

# JOURNAL OF AWARENESS

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Open Access Electronic Journal

Uluslararası Hakemli ve Açık  
Erişimli Elektronik Dergi

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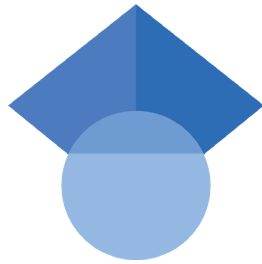
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# ABSTRACTING & INDEXING DİZİN & İNDEKS



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From the Editor

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to this issue that you will witness that cyber violence is addressed as an important problem. This volume is focusing on the complexity of our age and the new challenges brought by technological progress.

Technological advancements have increased communication and interaction across the globe, but have also brought with them a number of risks that threaten security in cyberspace. This issue focuses on the dynamics behind the emergence of cyber violence as a growing problem and its implications at national and global levels.

Cyber violence is behaviour that may harm the physical or emotional health of the victim. These behaviours include threats, harassment, insults, hate speech, defamation, accessing and sharing personal information, etc.

Cyber violence is a threat that deeply affects not only individuals but also societies. Attacks on the Internet not only violate personal privacy, but can also seriously undermine individual security. Especially at this point, it should be noted that children are very vulnerable groups. Therefore, I would like to emphasise how important it is to make national and global efforts to understand and prevent various forms of cyber violence.

In this issue of the journal, you will have the opportunity to review the latest research by academics, experts and graduate students on the origins, types, effects, consequences and the conceptual, psychological and legal framework of cyber violence which have been presented in V. International Understanding Violence Congress.

Please remember that cyber violence is a rapidly evolving threat. Therefore, we call for a concerted effort to tackle this problem, emphasising the importance of information sharing and cooperation of different actors such as lawyers, decision makers, psychologists, health workers, scientists etc. A secure digital future can be built with the joint efforts of all actors, scientific studies that contribute to the field and the use of these studies in a way that will affect life.

Yours sincerely,

**Prof. Dr. Oğuz Polat**

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**HOLISTENCE**  
publications

*Bu sayfa dizgiden dolayı boş bırakılmıştır*

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RESEARCH ARTICLE/ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ

# Cyber dating violence- a case report

Neslim Güvendeğer Doksat 

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** Cyber dating violence includes both the state of the victim to be harmed by threats, the dissemination of confidential information under the name of cyber violence, and the harassment of controlling the social relations of the victims, called cyber control, by constantly checking what they are doing on social media at any time. In the face of this type of violence that goes beyond spatial and geographical boundaries, the well-being of the victims is adversely affected because they consider the situation to be unresolved.

**Method:** In this case report, a 13-year-old girl who has been exposed to cyber dating violence will be mentioned.

**Findings:** After 3 months of virtual friendship with a 17-year-old man, whom this adolescent met on the computer games, she started to send him nude photos, they had virtual sex during the video call, the man guided her and offered to be a husband and wife with her during virtuel sex. It has been learned that she inserted a pen in front of the screen through his genitals and it hurt a lot. In the following days, they communicated to meet outside, the boy persuaded the teenage girl to take her home to introduce her to his family. The girl's family who followed them on their suspicions intervned in the situation, it became clear that they were faced with gang members. It has been revealed that throughout the time they communicated, the gang has collected a lot of data about the family's income level over the internet and social media and asked the girl's family for money through blackmail.

In conclusion; with the legal complaint of the family, the gang members received legal punishment and the adolescent girl was taken to psychiatric treatment with the diagnosis of "post-traumatic stress disorder".

**Keywords:** Cyber dating, violence, child abuse

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the widespread use of digital technologies has led to the emergence of online victims related to cyber dating. Cyber dating violence is also associated with other bullying behaviors, and its harmful effects are more pronounced in females (Miller, et al., 2018).

Many adolescents use the internet to socialize, initiate social relationships through virtual networks, initiate romantic relationships, and maintain communication with their peers and lovers. This trend has been increasing recently. The widespread internet use not only makes life easier but also increases harassment, controlling and abusive behaviors since it stretches interpersonal boundaries (Galende, et al., 2020), and dating violence plays a mediating role in committing crimes (Cava, et al., 2020a).

Cyber dating violence is defined as repetitive controlling, harassing or damaging behaviors toward a current or former lover, and it includes frequently visiting the person's profile on social networks, sending offending or threatening messages, spreading negative information about the person, stealing or abusing one's social media passwords (Galende, et al., 2020).

Cyber dating violence can also lead to a range of harmful consequences, ranging from demanding obscene photographs from the other party to acts of sexual oppression and coercion (Muñoz-Fernández, et al., 2023). In recent years, sextortion acts, which take place in online sessions in the form of threatening the other person to share sexual images and forcing the victim to share more sexual images for sexual or other purposes, pose a serious threat to youth.

It has been reported that sexual harassment victimizations lead to serious consequences, which is often associated with adolescent dating violence (Wolak et al. 2018). The study by Wolak et al. (2018), one of the studies on this subject, reported that 60% of underage youth knew the perpetrators at the time they were exposed to sexual harassment, and they often defined these people as their romantic relationship partners. Most of them (75%) stated that they sent their

pictures voluntarily, while 67% reported that they felt pressured to send these pictures. It was indicated that one-third of these individuals were physically threatened and stayed under threat for more than 6 months, half did not disclose the event, and very few reported the situation to the police. Furthermore, it was argued that underage victims were subjected to increased pressure by their aggressive flirts or sexual partners to initially send sexually explicit pictures, were repeatedly asked for pictures, were exposed to threats for more than six months, and were encouraged to harm themselves (Wolak, et al., 2018).

Cyber dating violence is becoming increasingly problematic. The increase in technological communication involved in adolescents' romantic relationships increases the possibility of mutual attachment due to easy accessibility (Cava, et al., 2020b). The fact that males and females become cyber control victims is rather related to their partners' high levels of anxious attachment. Females' committing cyber control crime is associated with high levels of anxious attachment, both for themselves and their partners. It was suggested that males' committing cyber control crimes was related to the increase in their anxious attachment level rather than their partners (Laforte, et al., 2023). According to another study on this subject, it was argued that anxious attachment was related to psychological cyber dating violence, stalking victimization and perpetration. It was reported that avoidant attachment was associated with both psychological cyber dating violence victimization and perpetration and sexual cyber dating violence victimization. The youth usually tend to view control, cyber stalking, and harassment behaviors as evidence of love rather than cyber dating violence (Fernet, et al., 2023).

In adolescents, the frequency of victimization due to cyber dating violence was stated as 12-56% (Stonard, et al., 2014). A study evaluating the rates of perpetration and victimization of cyber dating crime in adolescents separately reported the frequency of victimization as 12-56% and the rate of perpetration as 12-54% (Stonard, et al., 2017). This type of dating violence is defined as

being controlled, harassed, threatened, stalked, and harassed by current or former lovers through technology and social media (Cava, et al., 2020b).

Studies argue that cyber dating violence is associated with increased rates of depression and anxiety in victims, an increased tendency to describe relationships as an ambiguous process in general, an increase in antisocial behavior, and an increase in coercion (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011). Cyber dating violence leads to adverse consequences in terms of mental health, including suicidal tendencies (Miller, et al., 2018). Furthermore, it causes emotional and psychological distress and decreased self-esteem (Cava, et al., 2020a). Dating violence poses a risk in terms of disrupting the psychological well-being of adolescents and establishing good relationships in the future (Muñoz-Fernández et al. 2023). It was reported that exposure to cyber dating violence, both as a victim and a perpetrator, or in both cases, was associated with low self-perception and psychological problems in adolescents. Cyber aggression was also found to be associated with an increase in self-esteem (Smith, et al., 2018).

The victimization related to electronic (cyber) dating violence is not different from the victimization in other dating violence events that young people are exposed to. It was stated that cyber dating violence was related to face-to-face physical dating violence. Risk factors for physical dating violence, such as bullying, were also revealed to be associated with cyber dating violence (Thulin, et al., 2021). Electronic sexual coercion includes the methods of applying pressure on the person to have sexual intercourse online. Sharing sexually explicit messages or images or sharing these private interactions online without permission is included in this coercion. This type of pressure can become threatening to the person (Thulin, et al., 2021).

Adolescence is a period when people are prone to being easily influenced. Some adolescents hand over their phone and social media passwords to their romantic partners to prove their deep commitment and love. This situation can lead adolescents to a danger that they are not aware of by facilitating the behaviors of being controlled

and watched, which are very typical for cyber dating violence (Galende, et al., 2020).

Cyber dating violence includes the behavior aimed at harming the victim by direct attacks (threats, etc.), the dissemination of confidential information under the name of cyber violence and the harassment of controlling the social relations of victims, which is called cyber control behavior, by constantly checking what they are doing on social media at any time. Cyber control behaviors are observed more commonly than cyber violence behaviors. These victims are constantly under cyberattack compared to offline dating, and it is much more difficult to avoid. In the face of this type of violence that transcends spatial and geographical boundaries, the well-being of victims is adversely impacted because they consider the situation unsolvable (Cava, et al., 2020b). Due to the possibility of being exposed to cyber dating violence at any time and in any situation, cyber dating violence can qualitatively lead to more negative consequences than traditional, in other words, face-to-face dating violence (Cava, et al., 2020a).

It was argued that victims who were frequently exposed to cyber dating violence had lower family-oriented self-concepts, had more communication problems with their mothers, felt more depressed and lonely, and had lower life satisfaction levels compared to individuals occasionally exposed to cyber dating violence. A correlation was reported between feeling more lonely and being exposed to cyber dating violence. Social isolation is often desired by aggressors who want to control their victims more easily (Cava, et al., 2020a).

Being a victim of cyber violence by a romantic partner was reported to be associated with face-to-face psychological, physical, and sexual partner violence experiences (Marganski & Melander, 2018).

The present case report addresses a 13-year-old female who was exposed to cyber dating violence:

AB is a 13-year-old female. She is the eldest child of a conservative family. She has a seven-year-old brother. It was thought that she looked older

than her age in terms of her external appearance and her self-care was appropriate. She is a seventh-grade student. It was stated that she had on good terms with her friends at school. Her academic achievement was rated as below average. A domestic conflict was not described. Her mother was reported as a housewife, and her father as a tradesman with an income level above the average. It was indicated that AB was not allowed to meet with friends outside of school due to the conservative family structure. Her girlfriends came to their house sometimes, and her mother offered them treats. It was stated that AB frequently asked permission from her family to meet with her friends, they had conflicts with her mother because of this, and AB's angry attitude toward her mother about this issue had emerged recently.

It was expressed that AB started playing computer games for 3 months and started making friends online with some of the people there. One and a half months ago, AB met a person named SO in the game environment, then they continued a virtual friendship, SO introduced himself as a 17-year-old high school student, and after virtual conversations, their friendship level progressed and turned into flirting, they called each other over video calls and video chatted. AB said that she became very attached to SO over time, found him very reliable, and thought they started a long-term relationship. It was learned that SO introduced himself to AB as a very reliable and caring person. It was revealed that SO started to ask for money from AB to pay his phone credits or debts in the 3rd week of their acquaintance. AB could not resist him and sent the money that she had set aside from her own pocket money. It was found that AB gave all the social media passwords to SO to prove the degree of her commitment to their relationship. SO followed AB very closely on social media, was jealous about this issue, they had a quarrel about this issue, he pressured AB to restrict her communication with other people, AB attributed these behaviors to SO's great love for her and did not display a reaction. Over time, at the insistence of SO, AB started to send him nude photographs, they had virtual sex during the video call, she took off her clothes because SO wanted to see her naked in

the video environment, and one day, during the virtual sex, when SO offered to be husband and wife and directed her, she inserted a pen into her genitals in front of the screen, blood came out during this, and she was very hurt and afraid. After this incident, SO told her that they were now husband and wife and he wanted to meet outside. Saying that she was attached to SO with love, AB said that she found a way to meet him on the weekend, left the house by making up an excuse for her mother, and went to meet with SO at the specified place and time. She stated that SO took her by the hand at the meeting place and said that he would take her to his house and that it was very natural since they were now husband and wife, and he wanted to introduce her to his family. They got on a minibuss and headed for another district, got off at the last stop and went to an apartment. It was learned that, in the meantime, her mother, who was suspicious of her behaviors and movements in the last days, followed her with her father, and AB found her father behind her just as they were about to enter the apartment. A person whom SO described as "my uncle" and several men were waiting for them in the apartment, AB's father threatened to report everyone there to the police station, but one of the adults there, who was described as "uncle," threatened her father with the video recordings in their hands.

It was learned that this team was a gang, SO was used as a tool, they had collected a lot of data about AB's family and their income level over the internet and social media during their conversation, and they wanted money from them through blackmail.

Despite all the threats, the father of AB reported this gang to the police and ensured that they were taken into custody, and the legal dimension of the process was started.

It was determined that, in this process, the family took AB from school, enrolled her in distance school, took the tablet computer and mobile phone from her and applied for psychiatric treatment, and that AB was taken under psychiatric treatment with the diagnosis of "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder." It was revealed that AB felt like a useless individual



because of all these events, felt guilty for causing these problems to her family, cut off communication with people and did not trust anyone. It was found that the diagnosis of "major depression" accompanied the clinical picture as a comorbidity in the 2-month course following the acute event.

## 2. DISCUSSION

In this case report, as stated by Galende, et al., (2020), it was determined that AB used the internet as a tool to initiate a romantic relationship, and the use of the internet led to the dating violence crime in this case (Cava, et al., 2020a). As Galende, et al., (2020) and Cava, et al., (2020b) indicated, with the increased attachment due to technological communication, AB became attached to SO enough to give her social media passwords over time and in the cyber dating violence she was subjected to, SO wanted to control the people with whom she came into contact in the virtual environment and to limit the people she communicated with over time. It was found that AB considered these controlling behaviors as evidence of love rather than dating violence, as specified by Fernet, et al., (2023). Furthermore, as indicated by Muñoz-Fernández, et al., (2023) and Wolak, et al., (2018), AB was subjected to cyber dating violence in the form of acts of sexual oppression and coercion to send obscene photographs to the other party. In line with the findings of Wolak, et al., (2018) stating that 75% of underage youth send their pictures voluntarily, AB sent her nude pictures to SO voluntarily and was subsequently exposed to cyber dating violence.

The fact that after their relationship progressed, AB was persuaded by SO with the claim of "I'm taking you to meet my family" and taken to the house where the fraudulent and abusive gang was located, and following the involvement of her family, she was exposed to the threat of sharing sexually explicit messages or images or these private interactions in the virtual environment without permission is in line with the results of the study in which Thulin, et al., (2021) reported that cyber dating violence was associated with bullying and face-to-face physical dating violence. Moreover, these findings are in line with

the results reported by Marganski and Melander (2018), indicating that being a victim of cyber violence by a romantic partner is associated with face-to-face psychological, physical, and sexual partner violence experiences.

The fact that the cyber dating violence that AB was exposed to emerged at a time when she was in conflict with her mother is in line with the results of the study by Cava, et al., (2020a), which reported that victims frequently exposed to cyber dating violence had more communication problems with their mothers.

As reported in the studies by Hinduja and Patchin (2011), Cava, et al., (2020a), and Smith, et al., (2018), AB was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and major depression and suffered psychological distress following this cyber dating violence. Furthermore, in line with the study by Muñoz-Fernández, et al., (2023), it was determined that AB experienced psychological problems and this situation posed a risk for establishing good relationships in the future.

## 3. CONCLUSION

Since adolescence is a much more vulnerable period mentally and emotionally, adolescents affected by cyber dating violence are more likely to develop mental illnesses such as depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Psychological problems with adverse impacts on self-esteem and deterioration of interpersonal relationships also negatively affect the mental health of society.

Considering the important psychological and social problems caused by cyber dating violence, it is clear that it is essential to take measures to prevent this situation. In this respect, it is necessary to evaluate the mental and emotional needs of age groups who are particularly vulnerable regarding exposure to cyber dating violence. It should be taken into account that especially the youth who have experienced violence in the family and society are also likely to be exposed to violence from their early relationships. Moreover, it is of great importance to arrange education programs for the youth on how to maintain healthy relationships.

Since cyber dating violence is associated with psychological distress and decreased self-esteem, the concepts of cyber dating violence and psychological violence are not very separate from each other. Hence, it is extremely important that programs aimed at preventing dating violence in schools also include cyber dating violence.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE/ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ

# A medicolegal perspective on the issue of cyberbullying in Turkey: A retrospective descriptive study on medical specialization theses

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## Abstract

In recent years, the issue of cyberbullying has attracted the attention of researchers from many different fields as well as medical professionals. The aim of this study is to discuss the descriptive variables of medical specialty theses written on cyberbullying in Turkey in terms of forensic medicine. In this study, using the keywords “cyberbullying” and “cyber violence”, theses registered in the Thesis Documentation Center of the Council of Higher Education were scanned. As a result of the screening, among 179 theses, 15 medical specialty theses related to the subject were examined within the scope of the study. The distribution of the 15 theses examined according to specialty areas was n:7 (46.6%) psychiatry, n:4 (26.6%) family medicine, n:1 (6.6%) forensic medicine, n:1 (6.6%) child and adolescent mental health and diseases, n:2 (13.3%) pediatrics. The peak in the writing of specialty theses was in 2019 (n:4). The population of the theses consisted of individuals aged 12-18 years in n:10 (66.6%) and 10-18 years in n:3 (20.0%) and university students in n:2 (13.3%), respectively. It was determined that questionnaires were used as the instrument and method in all of the theses analyzed. Most of the theses analyzed were conducted on adolescents between the ages of 12-18. There were no thesis studies among adults without or not a university degree. In future studies, these populations should also be examined. Due to its effects on people, it was thought that there may be an increase in the number of patients exposed to cyberbullying in the fields of psychiatry and forensic medicine. Therefore, it is necessary to increase medical awareness and conduct more studies on the cyberbullying issue.

**Keywords:** Cyberbullying, cyber violence, forensic medicine, psychiatry

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Cyberbullying is the behavior of spreading rumors about another person, sharing inappropriate photos, or harming another person by using e-mail or other means of communication via mobile phone or the internet (Türk et al., 2021). For a behavior to be considered as cyberbullying: The behavior is expected to be planned and intentional, to be done more than once, to cause problems in the victim, and to be done through technological platforms (Hinduja et al., 2014). People who are subjected to cyberbullying are defined as cyber victims; people who commit cyberbullying are defined as cyber bullies; and people who watch the bullying act from the outside are defined as witnesses (Kavuk et al., 2018). Cyberbullying is observed as a behavior that is usually done in more than one way using communication technologies. Cyberbullying can be seen as teasing, online harassment, cyber harassment to create threat or fear, defamation, pretending to be someone else, exposing, exclusion, sexting, grieving, and trolling (Kowalski et al., 2012; Türk et al., 2021). The fact that it can be done in many and various ways makes it easier for the bully to engage in cyberbullying behavior at any time and place.

People can commit cyber violence or become victims of cyber violence in many different ways. Through *instant messaging applications with threatening and humiliating messages*, sharing private information with other people; through *e-mail applications by sending harmful e-mails that can make the victim a member of various pornographic and shopping sites*; through *forums or video viewing platforms such as YouTube by mocking, threatening, humiliating, targeting the opinions of other individuals in forums*; through *social networking sites such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and Tiktok by opening multiple accounts with secret identities, following the victim through these accounts, sending sexually explicit photos or messages, approaching the victim as a different person, and through voice conversations or in-game messaging through internet games* (Türk et al., 2021). As technology and social media platforms evolve, different

types and tools of cyberbullying may emerge.

