

THE FREQUENCY OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN YOUNG WOMEN AND THE EFFECT OF THEIR LEVELS ON THE EMOTIONAL THEMES OF SHAME AND GUILT

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ABSTRACT

Background and Aim: The objective was to determine the frequency of intimate partner violence (IPV) and sexual violence (SV) perpetrated by anyone in young women and the distribution of violence according to its types. **Materials and Methods:** We used a simple random method to select 270 female students attending a university in Ankara, Turkey. The research form consisted the Severity of Violence Against Women Scale (SVAW), the Sexual Experiences Survey–Victimization Version (SES–VV), and the Personal Feelings Questionnaire–2 (PFQ–2). **Results:** The results show that 56.8% of the participants were exposed to psychological, physical, or sexual IPV or SV; 51.5% of the participants were exposed to IPV; 15.4% of the participants were exposed to SV perpetrated by anyone after the age of 14; and 10.1% of the participants were exposed to both IPV and SV by anyone. **Conclusion:** Young women have a very high incidence rate both for IPV and SV. The shame and guilt scores of the young women who experienced violence are higher than those who did not. The guilt scores of those who experienced psychological IPV are significantly higher for all levels of psychological violence.

KEYWORDS: Sexual violence; Intimate partner violence; young adult; women; shame; guilt.

INTRODUCTION

Violence is defined as any situation that arises due to physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse, controlling behavior, etc., and leads or has the potential to lead to injury, death, and psychological damage.^[1] Violence against women is a violation of human rights in a pandemic dimension. It seriously violates or practically invalidates women's human rights, including basic rights such as life, security, freedom, dignity, and the right to physical and emotional health.^[2]

In Turkey, 44% of women have been exposed to psychological violence, 36% to physical violence, 30% to economic violence, and 12% to sexual violence (SV) at one time in their lives. And 38% of women have experienced physical violence, SV, or both.^[2,3] This shows that SV is experienced along with physical violence. Previous research has demonstrated that women generally do not / cannot share their violent experience with anyone. The thinking is that being

subjected to violence is shameful for the women and this only happened to them may cause to struggle against violence on their own.^[4]

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines SV as “an attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual conversations, taking advantage of someone for sexual purposes, compulsory sanctions towards the sexuality of a person at home or office, regardless the quality of the relationship between the victim and offender”.^[5] Physical violence is defined as any kind of assault that damages the physical integrity of someone else and makes him/her suffer.^[3] Family violence expresses violence against a relative. Intimate partner violence (IPV) is defined as any sexual assault, physical violence, or emotional maltreatment within the context of a dating relationship.^[6]

According to data from 2013, women exposed to violence become depressed almost twice as much as those who are not.^[5] 35% of women around the world are

exposed to physical and/or SV by their partners (spouse or someone they live with) or by someone who is not their partner, and the women exposed to physical or SV by their partners face many health problems.

Teenagers are thought to be at increased risk of violence in a dating relationship because they are in transition from childhood to adulthood and are relatively inexperienced in bilateral relations.^[7] IPV may leave short-term physical traces of abuse on the individuals in a couple and have some long-term consequences that would negatively affect self-confidence and self-worth development of a person. Violent experiences among spouses may have negative consequences for both the parties involved and the society as a whole.^[8] Thus, violence should not be seen as just a health problem but also a significant health risk factor.

Previous research on the subject shows that partner violence in adolescence causes injuries, substance abuse, depression, sexually transmitted infections, and conflicts in close relationships. It has been shown that young people who are subjected to violence are more likely to experience problems, such as lower school performance, than those who are not.^[8]

The role of the fear and anxiety, as well as shame, guilt, anger, and sadness have been recognized in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).^[9,11] These emotional states may shape PTSD symptoms and the need for its treatment.^[10,11] Shame and guilt emotions are very close to each other. Shame is a feeling about one's self where a person has intense and painful feelings of worthless and inadequacy, and needs the evaluation of others; additionally, behaviors such as hiding and escaping are prominently experienced. On the other hand, guilt is a feeling where a negative self-evaluation on the behaviors, tension, sorrow, regret emotions are seen and an emphasis is made on the effect of the current situation on others and as a consequence, apologizing and confessing are more likely to happen.^[12,13]

The objective was to determine the frequency of IPV, the distribution of that violence according to psychological, physical, and SV types; the frequency of exposure to SV perpetrated by anyone after the age of 14 in female university students. We aimed to compare the self-consciousness emotional themes of shame and guilt, between young women who experienced IPV and non-partner SV and those who have not.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the biostatistics pre-assessment, the prevalence of SV in Turkey and other countries was taken as 10% and the sample size was calculated as 247, in order to reach this prevalence at a 95% confidence interval by predicting that there may be 10% participation rejection with a sensitivity of $\pm 3.0\%$.

