



The Loneliness Levels as the Predictor of University Students' Violence Tendency¹

Research Article

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To cite this article: Soylu, G. & Kumcagiz, H. (2019). The Loneliness Levels as the Predictor of University Students' Violence Tendency, *International Online Journal of Educational Sciences*, 11 (5), X.

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received Tarih girmek için burayı tıklayın.

Received in revised form Tarih girmek için burayı tıklayın.

Accepted Tarih girmek için burayı tıklayın.

Available online Tarih girmek için burayı tıklayın.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between violence tendency and loneliness levels of university students according to various variables. To this end, the study used a correlational survey design. The sample consisted of 596 students studying at different faculties of Cumhuriyet University in the 2017-2018 academic year. The data were collected using the Attitude towards Violence Scale, UCLA Loneliness Scale, and a Personal Information Form. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics and one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), and simple linear regression. The results of the analysis showed that male students had significantly greater violence tendency compared to female students, while there was no significant difference in loneliness according to gender. There was no significant difference between the students' violence tendency and loneliness levels according to the variable of exposure to maternal violence. On the other hand, it was found that there was a significant relationship between the variables of exposure to paternal violence and the level of violence tendency of students while there was no significant relationship between loneliness level and exposure to paternal violence. The violence tendency and loneliness levels differed significantly by the variable of witnessing parental violence. There was a low positive correlation between students' violence tendency and loneliness levels. Additionally, as the levels of loneliness increase, so does violence tendency. The findings were discussed in light of the literature.

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Keywords:

Violence, violence tendency, university students, loneliness, loneliness level

Introduction

Violence exists in human nature and is sometimes considered a part of human life and a form of behaviour that is learned and acquired (Mercy, Dahlberg, & Zwi, 2002). The tendency toward violent actions including relevant emotions, thoughts and behaviours are defined as attitudes towards the violence. Personal

¹ It is part of the master's thesis supervised by Assoc. Prof. Hatice Kumcağız
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15345/iojes.2019.05.013>

characteristics, family, friends, environmental factors, media, and society's roles have an impact on individuals' attitudes towards violence (Demir & Kumcağız, 2015). Violence in various environments (family, school, and media) is defined as a process that is not instantaneous or short-term; thus, the negative impact of violence may continue to affect the subsequent developmental stages of individuals. Peer bullying, which is a common form of violence in schools, affects the psychological, social, school, and health development of both the victim and the bully students and this effect is not limited to school years and likely to continue throughout adulthood (Çetinkaya, Nur, Ayvaz, Özdemir, & Kavakci, 2009). Children who witness violence in the family exhibit more negative behaviours compared their peers (Haskan & Yıldırım, 2012). Thus, children who witness the violence between their parents at home are at risk of being both victims and perpetrators (Fagan & Browne, 1994; Reiss & Roth, 1994). Because violence is caused by the complex interactions of biological, psychosocial, and environmental factors, there is a need for preventive efforts that are sensitive to developmental needs and the barriers that should be put in many environments from family to school (Dahlberg & Potter, 2001). Loneliness is another variable that may be related to violence.

Different definitions and interpretations of loneliness have been made. Perlman and Peplau (1981), who made one of the most well-known definitions, described loneliness as the unpleasant experience of an individual with qualitative or quantitative inadequacies in social relations. According to the authors, loneliness may be a thought or a feeling in a person's perception rather than solitude as a personal phenomenon of loneliness; thus, it has its origins in inadequate social relations. Social relations are important for everyone and regardless of age, each individual has to interact with others (Ünalmiş, 2010). Healthy relationships affect individuals' mental health positively. Interpersonal relations deteriorate for various reasons and loneliness is one of these factors that affect individual life negatively (Pancar, 2009; Sevim, 2005).

Although many individuals do not exhibit violent behaviours, they are prone to exercise violence and can pose a threat to mental health in society. Knowing the risk factors is important to reduce violence and violent crimes (Avcı & Yıldırım, 2014). It is crucial to investigate the relationship between violence and loneliness, which is thought to be a perpetuating risk factor for violence. It is also important to provide support for violence prevention, intervention programs, and projects. Because loneliness manifests itself with unpleasant feelings, it may be related to attitudes towards violence. In addition, it is important to investigate variables such as exposure to parental, class, gender, physical, and emotional violence and witnessing the violence between parents.

Previous research on violence or loneliness has mostly surveyed adolescents (Avcı & Yıldırım, 2014; Buelga, Musitu, Murgui, & Pons, 2008; Çivitçi, 2011, Çelik, Gençoğlu, & Kumcağız, 2016; Erözkan, 2004; Gündoğmuş, 2017; Henry, Tolan, & Gorman-Smith 2001; Pancar, 2009; Yıldırım, 2007). No research has been found that examines the relationship between violence and loneliness among university students. Therefore, this study fills a gap in the literature.