In a study conducted by Huang et al. in Taiwan, it was reported that cyberbullying was 20.4% and cyber victimization was 34.9%; in a study conducted by Lee et al. in 2017 with 4000 adolescents in South Korea it was reported that 6.3% of the participants were cyberbullies, 14.6% were cyber victims, and 13.1% were both cyber bullies and victims (Huang et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2017). If we look at different studies conducted in the world, 23.8% of the participants in the study conducted by Mishna et al. in 2012 and 5% of the participants in the study conducted by Laftman et al. in 2013 were reported to be cyber victimized (Mishna et al., 2012; Laftman et al., 2013). When we look at the studies conducted in Turkey; in the study conducted by Dilmaç et al. in 2009 with 666 university students, it was stated that 55.3% of the participants were victims of cyberbullying at least once in their lives (Dilmaç et al., 2009). In Eroğlu's study conducted with 606 high school students in 2014, it was observed that 6.94% of the participants were victims of cyber violence and 63.68% of the participants were both cyber bullies and victims of cyber violence (Eroğlu, 2014). In the study conducted by Dursun et al. among 610 university students in 2020, 41.8% of the participants were exposed to cyberbullying, and in Öztürk's study conducted with university students in 2020, 59.7% of them were cyber-victims (Dursun et al., 2020; Öztürk, 2020).

In recent years, it is seen that cyberbullying has become an important problem both in Turkey and in the world with the development of technology, and the methods and prevalence of cyberbullying have increased. However, there are very few medical studies in the literature, and there is a research gap in examining the issue of cyberbullying from a medical-legal perspective. Therefore, the aim of this study is to discuss the descriptive variables of medical specialty theses on cyberbullying in Turkey in terms of forensic medicine.

## 2. METHOD

This study is a cross-sectional descriptive retrospective study. Ethical approval was not obtained because open sources were used. In this study, using the keywords "cyberbullying" and "cyber violence", theses registered in the Thesis Documentation Center of the Council of Higher Education were scanned. Among a total of 179 specialty theses on cyberbullying and cyber violence, 15 theses written in the field of medical specialty were examined within the scope of the study. Statistical data were presented as number, percentage and mean values.

## 3. FINDINGS

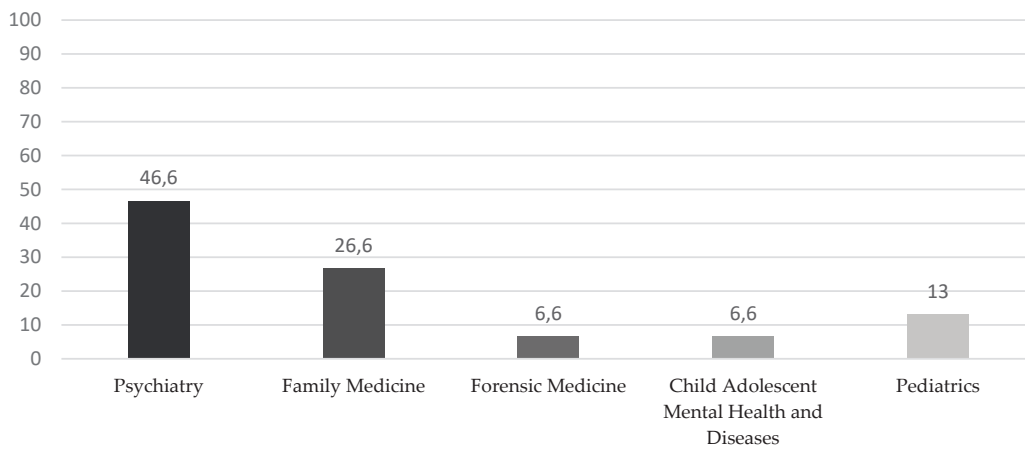
There were a total of 179 theses on cyberbullying and cyber violence, registered in the Thesis Documentation Center of the Council of Higher Education and belonging to different fields. Of these, 144 (80.4%) were master's theses, 15 were medical specialty theses (8.3%) and 20 (11.1%)

were doctoral theses.

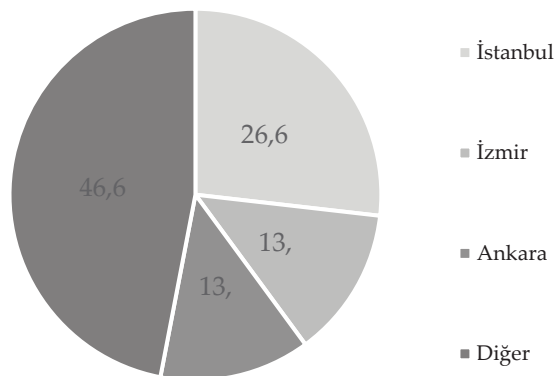
The age distribution in the reviewed medical specialty theses was 12-18 years in 10 theses (66.6%), 10-18 years in 3 theses (20.0%) and university students in the other 2 theses (13.3%). Descriptive findings such as age, gender and sample characteristics of the analyzed theses are shown in Table 1.

The distribution of the 13 theses according to the fields of medical specialization was as follows: 7 (46.6%) Psychiatry, 4 (26.6%) Family Medicine, 1 (6.6%) Forensic Medicine and 1 (6.6%) Child Psychiatry (Graphic 1).

When the distribution of the cities where the medical specialty theses were conducted was examined; n:4 (26.6%) Istanbul, n:2 (13.3%) Izmir, n:2 (13.3%) Ankara, n:2 (13.3%) Isparta and n:5 (33.3%) other cities (Sivas, Antalya, Konya, Edirne, Aydın) (Graphic 2).



Graphic 1. Medical Specialties



Graphic 2. Provinces where medical specialization thesis was made.

Table 1. Characteristics of the medical specialization theses reviewed

Author/Year	Title	Number of Population	Studied Population	Sex Male/Female	Mean age
Yücel Z., 2023	The relationship between school engagement and cyberbullying sensitivity among adolescents	103	Patients between the ages of 11-18	Male: 122 Female: 181	14,92±1,78
Eroğlu H., 2023	Examination of problematic internet use, social media addiction, self-esteem, internet gaming disorder, cyber bullying/victimization levels in adolescents diagnosed with obesity	164	Children and adolescents aged 12-18 years who were diagnosed with obesity in the Pediatric Endocrinology and healthy controls with normal weight range and did not have a known psychiatric diagnosis	Male: 49 Female: 115	15,23±1,579 15,69±1,661
Yerlikaya Oral E., 2022	Comparison between suicidal behavior disorder and non-suicidal self injury in terms of smartphone addiction risk and cyberbullying	102	Adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18 who engage in self-harming behavior and those who do not	Male = 13 Female= 89	15,50±1,13 15,24±1,42 15,24±1,46
Firat E., 2022	Research of Internet Addiction, Peer-to-Peer Bullying and Cyberbullying Frequency in Adolescent Cases Diagnosed with Generalized Idiopathic Epilepsy	90	45 Generalized Adolescents diagnosed with idiopathic epilepsy and 45 healthy participants.	Male: 42 Female: 48	177,72±26,31 month
Ertürk B., 2022	Evaluation of the relationship between social anxiety levels and cyber bullying in adolescents with problems	378	9th-11th grade high school students	Male: 254 Female: 117	14,9 year
Yılmaz O., 2020	Determining the Relationship Between Cyberbullying Victimization and Depression Among Students Attending at Akdeniz University Medical Faculty	337	Students from 1 to 3 semesters studying at the medical faculty	Male: 160 Female: 177	20,01±1,39 year
Yılmaz HS., 2020	Partner cyber violence among university students evaluation	1097	1st - 6th year medical faculty students	Male: 554 Female: 540 Not Specified: 3	22,3±2,03 year
Durna S., 2019	Investigation of cyber bullying and victimization frequency and their relationship with anxiety and depression in high school students: a case of Konya	460	Ninth, 10th, 11th and 12th grade students who receive three different types of education: anatolian high school, private high school and imam hatip high school.	Male: 202 Female: 258	16-17 years

Table 1. (continues) Characteristics of the medical specialization theses reviewed

Tunçtürk M., 2019	Comparison of the adolescents with internet gaming disorder and problematic internet use in terms of parameters as cyber bullying, aggression and loneliness	124	Adolescents between the ages of 12-18 joined Internet Gaming Disorder group who met DSM 5 criteria for the disorder and who didn't meet DSM 5 criteria for the disorder	Male: 124 Female: 0	14,3 ± 1,7 year
Tetik S., 2019	Assesment of factors about cyberbullying among high school students in Edirne city center	2003	Male and female students aged 14 and over	Male: 965 Female: 1038	16±1,22 year
Göksu M., 2019	Relationship between social media attitudes and cyber bullying in depressed adolescents	104	53 female adolescents between the ages of 13-18 diagnosed with major depressive disorder (MDD) and 51 healthy female adolescents matched with the case group in terms of age.	Male: 0 Female: 104	15,54±1,18 15,49±1,13
Özen E., 2018	The Determination of Psychiatric Comorbidity, Psychological Profile and Examination of the Relationship Between Problematic Internet Usage and Traditional-Cyber Bullying-Victimization in Adolescents with Cleft Lip and Palate	80	Adolescents diagnosed with cleft lip and palate and healthy adolescents aged 14-18	Male: 44 Female: 36	15,17±1,14 year
Yasin A., 2018	Evaluation of the relationship among pathological internet use, aggression and cyberbullying in children and adolescents	60	Among males aged 10-18, diagnosed with ADHD and those without any diagnosis	Male: 60 Female: 0	13,1±2 13,2±2
Kök BE., 2017	An Investigation of Cyber Bullying and Victimization in Adolescents with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder: Prevalence and Associated Factors	92	Adolescents aged 12-18 diagnosed with ADHD	Male: 69 Female: 23	14,37±1,78 year
Aydın Görücü R., 2016	Investigation of Factors Associated with Cyber Bullying and Victimization among Children and Adolescents with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder	124	65 adolescents diagnosed with ADHD and 59 healthy individuals	Male: 96 Female: 28	14,06 ± 1,8 14,05 ± 1,9

When the distribution of theses according to years was analyzed, it was seen that most medical specialty theses were written in 2019 (n: 4, 26.6%). The first cyberbullying/violence medical specialty was conducted in 2016. In 2021, after the pandemic, there was no thesis on this subject. Finally, n:2 (13.3%) theses were written in 2023. It was found that questionnaires and scales were used as instruments and methods in all of the theses analyzed. All theses included descriptive questions inquiring sociodemographic characteristics. Among the scales used were; Affective disorders and schizophrenia interview schedule for school-age children with family-now and lifelong form in 7 theses, Cyberbullying Scale in 6 theses, Internet Addiction Scales in 5 theses, Revised Cyberbullying Inventory-II in 3 theses, Cyber Victimization Scale in 4 theses, and school engagement scale in 1 thesis. Among the sample groups in the medical specialty theses, there were adolescents with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in 3 theses, adolescents with internet gaming disorder/problematic internet use in 2 theses, adolescents with depressive symptoms in 2 theses, adolescents with obesity in 1 thesis, and adolescents with cleft palate-lip and psychiatric comorbidity in 1 thesis. Among the topics in the theses examined; comparison of adolescents with and without suicidal behavior disorder in terms of cyberbullying, cyberbullying frequency in adolescents with generalized idiopathic epilepsy, cyberbullying frequency in medical school students, partner cyber violence among medical school students, cyberbullying factors in high school students, the relationship between school engagement and cyberbullying susceptibility in adolescents.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

With the increase in internet usage time, people have started to use the virtual environment more to establish friendships. The use of the Internet as a means of socialization through instant messaging, e-mail, social media platforms such as Twitter, Tiktok, chat rooms, and internet games has made the virtual environment a clear threat to cyberbullying (Yilmazer, 2020). To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study focusing on cyberbullying-themed medical specialty theses

in Turkey. It was found that the first medical specialty thesis on cyber violence was written in 2016. In the following years, medical interest in cyberbullying increased and the number of specialty theses increased. It was found that the highest number of theses were written in the specialty of Psychiatry. It was thought that the fact that many psychiatric problems such as depression, anxiety, high anxiety level, decrease in school and academic achievement, problems in peer and family relationships, which affect the person negatively for a long time, were seen in victims of cyber violence may have an effect on the fact that more theses were written in this field. In the literature, no medical specialty thesis written in English in a country other than Turkey was found; however, there were a few non-medical theses on cyberbullying in the workplace. There are studies on cyberbullying in different medical specialties other than specialty theses.

When the age range of the participants in the analyzed theses was evaluated, it was seen that the most common age range was 12-18 years old, and in 2 theses, research was conducted on university students. It was thought that more studies were conducted on this age group because adolescents are more vulnerable to being both victims of cyber violence and cyberbullies because they are impulsive due to their age, are prone to risky behaviors, want to prove themselves to their peers, and use social media for longer periods of time to establish relationships with their friends. In Durna's (2019) study titled "Examining the frequency of cyberbullying and cyber victimization in high school students and their relationship with anxiety and depression: The case of Konya", a total of 460 students consisting of 10th-11th-12th grade students were included in the study. In the study, it was stated that most of the messages were exchanged via social networks (50 messages per day on average), 55.7% (n:256) of the students had no internet control, 58.7% (n:270) were victims, and 24.5% (n:112) were both bullies and victims. In Eroğlu's study conducted with high school students in 2014, it was observed that 6.94% of the participants were victims of cyber violence and 63.68% of the participants were both cyber bullies



and victims of cyber violence (Eroğlu, 2014). In Durna's (2019) study, it was found that 4.3% (n: 20) of the students frequently experienced victimization in the form of hearing rude words by another child online, and there was a positive correlation between cyber victimization score and anxiety and depression risk. In Tetik's (2019) medical specialty thesis titled "Evaluation of cyberbullying and related factors in high school students in the center of Edirne", 2003 high school students were surveyed using the cyberbullying scale. In the study; determining the cyberbullying levels of students and evaluating the factors related to sociodemographic factors, mother/father education level, computer/tablet/mobile phone ownership status, time spent on the internet per day, family attitude, parental supervision of internet use, frequency of social media use and cyberbullying levels; age, gender, grade, school type, smoking/alcohol/substance use, involvement in family decisions, perceived school achievement, friendships, daily internet usage time, reaction to injustice, desire for revenge, acceptance of friendship requests from strangers, family attitude, frequency of social media use, membership name used in social media, parental supervision of internet use and cyberbullying. These studies show that being an adolescent is a risk factor for cyberbullying.

Regarding the theses conducted among university students examined within the scope of this study, it was considered to be important because it showed that adults were also exposed to cyber violence and they had difficulty in telling others about the events they were exposed to due to social pressures. In Yılmaz's (2020) medical specialty thesis titled "Evaluation of partner cyber violence among university students", a questionnaire was applied to 1st-6th grade medical faculty students in the EÜTF 2018-2019 academic year. In the study, it was stated that 88.6% of the participants used the internet for communication purposes, 93.7% of them had a social media account and used this account an average of 15.2 times a day, 23.5% of the students who stated that they had at least one partner so far were exposed to partner cyber violence at least once, and the most common type was "sending insulting messages". In the study, it was stated

that the victimization of partner cyber violence was negatively correlated with the level of self-esteem, the number of daily access to social media and the number of hours logged in daily, exposure to any partner violence, the number of partners, and exposure to cyber violence increased in direct proportion, the most common effect seen in victims after partner cyber violence was "anger", and 39. %9of the victims' academic achievement was negatively affected. For these reasons, it was thought that there is a need for research on cyberbullying among university students.

When the sample groups of the theses were examined, it was determined that most studies were conducted on Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder. The second most common topics were internet gaming disorder and problematic internet use. In addition, it was seen that scales related to cyberbullying and internet addiction were more preferred in theses. The fact that children's internet use is left excessively free by their families, the lack of supervision of gaming environments and the ease of insulting, humiliating and mocking behaviors using anonymous accounts have an important place among the causes of cyber violence exposure. Therefore, these groups and their possible problems should be emphasized. It is predicted that the number of people exposed to cyber violence will increase even more with the development of technology in the future. People may come to us as patients due to both psychiatric problems and forensic requirements. These patients should be evaluated by physicians and more studies should be conducted on patient management. In Kök's (2017) study titled "Prevalence and Predictors of Cyberbullying and Victimization in Adolescents with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder", a study was conducted with 92 adolescents between the ages of 12-18. The Revised Cyberbullying Inventory-II, Turgay DSM-IV Based Disruptive Behavior Disorders Symptom Screening Scale and Family Internet Use Control and Follow-up Form were completed by the volunteers and their families. The frequencies of cyberbully, victim and bully/victim were found to be 35.9%, 38.0% and 23.9% respectively in adolescents diagnosed with

ADHD, there was no difference in the number of psychiatric comorbidities between the presence/absence of cyberbullying and victimization, social anxiety disorder was found more frequently in cyber-victims, ADHD symptom severity of cyberbullies was significantly higher than non-bullies, and cyberbullies hid their identities more frequently during chatting. As a result of our study, in line with the literature, it can be said that adolescents are more aware of the cyber violence they are exposed to.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Rapid technological development and widespread use of social media lead to an increase in cyber violence. Most of the medical specialty theses on cyberbullying were conducted on adolescents between the ages of 12-18. There are fewer theses conducted among university students; this group should be investigated more widely. It would also be useful to study post-university and older age groups, for example, to examine the problem of cyberbullying in the workplace. The number of cyberbullying patients is expected to increase in the fields of psychiatry and forensic medicine as it has a great impact on the lives of individuals. Therefore, in order to develop a proper medical-legal approach to these patients, it is necessary to raise awareness and conduct more studies on this issue.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE/ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ

# Earthquake, social disorder, violence

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## Abstract

Natural disasters appear as unexpected, traumatic events that break the normal flow of life; these events cause changes in the social structure in the region. There are two alternatives for this change. The first alternative is social unity, the other is social disorder. The purpose of the study is to explain the violent events that occurred after the earthquake in Kahramanmaraş on the 6th of February 2023, through the theory of social disorder. The literature on relevant subjects will be searched and the violent events displayed in the media will be explained in the context of social disorder theory in this study. The increased rates of violence and crime in the long-term period after disasters have been detected by the researchers and this situation has been explained with the theory of social disorder. The social disorder theory emphasizes that the increased stress burden causes an increase in domestic violence. The longitudinal studies that have been carried out on crime rates after the disaster determine that with the help of cooperation and social cooperation, there is a decrease in the crimes against property and violence and an increase in the cases of domestic violence. The disappearance of unaccompanied minors, child abuse, rapine, violence against women, and hate crimes against refugees are some of the criminal behaviors that are reflected in the media in the acute period and evaluated within the scope of this study. The Decrease of control due to social disorder and the absence of officials to provide security in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake explain that criminal behavior may occur in the acute period. The systematic, rapid, and effective implementation of the actions planned to prevent social disorder after natural disasters may be beneficial in preventing crime and violence in regions damaged by natural disasters.

**Keywords:** Natural disaster, crime, crime theories

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Traumatic events are life-threatening events that negatively affect the individuals' coping mechanisms and cause great distress, feelings of helplessness, and terror in their lives. It causes people to lose their sense of meaning, and control. Wars, traffic accidents, sexual assaults, injuries, and natural disasters are some of the examples of traumatic events (Dalenberg, et al., 2017).

As traumatic events, are different than everyday life stressors and disrupt the natural flow of people's lives, natural disasters are one of the traumatic events that suddenly change the everyday life of people affected. Natural disasters not only change individuals' lives but also change the social structure of the region that it has impacted. For that reason, natural disasters differ from other traumatic events due to their nature. The first difference is that natural disasters affect many people at the same time. Additionally, after natural disasters, social attention, resources, and support are transferred to the region and individuals immediately. In this way, resource access is facilitated, unlike individual traumas like assaults. On the other hand, since more than one person is affected by natural disasters at the same time, individual needs and problems may not be noticed. Besides, natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods, destroy infrastructure elements such as hospitals, roads, communications, houses, and workplaces. Because of this destruction, the increased needs of the people due to disaster may not be met until the infrastructure components are rebuilt. In this respect, natural disasters causing collective traumas have certain risk and protective factors which can affect the development of certain psychological problems due to the trauma like post-traumatic stress disorder, and depression (Watson & Hamblen, 2002).

Earthquakes like most natural disasters not only negatively affect the psychological well-being of the people but also cause damage to physical spaces and structures. The destruction and damage to infrastructure components, such as hospitals, roads, communication networks, and houses also lead to changes in living areas which

can turn into a constant stressor. Due to harm to infrastructure caused by earthquake, survivors have a hard time reaching necessary needs, and their everyday lives are disrupted. This situation can be a risk factor for development of the psychological disorders (Watson & Hamblen, 2002). In addition to psychological problems, increased fear of crime can be seen because of the insufficient security measures in destructed areas after the earthquake (Hino, et al., 2018).