Two hundred and seventy female students were randomly selected by lot from a total of 4,996 female students enrolled at a university in Ankara, Turkey. All 270 female students were reached by phone and provided with information about the study. The participants were invited to the campus health center to fill in the research questionnaire or provided the opportunity to make an appointment at any campus building they saw appropriate to have it administered by the investigators. The participants self-administered the questionnaire. Of the students selected for the research, 43 (15.9%) refused to participate in the study either at the first contact or at the time of administering the questionnaire. The analyses were completed with data from the 227 female students (84.1%) who participated in the research. The participants signed our volunteer consent form.

The research questionnaire was composed of questions on the sociodemographic characteristics prepared by the investigators from the Turkish version of the Severity of Violence Against Women Scale (SVAW) that measures psychological, physical, and SV during partnership; the Turkish version of the Sexual Experiences Survey – Victimization Version (SES–VV) towards SV perpetrated by anyone; and the Turkish version of the Personal Feelings Questionnaire-2 (PFQ–2) that measures self-consciousness emotional themes.

Turkish version of the SES–VV is a 11-item measurement tool with established validity and reliability (Cronbach Alpha=0.738) for investigating four types of SV: rape, sexual contact, sexual coercion, attempted rape.^[14,16] The Turkish version of the SVAW is a 46-question scale with 4-point Likert-type answers, with established validity and reliability (Cronbach Alpha=0.979) for evaluating IPV against women with during close relationship as three basic dimensions under psychological, physical, and SV titles.^[16,19]

PFQ-2 is a scale that was developed to make a quantitative evaluation for differentiating the feelings of shame and guilt. PFQ-2, which is an expansion of the PFQ, consists of 10 shame- and 6 guilt-related affective descriptors (e.g., for guilt, intense guilt, regret, remorse, worry about hurting or injuring another; for shame, embarrassment, feeling ridiculous, feeling childish, feeling disgusting to others).^[20,22] PFQ-2 is a scale with established validity and reliability adapted to Turkish (Cronbach Alpha= 0.949).^[23]

Normal distributions were measured with the Kolmogorow-Smirnow and Shapiro-Wilk tests and variance homogeneity was measured with the Levene test. The averages were compared with the Mann-Whitney U test. Values of $p < 0.05$ were considered as statistically meaningful. Analyses were performed with IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 22.0. Armonk, NY: IBM Corp.

RESULTS

The results were as follows: the average age of the participants was 21.3 ± 1.8 ; 19.8% of the participants were in their first year at the university and 23.8% were in their 4th year.; 57.3% of participants were living with their families and 75.8% of those families were the nuclear type; participants whose mother or father had graduated from a university were 39.6% and 51.5%, respectively; the rate of employment for those mothers and fathers were 31.7% and 72.2%, respectively; A total of 75.8% of the participants had middle income level; 3.5% of the participants were actively working; 27.8% of the participants smoked cigarettes; 28.6% had consumed alcohol; and no participants were a drug users. Additionally, 54.2% of participants had gone on a date and among those 48.8% smoked cigarettes, 43.9% had consumed alcohol, and 2.5% were drug users (Table 1).

The results also showed that 56.8% of the participants ($n=129$) were exposed to psychological, physical or sexual IPV or SV perpetrated by anyone; 51.5% of the participants ($n=117$) were exposed to IPV; 15.4% ($n=35$) were exposed to SV perpetrated by anyone after the age of 14; and 10.1% of the participants ($n=23$) were exposed both to IPV and SV perpetrated by anyone after the age of 14.

The data analyses also found that 29.1% of the psychological IPV was determined to be symbolic threat, 42.3% was a mild threat, 17.2% was a moderate threat, and 21.6% was serious threat; 15.9% of the physical IPV was determined to be mild, 19.8% was minor, 6.2% was moderate and 4.8% was serious; and sexual partner violence was determined to be 9.3%. According to the SVAW scale, Acts of serious violence (kicked you; hit you with an object; stomped on you; choked you; punched you; burned you with something; used a club-like object on you; beat you; used a knife or gun on you) and Acts of moderate violence (slapped you with the palm of his hand; slapped you with the back of his hand; slapped you around the face and head) were experienced more than once compared to others (16.2% and 14.3%, respectively) (Table 2).