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between university students' violence tendency and loneliness levels and to find out whether loneliness explains violence tendency. To this end, violence tendency and loneliness levels of university students were examined according to a set of variables and answers to the following questions were sought:

1. Do students' violence tendency and loneliness levels differ significantly by gender?
2. Do students' violence tendency and loneliness levels differ significantly according to the exposure to maternal violence?
3. Do students' violence tendency and loneliness levels differ significantly according to the exposure to paternal violence?

4. Do students' violence tendency and loneliness levels differ significantly according to witnessing parental violence?

5. Is students' loneliness level a significant predictor of violence tendency?

Methods

Research Design

This study used a correlational survey design to examine the relationship between the violence tendency and loneliness levels of university students. This design aims to clarify the existence and degree of change between two or more parameters (Karasar, 2012).

Sample

The universe of this research consisted of 29585 students studying at undergraduate programs at Cumhuriyet University in the spring term of 2017-2018 academic year. In the study, the sample size was determined as 380 students with 95% reliability level and 5% error margin to represent the universe. In the research, 596 students were selected using convenience sampling method. In the method, the researcher selects participants from among those who are easy to reach, suitable for the research, and volunteer. This method can be defined as a sampling method applied in the form of a questionnaire to people with common characteristics in cases where it is difficult to provide a certain representation from the universe due to time, economy and other reasons (Balci, 2010).

The sample group of the study consists of 32.9% (n = 196) of first grade, 28% (n = 167) of second grade, 23% (n = 137) of third grade and 16.1% (n = 196) of fourth grade university students. The frequency and percentages of the sample are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequency and Percentages of the Working Group (N = 596)

		n	%
Gender	Female	345	57.9
	Male	251	42.1
Maternal violence	Yes	27	4.5
	No	569	95.5
Paternal Violence	Yes	28	4.7
	No	568	95.3
Witnessing parental violence	Yes	78	13.1
	No	518	86.9

As shown in Table 1, 42.1% (n = 251) of the university students were male and 57.9% (n = 345) were female. 4.52% (n = 27) of the university students were exposed to maternal violence while the rest (95.5%, n = 569) stated that they were not exposed to maternal violence. In addition, 4.7% (n = 28) of the students were exposed to paternal violence while the rest (95.3%, n = 568) were not exposed to paternal violence. While 13.1% (n = 78) students witnessed parental violence; 86.9% (n = 518) of the students did not witness it.

Data Collection Tools

Violence Attitude Scale: The scale was developed by Çetin (2011) to determine attitudes towards physical violence. The scale consists of 10 items and one subscale. The validity of the scale was tested through exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis and total variance was found to be 43.86%. To test the reliability, Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was calculated as .85 (Çetin, 2011). In this study, Cronbach's alpha was calculated as .88.

UCLA Loneliness Scale: The scale developed by Russell, Peplau, and Cutrona (1980) was adapted to Turkish by Demir (1989). The internal consistency coefficient of the scale was calculated as .96. The correlation coefficient was found to be .94 using the test-retest method. The Likert-type scale consists of 20 items. Scores range from 20 to 80 and high scores are interpreted as an indicator of intense loneliness (Demir, 1989). In the study, Cronbach's alpha was calculated as .82.

Personal Information Form: The form was designed by the researchers to identify the socio-demographic characteristics of students (age, gender, grade level, exposure to maternal violence, exposure to paternal violence, and witnessing parental violence).

Data Collection: Written permission was obtained from the Social and Human Research Ethics Committee of Ondokuz Mayıs University (Decision no: 2017 / 226-271) and Cumhuriyet University Rectorate to conduct the research. After obtaining the necessary permissions, data collection tools were administered to 615 students. The participants filled in the personal information form, Violence Tendency Scale and UCLA Loneliness Scale. After informing the participants about the purpose of the research, it was also noted that their responses to the data collection tools would remain confidential and participation in the research was voluntary. The scales were administered either at the beginning or at the end of each course in line with the request of instructors. 19 measurement tools were excluded from the analysis because they were not filled properly. 596 measurement tools were included in the study. The procedure took approximately 20 minutes.

Data Analysis: The data were analysed using SPSS software version 21. One-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to test whether university students' violence tendency and loneliness scores differed according to gender, exposure to maternal violence, exposure to paternal violence, and witnessing parental violence. Finally, the impact of loneliness levels in determining violence tendency scores was analysed using simple linear regression analysis.