Studies show that criminal behavior increases after natural disasters. It is observed that crime incidents increase after the disasters due to changes in physical areas, insufficient resources, job loss, and lack of adequate security during the temporary settlement process (Kwanga, et al., 2017). Similarly, in the study conducted after the earthquake in New Zealand, it was found that rate of the crime incidents first increased immediately after the disaster and then decreased in time, except for domestic violence the rate of crime did not decrease in time (King and Fabris-Rotelli, 2016).

According to Fritz (1961), crime incidents decrease or slightly increase after the disaster, because after the disaster people try to restore their social life thus promoting safety. It is argued that after a disaster, loss, and suffering are collective rather than individualistic, and as all the members of the community are affected by the disaster, solidarity is promoted among the survivors. In addition, natural disasters like earthquakes threaten the survival of the people. This threat is visible to most people causes increased empathy toward the survivors and encourages social cooperation to solve urgent problems such as rescue and debris removal, and disasters represent opportunities for social change.

However, contrary to Fritz's view, many studies reported an increase in post-disaster criminal activity which explains the causes of the crimes by two ecological theories of crime: the routine activities theory proposed by Cohen and Felson and the social disorganization theory proposed by Shaw and McKay. Routine activities theory proposes that crime will occur when three basic elements come together in time and space: the

presence of suitable targets such as property to be stolen and individuals to be victimized, the absence of protectors such as police, neighbors, or surveillance technologies, and the presence of motivated criminals (Cohen and Felson 1979). A number of studies in the field of criminology support the social disorganization theory to explain crime, showing that the theory is potentially important for studying crimes after disasters because the living areas of the people become criminogenic (Frailing and Harper, 2020).

### 1.1. Social Disorder Theory

Social disorganization theory was put forward by researchers at the University of Chicago in the 1920s and 1930s which is also known as Chicago school in the criminology field. Rapid urbanization, industrialization, and an increased number of immigrants in the city were one of the foundations on which the theory is based. Park and Burgess (1925), who were the first to write about how this change affected the city, stated that as people migrate and form new living areas similar to the ecological balance in nature, new social ecology forms. In relation to their observations on the city of Chicago, they put forward the Concentric Zone Theory, stating that people would compete for scarce resources and physical space. According to this theory, as business areas occupy the city and expand with the increasing population, this expansion disrupts the residential areas. As the growing city disturbs the people in the residential areas, the people residing in these areas move away and the abandoned settlements which causes social disorder (Porter, et al., 2015).

Park and Burgess' definitions of social disorder were later applied to criminal behavior by Shaw and McKay (1942). A fundamental question for researchers is how the concentric zone theory proposed by Park and Burgess explains juvenile delinquency. In this regard, they examined how the economic and social structures of areas with different crime rates differ. As a result of their studies, Shaw and McKay (1942) emphasized the importance of three structural elements: socioeconomic status, ethnic heterogeneity, and residential mobility (Kubrin, 2009). With this

theory, it is stated that the social structuring of the living area is important in the formation of criminal behavior and that failure to maintain order in social togetherness causes crime. At the same time, the social norms and values created by the people living in the region begin to differ (Walklate, 2017). Later studies have shown that factors such as social effectiveness, participation in organizations, and social networks also play a mediating role between crime and social disorder (Edwards, 2010). In other words, social disorder theory accepts the view that crime is a result of social interactions. All individuals who are part of a crime, such as the perpetrator and police, and their social, political, and economic needs and beliefs as factors in the emergence of crime. Social disorder emerges after events that have an impact on the social structure, such as economic crises, wars, terrorist attacks, globalization, and feminism (Sumner, 2004).

Social scientists brought the theory back to the agenda and expanded it in the following years. In the new model, the impact of collective impact and social capital elements on social order is mentioned (Porter et al., 2015). Collective influence appears as a necessary element for social bonds; It is the mutual trust and cooperation of people living together in a certain region. Social capital is the relationship between individuals that supports unity and provides social control through social ties that prevent crime from occurring (Kubrin, 2009). This social control includes actions such as creating friendship relations, organizing common activities, informing parents about their children's behavior, and warning people about behavior that does not comply with the norm. However, official social control is the maintenance of order through official structures such as law enforcement and laws (Kubrin and Weitzer, 2003).

The physical and social destruction that occurs after natural disasters causes social disorder. The region itself becomes criminogenic after the disaster due to factors such as inaccessibility to official institutions, unemployment, change of settlement, and staying in temporary living spaces. For this reason, official and unofficial social control in the residential area deteriorates

and the emergence of crime becomes easier (Frailing and Harper, 2017).

## **1.2. Natural Disasters, Social Disorder and Crime**

There are different studies on crime rates after natural disasters. After Hurricane Hugo, infrastructures on the island of St. Croix were damaged and many buildings were destroyed. It was observed that the incidents of looting increased after this incident. Researchers studying disaster criminology have stated that the partial reason for the increase in looting crime was hurricanes (Qurantelli, 1994) similarly after Hurricane Katrina also the rate of looting increased (Quarantelli, 2007). Harper and Frailing (2012) concluded that unemployment and low socioeconomic status after Hurricane Katrina caused social disorder and therefore theft increased in the region. When the areas in which hurricanes took place and the crime rate increased are examined, it is found that the society consists of different socio-economic classes, the authorities are rapidly losing control in the region, and the previous crime rates are high (Drabek, 2010). While post-disaster studies found that helping behavior among individuals increased, it was revealed that race and education level were predictive. It has been observed that vulnerable groups and economic income classes have less access to aid after natural disasters (Kaniasty and Noris, 1995; Bolin and Bolton, 1986). As a result of the analysis conducted using 14 years of geographical and longitudinal data in the United States, a relationship was found between the impact size of natural disasters and the increase in the crime rate. There has been an increase, especially in property crimes and aggressive crimes after the disasters (Prelog, 2015). Although helping behavior increases immediately after disasters and a therapeutic community is formed, long-term investigations in disaster areas revealed that criminal behavior increased in the long term (Leitner et al., 2011). Crimes reported to the police in the region were examined for the 5 years after the Canterbury earthquake, and it was found that general criminal behavior decreased during this period, but domestic violence, theft, arson, and assault

crimes increased (Breetzke, et al., 2016). In light of the information obtained through individual interviews after the 2010 Haiti earthquake, it was seen that sexual and physical assault increased in the region and created a significant problem, especially for women and girls (Kolbe et al., 2010).

## **1.3. Kahramanmaraş Earthquake**

Kahramanmaraş Earthquake happened on February 6, 2023, at 04:17 and 13:24, with epicenters in Pazarcık (Kahramanmaraş) with a magnitude of 7.8 and Elbistan (Kahramanmaraş) with a magnitude of 7.5. Later an earthquake of magnitude Mw6.4 occurred, with the epicenter in Hatay Yayladağı, which is also one of the city that affected by the Kahramanmaraş Earthquake, on February 20, 2023 at 20:04. These earthquakes caused great destruction in 11 provinces, which corresponds to 16.4 percent of the country's demographics and whose total population is 14,013,196 people for 2022. According to official data, more than 48 thousand people lost their lives and more than half a million buildings were damaged (Turkish Presidency Strategy and Budget Presidency, 2023).

## **2. AIM OF THE STUDY**

After the Kahramanmaraş earthquakes, harm to infrastructures and change in social organization caused social disorganization similar to another natural disaster. This social disorganization led to criminal events which were reflected in the press and the reports of non-governmental organizations. In this context, unaccompanied children whose relatives could not be reached immediately after the delays and deficiencies in search and rescue efforts after the earthquake, and missing children who could not be reached by their relatives, were the leading issues followed with concern. When we look at the violations of children's rights, the most prominent issues are the violation of children's data through the press and their vulnerability to neglect and abuse. Violence against women, one of the main problems of Turkey, has also come to the fore for women damaged by the earthquake, and the deficiencies in support mechanisms have become a matter of discussion.



In addition to all these, theft and looting incidents that occurred in the earthquake region, hate crimes against refugees, and torture and ill-treatment that occurred in this context were also among the events reflected in the press. This study aims to explain the human rights violations and violent incidents reflected in the media after the earthquake through social disorder theory.

### 3. METHOD

This study covers the content analysis of texts about violent incidents that developed in the earthquake region after the earthquake and were reflected in the media and the reports of non-governmental organizations, using a qualitative method. For this purpose, 'google.com' search engine was used, along with 'Kahramanmaraş/Maraş/Hatay earthquake', 'crime', 'child abuse', 'unaccompanied child', 'violence against women', 'theft', 'extortion', ' Searches were made with the keywords 'immigrant/Syrian immigrant' and 'torture'. In this context, news and NGO reports published on the internet between February 6, 2023, and July 10, 2023 were included in the research. Repetitive news from different sources was included in the study one time. A total of 23 news and 11 reports have been included in the study. The accessed news has been classified according to the classification of the relevant legal regulations.

### 4. RESULTS

#### 4.1. Unaccompanied and Lost Children

In the statement made by the Ministry of Family and Social Services on February 13, 2023, a week after the earthquake centered in Kahramanmaraş, it was stated that 1362 unaccompanied children in the provinces affected by the earthquakes were registered in the Ministry system, 369 of these children were identified and matched and delivered to their families, and there was a high number of children followed in the hospital. It has been stated that the number of children admitted to the Ministry's institutions is 201, that the identities of 1071 of these children have been identified, and that 291 children have not yet been identified (Ministry of Family and Social Services, 2023a).

In the last statement made by the Ministry of Family and Social Services on May 26, 2025, it was stated that there were 1914 unaccompanied children who were removed from the rubble after the Kahramanmaraş earthquakes, 1841 of these children were handed over to their families with an identity verification, the treatment of 7 children continued in hospitals, and 53 children were taken into institutional care (Ministry of Family and Social Services, 2023b)

According to the information prepared by the Mor Çatı Women's Shelter Foundation to inform the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child regarding the situation of unaccompanied children in the earthquake zone in Turkey, families trying to find the whereabouts of their children due to the lack of coordination in the Kahramanmaraş earthquakes In Turkey, personal efforts were made to find solutions for unaccompanied children in hospitals, and in the meantime, violations of children's rights occurred. It has been reported that the personal information of children whose families or identities are being tried to be found is circulating on social media, that concerns about children being handed over to adults or abducted in an uncontrolled manner have arisen, and that the Disaster Child Civil Coordination Team established after the earthquake has quickly worked on the processes to be followed regarding missing and unaccompanied children (Mor Çatı, 2023a).

The Disaster Child Civil Coordination Team started its work immediately after the earthquake and published the Information Note on Unaccompanied Children on February 8, 2023. By scanning and confirming social media posts on February 6-7, 2023, 95 children were declared missing and there were 50 unidentified children in hospitals (Disaster Child Civil Coordination Team, 2023a). Following the work carried out by the Coordination Team by scanning and confirming social media posts between 6-10 February 2023, it was determined that as of 17:00 on Friday, February 10, a search warrant was issued for at least 168 children and there were many unidentified children in hospitals (Disaster

Children's Civil Coordination Team, 2023b). In the information note dated 14.02.2023 titled Second Information Note - Recommendations on Unaccompanied Children, the Coordination Team listed the steps that should be followed to ensure that the best interests of the children who are left unaccompanied and for whom a search warrant has been issued are considered. Accordingly, it has been recommended to strengthen the connection between units, ensure the safety of children, provide regular information, establish information desks, identify the relevant personnel, identify and identify children, investigate the relationship of proximity, and monitor child safety and well-being (Disaster Child Civil Coordination Team, 2023c).

Apart from this general information, there is also special news reflected in the press. On 01 June 2023, in the news titled "The forgotten face of the earthquake: Where are the missing children?" ("Depremin unutulmuş yüzü: Kayıp çocuklar nerede?"), it is stated that a 4-year-old child has not been found even though 114 days have passed since the earthquake. According to the statements of his relatives, search and rescue efforts started 5 days after the earthquake, and family members who did not leave the debris could not find a trace of the child. Yet, even though the family reported the situation to the prosecutor's office, DNA samples to search and match the child and the family were taken 60 days later (Cumhuriyet, 2023). Again, "Grandma and grandfather in Kahramanmaraş are looking for their granddaughter Ela, who disappeared in the earthquake" ("Kahramanmaraş'ta anneanne ve dede, depremde kaybolan torunları Ela'yı arıyor") (T24, 22 February 2023); similar news content regarding missing and unaccompanied children also found with the news title "New image from Mukaddes Erva, which disappeared after emerging from the rubble" ("Enkazdan çıktıktan sonra kaybolan Mukaddes Erva'dan yeni görüntü") (NTV, 28 February 2023), "Earthquake victims looking for their missing ones: 'We want our children to be found even if they are bones'" ("Kayıplarını arayan depremzedeler: 'Çocuklarımızın kemikleri bile olsa bulunmasını istiyoruz'") (BBC Turkish, 21 March

2023) were found. These news contents include information specific to the children mentioned and information regarding unaccompanied children in general.

#### 4.2. Violation of Children's Right to Be Forgotten

Another criminological issue found in the news was regarding to violation of the children's rights. In the article written by Media Ombudsman Faruk Bildirici on 20.03.2023, it was stated that the images of children rescued from the rubble after the earthquake were frequently included in the media, and that they even created pages with these photographs in two different newspapers with the titles "Babies of Hope" ("Umudun bebekleri") and "Believe in Children" ("İnanın çocuklar") even there was no aid to public interest in publishing these photographs. It has been stated that it is possible to make effective news with shots where children's faces are not visible, by sharing the photos of children to manipulate the feelings of the reader, children's privacy and security are put at risk, and their traumas can last a lifetime (Birgün, 2023a).

Studies carried out by the Disaster Child Civil Coordination Team (Afet Çocuk Sivil Koordinasyon Ekibi) after the Kahramanmaraş earthquakes showed that news about children circulated continuously in different media, that all children had access to this news, and that this negatively affected the children's sense of trust, trigger their anxiety and fear, and paved the way for abuse. It was emphasized that it violated children's physical speech rights. For child rights-based journalism four basic steps have been suggested: "not instrumentalizing, getting approval, supporting, and being an example" (Disaster Child Civil Coordination Team, 2023d).

#### 4.3. Child Neglect and Abuse

In the Guide on the Protection of Children Affected by the Earthquake in Turkey published by UNICEF Turkey, it is stated that the risk of violence, exploitation, abuse, and neglect increases in emergencies such as earthquakes and that gender-based violence, sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, economic exploitation, and illegal

adoption are among these risks. It has been emphasized that these risks are especially valid for children who lose their caregivers. It is important to establish safe areas that support the identification of risks to children, along with emergency support and protection services, after disasters (UNICEF, 2023).

*Turkish Grand National Assembly on March 1, 2023, following the Kahramanmaraş earthquakes establish a commission for protection of child brides under the name of "Parliamentary Investigation Commission Established to Investigate the Case of a Six-Year-Old Girl Being Exposed to Sexual Abuse in the Name of Marriage and to Determine the Precautions to be Taken to Prevent Similar Incidents and to Prevent All Kinds of Child Abuse" ("Altı Yaşındaki Bir Kız Çocuğunun Evlilik Adı Altında Cinsel İstismara Maruz Bırakılması Olayının Araştırılarak Benzer Olayların Yaşanmaması ve Her Türü Çocuk İstismarının Önlenmesi İçin Alınması Gereken Tedbirlerin Belirlenmesi Amacıyla Kurulan Meclis Araştırması Komisyonu").* The commission listened to the experts from field for the possible solutions and suggestions regarding how to protect children from abuse who live in camps. According to the commission meeting minutes, child abduction and abuse are the main threats to the safety of children after natural disasters. It is mentioned that after the previous earthquakes, there were abuse cases in which male camp workers were responsible for providing basic needs in the camps. Because camp security is not enough, girls are abused in the camp. So, it is stated that there is a lack of control in tent camps and container camps in the region of earthquakes which can lead to cases of sexual abuse (TBMM, 2023).

Other than the sexual abuse incidents in which children were subjected to physical sexual abuse were also reported in the press. In the news titled "Sexual abuse in the hospital of a Syrian child pulled out of the rubble" ("Enkazdan çıkarılan Suriye'li çocuğa hastanede cinsel istismar") dated February 28, 2023, it was stated that a 13-year-old Syrian girl saved from the rubble in Hatay was subjected to sexual abuse by a man while she was receiving treatment in the hospital, and similar behavior of the same man towards other

women was detected (Bianet, 2023). According to another incident reported in the press on June 30, 2023, a person was detained on the allegation that a 17-year-old girl staying in a tent camp in Malatya was harassed by a 21-year-old person (Cumhuriyet, 2023b).

Another finding regarding children's rights was neglect. As most of the news stated there were delays and lack of coordination during search and rescue efforts immediately after the earthquake. This delay led to children's inability to access shelter, clothing suitable for seasonal conditions, medical treatment, clean water, food and hygiene materials, education, and psychosocial services (Duvar, 2023). Neglects have even caused children to lose their lives after the earthquake. For example, in the news dated May 9, 2023, it was stated that a 4-year-old child died after a fire broke out due to electrical contact in the shed that a Syrian immigrant family set up in the garden of their house, which was damaged by the earthquake in Malatya (Habertürk, 2023).

#### 4.4. Gender-Based Violence

In addition to child abuse also earthquake areas become riskier for the women based on the NGO reports and news. "Mechanisms to Combat Violence Against Women in the Earthquake-Affected Region" published by the Mor Cati Women's Shelter Foundation after the Kahramanmaraş earthquakes, stated that after the earthquake, it became difficult for women to access mechanisms to combat violence, officials had insufficient information on guiding women, and there were no safe toilet areas for women and children. Women had to postpone their hygiene needs due to security risks, which also caused the emergence of diseases caused by lack of hygiene. Women who were subjected to violence and were in the process of divorce or living separately from their spouses could not reach the tent and were forced to stay with their violent spouses and family members. It has been stated that single women have difficulty accessing safe shelter services, all these situations pose a risk of violence for women and prevent women from moving away from a violent environment (Mor Çatı, 2023b). In the report titled "Women's Experiences of Moving Away from Violence and Support Mechanisms in

*Earthquake-Affected Regions* “ published by the same organization on July 6, 2023, it is stated that even after 5 months, still the basic needs of women are not met, support mechanisms are not accessible, and the problematic applications in the area constitute an obstacle for women to move away from violence.

When we look at the news reflected in the press, cases of violence against women have been encountered. In the news titled “ *Male violence in the earthquake zone: He did not show his children, he used violence* “ (“*Deprem bölgesinde erkek şiddeti: Çocuklarını göstermedi, şiddet uyguladı*”) dated February 19, 2023, stated that a woman in Hatay Samandağ handed over her two children to her estranged husband, with whom she was in the process of divorcing, due to the damage to her house, however when the woman asked to see their children, she encountered with physical violence of her husband (Artibilgi , 2023). In another case which is reported by the news dated February 24, 2023, by the title “*He poured boiling water on his ex-wife!*” ‘*He said aftershock earthquake is happening*’ (“*Eski eşinin üstüne kaynar su döktü! ‘Artçı depremden oldu’ dedi*”). The woman, whose house was severely damaged due to the earthquake, went to her ex-husband’s earthquake-resistant house so that her children would not have any problems, and at the end of the third day, her ex-husband poured a pot of boiling water over her head while she was sleeping. Her husband said, ‘Pray that I did not kill you’ (*Dua et seni öldürmedim*). The woman who was subjected to violence said: “ *The reason for the violence was that I stood tall after the divorce and had friends. He took revenge on me.*” (“*Gereğesi boşandıktan sonra dimdik ayakta durmam ve arkadaşlarımın olmasıymış. Benden intikam aldı.*») (NTV, 2023).