The results show that 13.7% of the participants were exposed to unwanted sexual contact after the age of 14, 2.2% of the participants were exposed to sexual coercion, 5.7% were exposed to attempted rape, and 5.7% were raped. When the average episode numbers are calculated for each type of sexual victimization, the average was determined to be 1.7 (SD 0.8) times for sexual contact, 1.0 (SD 0.0) times for coercive relations, 1.3 (SD 0.5) times for attempted rape, and 1.3 (SD 0.5) times for rape. Episode numbers for the last year were 1.5 (SD 0.8) times for sexual contact, 0.6 (SD 0.5) times for sexual coercion, 0.7 (SD 0.8) times for attempted rape, and 0.4 (SD 0.8) times for rape (Table 3).

Both shame and guilt subdomain scores in young women who experienced threats of moderate violence by their

partner (destroyed something belonging to you; threatened to harm and damage things you care about; threatened to destroy property; threatened someone you care about) and threats of serious violence (threatened to hurt you; threatened to kill himself; threatened you with a club-like object; threatened you with a knife or gun; threatened to kill you; threatened you with a weapon; acted like he wanted to kill you) were found to be significantly higher than those who did not experience any violence. No significant difference was found in the shame subdomain for the other categories of partner violence (Table 4) (Figure 1). Shame scores in young women who experienced SV perpetrated by anyone after the age of 14 were higher than those who did not experience violence in any of the SV types, but the difference was significantly higher in young women who only experienced rape (19.1 vs 15.0; $p=0.008$)

The guilt subdomain score in young women who experienced symbolic violence by partner (hit or kicked a wall, door, or furniture; threw, smashed, or broke an object; drove dangerously with you in the car; threw an object at you), threats of mild violence (shook a finger at you; made threatening gestures or faces at you; shook a fist at you; acted like a bully to you), and acts of mild violence (held you down; held you in a fixed position; pushed or shoved you; shook or roughly handled you; grabbed you suddenly or forcefully) was significantly higher than those who didn't experience any violence. No significant difference was found in the Guilt subdomain for the other categories of partner violence (Table 4) (Figure 1).

According to SES-VV, the guilt subdomain score was found to be significantly higher in young women who experienced SV as sexual contact or rape than those who did not have an SV history. However, the guilt subdomain score was not higher in these women than those who experienced other SV categories. Thus, the guilt score of 13.4 for sexual coercion was higher than the guilt score of 11.4 for sexual contact (Table 4) (Figure 1).

DISCUSSION

One in four women who were exposed to violence, first experienced violence by partner in adolescence (6,24). In the United States, 26.1% of the adolescents were exposed to psychological violence and 11.9% to physical violence during their current partnership.^[25] In Spain, a rate of 20.0% was found for the 18 to 30 age group, and in 46% both physical and psychological violence existed.^[26] In a research on partner violence among Japanese university students, 47.8% of the participants expressed that they experienced physical, verbal, and sexual harassment by their partners at least one time.^[27] In other countries, prevalence of partner violence for both sexes were reported as 94.6% in Iran, 77.7% in Mexico, 62.3% in Israel, and 57.5% in Greece.^[28] We determined that 56.8% of the female students that participated to our study were exposed to psychological,

physical, or SV by their partners. In previous studies on partner violence in university students in Turkey, rates ranging from 28.6% to 73.9% were reported.^[29,31] In Demir *et al.*'s study, which detected the highest rate among other studies, 74.7% of the university studies expressed having experienced emotional violence, 26.3% verbal violence, 15.1% physical violence, and 5.4% SV.^[31] In our study, the highest rate was reported for partner SV at a rate of 9.3%. In Yigitalp *et al.*'s study, it was determined that 6.2% of the female students experienced physical violence within the last 15 days. In the same study, rape and violence in the form of molestation were reported at the rates of 1.2% and 4.5%, respectively.^[32] In Turkey, it was recorded that the causes of the shelter applications made to the Women Center Foundation (KAMER) in 2015–16 were SV at 40%, and 80% of the behaviors involving SV were rape.^[33] In our study, the rate of SV experienced in university students after the age of 14 was 15.4%, and it was determined that 40% of that was rape and 40% attempt to rape, according to the SES–VV scale. The rate of rape was much higher in our study than it was in Yigitalp *et al.*'s study.^[32] at a rate of 5.7%.

