

Attitudes Towards Emotional Abuse in Romantic Relationships from a Gender Perspective

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Abstract

Emotional abuse is one of the most challenging forms of violence to define, and many individuals often unknowingly experience emotional abuse. Existing literature has found that individuals who have experienced psychological abuse tend to suffer from depression, low self-esteem, a decreased sense of autonomy, fear, and an increased risk of suicide. Studies on emotional abuse between partners in romantic relationships are limited.

In this study, the attitudes of Turkish university students and individuals with university degrees or above towards emotional abuse were investigated. Gender differences were investigated. Additionally, the study examined whether the degree of emotional abuse was related to attitudes towards emotional abuse. In addition, it was also examined how the emotional abuse people were exposed to in romantic relationships differed according to gender. 272 people (66.2% women, 33.8% men) participated in the research. Demographics Form, Hypothetical Scenarios, and Follingstad's (2005) FPAS scale adapted to Turkish were used to collect data. Independent sample t test analysis was conducted to analyze the attitude scores of male and female individuals. According to the findings of the research, the attitudes of female participants towards mild, moderate, and severe levels of emotional abuse varied from the attitudes of male participants. The scores of female individuals were found to be statistically higher. However, when looking at the experience dimension, no gender difference was found, and participants in both groups were found to have a certain amount of exposure. In hypothetical scenarios, there was no gender difference in attitudes towards emotional abuse, but male individuals stated that they were more exposed to this situation when the subject of the abuser was a woman. This study may be necessary in understanding and evaluating the prevalence of attitudes and experiences towards emotional abuse from a gender perspective.

Keywords: Emotional abuse; gender differences; psychological abuse; Turkish culture; university students

INTRODUCTION

What is Emotional Abuse?

As per the United Nations (2019), abuse encompasses any form of coercive, threatening, or detrimental behavior that can be physical, sexual, emotional, or psychological in nature. It involves actions aimed at intimidating, manipulating, harming, humiliating, or assigning blame to another individual. Furthermore, the United Nations defines exploitation as “any behavior conducted by the perpetrator to exert power and control over the victim”, and it labels this cycle as the "control and power wheel" (p.1). From this perspective, emotional abuse is an umbrella term encompassing all these forms of violence. Emotional abuse includes forms of abuse that individuals are exposed to from childhood to old age, regardless of religion, language, or race.

According to the World Health Organization (2023), child maltreatment includes “all forms of physical and/or emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, carelessness, and commercial or other exploitation that harms or threatens to harm a child's health, survival, development, or dignity while taking place in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust, or power” (par.1). Due to the widespread prevalence of child abuse worldwide and the fact that children often struggle to identify and report the abuse they experience out of fear, although somewhat insufficient, the criteria and legal practices regarding child abuse are comparatively more precise than those for other types of abuse (Ikram and Malik, 2019).

Additionally, from a legal perspective, in Turkey, when couples in the process of divorce experience psychological-emotional violence from their spouses, they are expected to provide evidence of this situation (Alkan, 2023). Typically, they are expected to submit WhatsApp messages or other written documents as evidence. Usually, a fine is imposed on the abused person, and in cases where it causes harm to the person's integrity, a criminal case is opened. However, in cases of psychological violence in dating relationships, sentences typically range from 6 months to 2 years, but individuals often do not receive punishment because the sentence is less than three years.

Definitions of Emotional Abuse

There is no unity between researchers for the term, “emotional abuse”. "Psychological abuse," "emotional maltreatment," and "psychological maltreatment" are used by psychologists interchangeably (Goldsmith and Freyd, 2005). This study will exclusively employ the term 'emotional abuse' for its scope and analysis.

Emotional abuse is an umbrella term that includes other types of nonphysical violence; therefore, it is a phenomenon that is difficult to define on its own due to the lack of physical parameters, like those that apply to physical and sexual abuse (Follingstad and Rogers, 2014, p.4). Additionally, it is difficult to define, differentiate and measure this type of violence as it is necessary to distinguish it from physical violence parameters or visible violence. In this regard, it is challenging to conceptualize emotional abuse for researchers. For this reason, researchers have struggled to develop a valid and reliable way to measure emotional abuse because of definitional and conceptual issues (Follingstad, 2007). As a result, there are a limited number of studies in this area.