Results

Findings on Violence and Loneliness Levels of Students Based on Gender

Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation of violence and loneliness scores according to the gender. One-way MANOVA was conducted to test whether university students' violence tendency and loneliness scores differ significantly according to the gender variable.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Violence Tendency and Loneliness Scores according to Gender

	Gender	\bar{x}	Sd	p
Violence Tendency	Male	25.24 ^a	8.11	.001
	Female	19.28 ^b	7.19	
Loneliness	Male	38.36	9.15	.001
	Female	36.92	8.57	

Note: There was a significant difference between the groups: $a > b$

The results of the one-way MANOVA showed that the main multivariate effect was significant (Pillai's Trace = .13, $F(2,593) = 45.21$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .13$).

These results show that there was a significant difference in at least one of the mean scores of violence tendency or loneliness levels according to gender. Table 3 shows the results of the one-way ANOVA to determine the source of the difference.

Table 3. Results of the One-Way ANOVA based on Gender

Source	df	Squares Averages	F	p	Partial η^2
Violence Tendency (A)	1	5162.02	89.54	.001**	.13
Loneliness (B)	1	301.12	3.87	.050	.01
Error A	594	57.65			
Error B	594	77.79			

** $p < .01$

As shown in Table 3, there was a significant difference in the violence tendency scores according to gender ($F(1, 594) = 89.54, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .13$) but loneliness scores ($F(1, 594) = 3.87, p > .05, \eta_p^2 = .01$) did not differ significantly accordingly. As seen in Table 2, men's violence tendency was significantly higher compared to women.

Findings Regarding Violence Tendency and Loneliness Levels According to Students' Witnessing Parental Violence

One-way MANOVA test was conducted to test whether university students' violence tendency and loneliness scores differed according to the variable of witnessing parental violence. Table 4 provides information on the mean and standard deviation values of violence tendency and loneliness scores based on the witnessing parental violence variable.

Table 4. Violence Tendency and Loneliness based on the Variable of Witnessing Parental Violence

	Parental violence	n	\bar{x}	Sd	p
Violence Tendency	Yes	78	24.35 _a	9.07	.001
	No	518	21.41 _b	7.93	
Loneliness	Yes	78	41.14 _a	9.24	.001
	No	518	36.98 _b	8.66	

Note: There was a significant difference between the groups: $a > b$ ** $p < .01$

The one-way MANOVA test results in Table 4 showed that the multivariate basic effect was significant (Pillai's Trace = .04, $F(2, 593) = 11.02, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .04$). These results indicate that at least one variable of the violence tendency or loneliness scores showed a significant difference according to witnessing parental violence. Table 5 shows the results of the one-way ANOVA to determine the source of the difference.

Table 5. One-way ANOVA Results for the Variable of Witnessing Parental Violence

Source	df	Sum of squares	F	p	Partial η^2
Violence Tendency (A)	1	586.85	8.98	.003**	.02
Loneliness (B)	1	1170.22	15.33	.001**	.03
Error A	594	65.35			
Error B	594	76.32			

** $p < .01$

As seen in Table 5, the tendency of violence ($F(1, 594) = 8.98, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .02$) and loneliness scores ($F(1, 594) = 15.33, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .03$) showed a significant difference according to the variable of witnessing parental violence. These results show that the tendency and loneliness scores of university students who witnessed parental violence were significantly higher than those who did not witness parental violence.

Findings on Students' Loneliness Levels in Predicting Violence Tendency

Table 6 shows the results of simple linear regression analysis conducted to determine the level and direction of university students' loneliness scores in predicting their attitude scores for violence tendency.

Table 6. Simple linear regression analysis results for predicting scores of violence tendency

	Level 1		B	t	p
	B	SE			
Constant	17.56	1.44		12.15	.001**
Loneliness	.11	.04	.12	3.01	.003**
R ²		.02			
Adjusted R ²		.01			
SE		8.08			
F(sd ₁ , sd ₂)		1, 594			

Note: SE: Standard Error, ** $p < .01$

In Table 6, as a result of simple linear regression analysis, it was interpreted that loneliness scores of university students explained 2% of the change in violence scores ($F(1, 594) = 9.08, p < .01, \Delta R^2 = .02$). This model has a low-level effect size. In other words, when other variables are kept constant in this sample, the university students with high levels of loneliness have greater violence tendency.