#### 4.5. Crimes Committed Against Property

News about looting and theft in the regions affected by the Kahramanmaraş earthquakes have been on the agenda since the first days:

The news titled “*102 arrests in the investigation of looting and theft in the earthquake zone*” (“*Deprem bölgesinde yağma ve hırsızlık soruşturmasında 102 tutuklama*”) dated February 14, 2023, stated that

248 incidents related to crimes against property in the earthquake zone were encountered, 175 suspects were identified, 102 of the suspects were arrested by the judgeships, 23 people were ordered to undergo judicial control, 23 arrest warrant was issued for the suspect, it was stated that 7 suspects were detained (TRT Haber, 2023).

In the news content dated February 28, 2023, titled “*Sexual abuse of the Syrian child removed from the rubble in the hospital*” (“*Enkazdan çıkarılan Suriye’li çocuğa hastanede cinsel istismar*”), under the title of neglect and abuse towards children, it was stated that the 18-year-old sister of the girl who was subjected to sexual abuse and other women in the hospital were also victims of the crime of theft by having their gold stolen by the same man (Bianet, 2023).

As reported in the press on February 8, 2023, titled “*Scandal in the earthquake zone! Stealing with AFAD clothes*” (“*Deprem bölgesinde skandal! AFAD kıyafeti ile hırsızlık*”), it was stated that 2 people who were determined to have stolen from evacuated houses in Şanlıurfa by wearing clothes of AFAD an aid organization to not to be caught by the police during the crime (Milliyet, 2023).

#### 4.6. Hate Crimes Against Immigrants

It has been announced that the number of immigrants residing under temporary protection in the earthquake zone is 1,738,035. (TC Presidency Strategy and Budget Directorate, 2023) However, it is also known that there are many immigrants in these regions due to their proximity to the border gates of the provinces affected by the earthquake (Duruel, 2023).

As stated above, many theft and looting incidents in the region after the earthquake was reported in the press, but these incidents were primarily attributed to Syrian immigrants (Gazete Karınca, 2023). The news titled “*They experienced double fear*” (“*Çifte korku yaşadılar*”) dated February 24, 2023, stated that Syrian earthquake victims, whose lives were turned upside down by the destruction caused by the earthquake, experienced double fear with lynching attempts. Besides, it is also mentioned that they have a hard time reaching their basic needs that they

could not find shelter, and that they could not request support due to the risk of being attacked. Indeed, those who participated in search and rescue efforts were treated like thieves and had to leave the region (Birgün, 2023b).

Relevant NGOs, on the other hand, reported that the allegations of looting and theft in the press about immigrants were not true, that immigrants were criminalized with the influence of hate speech, and that they were affected differently by the earthquake (CİSST, 2023).

#### 4.7. Torture and Ill-Treatment

In the joint statement published by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch on 5 April 2023, it was stated that law enforcement officers in the earthquake region tortured and mistreated people they suspected of being involved in theft and looting, that one person died in custody after being subjected to torture, and that in some cases, law enforcement officers committed crimes. It was determined that there was no intervention to prevent attacks by civilians against the alleged people, in some cases the victims were determined to be Syrian refugees, and xenophobia played a decisive role (Amnesty, 2023).

Incidents of torture and ill-treatment also emerged as a reflection of crimes against property and hate speech against immigrants after the earthquake. In the news dated February 18, 2023, it was stated that the suspect of the looter who was later found out to be innocent beaten by the police with the words "I will relieve my stress with you" (*Seninle stresimi atacağım*). The news titled "Three soldiers were arrested in Hatay on charges of "killing people" ("Hatay'da üç asker, "insan öldürme" suçlamasıyla tutuklandı") dated March 18, 2023, stated that two of the Syrians who were beaten and given diesel at the police station in Hatay died, two of them were in intensive care, and in the investigation launched in Reyhanlı, two lieutenants and one first lieutenant were arrested (T24, 2023; Evrensel 2023).

## 5. DISCUSSION

After the Kahramanmaraş earthquake, post-disaster crime incidents were observed, in line with the literature. Although statistical data regarding these criminal incidents is not published, based on the reports of NGOs serving in the region and individual incidents reflected in the press it is possible to say that criminal acts have taken place in the region.

According to the view that natural disasters increase crime by disrupting social organization patterns, in connection with the theory of social disorganization, it is argued that since disasters create significant stress on households, there may be an increase in cases of domestic violence (Zhou, 1997; Zahran et al, 2009). Results of a study conducted in Florida show that natural disasters significantly reduce levels of reported property and violent crimes, but significantly increase the number of reported domestic violence crimes (Zahran et al, 2009). In a review study addressing the relationship between natural disasters and gender-based human rights violations against women and girls, findings were found that natural disasters disproportionately affect women and girls compared to men (Düger and Yaman, 2022). A qualitative study done by Thurston et al. (2021), found that the triggers that cause violence against women have increased after the natural disaster because of increased stress factors, deficiencies in supervision and support services, and the increased social problems related to inequality that lead to violence.

Some studies show that natural disasters cause domestic violence crimes to increase significantly, while significantly reducing the levels of crimes against property (Zahran et al., 2009). Although disaster sociologists generally claim that looting is rare after natural disasters, based on their qualitative studies with people damaged by disasters, criminologists prefer secondary data such as official statistics on crime to better understand this phenomenon, and according to such data, many natural disasters occur. It is observed that theft incidents increase significantly after disasters, and it is suggested that this situation may be caused by the increase

in the number of disadvantaged people after disasters, the existence of a subculture that tolerates small-scale thefts, the existence of criminal gangs and an insufficient police force (Frailing and Harper, 2020).

In our study in line with the literature, different types of crimes have been conducted according to news and NGO reports. According to types of the crime seven themes are determined which are unaccompanied and lost children, violation of children's rights, child neglect and abuse, crimes committed against property, gender-based violence, hate crimes, and torture. Even though the exact number of the crimes is unknown, it can be argued that after the disasters criminal acts continue to happen.

From the social disorganization theory perspective, since the units that will officially provide social control were affected by the earthquake and were not sufficient, the arrival of support teams from different cities appeared as a risk factor in terms of social disorder theory in maintaining social order. The loss of control of the authorities immediately after the event (Bolin and Boltin, 1986) resulted in child losses and child abuse in the period immediately after the earthquake. In addition, like other studies, cases of looting and domestic violence were also reflected in the media.

It is seen from the themes that vulnerable groups are more prone to be victimized after disasters. After the disasters, vulnerable groups like women, children, older people, and minorities are at higher risk for victimization. Because lack of social cohesion and norms of informal social control which are constructs of social disorganization theory, lead to an increase in crime (Lyons, 2007), vulnerable groups are more likely to be affected by lawlessness and chaos after the disasters (Bizzarri, 2012). Similarly, news headings in this study also showed that victims are mostly children, immigrants, and women.

As previous studies (Drabek, 2010) have shown, immigrants who are among vulnerable communities benefited less from aid and even became victims of hate crimes. This study's

results also showed that immigrants are the victims of hate speech and ill-treatment. Freilich and Chermak (2014) concluded in their study that social disorganization is correlated with hate crimes due to demographic changes, and perceived inequality. It is found that as the community heterogeneity increased, the hate crime rate also increased especially in economically disadvantaged neighbors (Lyons, 2007). A qualitative study conducted in Hatay showed how limited resources affect the perceived discrimination and hate speech interviewees stated that locals verbally abuse them and they have a hard time reaching resources (Duruel, 2023). As the earthquake region, which is socially disorganized and economically disadvantaged, includes cities that have higher rates of immigrants, hate crime toward ethnic minorities is expected to increase from the social disorganization theory perspective.

## 6. CONCLUSION

To explain the criminal activities in the earthquake region from the perspective of social disorder theory, it is important to understand the magnitude of the earthquake's destruction. Kahramanmaraş Earthquake greatly damaged the infrastructures and buildings and some of the roads, hospitals, and other government institutions collapsed with the individual buildings. This destruction affected the dynamics in the social organization together with the psychological well-being of the individuals. Some of the individuals affected by the earthquake migrated out of the city and lived in temporary settlements, most of the people started to live in tents or container camps which led to changes in social ties, which is a crime-preventing factor.

No matter how powerful the destruction is, it is a necessity to provide safe living spaces for everyone after natural disasters. In addition to shelter, the food and hygiene needs of people damaged by the earthquake must be met quickly and effectively. All services provided to people affected by the earthquake should be handled with a trauma-sensitive approach, and practitioners should be trained and supervised in this regard. Every institution should have an

emergency action plan specifically for natural disasters and earthquakes, and these action plans should be inclusive of vulnerable populations like people with disabilities, the elderly, children, prisoners, etc. It is important that action plans are sensitive to the needs of vulnerable populations. A gender-sensitive disaster management plan and emergency action plans also need to combat violence against women after disasters as studies showed that gender-based violence increases after disasters.

To conclude, after the damage caused by the Kahramanmaraş earthquake social ties and social organizations have been also damaged. Individuals suffer from the individual effects of the trauma together with its social effects. According to social disorganization theory, crime is not against the individual but against the society. Societies that lack societal norms, and surveillance, are more prone to crimes. For that reason, it is important to take necessary precautions for the safety of the areas that are affected by the earthquake. Since the crime investigations carried out within the scope of this study were only events reflected in the media, our results have limitations. It is seen that criminal acts in the region cause stress on the individuals. Besides, there is a need for more study on the disaster criminology area for a better understanding of the issue.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE/ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ

# Violence against healthcare workers: Comparison of Türkiye and Germany

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## Abstract

**Context and Aim:** Violence against healthcare workers has been defined as a situation that consists of physical/sexual/economic violence, verbal threat and/or behaviour caused by the patient, relatives of patient or any other individual. This study aims to raise awareness on why and how often violence against healthcare workers and what legal actions can be taken, by comparing Türkiye and Germany.

**Methodology:** The study is based on literature research and review. The literature review was conducted in "Google" and "Google Scholar" between March 2023 and April 2023 using the words "violence against health workers" and "violence in health".

**Findings:** The violence against healthcare workers is not only specific to Türkiye but also a worldwide problem. According to the Research on Violence in Health for the year 2022, 82.3% of health workers who participated in the research stated that they were worried about experiencing violence in the workplace while 67.3% of 2124 healthcare professionals experienced some type of violence at least once in their professional life and 71.8% of them witnessed workplace violence. The research also showed that 1 out of every 4 healthcare professionals was exposed to physical violence and physicians/dentists and nurses were exposed to more violence than other occupational groups. It was concluded that women were at more risk of verbal violence and men at more risk of physical violence.

**Conclusion:** Violence is one of the most significant problems experienced by healthcare workers. Thus, it is necessary to increase security measures in hospitals, train the staff on the methods to calm down patients' relatives, especially in the emergency services. Effective prevention of violence against healthcare workers is among the duties of the government. The healthcare workers who are faced to physical, verbal, or sexual violence may take legal actions such as file a criminal and/or compensation lawsuit.

**Keywords:** Violence against healthcare workers, violence in health, legislation on violence against healthcare workers, comparison of Türkiye and Germany.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Violence is a phenomenon that exists in daily life in the 21st century and threatens us in many dimensions (Polat, Violence 2019). The World Health Organization (WHO) stated in its 2014 report that over 1.3 million people died annually due to acts of violence, accounting for approximately 2.5% of all deaths worldwide, and that the majority of those who died were between the ages of 15 and 44 (WHO, 2014). According to 2022 figures, an estimated 1.4 million people die each year as a result of violence. This corresponds to approximately more than 3800 people per day, showing that violence is a serious public health and human rights issue (WHO, 2022).

When occupational violence is examined, it is discovered that the service, education, social service, and health sectors are the most prominent, with healthcare workers being 16 times more likely to be subjected to violence than other occupational groups (Uğurlu-Şantaş, 2023; OSHA, 2016). Violence against healthcare workers is an important problem in this context.

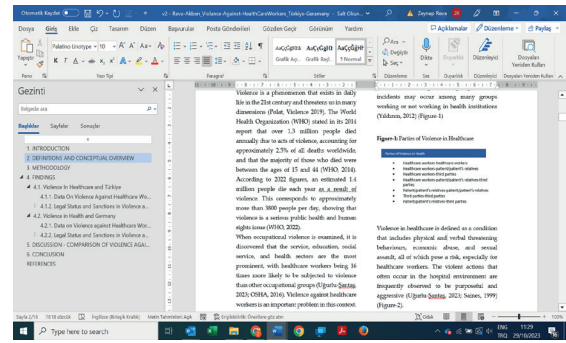
The present study aimed to raise awareness about violence against healthcare workers, which has been increasing in recent years, and to compare the situation of violence in health care in Türkiye with that in Germany, where the majority of physicians have chosen to live in recent years. The study also aims to raise awareness about the causes and frequency of violence against healthcare workers, as well as methods of dealing with this situation legally.

## 2. DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW

Violence against healthcare workers is defined as “threatening behaviour, verbal threats, economic abuse, physical assault, and sexual assault that poses a risk to the healthcare worker by the patient, the patient’s relatives, or any other individual.”

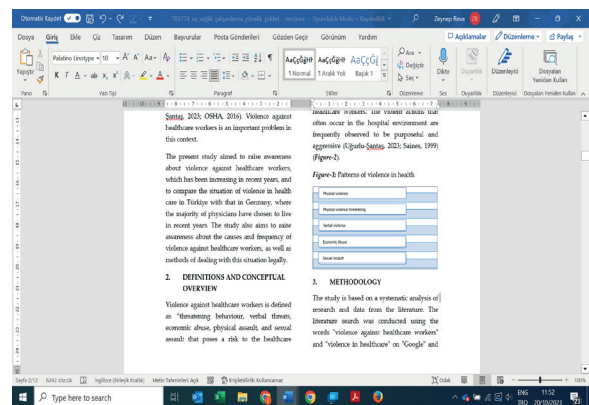
The perpetrators of violence against healthcare workers are not a particular group. Violence incidents may occur among many groups working or not working in health institutions (Yıldırım, 2012) (Figure-1)

Figure 1. Parties of Violence in Healthcare



Violence in healthcare is defined as a condition that includes physical and verbal threatening behaviours, economic abuse, and sexual assault, all of which pose a risk, especially for healthcare workers. The violent actions that often occur in the hospital environment are frequently observed to be purposeful and aggressive (Uğurlu-Şantaş, 2023; Saines, 1999) (Figure-2).

Figure 2. Patterns of violence in health



## 3. METHODOLOGY

The study is based on a systematic analysis of research and data from the literature. The literature search was conducted using the words “violence against healthcare workers” and “violence in healthcare” on “Google” and “Google Scholar” between March 1, 2023, and April 30, 2023.

## 4. FINDINGS

### 4.1. Violence in Healthcare and Türkiye

#### 4.1.1. Data on Violence against Healthcare Workers in Türkiye and Its Patterns

In terms of the effects of violence against healthcare workers, in response to the increase

in violence against healthcare workers in Türkiye, the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye conducted research on the issue, and a report was prepared by the GNAT Research Commission in order to determine the measures to be taken (GNAT, 2013). The report concluded that “the effects of violence in the workplace against healthcare workers include physical injury, stress, loss of self-esteem, shock, anger, weakness, absenteeism, deterioration of social relationships, decreased job satisfaction and commitment to work, and labour turnover.”

In the light of the data obtained by compiling the findings of the studies conducted in Türkiye, the causes of violence in health are determined as follows: mental and behavioural disorders, low educational level and non-compliance with rules, performing numerous examinations and tests, patients’ stressed relatives, crowded and noisy environments, excessive demands of patients and their relatives, long waiting times, insufficient number of healthcare workers, misunderstandings, communication problems, and personal problems (Özcan-Bilgin, 2011).

A study suggests that the media trivializes violence against physicians by justifying it in the news headlines. It emphasizes the continuity of violence by using headlines that arouse suspicion about violent behaviour and thus build hopelessness (Küçük Durur, 2017). In a study of 352 healthcare workers, 11.6% were physicians, 39.8% were nurses, 18.8% were administrative staff, and 29.8% were other healthcare personnel. It was reported that 60.5% had been subjected to violence, with 28.7% having been subjected to physical violence, 59.9% to verbal/psychological violence, and 3.4% to sexual violence (Uğurlu-Şantaş, 2023). According to the same study, patients were responsible for 31.8% of physical violence, patients’ relatives for 50.2%, co-workers for 6.6%, managers for 10%, and other employees for 1.4%.

According to the 2022 Violence in Health Survey conducted by the Sağlık-Sen (Union of Health and Social Service Workers) Strategic Research Center Institute, 82.3% of healthcare workers were concerned about encountering violence at work (SASAM and Sağlık-Sen Stratejik

Araştırmalar Merkezi Enstitüsü, 2022). Of the 2124 health workers, 67.3% reported having experienced some form of violence at least once during their professional careers. 71.8% of the participants have witnessed violence at the workplace. According to the results, one out of every four healthcare workers is subjected to physical violence. Increases in working hours and the frequency of shifts increase the possibility of violence. It is stated that women are more at risk for verbal violence, and men are more at risk for physical violence.

The fact that 10,771 white code calls were made in 2016, 7,751 in 2017, and 101,984 in 2021 shows that healthcare workers are increasingly being subjected to violence (MoH, 2021 Annual Report; Takak Artantaş, 2018).

In response to the increasing incidence of violence in health care and the inadequacy of existing measures, the Turkish Medical Association (TTB) developed the “TTB Yanımda (TTB is on My Side)” mobile application in 2022. The primary objective of this initiative is to increase solidarity among physicians and facilitate their access to medical chambers (TTB, 2022). It was noted that although violence in health care is more common, the rate of reported violence is lower. This is due to the fact that serious situations involving injury are perceived as violent, whereas other types of violence are ignored (Al et al., 2012; Karakaş et al., 2021).

According to a study conducted to determine the relationship between patients’ attitudes toward using their rights and the thought of violence against healthcare workers, 54.4% of participants received information about patient rights (Çelik-Taşhan, 2014). The study found that 46.3% of the individuals received information from the media. According to the study, 18.7% of individuals attempted violence against health care workers, with 17% committing verbal violence. When asked about the reasons for violence against healthcare workers, the first two reasons given were that the healthcare worker did not care about the patient and relatives (12.3%) or that the healthcare worker did not help them (11.7%) in the study.

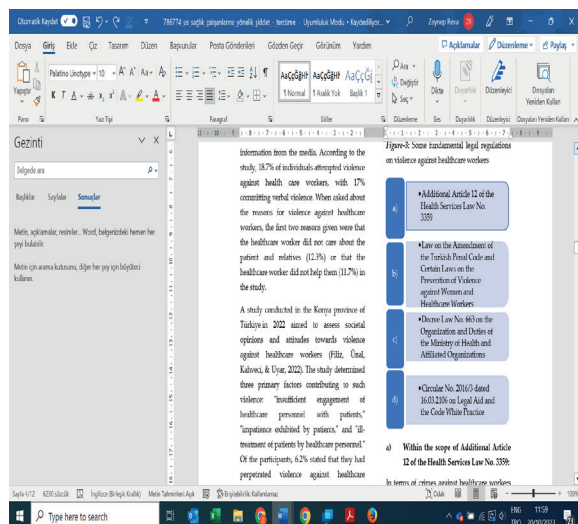
A study conducted in the Konya province of Türkiye in 2022 aimed to assess societal opinions and attitudes towards violence against healthcare workers (Filiz, Ünal, Kahveci, & Uyar, 2022). The study determined three primary factors contributing to such violence: “insufficient engagement of healthcare personnel with patients,” “impatience exhibited by patients,” and “ill-treatment of patients by healthcare personnel.” Of the participants, 6.2% stated that they had perpetrated violence against healthcare workers and that the type of violence they had perpetrated or witnessed was mostly verbal violence.

#### 4.1.2. Legal Status and Sanctions in Violence against Healthcare Workers in Türkiye

Although there is a “Patient Rights Regulation” in Turkish law, there is no clear regulation on the rights of healthcare workers. The lack of a specific regulation for professionals such as healthcare workers who perform their profession under high risk, have long working hours, are likely to be exposed to pathogens, suffer from psychological stress and extreme fatigue, have high levels of occupational exhaustion, and are likely to face occupational stigmatization is a deficiency.