Emotional abuse does not have a single definition among researchers, as it is an invisible, implicit form of violence. In addition, emotional abuse is difficult to define because verbal and nonverbal acts that hurt others meaningfully or threaten to harm them have all been defined as emotional abuse (Straus, 1979). In parallel, there is little agreement on which acts constitute emotional abuse (Follingstad and DeHart, 2000). Therefore, researchers often use operational definitions that include different sub-dimensions to define emotional abuse.

In some studies, emotional abuse is defined as a continuing process whereby one person gradually damages and obliterates another's inner self, and consistently discounts the victim's core beliefs, emotions, perceptions, and personality traits (Loring, 1994). It is difficult for individuals to realize that they are exposed to emotional abuse, as it is primarily an implicit process. It causes adverse effects on the self and the psychological well-being as the exposure continues. In O’Leary's research (1999), emotional abuse was defined as encompassing controlling and coercive behaviors. This includes actions like isolating romantic partners from social interactions, asserting dominance, and employing repetitive criticism, threats, and verbal aggression. Likewise, Marshall (1996) defines emotional abuse as behaviors including control, dominance, withdrawal, criticism, and isolation.

Within the current body of literature, the assessment of emotional abuse frequently involves categorizing its sub-dimensions, as outlined by Murphy and Hoover (1999), “which encompass restrictive engulfment, hostile withdrawal, denigration, and dominance/intimidation (p.39)”.

The Effects of Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is a phenomenon that can start in the family at a young age and shows its effects in many different areas and relationships in the individual's adulthood (Goldsmith and Freyd, 2008). In other words, emotional abuse is a phenomenon that individuals of all ages can be exposed to in their lives and generally affects them negatively. For individuals exposed to emotional abuse, coping with the devastating effects of this abuse is relatively long-term (Follingstad et al.,1990). Additionally, battered women typically claim that the psychological abuse that goes hand in hand with the physical abuse—such as coercive, restricting, and domineering behavior—has a more severe and long-lasting effect on them (Tolman,1992).

Furthermore, studies showed that being exposed to emotional abuse in the family causes psychological symptoms in adulthood, such as depression, dissociation, and anxiety (Goldsmith and Freyd, 2008). In parallel, Kent et al., (1999) found that “emotional abuse is the only form of abuse that might predict problematic eating behaviors in adult women” (p.165-166). In other words, it can be said that being exposed to emotional abuse has adverse effects on individuals of all ages.

Adult emotional abuse literature is still evolving. Follingstad et al., (2000) reviewed that early studies on emotional abuse have been related to childhood abuse mostly. Psychological abuse has been labeled as child abuse, including physical and sexual abuse and neglect. Also, childhood emotional abuse literature is more systematic in conceptualizing emotional abuse to protect children from their abusive parents. In the adult emotional abuse literature, it has been considered together with physical violence studies for a long time. For example, emotional abuse experienced in the early stages of marriage results in physical violence (O’Leary et al., 1994). Therefore, World Health Organization (2021) reported that “one in every three women experiences physical violence from their partners” (p.1). In this context, we can say that emotional abuse is quite common.

Additionally, due to the frequent association of psychological abuse with physical violence in relationships and its occurrence independently, several researchers posit that “the experience of psychological abuse within romantic relationships might be more prevalent than other forms of intimate partner violence (IPV) (Follingstad and Rogers, 2014, p.3-5). Hennings and Klesges (2003) emphasize that psychological abuse can occur independently, separate from other abusive relationship behaviors. Additionally, it is almost invariably present alongside physical abuse. Consequently, numerous researchers speculate that the prevalence of psychological abuse within romantic relationships might even surpass the rates of physical abuse.

As anticipated by researchers, “the most prevalent form of (IPV) experienced over a person's lifetime is psychological aggression, nearly half of women (47.1%) and an equivalent proportion of men (47.3%) reported encountering at least one instance of mental hostility from an intimate partner in their lifetimes in the U.S. While all forms of assessed IPV occurred at alarmingly high rates overall, psychological aggression emerged as the most widespread form (Hinsliff-Smith et al., 2017, p.4020)”.

Current studies show that being exposed to emotional abuse in romantic relationships affects individuals' mental health. For example, Follingstad et al., (1990) in their study found that “the long-term effects of emotional abuse almost the same as the physical violence” (p.108-109). Riggs (2010) proposed that childhood emotional abuse might hinder the healthy development of the attachment system. This, in turn, could result in cognitive and emotional shortcomings, raising the chances of experiencing social difficulties and emotional distress later in life. Consequently, these challenges may contribute to dysfunctional adult romantic relationships across different aspects. According to Riggs' study, childhood emotional abuse patterns affect individuals' later romantic relationships. According to this model, individuals exposed to this type of abuse during childhood tend to view themselves as unlovable or their partners as untrustworthy in their adult romantic relationships. This points to the devastating effects of exposure to invisible violence in an individual's life. Similarly, another research shows that exposing emotional abuse in the family negatively affects individuals' romantic adulthood relationships.

