

The effects of irrational romantic relationship beliefs and experiences in close relationships on dating violence of nursing and midwifery students

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aimed to investigate the effects of irrational romantic relationship beliefs and experiences in close relationships on dating violence of nursing and midwifery students.

Methods: This was a descriptive, correlational study. The study was conducted with 261 nursing and midwifery students in a university located in northeastern Turkey.

Results: A negative and moderate correlation was found between students' dating violence with the use of social time and different thinking ($p < 0.01$). Anxious attachment ($\beta = -3.241$), secure attachment ($\beta = -3.119$), use of social time ($\beta = -0.252$), and different thinking ($\beta = -2.788$) were predictors of dating violence ($p < 0.01$).

Practice Implications: Nursing and midwifery students exposed to dating violence should be applied psychosocial interventions including motivational interviewing and cognitive-behavioral therapy.

KEYWORDS

dating violence, irrational beliefs, midwifery students, nursing students, romantic relationship

1 | INTRODUCTION

Dating violence (DV) is a common type of violence defined as words, gestures, and behaviors that involve the use of painful or hurtful physical or psychological forces and threats against the partner in the dating relationship (Avşar-Baldan & Akış, 2017). It consists of six dimensions: physical, sexual, psychological, social, digital, and stalking (Fidan & Yeşil, 2018). DV aiming to control the romantic partner and including aggression is a gender inequality issue that has a threatening role on young people's health (Akcan, 2020).

The risk factors associated with DV are consumption of alcohol, use of a substance, being involved in aggressive activities, poverty, experiencing interparental violence, and prior experience with violence (Chinyama et al., 2020). The predictors of DV among university students are low perceived relationship self-efficacy, low self-esteem, and high preoccupied attachment style (Yolcu & Akbay, 2020). University students whose mothers have a low educational level, who are male,

have a dating relationship, are exposed to dating violence in the relationship, have social perception of gender, have low self-esteem, and are exposed to/witnessing sexual/domestic violence are also predictors of the students' attitudes toward DV (Alp-Yılmaz & Şener-Taplak, 2020). Students with extroverted personalities are more likely to experience DV (Cortes-Trevino et al., 2020). Individual characteristics such as anger, anxiety, sadness, and low self-control are significant predictors of DV perpetration among females (Duval et al., 2020).

According to studies conducted in our country, the rate of exposure of university students to dating violence is relatively high. In a study, Turkish university students' emotional, verbal, economic, physical, and sexual violence rates are 88.0%, 22.2%, 21.4%, 16.4%, and 7.2%, respectively (Alan-Dikmen et al., 2018). In a study, Turkish nursing students' psychological, physical, and sexual violence rates are 39.5%, 8.5%, and 3.9%, respectively (Tarı-Selçuk et al., 2018). Other studies report that 56.0% of student-athletes and 66.3% of student nurses and midwives experience some form of DV

victimization (Cantor et al., 2020; Kisa & Zeyneloğlu, 2019). Among Turkish university students, prevalence rates of psychological aggression, physical assault, sexual coercion, and injury are 94.1%, 88.2%, 19.1%, and 37.5%, respectively (Calikoglu et al., 2021).

Dating violence has unintended consequences such as injury and death (Orpinas et al., 2017). Besides, it causes severe psychopathological disorders such as low self-esteem, depression, anger outbursts, suicidal thoughts, and eating disorders (Akcan, 2020). Some students contract sexually transmitted diseases and HIV, become pregnant, lose or terminate their pregnancy, isolate themselves from society and start living recklessly (Chinyama et al., 2020). Early detection of dating severity and related factors is essential in nursing and midwifery students, mostly female students. Psychological guidance and counseling to establish healthier relationships and get rid of violence can provide students at risk.

Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the effects of irrational romantic relationship beliefs and experiences in close relationships on dating violence of nursing and midwifery students. The following hypotheses in this study:

Hypothesis 1. *Dating violence is negatively related to irrational romantic relationship beliefs.*

Hypothesis 2. *Dating violence is negatively related to experiences in close relationships.*

2 | METHODS

2.1 | Study design

This study is a cross-sectional and correlational design.

2.2 | Sample

The population of the research consisted of 740 nursing and midwifery students in a university located in northeastern Turkey during the 2018–2019 Academic Year. Raosoft (2004) was used to determine the sample of the study. Sample calculation was made considering an 80% non-response rate. The study sample was defined as 254, with the sample size calculated with a 5% error margin at a 95% confidence interval.