There are various regulations on violence against healthcare workers in various legal regulations. Some of these basic arrangements are as follows. (Figure-3)

**Figure 3.** Some fundamental legislation on violence against healthcare workers



#### 4.1.2.1. Within the scope of Additional Article 12 of the Health Services Law No. 3359

In terms of crimes against healthcare workers committed while performing their duties, healthcare workers are governed by Additional Article 12 of Health Services Law No. 3359.

*“In the crimes of intentional injury (Article 86), threat (Article 106), insult (Article 125), and resisting to prevent the execution of duty (Article 265) in the Turkish Penal Code No. 5237 committed against health personnel and auxiliary health personnel working in public or private health institutions and organizations:*

*a) The penalties to be determined according to the relevant articles shall be increased by half.*

*b) The provisions on postponement of imprisonment set forth in Article 51 of the Turkish Penal Code shall not apply. Personnel working in private health institutions and organizations are regarded as public officials under Turkish Criminal Code No. 5237 for crimes committed against them in the performance of their duties.*

*Those suspected of committing crimes against health institutions and organization personnel while performing their duties shall be arrested by law enforcement officers and referred to the Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office after the necessary procedures are completed. The public prosecutor finalizes the judicial proceedings. During investigations of these crimes, law enforcement officers take the statements of health personnel who are complainants, victims, or witnesses at their workplaces. The provisions of this paragraph shall also apply to crimes committed against private health institutions and organizational personnel in the course of their duties.*

*In the health institution or organization where the violent incident took place, if there are additional healthcare professionals and auxiliary staff members capable of delivering the services previously provided by the victim to the perpetrator or their relatives, said services shall be provided by other personnel.”*

#### **4.1.2.2. Within the scope of the Law on the Amendment of the Turkish Penal Code and Certain Laws on the Prevention of Violence against Women and Healthcare Workers**

The Law on the Amendment of the Turkish Penal Code and Certain Laws on the Prevention of Violence Against Women and Healthcare Workers (Official Gazette, 2022) amended Article 100/3 of the Code of Criminal Procedure No. 5271. Accordingly, a new regulation has been made regarding violence against healthcare workers, and crimes of intentional injury committed against healthcare workers during or because of their duties have been included among the catalog crimes related to arrest. This paved the way for those who are charged with violence against healthcare workers to be jailed pending trial.

Additional Article 12 of HSFL No. 3359 was amended with the 28th article of Law No. 7243 on the Amendment of the Higher Education Law and Certain Laws through the legislative technique of the omnibus bill. As stated in Article 1 of the Turkish Penal Code No. 5237, the purpose of the penal code is “to protect individual rights and liberties, public order and security, the state of law, public health and the environment, public peace, and to prevent the commission of crime...” Considering Additional Article 12 of Law No. 3359 in this respect, the severity of the penalties alone is insufficient in terms of deterrence, and the fact that threats and insults against healthcare workers may be changed to alternative sanctions and judicial fines and that deferment of the announcement of the verdict may be applied, cannot be considered sufficient in terms of preventing violence in healthcare.

#### **4.1.2.3. Under the Decree Law No. 663 on the Organization and Duties of the Ministry of Health and Affiliated Organizations**

Article 54 of Decree-Law No. 663 on the Organization and Duties of the Ministry of Health and Affiliated Institutions stipulates “Regulation on the Procedures and Principles of Legal Aid to be provided to the Personnel of the Ministry of Health due to Crimes Committed against them” regarding the regulations on legal

aid to be provided. Regarding the purpose of Article 1 of the Regulation, it is noted that if the health personnel who are victims of violence or their legal heirs do not request or do not meet the specified conditions, even if they do request, they will not receive the legal aid specified in the Regulation. Furthermore, even if the conditions specified in the regulation are met, it has been ignored that the act of violence against health workers also has a material/moral damage dimension. Legal aid is limited to the scope of the penal code. The fact that the regulation does not cover actions and lawsuits that can be filed against perpetrators of violence under the compensation law indicates that it is inadequate in this regard.

#### **4.1.2.4. Within the scope of Circular No. 2016/3 dated 16.03.2106 on Legal Aid and the White Code Practice**

Circular No. 2016/3, dated March 16, 2106, on Legal Aid and the Code of White Practice (White Code Circular), is also one of the regulations on violence against healthcare workers.

It is explained in the circular that “the measures to be taken for the safety of healthcare workers have been explained in order to ensure that healthcare workers work safely and with high motivation, and there will be no discrimination in terms of location in reporting cases due to crimes committed against personnel during the provision of health services or due to these duties, and that all cases occurring in all public or private health institutions should be reported to the address “<http://www.beyazkod.saglik.gov.tr>” or the phone number “113”.

Healthcare workers who are victims of violence can also seek their rights through the penal code and compensation law. Moreover, if healthcare workers who are civil servants are unfairly complained about or denounced without cause, they may file a lawsuit for compensation against the individuals who made the unfair complaints or denounced them to compensate for the material / moral damages they have suffered, as well as file a criminal complaint by applying to the Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office.

In crimes of violence committed against healthcare workers, the state has the obligation

to ensure the right to healthy and safe work and the obligation to protect the right to life. When necessary, the state's responsibility for compensation shall also come to the fore.

## 4.2. Violence in Health and Germany

### 4.2.1. Data on Violence against Healthcare Workers in Germany and its Patterns

Violence against healthcare workers is a global problem and is also seen in Germany. In Germany, the violence against healthcare workers is frequently associated with social violence and memorialized as such. In 1992, when refugee camps were set on fire in Rostock, the prevention of first aiders by the public from treating the wounded and those in danger was one of the most important incidents of violence against healthcare workers (Scheffler, 1995). The severity of violence against healthcare workers in Germany is less severe than in Türkiye, but it has emerged as a national issue worthy of consideration, as evidenced by the data. Public officials of the Federal Criminal Police (BKA) have announced that healthcare workers have been threatened and assaulted by opponents of the coronavirus disease, medicines, and vaccines, known as "corona deniers." Many medical associations, health insurance companies, and hospitals in Germany offer psychosocial counseling for physicians, as well as seminars and training programs on violence. It is reported that local police support physicians to protect themselves from violence, especially from patients and their relatives, and that they provide physical defense actions. Moreover, the insufficient number of personnel working in emergency services is one of the reasons for the prevalence of violence in the German health care system, particularly in emergency services (Schmitt-Sausen, 2018).

At the 125th German Doctors' Day in November 2021, European Parliament members stated in their minutes (Pühler et al., 2021) that existing regulations are insufficient to protect physicians from violence and called for an extension of violence prevention measures. They stated that their claims about the inadequacy of the measures in place were justified, particularly

during the COVID-19 pandemic, citing the fact that physicians who administered vaccines were frequently threatened, insulted, and subjected to physical violence. They stated that in some cases police protection was required. They stated that in the current situation, it is becoming increasingly difficult to develop a trusting physician-patient relationship. It has been argued that the 2020 regulation in Germany on the aggravation of criminal law sanctions in the case of violence against healthcare workers (Article 113 et seq. StGB) and the training and advice provided for physicians and medical assistants in medical chambers in the case of violence in health are beneficial but insufficient. Moreover, in the minutes of the 127th German Doctors' Day in May 2023, it was stated that violence against healthcare workers is an acute problem, and similar demands were made. In a study conducted by the Institute of Forensic Medicine at the University of Heidelberg in cooperation with the North Baden Regional Medical Association and with the support of the State Medical Association and the Baden-Württemberg State Dental Association, with the majority of participants based in Baden-Württemberg (85.7%) and North Rhine-Westphalia (6.2%), more than 1,800 questionnaires were evaluated, suggesting that the demand for an extension of violence in health measures is justified (Pühler, et al., 2023).

According to *Ärztemonitor 2018* data, at least 75% of all attempted physical violence against physician assistants and their teams happens every day, regardless of gender. It was revealed that one out of every four physicians has already experienced physical violence. It was concluded that 16-17% of physical violence was inflicted on female physicians as well as male physicians (URL-3, 2018). The German Medical Association reported a significant increase in cases of violence against healthcare workers in Germany due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Osterloh, Reichardt, & Richter-Kuhlmann, 2021). The Fulda University of Applied Sciences surveyed 354 employees of 51 emergency departments in Hesse, Germany, in 2018 on incidents of psychological, physical, and sexual violence in the "GINA - Violence in the Emergency Department Survey," which



resulted in almost 76% of respondents stating that they had experienced at least one form of physical violence in the last twelve months. The figures are even higher for verbal violence. Among the respondents, 97% confirmed that they had experienced at least one form of verbal violence in the last 12 months. One out of every two people (52%) reported having experienced at least one form of sexual violence (Freudenstein-Güzel & Christiansen, 2019). The survey conducted on the prevalence rate of violence in health in 2022 with health personnel working in ambulances indicated that verbal attacks, in particular, have become a routine part of the daily work of emergency health services. On average, 29% of respondents reported being humiliated, harassed, or verbally threatened. Additionally, 8% of the participants reported being subjected to physical attacks (Leuschner, Herr, Lutz, Fecher, & Selzer, 2022). As explained, cases of violence against healthcare workers, which existed before the COVID-19 pandemic, have gradually increased after the pandemic. Anti-vaccination movements and corona deniers, which emerged especially with the COVID-19 process, have been effective in reducing the increase in violence against healthcare workers. The State Medical Associations have also recorded an increase in violence against healthcare workers. The Hessian Medical Association developed in 2019 a form for reporting violence against physicians and their teams in order to obtain data on the forms of violence used. It became the first medical association in Germany to develop such a form and publish it on its website. As of November 2021, the Hessian Medical Association had received 27 registrations on this form before the start of the pandemic and 37 after the pandemic. Most of the reports originated from medical practices. The forms revealed that aggressive behaviour was especially directed towards resident physicians. Furthermore, it was also revealed that even in cases of violence directly related to the pandemic, patients insulted and threatened healthcare workers because the waiting time was prolonged due to the high density of patients and the fact that they came without an appointment. Some patients even threatened to call the police when they had to wait for a long time. It was reported that in one case,

during a pandemic consultation, the medical secretary was subjected to violence by being pushed against the wall because the patient was not allowed to enter the consultation room. The President of the Berlin Medical Association, Dr. Peter Bobbert reported that physicians received many threatening messages and many requests for help from physicians. The Saxony-Anhalt Medical Chamber condemns violence against physicians. The Council of the Chamber of the Thuringian State Medical Association has set up a special e-mail address (Power-against-aerzte@laek-thuringen.de) for health professionals to report their experiences of violence and to contact them about the increasing aggression against health professionals in 2021. It was revealed that many of these e-mails were sent by physicians who had received threatening messages about the coronavirus vaccine. The Thuringian Medical Chamber reported that criminal complaints have been filed and investigations are still ongoing in most of the cases (Osterloh, Reichardt, & Richter-Kuhlmann, 2021).

#### **4.2.2. Legal Status and Sanctions in Violence against Healthcare Workers in Germany**

##### **4.2.2.1. Under the German Criminal Code (StGB)**

Amendments adopted in 2017 to the German Criminal Code (StGB) criminalize the prevention by force or threat of force of the intervention of first aiders in accidents, general danger, or distress. Although physicians and other health care workers who arrive at the scene of the incident are also included within the scope of first aid workers, the German legislator did not include physicians and other health care workers in emergency services within the scope of the second newly regulated offense, as in the offense of obstruction of rendering assistance (StGB § 323c/2). The reason for this is that, as can be clearly seen in the incidents reported in the German media, obstruction of healthcare workers is mostly seen in external interventions. This occurs not only in accidents but also in social incidents when crowds prevent first aid teams from performing their duties. The German legislator has regulated this provision in connection with the offense of resisting an

officer in the performance of his duty (StGB 113 § ). In fact, in these cases, as in cases where assistance cannot be rendered by obstructive behaviour, it is intended to protect the personal rights of victims or patients and, relatedly, the public interest in the provision of health care. Although it is generally accepted that criminal laws do not provide special protection for certain professions, there is a view that the qualified danger to personal rights in the case of first aid justifies the protection of healthcare workers by this means. A further amendment to the German Criminal Code (StGB) in 2017, § 115/3, reveals that this offense does not cover all forms of first aid, but only some of them and only first aid workers, i.e., it does not protect healthcare workers working in emergency services. The reason behind this, as explained above, is the German legislator's belief that the fulfilment of the duties of healthcare workers is more difficult in their external activities. The offense of assault under StGB § 115 § 3 sentence 2 can also be committed by the patient who is receiving first aid. In this regard, we could argue that the German legislator has found a solution to patient violence against healthcare workers during first aid through the criminal law. It is observed that the institutional status of the healthcare worker providing first aid intervention is insignificant. Although it is generally accepted that criminal laws do not provide special protection for certain professions, there is a view that the qualified danger to personal rights in the case of first aid justifies the protection of healthcare workers by this means. Another justification for protecting the existence of such a public interest is the idea that health officials actually provide social solidarity in such situations by institutionally helping people in distress. Obstruction of first aid workers or emergency service workers who help or want to help others in accidents, general danger, or difficult situations (judicial fine or imprisonment of up to one year: The German Criminal Code (StGB) 323c "Offense of refusal of assistance" criminalizes obstruction by force or threat of force (punishable by a fine or up to three years' imprisonment: § 115/3 and 113/1 of the German Criminal Code (StGB) or actual assault against such persons (imprisonment from three months to five years: StGB § 115/3). §115/3 StGB

provides a qualification for the aforementioned offenses if committed with more than one person or with an armed or dangerous weapon (StGB § 115/3, 114/2 and 113/2). The attempt to commit these offenses is not punishable under German law, as they do not constitute an offense (Verbrechen) and are not separately regulated in the law. It should be noted that the scope of attempts that do not constitute an offense can only be determined after determining the elements of the offense. However, it is possible to attempt the offenses of wounding (§ 223/2 of the German Criminal Code (StGB)), deprivation of liberty (§ 239/2 of the StGB), force (coercion) (§ 240/3), which can often be committed in an intellectual combination, even if the attempt is unfavourable. The draft law on combating right-wing extremism and hate offenses adopted by the German cabinet on February 19, 2020, includes a special provision on violence against healthcare workers. Within the scope of this amendment, a special protection under criminal law has been introduced against violence against healthcare workers working in emergency health services and emergency services and is included in the scope of Article 113 et seq. of the German Criminal Code (StGB). The German Federal Government characterizes this amendment as a response to the increasing violence against healthcare workers. Thus, the provisions of Article 113 et seq. of the German Criminal Code (StGB - Strafgesetzbuch) titled "Resisting an Officer in the Performance of Duty" have started to be applied to healthcare workers. Paragraph 1 of the Law: "Whoever resists or assaults by force or threat of force a public official or a soldier of the Bundeswehr authorized to execute or enforce laws, regulations, court judgments, and decisions or orders, or a soldier of the Bundeswehr during the execution of such an order, shall be punished by imprisonment of up to three years or by a judicial fine." The following paragraph states that in very severe cases, the penalty is imprisonment for six months to five years or a judicial fine. Medical emergency services, or emergency service assistants, were integrated into the law on April 3, 2021. In conclusion, it is concluded that not all acts of violence committed by patients, relatives, or third parties against healthcare workers are protected under criminal

law under the regulations in the German Criminal Law, and that the types of offenses added to the Law in 2017 are limited to being applied only in the event that they are committed against a certain group of healthcare workers, in order to comply with the principle of the ultima ratio as much as possible. Nevertheless, as mentioned, obstruction and actual assault behaviours are amendments that expand the scope of criminal responsibility. However, although the scope has been expanded, most of such behaviours may be those that healthcare workers do not consider significant and do not report, as stated in studies and reports.

#### 4.2.2.2. Under the German Civil Code (Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch - BGB)

The German Civil Code (Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch - BGB) § 823 - 853 regulates liability for damages arising from tortious acts. German tort law recognizes the compensatory purpose.

BGB § 823 establishes that *“anyone who intentionally or negligently unlawfully infringes the life, body, health, liberty, property, or any other right of another person shall be liable to that person for the damage caused thereby.”* Pursuant to BGB §249 (1) *“Type and Scope of Compensation,” “the indemnitee is obliged to compensate the injured party for the full amount of the damage suffered and to restore the injured party to the condition in which he would have been had the event giving rise to the obligation to compensate not occurred.”* The acceptance of the compensatory purpose is described in the preamble to BGB §249 in the sense that the determination of private law consequences must not be based on moral or criminal law considerations, that the scope of the damage determines the scope of the compensation, and that this is fair to the person entitled to compensation.

In accordance with BGB § 199 /2, *“Claims for damages for violations of the right to life, bodily integrity, health, and liberty are time-barred 30 years from the date of the “commission of the tort” (Begehung der Handlung), the “breach of obligation” (der Pflichtverletzung) or any other event that caused the damage, irrespective of when the claim arose and regardless of the*

*criteria of knowing/should have known. In such cases, the compensation periods pursuant to BGB § 199 /3 are subject to statute of limitations. The German Civil Code meticulously differentiates between “the occurrence of the right to claim” and “the occurrence of the tortious act or other event giving rise to liability” at the commencement of the statute of limitations.*

## 5. DISCUSSION - COMPARISON OF VIOLENCE AGAINST HEALTHCARE WORKERS IN GERMANY AND TÜRKİYE

Protection is provided in terms of criminal law in terms of the offenses of intentional killing, intentional injury, deprivation of liberty, force, threat, and insult committed by patients, their relatives, or third parties against healthcare workers in the course of their duties or due to their duties. Violence is one of the most prominent problems faced by healthcare workers.

Due to the recent increase in violence against healthcare workers, both countries have tried to prevent this issue through legislative amendments, but in fact, these amendments are merely populist in nature. In fact, as the famous criminal jurist Beccaria stated in his work *“On Crimes and Punishments,” “one of the most effective brakes preventing criminal offenses is not the severity of the penalties, but the inevitability of the penalties.”* The sentences need to be deterrents. However, more crucially, it is the execution of the sentences that is essential. Declines in confidence in the execution of sentences also reduce their deterrence.

Both the inclusion of the offense of intentional injury committed against personnel working in health institutions and organizations during or because of their duties in Türkiye in 2022 among the catalogue offenses for which arrest is presumed civil under the Criminal Procedure Law No. 5271, and the introduction of a special protection under criminal law against violence against healthcare professionals working in emergency health services and emergency services within the scope of Article 113 et seq. of the German Criminal Code (StGB) in 2020, which provides for more severe criminal sanctions

in case of resistance to law enforcement and execution officers under the title of “Resisting an Officer in the Performance of Duty” are essentially interventions made to the law in order to satisfy the public, which is incompatible with the principle of equality, which is one of the fundamental principles of law.

Violence against healthcare workers in Germany is treated with vocational training at medical chambers, but not in Türkiye.

Whereas in Türkiye, there are more cases of violence in healthcare resulting from communication problems, which are reported after the intervention of the physician and result in serious injuries. Violence against physicians in Germany is more often manifested in the form of preventing the physician from intervening. Indeed, in order to protect healthcare workers more effectively in Türkiye, the “white code” application was introduced in 2012, and an application called “TTB Yanımnda” was developed to increase solidarity among physicians on violence in health.

The incidence of violence in health is high in both countries, especially in emergency services. Germany provides training at medical chambers on how to approach patients in such circumstances. However, there is currently no similar practice in Türkiye, and in cases of violence in the healthcare sector, healthcare workers are assisted in defending or protecting themselves. We advocate that emergency services in both countries should be staffed by a psychologist-like employee specially trained to calm patients and their relatives.

Both countries have demands from physicians for harsher penalties for violence in healthcare. However, it is worth noting that the absolute imposition of a lighter penalty is a greater deterrent than the non-imposition of a heavier penalty. Therefore, in terms of deterrent penalties, it must be stated that absoluteness rather than gravity is at the forefront. Harsher penalties do not produce the hoped-for results in terms of deterrence. The major instrument of deterrence in the classical deterrence approach is the existence of punishments that are swift,

sufficiently severe and applied to everyone without exception. Under this approach, punishments would serve as a threat and an example for both potential and actual offenders.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Violence against healthcare workers remains an ongoing problem today. It is evident that violence against healthcare workers who neglect their own lives in order to save the lives of others when necessary, who make many sacrifices in order to save human lives, and who, despite their heavy responsibilities and working pace, must be prevented immediately in order to perform their duties properly. Although violence against healthcare workers is such an urgent issue, it is deemed that the regulations in Turkish Law are not sufficient in terms of preventing violence. Although the legislature in Türkiye has included regulations on patients’ rights, instead of making a separate law on the rights of healthcare workers or a regulation in the Turkish Penal Code, the legislature has regulated the rights of healthcare workers through the “omnibus law” legislative technique in a way that does not coincide with the gravity of the issue. The deficiencies in this regard should be eliminated, and regulations must be made in accordance with the rules of law by making regulations that will be in line with the modern state understanding in Türkiye.