Childhood emotional abuse indicates a decline in support for romantic partners, degrading the quality of relationships. (Sun et al., 2021).

Emotional Abuse and Gender

It is essential to comprehend the nature and effects of psychological abuse on both men and women since it may catalyze other types of violence (Follingstad and Rogers, 2011). However, in current literature the number of studies about emotional abuse from a gender perspective is limited. Additionally, studies in the literature mainly focus on women as victims of emotional abuse. This is related to the limited number of studies in this field and the association of abuse with men. One study showed that practicing psychologists perceived males' behavior as more abusive than females who engaged in the same behavior. Thematic analysis of behaviors, rated differently, indicated a perception that certain actions by females were considered more acceptable due to gender roles associated with caretaking; additionally, they were seen as having less responsibility for financial aspects compared to their partner and were perceived as having the right to monitor men (Follingstad et al., 2004). Therefore, this leads to overlooking that men are also exposed to emotional abuse. Understanding the dynamics and effects of emotional abuse for both genders is crucial because emotional abuse leads to other types of violence; in addition, women and men are both perpetrators and victims of emotional abuse. Follingstad et al., (1991) found that “being exposed to emotional abuse in a romantic relationship causes detrimental mental health outcomes such as depression, somatization, and PTSD for women” (p.87); also, they have suggested collecting data from men as well regarding these effects. On the other hand, results of another study with both young female and male college students exposed to emotional abuse in their romantic relationships showed that “younger men were more exposed to emotional abuse in their relationships than older women” (Karakurt and Silver, 2013, p.813-815). In parallel, another study showed that emotional abuse is not unilateral; it is reciprocal, and both females and males suffer adverse outcomes from emotional abuse in their romantic relationships (Follingstad and Edmundson, 2010).

Studies focusing on further gender differences showed that women and men have different reasons to abuse their partners emotionally. For example, women mostly experience isolation from their partner, which includes restricting their contact with their social surroundings and families; men overall experience more emotional abuse than women, and they evaluate these abusive behaviors as gender role, not abuse mostly (Karakurt and Silver, 2013). In other words, men abuse their partners to control and restrict their contact with others; women abuse their partners because verbal aggression is more acceptable than physical violence in society; even men who are exposed to emotional violence by their female partners do not define those behaviors as abusive. Similarly, according to the findings, women frequently believed that their partners expected to be in authority roles and establish the rules and standards for the relationship, typically linked with the male-gendered role (Lammers et al., 2005). Based on these study results, we can conclude that accepted gender roles make it difficult for people to recognize emotional abuse in terms of both genders. As the behaviors considered emotional abuse are seen as gender roles and individuals do not think they are exposed to abuse, this condition is more common, especially in males (Karakurt and Silver, 2013).

Attitudes Towards Emotional Abuse

Research on attitudes toward violence is crucial for focusing on preventive efforts, even though it is challenging “to demonstrate a direct relationship between attitudes and the experience or use of violence empirically” (Jackson, 1999, 242-245). Implicit attitudes are shaped by an individual's subjective experiences, interactions with others, their environment, and the teachings they have received, influencing how they perceive constructs and make sense of them. In this context, a person's implicit attitude towards abuse is formed based on their subjective experiences, interactions with their environment, and the meanings attributed to abuse within their surroundings, and their description is framed within this perspective (Malley-Morrison, 2004). Moreover, public views regarding IPV against women are particularly significant because “they can influence the social environment in which such violence occurs by socially endorsing, supporting, or accepting such behavior and because attitudes that condone or support partner violence contribute to a social environment where tolerance toward such behavior exists, potentially influencing

the rates of incidence” (para.3). It can be argued that public attitudes regarding Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) hold particular significance in shaping this climate (Ferrer-Perez, et al., 2020).