Inclusion criteria were (1) being a nursing or midwifery student, (2) volunteering to participate in the study and giving written consent, (3) completing the questionnaires and scales ultimately, and (4) attending classes between the study dates.

2.3 | Data collection tools

The data were collected from students in the classroom and through face-to-face interviews. It took approximately 25–30 min to

complete the data collection forms. Data were collected using Personal Information Form (PIF), Dating Violence Scale (DVS), Irrational Romantic Relationship Beliefs Inventory (IRRBI), and Experiences in Close Relationships Inventory-1 (ECRI-1).

2.3.1 | Personal Information Form

The PIF was created by the researchers and consisted of 11 questions including age, department, gender, family structure, economic status, income level, place of residence, parents' educational status, and parents' working status (Akcan, 2020; Cantor et al., 2020; Chinyama et al., 2020; Kisa & Zeyneloğlu, 2019; Koçturk & Bilge, 2017).

2.3.2 | Dating Violence Scale

The scale was developed by Terzioğlu et al. (2016). The DVS aimed to measure attitudes toward dating violence. The DVS consisted of 28 items and five sub-dimensions: general violence, physical violence, sexual violence, emotional violence, and economic violence. The scale was a 5-point Likert type (1 = I strongly disagree, 2 = I disagree, 3 = I am undecided, 4 = I agree, and 5 = I strongly agree). The average of the scores obtained from the scale is close to 5 shows that the individuals do not have an attitude supporting dating violence. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.91 in the original study. In this study, it was 0.87.

2.3.3 | Irrational Romantic Relationship Beliefs Inventory

The scale was developed by Sarı and Owen (2015). The IRRBI was designed to evaluate the irrational relationship beliefs of the individuals. The IRRBI consisted of 30 items and six sub-dimensions: over expectations, mind-reading, use of social time, physical intimacy, different thinking (it includes irrational beliefs that it is destructive for people to have different thoughts about events), and gender differences. The scale was a 5-point Likert type (1 = I strongly disagree, 2 = I disagree, 3 = I am undecided, 4 = I agree, 5 = I strongly agree). The scores obtained from the scale changed from 30 to 150. High scores indicated that people had high irrational romantic relationship beliefs. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.85 in the original study. In this study, it was 0.87.

2.3.4 | Experiences in Close Relationships Inventory-1

The scale was developed by Brennan et al. (1998). Turkish validity and reliability study was carried out by Sümer (2006). Sümer (2006) obtained a two-factor structure. Hisli-Şahin and Yaka (2010) obtained a three-factor structure. According to Hisli-Şahin and Yaka (2010),

the ECRI-1 measured individuals on three subscales of attachment: avoidance, anxiety, and secure. The scale consisted of 36 items and a 7-point Likert type (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strong agree). It aimed to measure the anxiety experienced in attachment in close relationships and avoidance of others. High scores indicated high anxiety and avoidance experienced in attachment in close relationships. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.85 in the original study. In this study, it was 0.87.

2.4 | Ethical considerations

Written approval to conduct this study was obtained from a local university ethics committee (2018/24). Verbal and written consent to participate in the study was received from all participants. The study was conducted according to the ethics guidelines set out in the Declaration of Helsinki.

2.5 | Data analysis

All data were analyzed using the IBM SPSS, version 22.0. Descriptive statistics were defined by the number, percentage, arithmetic mean, and standard deviation. The conformity of the DVS, IRRBI, and ECRI-1 mean scores to normal distribution was examined by the Kolmogorov–Smirnov (K–S) test since the sample number was greater than 50. The mean scores of IRRBI and ECRI-1 were normally distributed, but the mean DVS score was not normally distributed. For this reason, the relationship between variables was examined using the Spearman correlation test. Multiple linear regression analysis was performed to determine the DVS predictors of the students according to the variables that were significant in the correlation test. $p < 0.05$ was accepted.

3 | RESULTS

The average age of the students participating in the study was 20.94 ± 2.68 (min = 18, max = 41). Data on sociodemographic variables were presented in Table 1. Of them, 82.0% were female, 80.1% had a nuclear family structure, and 81.2% had a moderate economic level. Of the students, 70.5% stated that their income was equal to expenses, 54.4% lived in a city, 80.5% of students' mothers were not working, and 75.9% of students' fathers were working. 58.6% of their mothers and 35.6% of their fathers were primary school graduates.