- In preventing violence against healthcare workers, it is thought that it is crucial to provide training on how to confront patients, relatives, and third parties who are prone to violence within the body of medical chambers, as in Germany, to provide training to healthcare workers by law enforcement agencies so that they can physically defend themselves in case of violence, and to structure the physical infrastructure in healthcare institutions and organizations in a way to ensure security.
- Providing a safe working environment and enabling health workers to perform their work properly without demotivation,
- Reducing the patient density in health institutions and organizations and ensuring the employment of more healthcare professionals for this purpose

- Ensuring security by installing X-Ray devices at the entrances of healthcare institutions and organizations,

- The legal regulations that we have outlined in order to protect healthcare workers from violence and its effects must be effectively enforced, and alternative sanctions, judicial fines, and HAGB (Deferment of the Announcement of the Verdict) must be abolished in terms of crimes committed against healthcare workers during or because of their duties.

Finally, it is argued that the implementation of the penalties rather than the aggravation of the penalties for violence against healthcare workers is essential for real deterrence.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE/ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ

# Examination of the relationship between peer bullying and cyber violence in university students

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## Abstract

Peer bullying, encountered by individuals globally at an early age, necessitates a deep understanding of its underlying causes and associated elements for effective intervention strategies. The integration of digital technologies as tools has introduced the dimension of cyber violence to the discourse on peer bullying. This research aims to explore the relationship between peer bullying and cyber violence in a specific age group. Globally, 10-15% of children and adolescents experience peer bullying lasting over six months. Recognized as a global health issue by the World Health Organization and the United Nations, research indicates varying risks of exposure in different countries, such as 30% in Australia, 20% in Portugal, and 10% in the United States. The study investigates the connection between the violent behaviors adopted by individuals who have experienced peer bullying and their efforts to overcome the associated sense of worthlessness. Data were collected through an online survey utilizing the "Cyberbullying Scale" by Arıca et al. and the Turkish-adapted "Adolescent Peer Relationships" scale by Seçer. The sample comprises 260 university students aged 18-24. Findings reveal that 53.8% of participants scoring high on the cyberbullying scale also exhibit elevated scores on the bully form of the adolescent peer relationships scale. Notably, 10% of those scoring highest on the bully form relate to participants who scored high on the threat dimension. In conclusion, the research highlights the need for additional studies to address cyberbullying and underscores the necessity for the development of diverse strategies. This study may establish a foundational framework for future research, contributing to the formulation of more effective approaches in combating cyberbullying.

**Keywords:** Peer bullying, cyber violence, violence.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Peer bullying, a social problem that has gained increasing attention in the past century and laid the groundwork for the emergence of numerous concepts, is encountered as a social issue. Often observed in environments where peers of similar ages, such as schools, courses, and sports clubs, come together, and where possible competition is likely, peer bullying is mostly seen among individuals in the adolescent stage, commonly defined as the teenage years. The presence of peer bullying among adolescents in the transition to adulthood often results in the occurrence of various psychological, physiological, and behavioral problems in the bullied individuals or the development of a conducive process.

Peer bullying, in its broadest definition, occurs between individuals perceived as strong and weak and sometimes extends beyond the boundaries of the school, affecting everyday life. In this regard, peer bullying is not just a school-focused or within-school issue but is encountered as an issue that encompasses an individual's entire life.

With the development of cyber technologies and the easy access of individual users to these technologies, cyberbullying has become an increasingly discussed and important subtopic under the umbrella of violence. Cyberbullying is becoming more prevalent with the ease of access to cyber technologies and has led to the emergence of many bullies and victims. In this context, as seen in the literature on cyberbullying, it can be observed in conjunction with peer bullying, and cyber technologies can be a tool for bullies to engage in bullying behaviors outside of school. This situation prompts a discussion of the relationship between cyberbullying and peer bullying.

The aim of this study is to measure the relationship between peer bullying behavior among university students, who are increasingly drawn into the widespread use of cyber technologies, and cyberbullying.

Hypotheses of the Study:

H-1: Participants who score high on the

adolescent peer relationship scale in the bully form also score high on the cyberbullying scale.

H-2: There is a relationship between peer bullying and cyberbullying.

## 2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1. Peer Bullying

While research on aggression has a long history in the literature, studies related to the concept of bullying can be considered relatively new compared to research on aggression. Nevertheless, significant progress can be observed in studies on peer bullying conducted in schools, and in the academic literature on bullying, thanks to studies such as those by Tsaoasis (2016), Hong and Espelage (2012), and Gini and Pozzoli (2009).

Studies conducted by Olweus in the 1970s and 1980s are notable landmarks in the field of bullying research. Olweus's initial studies on bullying primarily focused on physical bullying (Olweus, 1977). However, over the years, discussions about the concept of bullying expanded beyond just physical behaviors, leading to diversified and expanded definitions of bullying (Smith & Brain, 2000).

Olweus defined bullying as a situation in which a person is exposed to negative behaviors from one or more individuals, including social exclusion, physical bullying, and verbal bullying (Olweus, 1993). Mynard and Joseph categorized bullying into four dimensions: physical, verbal, relational, and attacks on personal belongings, unlike other definitions, which included damage to personal belongings as part of bullying behavior (Mynard & Joseph, 2000).

In the general sense, bullying is defined as repeated intentional harm in interpersonal relationships where a clear power imbalance is evident (Olweus, 1993). What distinguishes bullying from other forms of aggression is the repetition of aggressive behavior. Many researchers emphasize that for a behavior to be considered bullying, it must be repetitive (Ybarra et al., 2014).

In the light of the definition of bullying, one of the

concepts that is currently being addressed and studied by various disciplines is peer bullying.

Olweus, known for his definitions of bullying, defined peer bullying as a student's perception of recurring and systematic behaviors that are intentionally harmful and inflicted by other students or a student group who are perceived as more powerful (Olweus, 1993). Defining the concept of harm is not straightforward. While physically harmful behaviors and actions can be defined and classified with clear boundaries, verbal behaviors, speech, and expressions create a more ambiguous framework compared to physical behaviors. This is primarily due to cultural differences, the richness and meaning of local expressions, and the role of students' jargon and behaviors in shaping these meanings.

A word or expression that does not carry any negative meaning under normal circumstances may convey a negative, demeaning, humiliating, or injurious meaning within a specific group of friends. Similarly, a speech or expression that is normally considered destructive and insulting may have a non-destructive meaning among a group of friends. In today's context, in social media, which is an important agenda setter, many words, behaviors, or expressions can transform and correspond to meanings that are far from their original intent.

The red line here should be what the expression, behavior, or behavior means to the targeted person. Under normal circumstances, an expression whose meaning is not known within a specific group of friends may seem normal to a third person, but it can cause the targeted peer to be hurt or feel bad. Therefore, it is more beneficial and meaningful to draw a flexible boundary for the concept of harm and look at it from the perspective of the dimension perceived by the targeted person.

Within this study, peer bullying is encountered as a contemporary issue that is currently being studied, based on this dimension, among individuals who are close in age. Peer bullying is primarily defined as a persistent attitude or behavior that causes recurring discomfort to students, predominantly within the school

environment but occasionally extending beyond the school (Gürhan, 2017).

Peer bullying, a type of bullying frequently encountered among peers, is indicated in the literature. Based on the research conducted at this point, it has become possible to make a certain determination regarding the profiles of bullies and victims (Pellegrini, 1998). In peer bullying, often younger individuals who are physically weaker are designated as victims, while in physical bullying, the victims are predominantly male students (Gürhan, 2017).

Besag has defined peer-to-peer bullying as deliberately causing harm, physically, mentally, or verbally, to people who are perceived as weaker, for the sake of the interests and goals of the person or group considered strong (Besag, 1989). As can be seen from the definition, bullying is a multifaceted set of behaviors.

One of the concepts that attract attention in the literature is peer bullying, which is examined in light of the definition of bullying.

There are five theoretical approaches to peer bullying that are noted in the literature: bullying as a result of individual differences among students, bullying as a developmental process, bullying due to peer pressure in schools, bullying from the perspective of restorative justice (Gürhan, 2017).

As mentioned in the definition of bullying, Olweus's early studies initially focused on the physical dimension of bullying, but as the number of studies increased and discussions in the academic literature clarified the conceptual dimension, bullying began to be examined in many dimensions.

## 2.2. Cyber Violence and Peer Bullying

Efforts to harm others by using information technologies with the aim of causing harm to other individuals or groups, falls under the umbrella of cyberbullying or cyber violence (Türk & Şenyuva, 2021). Cyber violence, which encompasses various dimensions, such as psychological, emotional, and social, carried out using two different information technologies,

is a form of violence discussed in the literature under the category of violence (Polat, 2016).

Although peer bullying mostly occurs within institutions where peers gather, such as schools, sports clubs, and courses, it is sometimes observed that bullying transcends these institutions. The fact that many behaviors associated with peer bullying extend into the technological infrastructure of the cyber world indicates that a significant portion of behaviors related to peer bullying can also be carried out using technology (Al-Alosi, 2017).

Behaviors studied under the title of cyberbullying, which include threatening messages, electronic messages, and harmful behaviors conducted through commonly used social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and Tiktok, can also be observed under the title of peer bullying (Polat, 2022).

The anonymity provided by digital technology, the easy opportunities and methods provided by social media platforms for creating user profiles (Guan et al., 2016), and the capabilities of cyber technology have made it possible for peer bullying and peer violence to extend beyond school to the world of social media (Schneider et al., 2012).

The extension of peer bullying beyond schools and educational institutions into the realm of cyber technology, and the role of cyber technologies as a means for peer bullying, prompt a discussion of the relationship between peer bullying and cyberbullying.

### 3. METHOD

#### 3.1. Sample

The sample group of this study consisted of university students aged 18-24.

Each participating participant is a member of at least one social media platform. The participants in the study spend at least 1 hour per day on one of the social media platforms.

It has been declared by the Ethics Committee of Doğuş University that there is no harm in conducting the study with the decision dated 17.01.2023 and numbered 39463.

#### 3.2. INSTRUMENTS

The study was conducted using the "Cyberbullying Scale" developed by Arıca and colleagues in 2012, and the "Adolescent Peer Relationships Scale - Bully Form," adapted into Turkish by Seęer in 2014 and developed by Parada to measure bullying and victimization in adolescents.

The cyberbullying scale used in this research consists of 24 items in its adolescent version. The scale is a 4-point Likert scale, where the response "never" corresponds to a score of 1, and the response "always" corresponds to a score of 4. Notably, there are no reversely scored items in the scale. The highest attainable score from the scale is 96, while the lowest score is 24.

Another scale utilized in this study is the Adolescent Peer Relationships Scale in the Bully Form, comprising 18 items. In this scale, the response "never" corresponds to a score of 1, and the response "every day" corresponds to a score of 6. Accordingly, the highest possible score from the scale is 108, and the lowest score is 18.

#### 3.3. Analysis

This study serves as a preliminary investigation for the related research, and the analysis of the study is interpreted through descriptive analysis method.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

All participants involved in this research are university students aged between 18 and 24. Of the participants, 48.7% are pursuing an associate degree, while 51.3% are enrolled in a bachelor's degree program.

All participants are members of at least one social media platform. Additionally, each participant spends a minimum of one hour per day on social media applications.

According to the findings, 22.8% of the participants in the study scored high on items related to "threatening" from the cyberbullying scale, while 36.7% scored high on items related to "transfer." Additionally, 18.2% of the participants scored high on items expressing

“excessive closeness.” No significant difference in the average scores was observed for the remaining 22.3% of participants.

Among participants who scored high on items related to “threatening,” 64.6% constitute those who scored the highest on the Bully Form of the Adolescent Peer Relationships Scale. This figure represents approximately 13.4% of all participants. However, it is noteworthy that among the 29 participants who scored the lowest on the Bully Form of the Adolescent Peer Relationships Scale (about 10% of all participants), 70.2% scored high on items related to “transfer” from the cyberbullying scale.

Participants who scored high on items related to “excessive closeness” in the cyberbullying scale, 54.6% scored higher on items related to “threatening” compared to those who scored high on the Bully Form of the Adolescent Peer Relationships Scale. Conversely, participants who scored the lowest on the same scale had higher scores on items related to “transfer.”

Among the top 26 participants who scored the highest on the Bully Form of the Adolescent Peer Relationships Scale (constituting approximately 10% of all participants), 88.7% scored high on items related to “threatening” from the cyberbullying scale. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that the highest-scoring 26 participants scored lower on items related to “transfer” from the cyberbullying scale.

The majority of participants who marked the highest value on the 6-point Likert scale, which is “every day,” for the statement “I made hurtful comments to some of my friends” in the cyberbullying scale, responded with “always” to the statement “I send threatening messages to other people on the internet” in the cyberbullying scale. At this point, it can be said that participants involved in peer bullying carry their bullying from school to the cyber world.

For the statement “I secretly use other people’s names to open accounts on sites like Facebook and Twitter” in peer bullying, participants who answered “every day” to this statement responded with “always” to the statement “I made jokes about some of my friends that they

wouldn’t like” in the cyberbullying scale. At this point, it can be suggested that participants who open accounts imitating others in the context of cyberbullying are primarily motivated to defame or label others.

Participants who responded “always” and “often” to the statement “I send threatening messages to other people on the internet” in the cyberbullying scale gave a parallel response of “every day” and “several times a week” to the statement “I deliberately slapped or punched some of my friends” in the peer bullying scale.

For the statement “I spread untrue rumors about some of my friends every day,” five participants who answered “every day” had higher scores in the cyberbullying scale compared to participants who gave different answers to the same statement. The same five participants also responded, “every day” and “several times a week” to the statements “I made fun of some of my friends by giving them nicknames they wouldn’t like” in the peer bullying scale and gave high scores to the statement that “I threatened other people” in the cyberbullying scale.

In contrast to these values, participants who answered “always” or “several times a week” to the statement “I tried to keep some of my friends away from me with my negative attitudes” received lower scores from the cyberbullying scale. This suggests that participants adopted such an attitude in their fight against peer bullying.

With the rapid proliferation of cyber technology from the 21st century onwards, the frequently mentioned concept of cyberbullying has given rise to the concepts of peer bullying and cyber peer bullying. This necessitates the need for studies on the relationship between peer bullying and violence. In line with this need, a preliminary study was conducted with a sample of university students, and the findings were shared.

As a result of the study, it was observed that participants who scored high in the Bully Form of the Adolescent Peer Relationships Scale also scored high in the Cyberbullying Scale.

Considering the social and psychological

effects of being exposed to peer bullying, the importance of combating peer bullying is evident in preventing the individual-level negative consequences mentioned in the literature. Moreover, the reflection of peer bullying on cyber technologies can be predicted to exacerbate the negative consequences of peer bullying at the individual level.

The relationship between peer bullying and cyberbullying highlighted in this preliminary study emphasizes the cyberbullying dimension in peer bullying. Therefore, it is evident that cyberbullying, carried out using cyber technologies, is encountered as a part of peer bullying.

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# The protective role of mindfulness in the cyberhate experience

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## Abstract

In today's world, widespread and uncontrolled access to social media channels, along with the possibility for individuals to hide their identities or use pseudonyms, can turn the internet, especially the social media environment, into a tool for violence for women due to many potential situations.

The purpose of this article is to inform about a study conducted with the participation of ten women actively involved in the Kars/Sarıkamış cooperative, focusing on the impact of mindfulness method on coping with the various short and long-term negative effects of cyberviolence on women. The research flow includes introducing the concepts discussed in the study and their relationships, the purpose of the research, the methodology, results, and future steps that can be taken. The aim of the research on the role of mindfulness in the experience of cyberviolence is to understand the effects of cyberviolence on women from the perspective of ten women participants actively involved in the Kars/Sarıkamış women's cooperative and the impact of mindfulness on women in coping with these effects. This study is of a qualitative nature, and survey research and focus group discussions have been preferred as the methods. The research results show that participants acknowledged the short and long-term negative psychological, physiological, and social effects of cyberviolence on individuals, but it also emerged that by strengthening solidarity among women and increasing the availability of methods such as mindfulness, the negative effects of cyberviolence can be reduced.

**Keywords:** Internet, mindfulness, cyberviolence, women, solidarity

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

With the advancement of technology and globalization, communities from different countries, cultures, and religions can communicate with each other through technology without time and space constraints (Cirban and Güneri 2021: 363). In today's world, the evolving and rapidly spreading information technologies have brought certain risks along with the convenience and ease they provide to individuals. Technological developments have enabled people to socialize in digital environments known as "social media" platforms, accommodating individuals of all ages, religions, and races (Siddiqui and Singh 2016: 75). Furthermore, on social networks, individuals can express emotions, thoughts, and attitudes they do not typically share in their daily lives without the obligation to disclose their real identities, in other words, anonymously. In virtual environments where the chance of remaining anonymous and the lack of surveillance are more prevalent, the likelihood of individuals engaging in violence, aggressive behavior, and attitudes increases (Mondal, Correa, and Benevenuto, 2020). Violence is a significant problem that exists in daily life, threatening individuals from various segments of society in different forms and degrees, without discrimination (Morales, 2023). Understanding the extent of violence as a problem requires addressing not only the act of violence itself but also the harm it causes to both victims and perpetrators. Therefore, comprehending and managing violence requires a multifaceted approach (Polat 2017: 325). Violence, which is prevalent in almost every aspect of life, continues to exist as a danger that steadily grows and negatively affects physical and mental health, regardless of race, language, religion, or gender (Cihan & Karakaya, 2017). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), violence is defined as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation" (WHO 2002: 5). The Turkish Language Association (TDK)

defines violence as "the degree of an action or power, superiority, hardness, using rough force against those with opposing views" (TDK, 2023).

With the development of technology, the concept of violence has taken on a new dimension. Cyberviolence encompasses harmful behaviors such as targeting, threatening, intimidating, humiliating, manipulating, controlling, exposing to hate speech, damaging reputation, and more, carried out by an individual or group using technology against another individual or group (UNFPA, 2021; Council of Europe, 2019). While cyberviolence has existed for years, the classification of different types of cyberviolence and the effectiveness of these types have only recently begun to be studied (Şener & Abınık, 2021; Council of Europe, 2019). Many countries still struggle to define the negative effects of cyberviolence on individuals and to enact legal measures to protect their citizens from these effects, even though cyberviolence has become a global problem with undeniable consequences (West, 2014; Council of Europe, 2019). Cyber violence can include various forms of harassment, privacy violations, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, and discriminatory behaviors targeting specific social groups and communities. Additionally, cyberviolence can encompass direct threats and/or verbal harassment, as well as various potential cyber crimes (Amnesty International, 2017; Council of Europe, 2019; UN Women, 2020). It is important to note that examples of cyberviolence types can overlap or be interconnected, and not all forms or examples of cyberviolence are equally severe or necessarily require a criminal law solution; they can be addressed with a specific approach and a combination of preventive, educational, protective, and other measures.

Cyberviolence affects people of all age groups, professions, and genders. Women, who are often subjected to societal pressure and violence, experience various forms of cyberviolence in online environments (Öksüzoğlu, 2021). The type of cyberviolence experienced by women varies according to their religion, race, ethnicity, and sexual preferences. If women belong to minority groups in terms of sexual



orientation and race, the continuity and severity of cyberviolence increases. According to the UNFPA (2021) Digital Violence Research in Turkey, one out of every five people in Turkey has experienced cyberviolence. The report reveals that women claim to experience more cyberviolence due to their gender and physical appearance. Approximately 51% of women receive written, verbal, or visual harassment messages in the digital environment, and 46% are subject to persistent stalking. According to the data, individuals in Turkey are most exposed to cyberviolence from unknown individuals and trolls. In Turkey, cyberviolence actions mostly occur through social media channels. According to the 2021 UNFPA report, the most common social media channels for cyberviolence actions are Instagram (53%), Facebook (35%), and Twitter (19%).