Studies show that both men and women can be perpetrators of violence in relationships. However, the levels vary based on specific types of violence (Razera et al., 2017). Furthermore, the figures for perpetrating violence are high for both genders; research shows that the meanings men and women give to violence and the reasons for perpetrating violence differ for each gender (Melton and Belknap, 2003). The findings showed that “while both men and women commit and suffer from acts of violence in their relationships with intimate partners in roughly equal numbers, the study suggests that men typically initiate violence before their partners retaliate” (p.343-345). Also, the claim that “women's violence is reactive mainly while men's violence is primarily proactive” is examined (Allen et al., 2008, p.1829). In their research with university students, Allen et al. (2008) found that men initiated violent behaviors towards their female partners, and women's violent behaviors towards their partners were generally measured as mild in response to violence initiated by male partners, often for protective purposes. These findings point to the underlying idea that although there is a similarity in numbers, the attitudes of male and female individuals to use violence against their partners are quite different. For example, males showed greater acceptance to violence than females and had more conventional attitudes regarding women. Males were substantially more likely than females to endorse violations and to place the blame for crimes on the victims while defending perpetrators (Jackson, 1999). According to studies investigating the motivations behind both female and male individuals using violence against their partners, “women also describe using violence as a means of gaining control, even though men's use of violence is more frequently linked to dominance and control by their victims” (Follingstad et al., 1991, p.51). This explains the different motivations of men and women to resort to violence. Similarly, research showed that “while men are more prone to use violence to show anger toward their partners, women are more likely to use aggression to express their emotions” (Campbell, 1999, p.209).

Studying these differences is vital in order not to legitimize violence against women. According to a study by Hamberger et al., (1997), in her research sample, “about two-thirds

of the women reported that they were abused and turned to violence to defend themselves or seek retribution” (p.416). Likewise, research findings indicate that “women are significantly more suffering injuries and are more inclined to resort to violence as a means of self-defense or retaliation” (Makepeace, 1986, p.385). In other words, women's violence against their partners is usually to protect themselves. However, women are systematically subjected to violence to be controlled and isolated by men (Follingstad et al., 1991). One tendency is that the physically violent partner frequently isolates his victim physically and socially, maybe even before using any physical force, and women are frequently discouraged from making regular phone calls home or engaging in other family-related activities (McHugh and Frieze, 2006). In other words, this means systematic isolation and control of women. This also means that psychological abuse frequently comes before physical assault. Ongoing criticism, correction, and humiliation erode the woman's confidence. She increasingly believes that she lacks the skills and abilities necessary to live alone. She is made to believe everyone is hostile toward her and uninterested in her. Through this way, the woman is now vulnerable to assault because she is now socially and physically alone (McHugh and Frieze, 2006). From this perspective, although male and female individuals seem to use violence against their partners at similar rates, the extent and underlying causes of violence are entirely different. Therefore, evaluating partner violence based on numbers reported by individuals merely would not be sufficient.

This research aims to investigate how attitudes towards emotional abuse vary based on gender in a sample of individuals with university degree or above. The goal is to measure attitudes towards different sub-dimensions of emotional abuse that young individuals may have experienced or are currently experiencing in their past or current relationships and how these attitudes vary by gender. Emotional abuse happens mostly in an implicit way, and it affects individuals' psychological well-being. For this reason, although emotional abuse includes all kinds of violent behavior, it is essential to identify implicit behaviors in relationships where there is no physical violence. Since research studies involving both male and female individuals who have experienced emotional abuse within the same sample are limited in the existing literature, it is essential to collect data from both men and women. Also, this study, aimed to measure the person's attitudes toward emotional abuse in terms of gender roles through scenarios.

Research Problems and Hypotheses of the Study

Research Question 1: Is there a difference between males' and females' attitudes towards emotional abuse?

Hypothesis 1: Female participants' Psychological Aggression Scale scores will be higher than male participants' scores--females will rate emotional abuse as more abusive than male participants.

Research Question 2: Is there a relationship between males' and females' attitudes towards emotional abuse across different degrees of emotional abuse?

Hypothesis 2.1: Female participants' Psychological Aggression Scale scores will be higher than male participants' scores for mild degree of emotional abuse—females will rate mild degree emotional abuse as more abusive than male participants.

Hypothesis 2.2: Female participants' Psychological Aggression Scale scores will be higher than male participants' scores for moderate degree of emotional abuse—females will rate moderate degree emotional abuse as more abusive than male participants.

Hypothesis 2.3: Female participants' Psychological Aggression Scale scores will be higher than male participants' scores for extreme degree of emotional abuse—females will rate extreme degree emotional abuse as more abusive than male participants.

Research Question 3: Is there a difference between males' and females' reports of emotional abuse in their past or current romantic relationships?