The students' average total DVS score was 4.53 ± 0.41 , their average total IRRBI score was 84.47 ± 15.34 , and their average total ECRI-1 score was 128.53 ± 28.66 (Table 2).

In correlation analysis (Table 3), a moderate and negative relationship was found between DVS with use of social time ($r = -0.369$) and different thinking ($r = -0.328$, $p < 0.01$). Different

TABLE 1 Sociodemographic characteristics of students ($n = 261$)

Characteristics	<i>n</i>	%
Department		
Nursing	176	67.4
Midwifery	85	32.6
Gender		
Female	214	82.0
Male	47	18.0
Family structure		
Nuclear	209	80.1
Extended	45	17.2
Divorced	7	2.7
Economic status		
High	38	14.6
Moderate	212	81.2
Low	11	4.2
Income level		
Income is equal to expenses	184	70.5
Income is more than expenses	28	10.7
Income is less than expenses	49	18.8
Place of residence		
City	142	54.4
Town	86	33.0
Village	33	12.6
Mother's working status		
Working	51	19.5
Not working	210	80.5
Mother's educational status		
Primary school	153	58.6
Secondary school	59	22.6
High school	39	15.0
University	10	3.8
Father's working status		
Working	198	75.9
Not working	63	24.1
Father's educational status		
Primary school	93	35.6
Secondary school	65	25.0
High school	69	26.4
University	34	13.0

thinking includes irrational beliefs that it is destructive for people to have different thoughts about events. There was a weak but significant relationship between DVS and IRRBI ($r = -0.288, p < 0.01$).

TABLE 2 Mean scores of the sample on the DVS, IRRBI, and ECRI-1

Scale	$X \pm SD$	Min.	Max.
General violence	4.66 ± 0.44	2.40	5.00
Physical violence	4.57 ± 0.52	2.40	5.00
Emotional violence	4.45 ± 0.57	1.67	5.00
Economic violence	4.25 ± 0.67	2.00	5.00
Sexual violence	4.69 ± 0.55	2.57	5.00
Total DVS	4.53 ± 0.41	2.32	5.00
Over expectations	27.06 ± 5.85	8.00	40.00
Use of social time	12.68 ± 4.61	6.00	29.00
Physical intimacy	8.69 ± 2.72	3.00	15.00
Mind reading	19.03 ± 4.86	6.00	30.00
Gender differences	8.61 ± 2.49	3.00	15.00
Different thinking	8.38 ± 2.92	4.00	17.00
Total IRRBI	84.47 ± 15.34	35.00	134.00
Anxious attachment	61.64 ± 20.03	19.00	127.00
Avoidant attachment	30.38 ± 9.88	8.00	54.00
Secure attachment	37.41 ± 10.64	9.00	63.00
Total ECRI-1	128.53 ± 28.66	36.00	216.00

Abbreviations: DVS, Dating Violence Scale; ECRI-1, Experiences in Close Relationships Inventory-1; IRRBI, Irrational Romantic Relationship Beliefs Inventory.

A moderate and negative correlation was found between emotional violence with use of social time ($r = -0.331$) and total IRRBI ($r = -0.327, p < 0.01$).

In correlation analysis (Table 3), it was determined that there is a weak but significant relationship between DVS and ECRI-1 ($r = -0.194, p < 0.01$). In particular, a significant relationship was found between ECRI-1 with physical ($r = -0.153$), emotional ($r = -0.265$), and economic violence ($r = -0.196, p < 0.05$).

The regression analyses of the effects of irrational romantic relationship beliefs and experiences in close relationships on dating violence were shown in Table 4. Total ECRI-1 ($\beta = 0.756$), anxious attachment ($\beta = -3.241$), secure attachment ($\beta = -3.119$), use of social time ($\beta = -0.252$), and different thinking ($\beta = -2.788$) had a significant effect on total DVS.

The predictors of sexual violence were different thinking ($\beta = -0.352$), use of social time ($\beta = -0.349$), and total IRRBI ($\beta = 0.339, p < 0.01$). The most important predictors of economic violence were anxious attachment ($\beta = -0.746$) and total ECRI-1 ($\beta = 0.710, p < 0.05$). Use of social time ($\beta = 0.178$) and secure attachment ($\beta = -0.353$) had a significant effect on it ($p < 0.05$). The only predictor of emotional violence was anxious attachment ($\beta = -0.319, p < 0.01$). Different thinking was only predictor of physical violence ($\beta = -0.190, p < 0.05$). The predictors of general violence were different thinking ($\beta = -0.328$), total IRRBI ($\beta = 0.233$), and use of social time ($\beta = -0.219, p < 0.05$).