Like domestic violence, partner violence is a type of violence experienced between people without foreign intervention and generally kept as a secret. Thus, the effects and dimensions of partner violence cannot be precisely determined.

It is difficult to measure the damage of violence, especially SV, in relation to health. Violence can lead to the development of serious health problems, including risky sexual behavior, unwanted pregnancy, sexual dysfunctions, sexually transmitted diseases, use of substances harmful to health, sleep disorders, eating disorders, PTSD, depression, and suicidal ideas.^[34] In addition, victims may show feelings of self-embarrassment, rejection of their own body, fear, insecurity, and hatred.

Violence during youth is a very serious problem, especially as romantic relationships begin to develop and bilateral relations are learned and transmitted to adulthood. Sexual violence and all other types of violence against women can cause psychological breakdowns that can make it difficult for a woman to recover. In women, violence leads to loss of self-respect and self-confidence.

In our study, we investigated the effects of being exposed to partner violence and non-partner violence on the self-consciousness emotions shame and guilt. Even though the scores of female students who experienced sexual partner violence are higher in both emotional themes than those who did not, we could not find a significant difference. Both the shame and guilt subdomain showed significantly higher scores for SV rape perpetrated by anyone, and the guilt score was significantly higher for sexual contact perpetrated by

anyone. We determined that all types of partner psychological violence and mild and moderate physical violence have significant effects on the emotional themes in question. All types of partner psychological violence showed significantly higher guilt scores in young women. Partner mild and moderate physical violence also had significantly higher scores, but no significant difference was found in other types of partner physical violence.

Shame is a feeling where a person feels an intense and painful sense of worthlessness and inadequacy, and needs the evaluation of others; additionally, behaviors of hiding and escaping are prominently experienced. On the other hand, guilt is a feeling where a person makes negative evaluations on the behaviors, less painful, tension, sorrow, regret emotions are seen and an emphasis is made on the effect of the current situation on others and as a consequence, apologizing and confessing are more likely to happen.^[12,13] The experience of shame, which causes an individual to lose self-respect in the eyes of herself and others, evokes the desire to hide and disappear.^[12,13,35] As previously emphasized, women can experience the feeling of shame that targets themselves as a result of violent behavior.^[36]

In Beck *et al.*'s study, it was stated that PTSD caused by partner violence may be associated with shame but not guilt.^[36] In Robinaugh & McNally's study, a similar result was reported for post-trauma guilt.^[10] People who are subjected to violence may feel that they could not do anything to prevent bad events during violence. They may think that they lost all control over their feelings, body, physical security, or life. After the trauma, people rethink what happened and question whether they could have done something different to change the course of events. Many people blame themselves for doing or not doing certain things or think they could have acted differently. The feeling of guilt arises after traumatic experiences and makes a person feel inadequate.^[37,38]

It is known that traumatic experiences cause an increase in guilt feelings due to trauma and an increase in level of guilt due to trauma.^[10,39,40] In Guler *et al.*'s study, it was shown that 43% of women think that domestic violence causes guilty feelings. Women see themselves as responsible for the domestic violence and assume the responsibility of the attacker.^[41]

According to the findings of the study, the levels of guilt in young women who were exposed to partner psychological, and mild and moderate physical violence, were found to be higher than women who were not exposed to violence. In this view, it can be said that partner violence causes an increase in the feeling of guilt. An increase in the feeling of shame was determined in moderate and serious levels of partner psychological violence. An increase in both the feelings of shame and guilt for rape perpetrated by anyone was also observed, and according to this, a significant increase was

determined only in the feelings of guilt for mild sexual contact.

Highlights	
•	According to the self-reports analyzed in the study, 51.5% of the participants were exposed to partner violence.
•	The rate of sexual partner violence was determined to be 9.3%.
•	After the age of 14, 15.4% of the participants were exposed to sexual violence perpetrated by anyone.
•	Forty percent of the sexual violence was experienced as rape and 40% as attempted rape.
•	The shame and guilt scores of the participants who experienced violence are higher than those who did not.

Table 1: Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Participants.