Hypothesis 3: Female participants' Psychological Aggression Scale scores in their past or current romantic relationships will be higher than male participants' scores—females will report more emotional abuse in their past or current romantic relationships than male participants.

Research Question 4: Is there a relationship between degrees of emotional abuse and males' and females' reports of emotional abuse in their past or current romantic relationships?

Hypothesis 4.1: Female participants' Psychological Aggression Scale scores for their past or current romantic relationships will be higher than male participants' scores for mild degree of emotional abuse—females will report more mild degree of emotional abuse in their past or current romantic relationships than male participants.

Hypothesis 4.2: Female participants' Psychological Aggression Scale scores for their past or current romantic relationships will be higher than male participants' scores for moderate degree of emotional abuse—females will report more moderate degree emotional abuse in their past or current romantic relationships than male participants.

Hypothesis 4.3: Female participants' Psychological Aggression Scale scores for their past or current romantic relationships will be higher than male participants' scores for extreme degree of emotional abuse—females will report more extreme degree emotional abuse in their past or current romantic relationships than male participants.

Research Question 5: Is there a relationship between the gender of the person exposed to violence and participants' ratings of emotional abuse? Will males find emotional abuse as more justifiable than females? Will males report more emotional abuse in their past or current relationship than females do?

Hypothesis 5.1: Hypothetical scenarios of females perpetrating emotional abuse were rated as more abusive by males than by females.

Hypothesis 5.2: Hypothetical scenarios of females perpetrating emotional abuse were rated as more justifiable by females than by males.

Hypothesis 5.3: Hypothetical scenarios of females perpetrating emotional abuse were reported as experienced more males than by females.

Hypothesis 5.4: Hypothetical scenarios of males perpetrating emotional abuse were rated as more abusive by females than by males.

Hypothesis 5.5: Hypothetical scenarios of males perpetrating emotional abuse were rated as more justifiable by males than by females.

Hypothesis 5.6: Hypothetical scenarios of males perpetrating emotional abuse were reported as experienced more by females than by males.

Method

272 individuals participated study. There were 180 women (66.2%) and 92 men (33.8%). Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 34 ($M = 21.98$, $SD = 3.59$). 231 participants (84.9%) were university students, whereas 41 participants (15.1%) were not.

Participants were asked to answer the following demographics questions: gender, gender of the partner, current relationship status, duration of the relationship, age, education level, student status, education level of their parents, relationship status of their parents, how many siblings, and income level. Two hypothetical scenarios were created by the researcher for each of the following situations encountered between couples in daily life: isolation, control, and hostile withdrawal. These dimensions were chosen based on the subdimensions of intimate partner violence in the study of Pickover et al. (2017). The two scenarios for each subdimension were created for male and female perpetrators and their partners interchangeably. To avoid response bias, the event flows were designed differently in scenarios of the same subdimension. However, the severity of abuse was kept constant in each subdimension. For each scenario, the participants were asked to rate on a 5-point Likert scale: 1) how much the perpetrator's behavior towards their partner is justified (ranging from 1 = *not right at all* to 5 = *extremely right*), 2) to what extent the perpetrator's behavior was abusive (ranging from 1 = *not abusive at all* to 5 = *extremely abusive*), and 3) whether they had experienced similar situations in their romantic relationship (ranging from 1 = *I never experienced it* to 5 = *I experienced it too much*).

In this study, to evaluate participants' attitudes towards emotional abuse, the Follingstad Psychological Aggression Scale was used, and the scale was adapted into Turkish. The categories measuring emotional abuse were as follows: “threats/intimidation; destabilizing perceptions of reality; isolation/monopolization; treatment as inferior; establishment of power through refusals; verbal abuse/criticism; jealousy/suspicion; monitoring/checking; rigid gender roles; control over personal behavior, withholding emotionally/physically; public embarrassment/humiliation; emotionally wounding

behavior around fidelity; lying/deception; guilt-induction/blaming; manipulation; and attacking attractiveness/sexuality. Mild, moderate, and severe items were created for each category. Fifty-one items were produced as a result, with three levels for each of the 17 categories” (Follingstad, 2005, p.30).