4 | DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to investigate the effects of irrational romantic relationship beliefs and experiences in close relationships on dating violence of nursing and midwifery students. The present

TABLE 3 Correlation analysis between the DVS, IRRBI, and ECRI-1

	General violence	Physical violence	Emotional violence	Economic violence	Sexual violence	Total DVS
Over expectations	0.104	-0.108	-0.184**	-0.083	0.063	-0.057
Use of social time	-0.253**	-0.205**	-0.331**	-0.294**	-0.273**	-0.369**
Physical intimacy	-0.036	-0.161**	-0.165**	-0.064	-0.054	-0.135*
Mind reading	-0.025	-0.223**	-0.205**	-0.096	0.058	-0.149*
Gender differences	-0.106	-0.068	-0.170**	-0.100	-0.087	-0.146*
Different thinking	-0.248**	-0.213**	-0.242**	-0.266**	-0.258**	-0.328**
Total IRRBI	-0.125*	-0.249**	-0.327**	-0.214**	-0.142*	-0.288**
Anxious attachment	-0.026	-0.172*	-0.293**	-0.240**	-0.184**	-0.253**
Avoidant attachment	0.061	-0.109	-0.009	0.073	0.118	0.038
Secure attachment	0.058	-0.083	-0.184**	-0.161*	-0.089	-0.132*
Total ECRI-1	0.065	-0.153*	-0.265**	-0.196**	-0.123	-0.194**

Abbreviations: DVS, Dating Violence Scale; ECRI-1, Experiences in Close Relationships Inventory-1; IRRBI, Irrational Romantic Relationship Beliefs Inventory.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

TABLE 4 The regression analyses of the effects of IRRBI and ECRI-1 on DVS

Variables	B	SD	β	t	p	R	R ²	F	p
Total DVS									
Use of social time	-0.021	0.008	-0.252	-2.605	0.010	0.445	0.198	6.642	0.000
Physical intimacy	-0.026	0.015	-0.183	-1.817	0.071				
Different thinking	-0.032	0.011	-0.236	-2.788	0.006				
Total IRRBI	0.006	0.003	0.247	1.906	0.058				
Anxious attachment	-0.015	0.005	-0.746	-3.241	0.001				
Secure attachment	-0.013	0.004	-0.356	-3.119	0.002				
Total ECRI-1	0.010	0.003	0.756	2.957	0.004				
Sexual violence									
Use of social time	-0.041	0.009	-0.349	-4.724	0.000	0.423	0.179	18.421	0.000
Different thinking	-0.065	0.013	-0.352	-4.871	0.000				
Total IRRBI	0.012	0.003	0.339	4.097	0.000				
Economic violence									
Use of social time	-0.025	0.011	-0.178	-2.403	0.017	0.400	0.160	9.075	0.000
Anxious attachment	-0.026	0.007	-0.746	-3.430	0.001				
Secure attachment	-0.022	0.006	-0.353	-3.835	0.000				
Total ECRI-1	0.017	0.005	0.710	3.072	0.002				
Emotional violence									
Anxious attachment	-0.008	0.002	-0.319	-4.794	0.000	0.347	0.121	14.190	0.000
Secure attachment	-0.004	0.003	-0.090	-1.348	0.179				
Physical violence									
Use of social time	-0.015	0.010	-0.129	-1.544	0.124	0.335	0.112	7.978	0.000
Mind reading	-0.018	0.010	-0.164	-1.708	0.089				
Different thinking	-0.034	0.014	-0.190	-2.438	0.015				
Total IRRBI	0.001	0.005	0.028	0.212	0.833				
General violence									
Use of social time	-0.021	0.007	-0.219	-2.857	0.005	0.344	0.118	11.336	0.000
Different thinking	-0.050	0.011	-0.328	-4.379	0.000				
Total IRRBI	0.007	0.002	0.233	2.719	0.007				

Abbreviations: DVS, Dating Violence Scale; ECRI-1, Experiences in Close Relationships Inventory-1; IRRBI, Irrational Romantic Relationship Beliefs Inventory.

study found that irrational romantic relationship beliefs and experiences in close relationships were associated with high rates of dating violence. Similarly, a study conducted with university students found a significant association between irrational beliefs in romantic relationships with high rates of physical and emotional abuse (Kaygusuz, 2013). Another study found that irrational romantic relationship beliefs of university students were associated with high rates of aggression in romantic relationships (Gündoğdu et al., 2018). Irrational beliefs were potentially dysfunctional because they hampered the formation of healthy romantic bonds and they led to normal romantic interactions being perceived as less than ideal or

unacceptable (Zagefka & Bahul, 2020). Being dissatisfied with a romantic relationship increased a tendency to suffer dating violence (Dodaj et al., 2020). Similarly in the present study, irrational beliefs in the use of social time and different thinking were related to supportive attitudes toward dating violence. In other words, participating in social activities together and doing leisure time activities together with increased violence. This finding may be related to different thinking because different thinking is an irrational belief that it is destructive for people to have different thoughts about events.