### 1.1. Mindfulness

Mindfulness, known as “bilinçli farkındalık” in Turkish, represents a mechanism of thought and existence where life unfolds by focusing on the present moment (Kabat-Zinn 2003: 146). With a history dating back approximately 2,500 years, this method has recently attracted the attention of many researchers (Kang and Whittingham 2011 :161 ; Aktepe & Tolan, 2020: 534). In the fast-paced flow of daily life, we often find ourselves performing routine actions that our minds have become accustomed to without noticing. Kabat-Zinn (2003) describes this state of mind as the “automatic pilot.” In contrast, mindfulness advocates shifting one’s attention toward the present moment, regardless of the judgments the mind is accustomed to hearing, and noticing the benefits of that moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2012). According to the Turkish Language Association (TDK, 2023), mindfulness is defined as “being aware of things that need to be seen or known, paying attention to something that needs to be understood.” Research has shown that mindfulness has benefits in self-regulation, cognitive flexibility, behavioral flexibility, and emotional well-being (Carmody et al., 2009). Mindfulness practices can vary. These practices can include mindfulness-based body exercises (yoga, tai chi, etc.) performed alongside simple

breathing exercises. Depending on individual preferences and conditions, practices can include only breathing exercises, visualization, and meditation (Tsang et al. 2008: 303).

### 1.2. Mindfulness Studies in Turkey

There has been an increase in mindfulness studies in Turkey in recent years. Şehidoğlu (2014) observed that regular mindfulness practices among adolescents aged 15-19 who actively use the internet led to a significant decrease in problematic internet use levels. In a study conducted by Dönmez (2018) with participants aged 12-55, it was found that as mindfulness increased, online gaming addiction decreased. Similarly, research examining the relationship between mindfulness and mobile phone addiction found that individuals with high levels of mindfulness had lower daily mobile phone usage (Güneri 2019: 367).

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Research Group

The research aims to investigate the impact of cyberviolence on women and the effectiveness of mindfulness in combating cyberviolence. The research group consists of adult women actively involved in the Women’s Cooperative in Sarıkamış Kars. This study was conducted with a total of 10 participants, who were selected from among the members of the women’s cooperative who volunteered to participate. All participants are women, and their ages range from 19 to 51. Specifically, 20% of the participants are 20 years old, 20% are 48 years old, 20% are 49 years old, 30% are 50 years old, and 10% are 46 years old. When examining the educational backgrounds of the participants, it is observed that 20% are university graduates, 70% are high school graduates, and 10% are primary school graduates.

Looking at the occupations of the participants, the majority are homemakers (60%). The research group also includes participants with direct professions such as social worker/businesswoman (10%), retirees (10%), and students (20%). When examining the participants’ social media usage, it is found that

the average usage duration is four hours. The longest usage duration extends to eight hours, while the shortest usage duration mentioned by the participants is two hours. 60% of the participants are married, while the remaining 40% are single. The most commonly used social media channel is Instagram (40%). Other social media channels used by the participants include WhatsApp (10%), Facebook (20%), TikTok (10%), and Twitter (20%).

### 3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The aim of the research is to learn about women's experiences of cyberviolence in their daily lives, the various effects of cyberviolence on women, women's coping methods with cyberviolence, and the opinions, thoughts, and experiences of women regarding the effectiveness of mindfulness practice in combating cyberviolence. The goal is to understand this process from the perspective of women. The reason for selecting Sarıkamış Women's Cooperative as the research participants is the sense of non-judgment and the environment where women feel free to express themselves and their thoughts, in short, the existence of women's solidarity.

Women Cooperatives provide an opportunity for local women mostly with low literacy rates to be empowered as members of consumer cooperatives. Women's cooperatives are also social constructions. Duguid and his colleagues (2015) highlight that healthy interpersonal relations are formed among women to provide the best operational capacity in many Turkish Women Cooperatives.

As a small local organization, Kars/Sarıkamış Women Cooperative consists of women from a range of age groups who have been actively using social media and are not hesitant to share their opinions and experiences about cyber sexual harassment of women and hate language in social media despite the prevalent view of regarding violence against women as a taboo in the region. According to a recent study, Kars is one of the cities where violence against women is significantly high, more than %40 (Utkan,2021).

The sub-objectives of the research are as follows:

- 1) This research attempts to determine the participants' awareness and knowledge of cyber violence.
- 2) The research aims to uncover the short-term and long-term effects of cyberviolence on the participants.
- 3) The study seeks to gather the opinions and thoughts of the participants about mindfulness as a method for coping with the negative effects of cyberviolence.

### 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted in Sarıkamış district of Kars province, Turkey. Different data collection techniques were used for different research questions. The research employed a questionnaire survey and focus group discussions as research methods.

Before moving on to the first stage of the research, which is the questionnaire survey, the participants were introduced to the subject and purpose of the research. In the second stage of the research, focus group discussions were conducted to delve deeper into the participants' answers to the questionnaire questions without restrictions, allowing participants to express their own experiences, opinions, and feelings.

#### 4.1. Survey Questions

The survey questions were adapted from questionnaire items used in previous studies by Şincek et al., 2017: 100) and Carp et al.(2022) and they were shared with the participants by the researcher. The survey questions were prepared taking into account demographic characteristics such as the participants' education levels and socio-economic status. In the first phase of the research, participants were asked to complete a written questionnaire consisting of a total of 27 open-ended questions. All participants completed both the survey questions and the focus group discussion questions.

The survey questions are divided into three sections. The completion time for the survey was approximately thirty minutes. The design of open-ended survey questions aimed to encourage participants to answer without feeling

limited by their thoughts and emotions.

In the first section of the survey, participants' demographic characteristics, including age, occupation, and education level, were asked. In addition to demographic questions, questions about participants' daily internet usage durations and social media usage durations were included in the survey to gather information about the participants. The survey then addressed the concept of cyberviolence. Participants were asked whether they had experienced cyber violence at any point in their lives, to describe the person who engaged in cyberviolence if they had experienced it, and to specify their reactions and preferred coping methods when facing cyberviolence. The third part of the survey aimed to understand the impact of cyberviolence on the participants and the effects they observed in individuals who experienced cyberviolence in their close circles. To ensure objectivity in the survey responses, participants were asked to complete the survey forms anonymously.

#### 4.2. Focus Group Discussion

Before implementing the focus group discussion method in our research, a conceptual framework related to the topic was established. This framework included decisions about whom to interview, why those individuals were selected, what common characteristics the selected individuals should have, which topics should be discussed during the interviews, and the order in which questions should be asked. The focus group discussion was conducted once and lasted approximately ninety minutes. The time and location of the focus group discussion were communicated to the participants by the Cooperative President one week before the discussion day, providing them with information about the topic. All participants attended the meeting on the designated day and time at their own discretion.

The focus group discussion questions consisted of open-ended questions designed to facilitate discussion and provide detailed insights. During the focus group discussion, the participants were guided to discuss the central concepts or topics, attention was paid to group dynamics,

and the importance of participants expressing their opinions rather than stating facts was emphasized. Throughout the meeting, minimal intervention was made to allow participants to interact with each other as much as possible. The conversations during the ninety-minute meeting were noted by the researcher, and a final conclusion was reached. After the discussion, short notes were taken by the observer, considering the characteristics of the group's social environment. Additionally, some interesting sentences related to the topic were collected from the participants and incorporated into the study report.

During the focus group discussion, questioning and summarization techniques were used to reveal individuals' thoughts and experiences. By analyzing the data, the evaluations, concerns, and opinions expressed by the participants were synthesized to understand the inner dimensions of the participants' thoughts, perceptions, and attitudes.

The focus group discussion at the Sarıkamış Women's Cooperative consisted of three sessions in total. These sessions covered topics related to women's experiences of cyberviolence, the effects of cyberviolence on women, and the methods women use to combat cyberhate, particularly focusing on mindfulness. The purpose of the focus group discussion was to obtain in-depth and multidimensional qualitative information about the participants' thoughts, emotions, perceptions, and attitudes related to cyberviolence.

The discussion was held around a round table, ensuring communication flow between the participants and the researcher. This seating arrangement allowed for everyone to have eye contact with each other and contributed to equal opportunities for self-expression. During the focus group discussion, both the topics addressed in the survey questions were discussed in more depth, and participants were provided with opportunities to express themselves verbally on specific subjects. Unlike the survey, during the focus group discussion, the researcher answered participants' questions only to clarify the questions; the researcher

refrained from expressing their own opinions as much as possible.

Participants were requested to keep their phones or various technological devices at a distance and refrain from discussing among themselves during both the survey and the focus group discussion. This created an environment where each participant could objectively answer the questions and freely express their own opinions.

## 5. FINDINGS

In this study, conducted through both a survey and focus group discussions, an investigation was carried out to learn about the experiences of participants and women in their close circles regarding cyberviolence, the short and long-term consequences of cyberviolence, how women cope when faced with cyberviolence, and their thoughts on mindfulness as a coping method.

Through the survey questions, participants expressed that they primarily use their daily internet usage for keeping up with current events and communication through social media. All participants were social media users and reported experiencing cyberviolence through social media channels. The majority of participants stated that they had been exposed to cyberviolence. More than half of the participants mentioned that cyberviolence perpetrators were anonymous. Some participants even noted that even if the identities of the cyberviolence perpetrators were not anonymous, they tended to judge directly rather than listen and understand, based on a comment they wrote on social media. It was also indicated by the participants that known cyberviolence perpetrators were male, and they repeated their violent comments and criticisms in digital media more than once, and these repetitions could continue until the victims took action.

When examining the reasons for exposure to cyberviolence, it was prominent that expressing political views freely on social media as a woman played a role. Furthermore, topics such as gender equality and its reflection on marital relationships, female stereotypes presented in Turkish television series in the context of gender roles, pressure and aggressive comments applied

through social media on family issues, criticism of women's clothing preferences, criticism of women's sexual identities, beliefs, and critical and disturbing attitudes towards their children were discussed.

All participants believe that those who are generally perceived as vulnerable by society are the ones mostly exposed to cyberviolence, and women are initially included in this group. Therefore, participants unanimously agree that they should increase their awareness of cyberviolence and take necessary measures in order to defend themselves effectively in the digital environment and prevent it.

The most preferred method for combating cyberviolence among participants is directly blocking the cyberviolence perpetrator on social media channels. This method is followed by reporting the cyberviolence perpetrator to the relevant authorities, engaging in written arguments on mutual social media channels, and doing nothing at all.

### 5.1. Results of Focus Group Discussion

During the discussion, it was observed that participants influenced each other just as they do in real life. Open-ended questions were asked by the researcher to encourage discussion, allowing individuals to provide detailed information about their thoughts, observations, and experiences. To prevent misunderstandings, what was said during the discussion was repeated, and care was taken to ensure that everyone participated in the discussions. Additionally, the researcher did not express personal opinions, and in cases where some participants were not willing to speak and others did not want to stop talking, an effort was made to include everyone's views and balance the participants.

As a result of the group interaction and group dynamics during the focus group discussions, new ideas emerged. Another noteworthy point during the focus group discussion was that one participant would share an idea, and another participant would elaborate on it, thus providing more detailed information. This was particularly observed when discussing the short-term and long-term psychological, social, and

physiological effects of cyberviolence.

## 5.2. Effects of Cyberviolence

Participants stated that they unanimously agree that cyberviolence has significant harmful negative effects on victims psychologically, socially, and physiologically. Although the type of cyberviolence varies, the psychological experiences of participants who have experienced cyberviolence as victims are similar. Participants mentioned experiencing anxiety, depression, stress, and self-esteem problems during and after cyberviolence. When examining the psychological effects of cyberviolence on participants, feelings of sadness, experiencing intense stress, feeling worthless, and embarrassment about personal information being known were mentioned. Socially, participants mentioned a decrease in self-esteem, conflicts in peer relationships, a lack of trust in relationships with others, and fear of judgment in social relationships as a result of being victims of cyberviolence. Due to the psychological problems experienced, participants also expressed feeling weak and powerless.

Regarding the prevention of cyberviolence, participants believe that there should be efforts to increase the effectiveness of existing laws in Turkey. Participants also mentioned that they apply mindfulness as simple breathing exercises in their daily lives and feel that these exercises help them transition to a more accepting and calm state when experiencing negative emotions.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In this research, conducted through both a survey and focus group discussions, an investigation was carried out to learn about the experiences of participants and women in their close circles regarding cyberviolence, the short and long-term consequences of cyberviolence, how women cope when faced with cyberviolence, and their thoughts on mindfulness as a coping method.

In today's world, social media channels have the potential to function not only as platforms where women are exposed to cyberviolence but also as digital social environments where

their victimization and mutual support among women can occur. It should be emphasized that women should be encouraged to be aware of and express their victimization when combating cyberviolence. With the increasing number of digital platforms and social media channels, it is observed that cyberviolence against women will increase. In the research findings, it is observed that cyberviolence has negative short-term and long-term effects on women, and women support each other through the Sarıkamış Cooperative and cope with the negative effects of cyberviolence through regular mindfulness practices.

In order to prevent cyberviolence, awareness studies, informative trainings for women to recognize, distinguish, and take precautions against cyberviolence, mindfulness practices, easily accessible training and resources for women to learn how to provide necessary support to individuals exposed to cyberviolence in their close circles, and steps to be taken when they themselves are exposed to cyberviolence are recommended. Some participants mentioned that they would like to receive informative support on taking measures to avoid reflecting their emotional processes as mothers when exposed to cyberviolence.

Participants expressed that they practice mindfulness mostly as simple breathing exercises during the day. Most of the participants (80%) also mentioned that they have difficulty in practicing mindfulness regularly and complained about the busy routine of daily life. All participants stated that they consider mindfulness practice effective as it has a calming and soothing effect when dealing with cyberviolence. In this regard, the expressions of the participants are as follows:

*Participant 1:* "I see cyberviolence most frequently when it comes to politics and towards women. There's a lot of political opposition on social media. Criticisms of women being excessively open or excessively closed are common. This is really disturbing and restricts women's freedom."

*Participant 2:* "Mindfulness practice is really soothing. Whenever I feel bad, especially if it's

because of someone else's comments, I take a deep breath and calm myself down."

*Participant 3*: "I feel relieved when I practice mindfulness. It's a different feeling. It's nice."

Participants believe that efforts should be made to increase the effectiveness of existing laws to prevent cyberviolence in Turkey. They mentioned that they apply mindfulness as simple breathing exercises in their daily lives and feel that these exercises help them to adopt more accepting and calm state when experiencing negative emotions.

Support to individuals exposed to cyberviolence in their close circles, and steps to be taken when they themselves are exposed to cyberviolence are recommended. Some participants mentioned that they would like to receive informative support on taking measures to avoid reflecting their emotional processes as mothers when exposed to cyberviolence.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE/ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ

# A field study on cyber stalking among university students

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## Abstract

Internet and technology devices not only connected people around the world but also opened new ways of cybercrime including cyberstalking. Ease in accessibility of social media brought criminals to the online world and facilitated the opportunities to do crimes in the cyber world. As the internet and social media are becoming inseparable parts of human life, it is important to make these environments safe for everyone, especially youth who are driven by social media the most. Understanding the prevalence of cyberstalking will help in finding ways to combat it and also to make a safer cyber environment.

**Aim:** The study aims to examine the prevalence level of cyberstalking in university students between the ages of 18-30. This study will also assess the difference of cyber stalking prevalence between men and women.

**Materials and Methods:** A preliminary investigation was made on the prevalence level of cyber stalking in university students between the age of 18-30. Cyber Obsessive Stalking Scale (Siber Obsesif Takip Ölçeği (SOTÖ)) was used to examine the stalking behaviours that people are exposed to while using electrical devices. While examining research participants, their age, gender, their anxiety about cyberstalking and if they had experienced cyberstalking or seen this behaviour in people around them were taken into account.

**Conclusion:** Developing technology has caused criminals to move to the online world. The severity of the situation will be brought to light by revealing the prevalence of victimization through studies. The prevalence level can direct researchers and technology developers to create safer online environments.

**Keywords:** Stalking, cyberstalking, cyber violence, violence, cyber

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Stalking is the act of following and harassing another person. The status of stalking as a crime is relatively new, having emerged in the early 1990s, but the behaviours that characterise stalking have changed with the development of technology. In the early 21st century, the explosive growth of social media has resulted in a new line in stalking behaviour. As social interaction is increasingly taking place in the digital world, traditional definitions of stalking are changing with the advancement of technology (Best, 2023).

A frequent threat or harassment sent via email or other computer-based communication that would cause someone to be concerned about their safety is known as cyberstalking (Strawhun et al., 2013).

Cyberstalking is the act of receiving continuous and unwanted messages from someone while being on the Internet. It can involve any number of incidents, including threats, libel, defamation, sexual harassment or other actions to control, influence or intimidate their targets (Sammons & Cross, 2017). These acts are repeated over time, which create fear in the threatened person and involve a violation of the person's right to privacy (Spitzberg and Hoobler, 2002). Stalking a person online can also involve stalking the target person in real life (Sammons & Cross, 2017).

The act of stalking can be carried out in certain places and stages. The concept of stalking includes following the victim on the internet, trying to find out where and what they are doing, sending e-mails or writing letters many times, disturbing the victim by calling them constantly if they have a phone, scrutinising the victim's profile on social media, using complimenting or threatening language against the victim, receiving gifts inappropriately, threatening to spread the victim's personal information, following the victim in places such as workplaces and shopping malls, and at the highest point, applying physical violence to the victim (McFarlane & Bocij 2003).

Cyberstalking can be perpetrated by a person closely known or professionally acquainted with

the target or by a stranger (Sheridan & Grant, 2007; Baum, 2011). The perpetrator can be an ex-girlfriend or ex-boyfriend, an ex-friend, an ex-employee or an acquaintance who wants to control, possess, intimidate, threaten or actually

harm the target. In most cases, cyberstalkers have access to certain personal information, accounts, inboxes or other private information related to their target's daily routine, lifestyle or life choices (Reyns, Henson, & Fisher, 2011). With advances

in communication devices, services such as text messaging, instant messaging, and email provide the advantage of anonymity to persistent cyberstalkers (Best, 2023).

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Sample

The sample of the study consisted of 251 students. Of the participants, 149 were female and 96 were male and 6 were other.

### 2.2. Data Collection Tools

Personal Information Form: A personal information form was created and used by the researchers in order to determine the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants (gender, frequency of victimization, anxiety thoughts of participants)

This review may give an idea to the researcher that there may be a cause-effect relationship; but it certainly cannot be interpreted as cause and effect.

Siber Obsesif Takip Ölçeği (SOTÖ) was used to examine the stalking behaviours that people are exposed to when using electrical devices. The survey was distributed both online and physically to the participants. The study participants were examined based on their age, gender, concerns about cyber stalking, and whether they had experienced cyber stalking or had seen this behaviour around them.

### 2.3. Operation

Data were collected both face-to-face and via Google Forms survey method. Permission to

participate in the research was obtained through the Informed Consent Form from the participants between the age of 18-30. Participants completed Personal Information Form and Cyber Obsessive Stalking Scale (Siber Obsesif Takip Ölçeği (SOTÖ))

## 2.4. Data Analysis

IBM SPSS 25 (The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was used for data analysis. Descriptive Analysis test was performed.

## 3. RESULT

The gender of the participants was 149 female, 96 male and 6 other.