In this study, for each question, the participants were first asked to what extent they found this situation abusive and whether they had experienced it in their relationship. In this way, the aim was to ask whether participants evaluate the current situation as abuse and to what extent they are aware of their own experiences. Participants were given the option of responding to each question on the dimension of "psychological abuse" on a 9-point Likert scale from 1 to 9 (ranging from 1 = not abusive at all to 9 = extremely abusive). Furthermore, for the second part measuring participants' own experiences, they were asked to rate frequencies of related situations as; (0) Never experienced, (1) Once, (2) Twice, (3) 3-5 times, (4) 6-10 times, (5) 11-20 times, (6) More than 20 times.

In the original scale, for the level of psychological abuse that participants assigned to each item, the Cronbach alpha was .98. The mild, moderate, and severe items had corresponding Cronbach alphas of .92, .95, and .96. For the Turkish version, Cronbach alpha was .95 for the total scale. The mild, moderate, and severe items had corresponding Cronbach alphas of .86, .91, and .93. To adapt the scale into Turkish, the translation-back translation method was used. The scale was translated from English to Turkish by a psychologist and a non-psychologist. Then the two Turkish translations were compared with each other and combined by the author and her thesis advisor. A professional translator was then asked to translate the combined scale into English. A comparison was made between the scale from the translator and the original scale, and the final version was used.

Independent t test was applied to find out how individuals' attitudes towards emotional abuse in romantic relationships vary according to gender. Independent sample t- test was used to examine how attitudes and experience towards the total items of the FPAS scale varied, and also how attitudes and experience changed depending on gender in the mild, moderate and severe ratings of the scale. Since the severe items of the scale showed extreme scores outside the normal distribution, analysis was performed using non-parametric independent sample t-test, Mann-Whitney U test.

In the analysis of hypothetical scenarios, the scenarios were divided into two according to the gender of the perpetrator in the scenarios. Independent sample t test analysis was conducted to examine the effect of the perpetrator's gender on the participants' attitudes and experience. In the analysis of the scenarios, 1 individual was excluded from the analysis because participant stopped answering the questions.

RESULTS

To assess the symmetry and distribution characteristics of scores, measures of skewness and kurtosis were computed for both FPAS total scores and its items grouped by severity levels. An analysis of kurtosis revealed that all four item groups exhibited a leptokurtic distribution (George and Mallery, 2010). Given the normal distribution found in this study, a t-test analysis was performed to ascertain the differences in attitudes toward emotional abuse between male and female individuals. However, non-parametric test was applied since the extreme items of the FPAS scale were outside the normal distribution in normality distributions.

An independent samples t-test was performed to compare attitudes towards emotional abuse between males and females. The total scores of the FPAS scale and the total scores of the mild, moderate, and severe items were examined separately by grouping by gender. Female participants ($M = 384.62$, $SD = 56.5$) scored significantly higher on all FPAS items, $t(270) = 3.51$, $p = .001$, compared to male participants ($M = 357.70$, $SD = 65.92$). Female participants found all items of the FPAS scale in the survey more abusive than male participants. Moreover, female participants ($M = 115.44$, $SD = 20.09$) compared to male participants ($M = 107.89$, $SD = 25.97$) demonstrated significantly higher scores on mild level abusive FPAS items, $t(270) = 2.64$, $p = .018$. In addition, female participants ($M = 134.36$, $SD = 19.78$) compared to male participants ($M = 124.08$, $SD = 23.42$) demonstrated significantly higher scores on moderate level abusive FPAS items, $t(270) = 3.80$, $p = .006$. Furthermore, since the extreme items of the FPAS scale did not show a normal distribution, they were analyzed using the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test. Results indicated that female participants' scores had significantly higher scores on

extreme level on FPAS items than male participants, $U=6163.50$, $z= -3.45$, $p = .001$ and $n^2= 0.04$.

We also examined the differences in individuals' experiences in each category of the FPAS scale, but no statistically significant differences were found. There was no significant difference for experiencing emotional abuse, $t(270) = -1.94$, $p = .85$, between the scores of women ($M = 45.11$, $SD = 46.69$) and men ($M = 56.56$, $SD = 44.24$). Also, there was no significant difference for experiencing emotional abuse in mild level, $t(270) = -1.31$, $p = .32$, between the scores of women ($M = 18.63$, $SD = 17.42$) and men ($M = 21.44$, $SD = 15.03$). Furthermore, Also, there was no significant difference for experiencing emotional abuse in moderate level, $t(270) = -3.07$, $p = .36$, between the scores of women ($M = 14.30$, $SD = 16.29$) and men ($M = 20.75$, $SD = 16.49$). Additionally, there was no significant difference for experiencing emotional abuse in extreme level, $t(270) = -1.04$, $p = .90$, between the scores of women ($M = 12.18$, $SD = 15.76$) and men ($M = 14.36$, $SD = 17.53$).