Demographic Characteristics	n (%)
Year at the university	
1	45 (19.8)
2	52 (22.9)
3	51 (22.5)
4	54 (23.8)
≥5	25 (11.0)
Current Living Place	
With Family	130 (57.3)
In Dorm	57 (25.1)
At Home With Friend	29 (12.8)
At Home Alone	11 (4.8)
Family Type	
Nuclear Family	172 (75.8)
Extended Family	43 (18.9)
Broken Family	12 (5.3)
Mother's Education	
Primary-Secondary School	55 (24.2)
High School	82 (36.1)
University	90 (39.6)
Father's Education	
Primary-Secondary School	55 (24.2)
High School	55 (24.2)
University	117 (51.5)
Working Condition of the Mother-Father	
Mother is Working	72 (31.7)
Father is Working	164 (72.2)
Income Level	
Low	9 (4.0)
Middle	172 (75.8)
High	46 (20.3)
Working Condition	
Yes	8 (3.5)
Bad habits	
Smoking	63 (27.8)
Alcohol	65 (28.6)
Relationship status	
Has a Date	123 (54.2)
Date Smoking	60 (48.8)
Date Alcohol	54 (43.9)
Date Drugs	3 (2.5)

Table 2: Experience of Physical Violence During Partnership Described in Nine Categories (SVAW Scale) among young women.

Category	N	Mean	SD	Never*	Once*	a few	Many Times*
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				%	%	times* %	%
Symbolic violence (four items)	66	7.7	2.4	46.6	22.7	21.6	9.1
Threats of mild violence (four items)	96	6.8	2.3	56.0	23.7	14.6	5.7
Threats of moderate violence (four items)	39	6.8	1.8	53.8	30.1	9.0	7.1
Threats of serious violence (seven items)	49	9.9	2.9	76.4	11.1	7.8	4.7
Acts of mild violence (four items)	36	6.7	2.3	57.6	27.8	7.7	6.9
Acts of minor violence (five items)	45	8.0	3.0	65.8	15.1	13.3	5.8
Acts of moderate violence (three items)	14	5.5	2.8	45.2	40.5	0.0	14.3
Acts of serious violence (nine items)	11	14.8	9.0	66.7	12.1	2.0	16.2
Acts of sexual violence (six items)	21	9.1	3.1	67.5	19.0	8.8	4.7

*%=mean percentage for the items calculated in each category. SD: standard deviation, SVAWS: the Severity of Violence Against Women Scale

Table 3: The Distribution of the Experience of Sexual Violence Perpetrated by Anyone into Four Categories.

Category	%	After the age 14 Number (SD)	Last year Number (SD)
Sexual contact	13.7	1.7 (0.8)	1.5 (0.8)
Sexual coercion	2.2	1.0 (0.0)	0.6 (0.5)
Attempted rape	5.7	1.3 (0.5)	0.7 (0.8)
Rape	5.7	1.3 (0.5)	0.4 (0.8)

SD: standard deviation

Table 4: Shame and Guilt Subdomain Scores of the Participants According to the Violence Types They Experienced.

Category	Shame			Guilt			
	Mean (SD)	Z	p-value	Mean (SD)	Z	p-value	
Not experienced any violence	15.0 (5.4)			9.2 (3.9)			
Partner violence							
Psychological	Symbolic violence	15.9 (4.2)	-1.209	0.227	11,5 (3.5)	-3.604	0.000
	Threats of mild violence	15.9 (4.6)	-1.518	0.129	10,4 (3.6)	-2.216	0.027
	Threats of moderate violence	17.5 (4.2)	-2.824	0.005	11,5 (3.6)	-2.813	0.005
	Threats of serious violence	17.8 (4.4)	-3.411	0.001	11,4 (3.6)	-3.122	0.002
Physical	Acts of mild violence	16.3 (5.8)	-1.281	0.200	10,8 (4.0)	-2.585	0.010
	Acts of minor violence	15.0 (5.8)	-0.131	0.896	10,2 (4.4)	-0.990	0.322
	Acts of moderate violence	15.7 (6.2)	-1.077	0.282	12,1 (4.7)	-2.035	0.042
	Acts of serious violence	16.3 (4.5)	-0.823	0.410	12,2 (4.4)	-1.865	0.062
Sexual	Acts of sexual violence	15.1 (5.6)	-0.241	0.809	10,0 (4.0)	-1.325	0.185
Anyone Sexual Violence							
Sexual	Sexual contact	15.2 (4.5)	-0.172	0.864	11.4 (4.6)	-2.590	0.010
	Sexual coercion	17.6 (6.0)	-0.955	0.340	13.4 (4.9)	-1.703	0.089
	Attempted rape	15.9 (4.3)	-0.442	0.658	11.3 (4.2)	-1.431	0.152
	Rape	19.1 (5.0)	-2.642	0.008	12.9 (3.7)	-2.963	0.003