The present study found that experiences in close relationships were correlated with physical, emotional, and economic violence.

Students who had anxious or secure attachment in close relationships did not have an attitude supporting dating violence. A study conducted with college students found that females with greater anxiety attachment and lower avoidant attachment were more likely to perpetrate dating violence (Tussey et al., 2021). A meta-analysis study found that attachment styles in romantic relationships were significantly associated with dating violence (Velotti et al., 2020). Unlike the present study, generally, avoidance attachment was associated with victimization and perpetrator of dating violence (Orke et al., 2021; Stover et al., 2018). Duval et al. (2020) reported that the type of relationship such as exclusive relationship was both a risk factor and a protective factor. But a longer, more committed, and exclusive relationship was associated with increased physical and psychological perpetration and victimization.

The predictors of sexual violence were different thinking, use of social time, and irrational beliefs in romantic relationships in this study. In a survey conducted between couples, expectations from a woman or a man in a relationship, different thinking, and especially the man's desire to control the woman were correlated with violent behavior (Kılıçarslan & Parmaksız, 2020). Similar to different thinking, relationship conflict was correlated with severe physical and psychological abuse perpetration (Du et al., 2020). Irrational beliefs were associated with interpersonal problems, sexual dysfunction, repeated victimization, and avoidance (Koçturk & Bilge, 2017). The male students' aggression levels and irrational beliefs related to social and free-time activities and different thinking were higher than females (Gündoğdu et al., 2018). We can say that terms of sexual violence, different thinking, use of social time, and irrational beliefs in romantic relationships are significant predictors.

The anxious attachment and secure attachment were associated with physical, emotional, economic, and sexual types of DV in the present study. The anxious attachment included the feeling of nervousness and worried about whether one's romantic partner was available and responsive (Lee et al., 2014). The anxious attachment in a romantic relationship was affected by child physical abuse, witnessing parental violence, and more unsatisfactory maternal relationships (Tussey et al., 2021). Abusive childhood experiences affected perpetration and victimization directly and indirectly through anxiety over abandonment (Sriyothin & Maneesri, 2017). The anxious attachment among college women was associated with an increased risk of experiencing physical assault (Sandberg et al., 2019). The anxious attachment significantly predicted the abuse and control dimensions of violence (Turan & Duy, 2020).

4.1 | Study limitations

There are some limitations. This study was conducted in a single center. The study results can only be generalized to students in this study. The study was designed as descriptive and correlational. Qualitative studies should be conducted to identify dating violence and its influencing factors in the Turkish population.

5 | CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate the effects of irrational romantic relationship beliefs and experiences in close relationships on dating violence of nursing and midwifery students. The dating violence level of nursing and midwifery students was associated with irrational beliefs in romantic relationships and experiences in a close relationship. The most important predictors of dating violence were anxious attachment, secure attachment, use of social time, and different thinking. As a result, this study revealed that irrational beliefs and experiences about close relationships were associated with dating violence. This result has made an important contribution to the literature to determine the risk factors associated with dating violence.

6 | IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING

Nursing and midwifery students' irrational beliefs in romantic relationships and experiences in close relationships predicted dating violence. To prevent dating violence in nursing and midwifery students and to reduce its negative consequences, irrational beliefs in romantic relationships and experiences in close relationships should be determined in their first year at university. For 4 years, these beliefs and experiences should be followed until students graduate. Specialist psychiatric nurses can apply cognitive-behavioral therapy to students who are physically, emotionally, economically, and sexually exposed to violence. Cognitive-behavioral therapy can help them change their irrational thoughts and solve the psychosocial problems they experience due to violence. Also, motivational interview techniques can be used to terminate the dating relationship in which she/he is subjected to violence and to benefit from her/his social/legal rights. Information about a safe romantic relationship can be given to students.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that there are no conflict of interests.

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