Discussion

It was observed that there was a significant difference in the violence tendency levels of the research students according to gender, and men's violence tendency was significantly higher than that of women. The findings of this research have been supported by the literature studies conducted in Turkey (Akman, 2013; Avcı & Yıldırım, 2014; Bozkurt, 2010; Çelik, Gençoğlu, & Kumcağız, 2016; Çetin, 2004; Haskan & Yıldırım, 2012). Similarly, in the studies conducted abroad; it is stated that violence tendency among male adolescents is more frequent (Duncan, 1999; Giles & Heyman, 2005; Gullone & Moore, 2000). Men's tendency to violence is significantly higher than that of women and this can be explained by the social structure, social roles and parenting behaviours in the child raising process. In our society, while women are more adaptable and expected to control their anger more frequently, men can immediately convert their anger into the violence, and in some respects, these violent behaviours can be justified. Haskan (2009) states that the violent behaviour of boys in our society is accepted as normal and reinforced as a masculine trait while girls are taught to remain passive and be obedient. Lopez and Emmer (2002), in their study with male adolescents who have committed crimes, have concluded that traditional male gender role beliefs, that is the understanding of masculinity, triggered violence in gang-related crimes and physical defences.

According to the study findings, the loneliness levels of university students do not show a statistically significant difference according to gender. Studies supporting the research findings have been reached in the literature (Aksakal, 2008; Brage, Meredith, & Woodward, 1993; Certel, Yakut, Yakut, & Gülsün, 2016; Çeçen, 2008; Çelik, Kurtipek, Yenel, & İlhan, 2017; Demirtaş, 2007; Kamath & Kanekar, 1993; Mahon, Yarcheski, & Yarcheski, 1994; Pancar, 2009). Although Eskin (2001) observed no significant difference between girls and boys in terms of loneliness scores, it has been found that more girls answered yes to the question of "are there any moments when you feel very lonely?". It is stated that the reason for this may be related to the meaning and perception of gender. According to the gender variable, some of the opinions about the loneliness scores reached to the conclusion that girls were lonelier than boys (Odacı, 1994; Terrell, Terrell & Von Drashek, 2000; Yücel, 2009), while others reached to the conclusion that boys were lonelier than girls (Erözkan, 2004; Gündoğmuş, 2017; Karaoğlu, Avşaroğlu, & Deniz, 2009; Körler, 2011). It is thought that this study could contribute to the solution to this problem.

Additionally, there was a statistically significant difference in the violence tendency and loneliness levels of university students according to the variable of witnessing parental violence. Thus, violence tendency and loneliness levels of the students who witnessed parental violence were significantly higher than those who did not. This might be explained by the fact that individuals who witnessed violence between their parents tend to behave more violently because they learned violence through role modelling and considered violence as a means to solve their problems. Krug et al. (2002) stated that individuals who learn to use violence in their family as a way of solving their problems tend to use violence more frequently. In addition, loneliness level can increase more easily in the family environments where usually individuals did not get enough attention, love, and support, were not accepted as they are, could not express their feelings and thoughts adequately and could not share their problems with other family members. The literature includes no research on the relationship between witnessing parental violence and loneliness levels of university students. Previous studies on witnessing parental violence variable and violence tendency reported similar findings. Kitmann et al. (2003) examined the psycho-social consequences of children who witnessed domestic violence in their meta-analytic studies conducted with 118 people between 1978 and 2000 and found that children who witnessed violence exhibited more negative behaviours than those who did not witness it. Kızmaz (2006) stated that individuals with violent behaviours grow up more commonly in environments where violent behaviours are present than those who do not demonstrate violent behaviours and stated that the presence of domestic violence may be a strong symptom of violent behaviours in the future.

Lastly, the study found that the loneliness scores of the university students explained 2% of the change in their violence tendency scores. This model has a low-level effect size. In other words, when the other variables are kept constant in this sample, the violence tendency of university students with high loneliness levels turns out to be high. In the study conducted by Avcı and Yıldırım (2014), they inferred that adolescents with high violence tendency have high loneliness levels and also less support coming from their friends, family and their teachers. Yıldırım (2007), who examined the loneliness levels of students according to whether or not being resorted to violence, concluded that adolescents who resort to violence feel lonelier than adolescents who do not resort to it. Buelga et al. (2008) investigated the relationship between dignity, loneliness, life satisfaction and aggressive behaviours in adolescents and at the end they found that loneliness and the life quality had an indirect effect on aggression.

Conclusion and Suggestions

This study set out to investigate the relationship between university students' violence tendency and loneliness levels and determine whether loneliness explains violence tendency. The following results were obtained:

As loneliness levels of university students increase, so does the tendency of violence. It was determined that the loneliness scores of the students did not show a significant difference according to gender, while males' tendency to violence was significantly higher than that of females. There was no significant difference between the violence and loneliness levels of the students who were exposed to maternal violence and those who were not, while violence tendency of the students who were exposed to paternal violence are significantly higher than those who were not.

Sharing the results of this research with educators and arranging social activities in which students can establish more sincere and stronger relations with each other will help them to understand each other more easily, express themselves better and reduce violence.

This study is limited to the students studying four-year programmes at Sivas Cumhuriyet University. Future research might recruit a larger sample and use different scales. Further research might use a qualitative design to discover the reasons behind these results.

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