The 92 male participants ($M = 4.84$, $SD = 2.41$) compared to the 179 female participants ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 1.45$) demonstrated statistically significant higher scores, $t(269) = -2.89$, $p = .000$. Therefore, in the scenarios where the female subject is the abuser, participants face this experience more in their relationships. However, in other categories, no statistically significant difference was found in the scores of male and female individuals depending on the gender of the abuser. There was no significant difference for abusiveness rate when perpetrator was female, $t(270) = 1.26$, $p = .26$, between the scores of women ($M = 7.52$, $SD = 2.33$) and men ($M = 7.15$, $SD = 2.21$). Also, when the perpetrator was female, there was no significant difference for justification of abusive behavior $t(270) = -.78$, $p = .56$, between the scores of women ($M = 7.17$, $SD = 2.47$) and men ($M = 7.20$, $SD = 2.20$). Furthermore, when the perpetrator was male there was no significant difference for abusiveness rate $t(270) = 3.99$, $p = .72$, between the scores of women ($M = 7.80$, $SD = 2.18$) and men ($M = 6.68$, $SD = 2.18$). Also, there was no significant difference for justification of abusive behavior $t(270) = -3.99$, $p = .56$, between the scores of women ($M = 6.79$, $SD = 2.30$) and men ($M = 7.97$, $SD = 2.32$).

Moreover, there was no significant difference for experiencing emotional abuse when perpetrator was male, $t(270) = -1.98, p = .25$, between the scores of women ($M = 4.39, SD = 1.75$) and men ($M = 4.87, SD = 2.12$).

DISCUSSION

First hypothesis of this study was that female participants' psychological aggression scale scores would be higher than male participants' scores, females would rate emotional abuse as more abusive than male participants. In this study, when the total scores of male and female individuals on the FPAS scale were examined, the results showed that female individuals found the given situations more abusive. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was supported. One of the possible reasons for this is that women are more sensitive to emotional violence because they are more exposed to it (Follingstad et al., 1990). Additionally, male individuals are more violent actors and they have normalized their abusive behaviors compared to female individuals because of traditional gender roles (Paul and Galloway, 1994). In this study, when mild-scale emotional abuse items were evaluated, the results indicated that the attitudes towards emotional abuse perceived by male and female individuals in romantic relationships were statistically different. Female participants' scores were statistically higher than male participants. In the current study, when the attitude toward moderate-level emotional abuse was examined, the results showed that the scores of female individuals were higher than those of male individuals. Female participants' ratings of extreme degree of emotional abuse were statistically higher than males' ratings; therefore, the results obtained are parallel to the research in the existing literature. Determining individuals' implicit attitudes is essential in terms of "evaluating their own behavioral tendencies or their ability to normalize or oppose other people's behavior" (Gracia and Tomás, 2014, p. 26) One potential explanation for this result could be that the "higher endorsement of such violence among younger boys might stem from their limited exposure to the progressive influence of education, alternatively, it could indicate shifts in attitudes or characteristics, such as empathy, sensitivity, and moral consciousness" (p.132). Another possibility could relate to a culture that is sexist or homophobic, wherein boys may feel pressured to conform to acceptance or tolerance

of violence against women, including Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), to gain approval among their peers. (Flood and Pease, 2009).

In this study, there was no statistically significant difference between males and females experiencing emotional abuse in their romantic relationships. In other words, both female and male individuals stated that they experienced emotional abuse by their partners in their relationships, and this experience did not vary depending on gender. This result contradicted with results other studies. From a feminist perspective, women are subjected to a significantly higher degree of emotional abuse than men (Lammers et al., 2005). In parallel, research findings supported that women are subjected to emotional abuse through the controlling behaviors and motivations of male individuals (Follingstad et al., 1991; Lammers, 2005), and this is related to traditional gender roles, as well (Diekman and Eagly, 2008).

In this study, it was hypothesized that female individuals experienced more abuse than males at mild, moderate and severe levels, but this was not statistically confirmed. These results parallel with another current research. Research stated that due to the power imbalance caused by physical strength differences, women may engage in emotional abuse towards men to protect or defend themselves against the physical or verbal violence they experience; these findings suggested that women and men experience emotional abuse from their partners nearly equal proportions (Stockdale et al., 2013). Also, when examining the literature on emotional abuse, it is evident that there is no consensus regarding the scores of both male and female individuals in terms of experiencing or perpetrating abuse towards their partners.

