a result of the data obtained as a result of the interviews with university students, 110 main codes, 6 sub-themes and two main themes as “direct violence” and “indirect violence” emerged (Figure 1).

Theme and Sub-themes

Direct violence	Indirect violence
Physical violence	Physical violence
Psychological violence	Psychological violence
Social violence	Social violence

Figure 1. Theme and sub-themes of the study

### 3.1. Theme 1. Direct violence

One of the categories extracted from the data is “direct violence”. In this category, there are three subcategories “physical violence”, “psychological violence” and “social violence”.

#### 3.1.1. Physical violence

Physical violence, which is in the main category of direct violence, is defined as the use of physical force to harm or intimidate a partner. Some of the participants as physical violence from their partners; They stated that they were exposed to behaviors such as being slapped, pulling hair, beating, throwing objects, and pushing. It was observed that female participants were more exposed to physical violence.

A 19-year-old female student said, “While I was working at the hospital, a friend of mine with whom we worked in the unit asked me a few questions about a patient. Because my boyfriend saw us side by side without understanding and listening, he walked up to me, yelled at me, squeezed my wrists and my arms were bruised. He was overly defensive and jealous. We couldn't go on like this.”

An 18-year-old female student said, “We were arguing about some issues as usual, she got angry and threw her phone at me. I was taken just in time, the phone shattered when it hit the wall. He could have come to me too.”

An 18-year-old female student said, “When he got angry, he pulled my hair and said his words to my face. I want it to be engraved in my brain. It was engraved.”

#### 3.1.2. Psychological violence

Psychological violence, which is in the main category of direct violence, is defined as psychological harassment carried out through hurtful words or actions to the partner. It can be said that psychological violence is the most common form of direct violence reported among students. For the students participating in the study, psychological violence is more important than other forms of violence. Verbal violence took the form of threatening, ridiculing, humiliating, swearing, slandering, mocking and criticizing.

An 18-year-old female student said, “My boyfriend is constantly using psychological violence against me. It's okay when the things he wants are done, but if something he doesn't want, he starts a fight from an incident we had in the past, which is irrelevant. Sometimes we experience such things that I can't even eat in the cafeteria without his permission. It's a very tiring process, but I love it. InshaAllah it will be get better.”

A 19-year-old male student said, “My girlfriend always wants me to take care of her and spend time with her. I can have my own private affairs and social life. He is so jealous that he doesn't even want me to go to my family, he always wants to make video calls to see me and check when I go. This pressure is making me tired.”

#### 3.1.3. Social violence

Social violence, which is in the main category of direct violence, can be defined as restricting one's partner, isolating him from social life and forcing him to a monotonous lifestyle. Social violence may result in social isolation, shyness, and difficulty in expression in students.

An 18-year-old male student said, “My girlfriend wants me to stay away from all kinds of activities. I want

our relationship to continue, but I don't want to be pressured like this. I think it is a basic need in socializing”.

### 3.2. Theme 2. Indirect Violence

Another category extracted from the data is “indirect violence”. In this category, there are three subcategories “physical violence”, “psychological violence” and “social violence”.

#### 3.2.1. physical violence

Physical violence, which is included in the main category of indirect violence, is defined as causing physical harm to one's partner indirectly. The participants stated that they experienced loss of function of the limbs as a result of alcohol consumption, accident as a result of fast driving, punching the window after arguments, due to the confusion and pressure experienced as indirect physical violence. This situation was observed more frequently in male participant students.

A 19-year-old male student said, “He was arguing for ridiculous reasons. My girlfriend was fighting because she went to one's family. One day we had an argument again, I drank too much alcohol and I got angry and punched the window glass. There was heavy bleeding and a nerve cut. Now I can't use my hand like before. It wasn't worth it.”

A 20-year-old male student said, “I found out my girlfriend was cheating on me and I drank too much alcohol that day. Then I drove a car, I wanted to die at that moment, I crashed.”

#### 3.2.2. Psychological violence

Psychological violence, which is in the main category of indirect violence, is defined as causing psychological harm to one's partner indirectly. The participants stated that the psychological effects of all forms of violence experienced by the partner continue for long periods.

A 20-year-old male student said, “I was in a relationship for three years and my boyfriend cheated on me. I couldn't handle this situation. I got diagnoses such as obsessive-compulsion disorder, severe depressive disorder and anxiety, and started psychological treatment. I don't think I can start a relationship easily after this. Relationships right now depend entirely on physical contact.”

An 18-year-old female student said, “There are many toxic relationships that harm each other and destroy people's lives. A friend of mine was a freshman in school, she was very much in love with her boyfriend and got married.

He dropped out of school to know. When you are cheated on and then separated, you turn into a person who has been abused at a young age, lost the sense of trust and disappeared from life”.

#### 3.2.3. Social violence

Social violence, which is included in the main category of indirect violence, is defined as the indirect damage to the partner in the social field and its effects. Participants stated this as the continuation of the social harm caused by partner violence by the partner.

A 20-year-old female student said, “I was the one who always tried to be harmonious in our relationship. I even took out loans and paid off their debts. After leaving, I realized how much sacrifice I had made. This situation has taken me away from social life, I feel like I have been stigmatized”.

## 4. Discussion

The results of the study showed that the students were exposed to physical, psychological and social violence by their close partners. This classification is also compatible with the results of other studies on intimate partner violence of students (Goldberg et al., 2019; Reyes et al., 2015; Schultz & Jaycox, 2008). They stated that female students who are exposed to direct psychological violence are the most common and important form of violence they are exposed to. Studies have also reported that psychological violence causes more harm than other types of violence (Lewis et al., 2006; Sullivan et al., 2010). One study found that the worst form of violence experienced by women was psychological violence (E Häggblom et al., 2009).

In the study, male and female participants reported cheating as the worst, repulsive and intolerable form of violence, and stated it as a situation that negatively affects the continuity of relationships. According to a study; cheating on the partner reduces the tolerance for violence and is accepted as an important factor for changing the status of the relationship (Chang et al., 2010).

Physical, psychological and social violence, directly and indirectly, constituted an important part of the experiences of the participants in this study. While emphasis is placed on physical and psychological violence in different qualitative studies, social violence is neglected (Bostock et al., 2009; E Häggblom et al., 2009). This study also provides information on how different forms of social violence affect university students.

When the gender differences of the data obtained from our study are evaluated, both women and men are affected by dating violence. These data support traditional studies on intimate partner violence, where women are more affected (Romans et al., 2007; Rosenfield et al., 2013). Although this traditional approach portrays women as victims and men as perpetrators, different dimensions of violence have been observed in both genders by participating students.

Although the participants in the focus group interviews wanted to openly discuss intimate partner violence, they were not inclined to fully reflect themselves. The reason for this may be cultural approaches, family history or the definition and perception of violence. The reasons stated may have affected the cohesion of the focus group. In future studies, these issues can be addressed and more transparent and transparent results can be obtained. In addition to age, gender interaction, perception of gender, perception of violence, history of domestic violence, previous relationships and results should be included in the evaluation.

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