SD: standard deviation

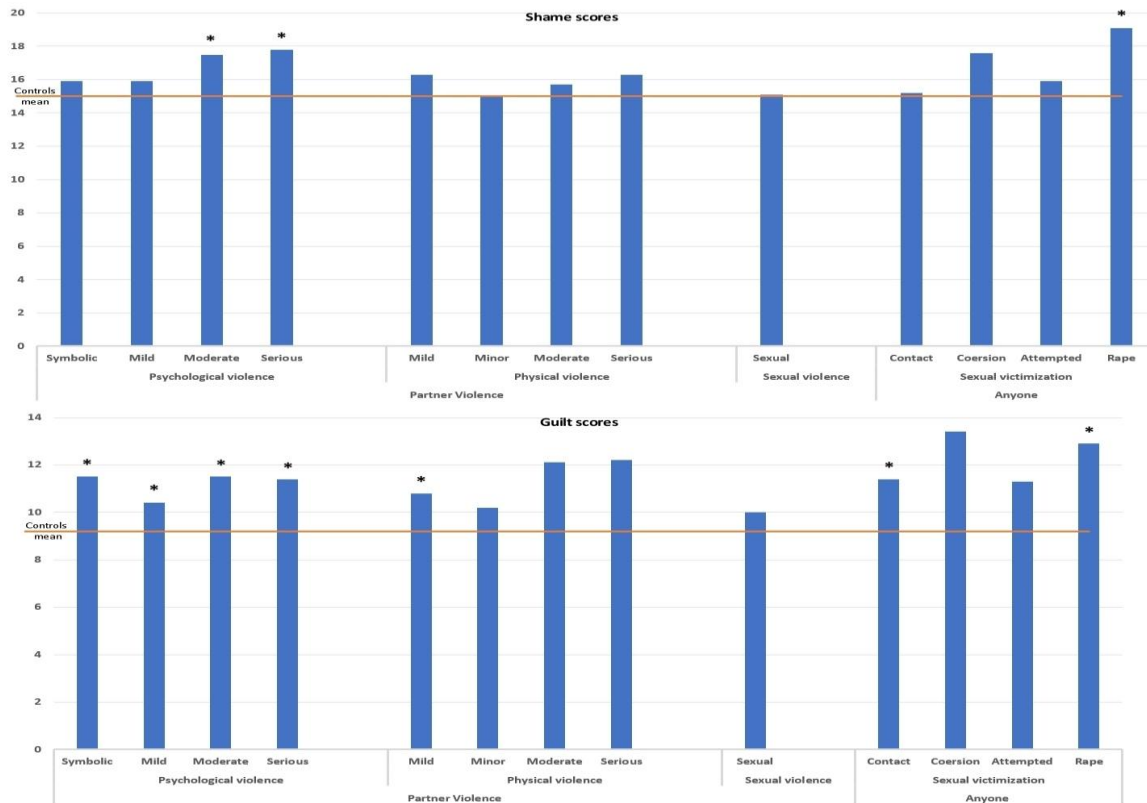


Figure 1 The Comparison of the Shame and Guilt Subdomain Scores of the Participants According to the Violence types they experienced With the Average Scores of the Young Girls Who did not Experience Vio.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we investigated partner violence, the frequency of SV perpetrated by anyone, and the repetition of violence after the age of 14 in female students at university in Ankara, Turkey. We tried to observe the effects of violence on the self-consciousness emotional themes of shame and guilt which are considered prevalent and prominent symptoms in PTSD patients. We aimed to reveal the situation of the emotional themes of shame and guilt in young women in Turkey.

Shame and guilt scores of the women who experienced violence were higher than those who did not. Guilt scores of those who experienced psychological partner violence were significantly higher for all levels of psychological violence. Moderate and serious psychological partner violence and SV in the form of rape caused a significant increase in feeling of shame.

To understand the post-traumatic psychological symptoms seen in young women who experienced violence, and to determine the best ways to support and treat these patients, we must discover the emotional themes caused by violence. It is clear that more comprehensive assessments on the psychological symptoms of the victims of violence, especially in Turkish women, will provide an important framework for psychosocial support.

It is necessary to change the view of women towards violence and provide them with information from various sources that violence is unacceptable under any circumstances. This information may have a protective qualification for many psychological problems that can be observed, by replacing emotional themes with antidotes.

Conflict of Interest: None.

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