In this study, the extent to which the gender of the perpetrator of emotional abuse influenced the attitudes and experiences of male and female individuals was measured through hypothetical scenarios. Hypothesis 5.1 was that hypothetical scenarios of females perpetrating emotional abuse were rated as more **abusive** by males than by females. The results showed no statistically significant difference between males and females. Hypothesis 5.2 of this study is that hypothetical scenarios of females perpetrating emotional abuse were rated as more **justifiable** by females than by males. There was no statistically significant difference between males and females. Hypothesis 5.3 was that

hypothetical scenarios of females perpetrating emotional abuse were reported as **experienced** more males than by females. There was a statistically significance between the scores of males and female. In other words, males stated that they experienced more female perpetrator situations in their relationships more than women did. One of the possible reasons for this finding is that mild emotional abuse was intended to be measured with the scenarios. The current study shows that due to the power inequality between men and women, women may engage in mild-level emotionally abusive behavior towards their partners to express their anger or protect themselves (Leising, 2013). This explains why male individuals in the current sample reported experiencing this situation more frequently. Hypothesis 5.4 was that hypothetical scenarios of males perpetrating emotional abuse were rated as more **abusive** by females than by males. There was no statistically significant difference between the scores of males and females. Hypothesis 5.5 was that hypothetical scenarios of males perpetrating emotional abuse were rated as more **justifiable** by males than by females. There was no statistically significant difference between the scores of males and females. Hypothesis 5.6 was that hypothetical scenarios of males perpetrating emotional abuse were reported as **experienced** more by females than by males. There was no statistically significant difference between the scores of males and females. These results show that the attitudes of both women and men towards mild emotional abuse in their relationships are not statistically different from each other in terms of perpetrator's gender. One of the possible reasons for this result may be that when abuse in relationships is difficult to see, it is also difficult to identify. And it supports the idea that individuals are subjected to considerable emotional abuse without even realizing it. On the other hand, although the motivations for emotional abuse that men and women inflict on each other are different (Follingstad et al., 1991; Campbell, 1996), it can be associated with the fact that emotional abuse is quite common in relationships (Follingstad and Rogers, 2011). In fact, the fact that there is no statistical difference depending on gender in the attitudes towards mild-grade emotional abuse in daily life, which is aimed to be measured with scenarios, can be explained by the fact that people do not see their experiences with their partners as abuse and normalize the relevant behaviors. In this context, it can be thought that emotional

abuse behaviors experienced in mild romantic relationships are not called abuse and perhaps individuals experience these behaviors without being aware of it.

One of the limitations of this study was the length of the questions. Due to the lengthy survey given to the participants, they likely experienced fatigue. Another limitation is the use of self-report data. It is believed that the social desirability effect influences the results. Furthermore, using "abuse" in the scales and scenarios may have also affected the research results. The use of this term may have influenced individuals' evaluations of abuse, either due to its association with more overt situations or its societal linkage with physical violence. Additionally, the validity of the FPAS scale in Turkish adaptation was not examined. Additionally, only individuals who identified themselves as heterosexual were included in the study, and the measurement of abuse experienced in romantic relationships by non-binary individuals was not assessed. Therefore, conducting studies in this context would be beneficial. Furthermore, in future research, gathering data from partners would be more beneficial, and it would be helpful to examine whether emotional abuse in a relationship is perceived as abuse by both male and female partners or to what extent it is evaluated as abuse. and frequencies of emotional abuse experienced in romantic relationships among individuals from different age groups would be beneficial.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we determined how attitudes towards emotional abuse in romantic relationships vary from a gender perspective. We also determined the frequency of emotional abuse experienced by people's partners in their relationships and its relationship on attitudes. Since emotional abuse measurement tools are limited, we adapted the FPAS scale to Turkish. According to the results of the study, we found significant differences between women's attitudes towards emotional abuse and men's attitudes. On the other hand, we did not find a significant difference in terms of exposure to emotional abuse in relationships. When we looked at the relationship between hypothetical scenarios and attitudes towards mild emotional abuse in daily life and the gender of the abuser, we could not find a significant difference. However, we found an

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experientially significant difference when the abuser was a woman. With this study, we aimed to better understand emotional abuse in romantic relationships, both attitudinally and experientially. We recommend that future studies collect data from partners.

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