**Table 1.** Frequency of Victim Participants

Frequency of exposure to cyberstalking				
	Once	1-4 defa	5-9 defa	10 ve üzeri defa
N=99	29	49	9	12

Exposed to Cyber Stalking (N=99)

**Table 2.** Gender of All Participants and Anxiety Thoughts Towards Cyber Tracking.

Anxious thoughts about cyberstalking					
			Hiç	Bazen	Sık Sık
Gender	Female	149	25	105	19
	Male	96	50	40	6
	Other	6	1	3	2
	Total	251			

**Table 3.** Scale Form

	None	Once	2-3	4-5	More than 5
Sending messages of influence (e.g., poems, songs, electronic greeting cards, praise, etc.).	114	24	56	19	37
Sending exaggerated messages of affection (e.g., expressions of affection that imply a more intimate relationship than the existing one, etc.).	123	27	54	11	35
Sending very specific messages (e.g. giving inappropriate information about life, body, family, hobbies, sexual experiences, etc.).	134	41	44	10	21

Sending overly needy or overly demanding messages (e.g., pressuring to meet, persistently offering to meet, arguing for another chance, etc.)	143	32	37	9	29
Don't sabotage your reputation (e.g., spread rumors about what you've done to your friends, family, partner, etc.).	185	35	19	4	7
Sabotaging your reputation in the school/work environment (e.g., spreading rumors about you, your relationships, or your activities on organizational networks, electronic bulletin boards, etc.)	209	22	13	3	3
"Bugging" your car, home, office (e.g. placing a eavesdropping or recording device, etc.)	233	1	3	1	0
Changing your electronic identity or profile (for example, breaking into your system and changing your signature, personal information or how you identify yourself, etc.)	195	35	18	1	1
Hacking your electronic identity or profile (e.g. using your identity in chat rooms, bulletin boards, pornographic sites or singles sites, etc.)	213	23	12	2	0
Directing other people towards you in a threatening way (e.g., making speeches on your behalf and suggesting risky sexual behavior, fantasizing about kidnapping someone, etc.)	215	21	13	1	0
Stalking you after first meeting online (e.g. stalking you while you're driving, at school, at work, at the gym, or at social events, etc.)	199	21	16	6	8
Breaking into (trying to break into) someone's life after the first meeting online (for example, unexpectedly appearing at work, in front of the door, in the parking lot, trying to force a conversation, etc.)	208	28	11	0	3
Threatening you after first meeting online (for example, threatening sexual intercourse, rape, physical coercion, or harming your property, pets, family, or friends)	288	15	5	0	1

Online Harm you after first meeting you (for example, meeting you through online dating sites and then stalking, harassing, or otherwise monitoring you)	232	12	6	0	0
Stalking you after an initial meeting online (for example, meeting you through online dating sites (or as an acquaintance) and then harassing, harassing, or otherwise stalking you).	196	35	14	3	0

#### 4. DISCUSSION

This study investigated the prevalence rate of cyberstalking in university students between the ages of 18-30 and the difference of prevalence rate between men and women, the result of the study demonstrated the high prevalence rate of cyberstalking among university students, especially the rates were higher for women. Similarly, in another study by Dreßing et al. (2014), a notably greater proportion of women than men reported having experienced cyberstalking. Our study also looked for the participant's concerns about experiencing cyberstalking and a high number of participants sometimes felt concerned about experiencing cyberstalking.

Like in the case of offline stalking, most victims of cyberstalking know the person who is stalking them. Cyberstalking happens in approximately equal numbers of offline social connections and includes the practice known as "ex-partner stalking" in over 35% of cases (Dreßing et al., 2014). In the case of our study 18% of the participants who experienced cyberstalking knew the perpetrator and 22% of the participants experienced cyberstalking from unknown people.

The prevalence rate of cyberstalking for this study was 40%. Similarly in another study by Maran and Begotti (2019) the results demonstrated the high frequency of cyberstalking. More than 46% of the sample, they discovered, had been the victim of cyberstalking. Moreover researchers also indicated that victims had greater depression and anxiety ratings than non-victims. Specifically, compared to victims of cyberstalking alone and non-victims, victims of cyberstalking

who had previously been victimised in the past in their lives showed higher signs of depression and anxiety. These findings demonstrated how victims' quality of life is negatively impacted when solutions are not provided (Maran & Begotti, 2019).

In another study researchers indicated that, depending on the type of cyberstalking behaviours, the prevalence of victimisation from cyberstalking ranged from 39.92% to 66.76%. The results revealed that the prevalence of harassment and annoyance, posting false information, sending sexual material, pretending to be a victim, trying to disable your computer, keeping an eye on your profile, sending threatening emails or letters, and writing offensive or threatening comments to the victim in chat rooms or instant messaging sites was 66.76%, 39.92%, 64.64%, 60.00%, 57.20%, 61.30%, 64.84%, and 49.18%, respectively (Abu-Ulbeh et al., 2021). In the case of this study, our result indicated that prevalence of sending very private messages (giving inappropriate information about the body, family, sexual experiences, etc.), sending excessively demanding and excessively needy messages (pressuring and instantly asking to meet), to sabotage the target's reputation in cyberspace, being followed and harassed after the first meeting in cyberspace, and sending exaggerated love messages (expressions of endearment that imply a more intimate relationship than the existing one, etc.) were 46.53%, 43.67%, 26.53%, 22%, 51.43% respectively.

Contrary to our result in this study researchers did not find a significant relation between gender and cyberstalking victimisation but the result showed a significant relation between age and cyberstalking victimisation (Abu-Ulbeh et al., 2021). According to the study's findings, students who engage in particular online activities more often may become victims of cyberstalking. Additionally, students who display attractiveness online and reveal personal information that makes them seem like good targets for cyberstalking will become victims of cyberstalking (Abu-Ulbeh et al., 2021).

In another study by Reynolds et al. (2012) the

findings were similar to our results and it showed that more than 40% of the participants have ever been victims of cyberstalking. According to this assessment, cyberstalking could be more common than traditional stalking. Due to the fact that the sample was limited to college students between the ages of 18 and 24, who frequently have free time and access to electronic communication, the age of sample respondents may assist to explain the high incidence of victimisation. Furthermore, statistically significant disparities in victimisation imply that victims of cyberstalking who were female, non-White, non-Heterosexual, and non-Single suffered more overall victimisation from cyberstalking than victims who were men, White, heterosexual, and single (Reyns et al., 2012). The findings also revealed that 44% of individuals who experienced cyberstalking were victims of strangers. With the exception of harassment, the stranger group represented the victim-offender connection that was most commonly mentioned in all forms of electronic pursuit. It is crucial to note that, despite the stranger category being the most commonly mentioned relationship between the victim and the offender, it was more usual in every instance for the victim and the offender to know one another in some capacity (Reyns et al., 2012).

The prevalence rate of cyberstalking is demonstrated high in this study and other similar studies, especially this rate was higher for women. Taking the negative impacts of cyberstalking on the well-being of people into account, it is important to understand the reasons for the high prevalence rate of cyberstalking and finally finding ways to prevent this issue and make cyberspace safe for everyone.

## 5. SUGGESTION

The high rates of cyberstalking prevalence between university students is very concerning and it points to the need of creating a safer online environment. Research should be done for preventing cyberstalking and finding solutions for this global problem.

Most of the participants in this study were students from Istanbul. Therefore, further research is needed in other cities of Turkey

and around the world, to investigate the prevalence rate of cyberstalking. Moreover, women participants were higher in number in this study, which might have had an impact on the prevalence rate between men and women, therefore, other studies are needed with equal numbers of women and men participants.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE/ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ

# Cyber bullying and victims among adolescents depending on perceived parental attitudes

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## Abstract

Being a cyberbully and being a cyber victim is a common problem that negatively affects the lives and psychological well-being of children and young people. This situation arises with the increase in internet usage. Being a cyber bully and being a cyber victim negatively affects the psychosocial development of children and adolescents. Family environment, parental behavioral attitudes and various factors play an important role in adolescents' involvement in cyber aggression and cyber victimization.

**Aim:** This study aimed to examine the relationships between perceived parental attitudes (democratic, authoritarian, protective and permissive) and cyber bullying (cyber aggression-victimization) in adolescents. These relationships were investigated by taking into account demographic variables such as gender, age, grade level, and own internet usage time.

**Materials and Methods:** The sample of the research consists of 125 high school students between the ages of 14-18 studying at a private high school in Istanbul. Data were collected from students in the classroom using the survey method. As a data collection tool in the research; Personal Information Form, Parental Attitudes Scale and Cyberbullying Scale were used. IBM SPSS Statistic Base 25.0 was used to analyze the data collected in the study. The following analyses, respectively; descriptive, reliability, normality and Pearson Correlation were performed.

**Conclusion:** According to the findings of the research, it was determined that there was a positive and moderate relationship between the characteristics of parents having a permissive attitude ( $r: 0.365$   $p: 0.000$ ) and having an authoritarian attitude and the students' exposure to cyber bullying ( $r: 0.334$   $p: 0.000$ ). However, it was determined that there was a negative and moderate relationship ( $r: -0.552$   $p: 0.000$ ) between parents' democratic attitudes and students' exposure to cyberbullying.

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Results: According to the results of the research, students' exposure to cyberbullying behavior will increase when they are faced with authoritarian and permissive parental attitudes, and the exposure to cyberbullying behavior will decrease in children of parents whose internet usage time is controlled and who have democratic attitudes.

**Keywords:** Cyber Bullying, Cyber Victimization, Parental Attitude, Cyber Violence

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Cyberbullying is a type of behavior that usually occurs on the internet and causes psychological or emotional harm to people (Willard, 2007; Li, 2007). Such behavior can occur in different forms such as threats, insults, slander or misuse of personal information (Arıcak, 2008; Juvonen and Gross, 2008). Cyberbullying is often recurring and leaves victims feeling vulnerable. Cyber victimization refers to individuals or groups who are harmed online (Smith et al., 2008). In the research conducted by Mishnaand (2012), it was found that the prevalence of cyberbullying was 33.7% and the prevalence of cyber victimization was 49.5% worldwide. A study conducted in American schools in 2013 found that the prevalence of cyberbullying among 12–18-year-olds was 6.9%. According to a study conducted by Hinduja and Patchinand (2017), cyber bullying and victimization are a common problem among young people, according to research conducted in Turkey. In the research conducted by Evėgü et al. (2014), 6.6% of the students were exposed to cyberbullying and 6.4% were exposed to cyberbullying. In the research conducted by Erdur-Baker and Kavşut, it was revealed that cyber bullying was 28% and cyber victimization was 30%. Serin's research also reveals that 26% of people are involved in cyberbullying. The person wants to take revenge on people by easily hiding his identity, considering himself inaccessible (Lenhart, 2016), and gaining the approval, attention and respect of his friends (Dilmaç ve Aydođan, 2009). The reasons for cyberbullying include cyberbullies having problems in personal communication (Kowalski et al. , 2008), lack of warmth in family relationships, weak bond between parents

and children, and the prevalence of bullying behavior (Li, 2010). Children being cyberbullied and victimized. It is also closely related to their parents' attitudes. The relationships between culturally and ethnically different children and their parents and the behavior of parents towards their children directly and indirectly affect children's development and behavior. Similarly, family attitudes form the basis of children's attitudes and behaviors towards other people and the environment (Aksaray, 2013). Factors such as how parents treat their children, how they evaluate their children, and how their children communicate determine how children will react to cyberbullying. Looking at the research, it has been revealed that children in families that do not have a close relationship with their children are more likely to resort to psychological and physical violence, discipline that emphasizes power, aggressive behavior and bullying. Similarly, Dilmaç and Aydođan (2010), in their study examining the effects of authoritarian, democratic and protective parental attitudes on bullying, concluded that only authoritarian parental attitudes predicted bullying. Families with authoritarian parenting attitudes use methods such as physical violence or psychological intimidation to discipline their children, and they expect their children to comply with the rules they set without objecting or questioning. In their study, Makri-Botsari and Karagianni (2014) found that adolescents from authoritarian families were more likely to be bullied, and adolescents from authoritarian families were more likely to be bullied. One of the most distinctive characteristics of parents of students exposed to bullying is the deterioration of the parent-child relationship. It has been found that student bullying is more common in families



where children are treated indifferently, there is a lack of support, and communication with family members is poor. Nikiforou, Georgiou, and Stavrinides (2013) found that inappropriate attachment to parents was associated with bullying. What's more, their research found that bullies and victims had worse relationships with their parents than did the victims. Similarly, Totan and Yöndem's (2007) study found that as adolescents' relationships with their parents deepen, their likelihood of being both bullies and victims decreases. Rigby (2013) defined bullying families as insecure, avoidant attachment to the child, being unresponsive and ignoring the child's needs, having an authoritarian parenting style and expecting the child to comply with the rules, and explained it as a family with expectations. Olweus (1993) found that, unlike bullies' families, victims' families were overly intrusive and protective. According to him, overprotection of victims' families prevents young people from developing their sense of independence and self-confidence. Rigby, Slee, and Martin (2007) describe the characteristics of victim families. They found that children are overprotected and grow up under pressure, and girls are under more pressure than boys. When the relationship between parental support and cyber bullying behavior in the family is examined; Online victimization decreased as perceived social support from family increased; As cyber victimization decreases, the perception of social support from peers increases; as parental support increases, all forms of bullying decrease; It has been determined that cyber victimization decreases when family support is high, even if friend support is low in single-parent families (Soydaş, 2011). While young boys increased their satisfaction in various areas of life by perceiving increased control from their parents and reduced their involvement in cyberbullying, girls' awareness of bullying and victimization and being followed increased their satisfaction in various areas of life and reduced their cyber victimization (Soydaş, 2011).

This study aimed to examine the relationships between perceived parental attitudes (democratic, authoritarian, protective and permissive) and cyber bullying (cyber

aggression-victimization) in adolescents. These relationships were investigated by taking into account demographic variables such as gender, age, grade level, and own internet usage time.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Sample

The sample of the research consists of 125 high school students between the ages of 14-18 studying at a private high school in Istanbul.

### 2.2. Data Collection Tools

The personal information form was prepared by the researcher by reviewing the literature in order to determine the socio-demographic characteristics, computer usage areas and social relations of the students participating in the research.

Parental Attitude Scale: Parental Attitude Scale (PAS) was developed by Lamborn, Maunts, Steinberg and Dornbush (1991). The scale includes three dimensions called acceptance/interest, control/monitoring and psychological autonomy. Admission/care aspect; The Control dimension includes statements measuring the extent to which children perceive their parents as loving, caring, and caring, the Control/Monitoring dimension includes statements measuring the extent to which children perceive their parents as human, controlling, and controlling, and the Psychological Autonomy dimension. It measures the extent to which perceived democratic attitudes are implemented and the extent to which children's expression of their individuality is encouraged. The four parental attitudes differ from the scale by the intersection of the acceptance/participation and control/monitoring dimensions. Accordingly, it is seen that the parents of the participants who score above the average in the acceptance/participation and control/control dimensions are democratic, the parents who score low are negligent, the parents of the participants who score below the average in the acceptance/participation dimension, and the parents of the participants who score above the average in the acceptance/participation dimension. control/control dimensions. People who score below

average on the control/control dimension are authoritarian, and people who score below average on the acceptance/participation dimension are authoritarian. Parents who scored above and below average on the control/monitoring dimension were considered permissive. Separate validity and reliability studies were conducted with primary school, secondary school and university students. Test-retest reliability coefficients and Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficients of the scale measuring parents' attitudes towards high school students: 0.82 and 0.70 for the acceptance/participation scale, 0.88 and 0.69 for the control/monitoring scale; It was found to be 0.76 and 0.66 for the psychological autonomy scale (95). In the study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient for AABTS subscales; The psychological autonomy sub-dimension was found to be .65, the acceptance/participation sub-dimension was .71, and the control/monitoring sub-dimension was .73. Ölçeğin Türkçe uyarlaması, geçerlik güvenirlik çalışması kaynak gösterilmemiştir.

Cyberbullying Scale: Stewart, Drescher, Maack, Ebesutani, and Young (2014) developed a scale to measure cyberbullying. Although the scale consists of a total of 16 questions, 16 of the 14 questions are Likert type and the remaining 2 questions are multiple choice. The first of the multiple choice questions asked participants via email, text, video, etc. He asks if they can send it. When asked if they have bullied others through any platforms, another question asks if they have been bullied through specific platforms. Participants respond to Likert-type questions with "never, almost never, sometimes, almost always, always." The content of the questions asked to the participants includes whether they have been subjected to visual or written harassment in the virtual environment, whether their personal information has been shared without their consent and knowledge, whether they have been exposed to feelings such as exclusion, humiliation and threat. The validity and reliability study of the scale was conducted by the same researchers. , the first 2 questions of the scale were kept separately. The reliability of the SZÖ scale reported by the researchers who developed it is 0.95. The

validity study of the scale was conducted by Küçük et al. (2017). Kaynakçada göremedim... In this study, the 14-question scale of SZÖ was used as a 13-question scale, and as a result of the internal consistency and total reliability analysis, the only question that did not give a composite score received a reliability coefficient of 0.89.

### 2.3. Operation

Data were collected from students in the classroom using the survey method. As a data collection tool in the research; Personal Information Form, Parental Attitudes Scale and Cyber Aggression Scale were used. IBM SPSS Statistic Base 25.0 was used to analyze the data collected in the study. The following analyses, respectively; descriptive, reliability, normality and Pearson Correlation were performed.

## 3. FINDINGS

The participants of the research consist of 125 students attending a private educational institution in Ataşehir, Istanbul, in the 2022-2023 academic year. Sociodemographic characteristics of the participants are included in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Socio-Demographic Variables

		N	%
Gender	Woman	53	42,4%
	Man	72	57,6%
Class	9.Class	26	20,8%
	10. Class	24	19,2%
	11. Class	34	27,2%
	12. Class	41	32,8%
Ages	14-15 Age	27	21,6%
	16-17 Age	63	50,4%
	18 Age	35	28,0%
Parental Partnership Status	Together	117	93,6%
	Divorce	7	5,6%
	The Father Is Not Alive	1	0,8%
Total		125	100

Table 2 includes descriptive characteristics of students' internet use, such as the number of computers at home, daily internet usage time, whether they have their own computer, mobile phone or tablet, and whether they have an internet connection at home. 65.6% of the participants (82 students) have 1 computer at home, and 59.2% (74 students) can use their own computer. The rate of participants who have their own mobile phone is 79.2% and the rate of participants who have their own tablet is 13.6%. The rate of participants with a personal internet connection is 91.2%. Family control over participants' internet use was distributed as 55.2% (69 students) no, 44.8% (56 students) yes. Internet stay duration of participants; 36.8% (46 students) were reported as 3-4 Hours, 34.4% (43 students) were reported as 1-2 Hours and 28.8% (36 students) were reported as 5 Hours or more. Participants according to the types of media they use; They are distributed as 73,2% (90 students) whatsapp, 24,4% (30 students) instangram, 2,4% (5students) e-posta.

**Table 2.** Internet use Features of Students

		n	%
Number of Computers in the House	None	24	19,2
	1	82	65,6
	2+	19	15,2
Internet Usage Times	1-2 Hours	43	34,4
	3-4 Hours	46	36,8
	5 Hours and Above	36	28,8
having/not having a pc	No	74	59,2
	Yes	51	40,8
having/not having a mobile phone	No	26	20,8
	Yes	99	79,2
having/not having a tablet	No	108	86,4
	Yes	17	13,6
internet connection at home	No	11	8,8
	Yes	114	91,2
family control	No	69	55,2
	Yes	56	44,8
Device Connecting to the Internet	Mobile phone	104	83,2
	Tablet and pc	21	16,8
Media Type Used	Whatsapp	90	73,2
	Instagram	30	24,4
	E-Posta	5	2,4
Total		125	100

Table 3 examines the differences in the participants' parental attitudes and cyber bullying scores according to their gender. In the study, the distribution of parental attitudes and cyber bullying levels according to gender was examined with a t-test, and it was determined that only democratic parental attitudes differed according to gender and that the parents of female students had a higher level of democratic parental attitudes than the parents of male students ( $p .024$ ). No relationship was found between the cyberbullying exposure levels of female students and the gender of the students.

**Table 3.** Distribution of Students' Cyberbullying Scores and Parental Attitudes By Students' Gender

Parental Attitudes	Gender	N	Average	t	df	p.
democratic attitude	Man	53	60.7	-	12	0,02
	Woman	72	64.3	2,286	3	4
authoritarian attitude	Man	53	28.3	-	12	0,92
	Woman	72	28.4	0,096	3	4
protective attitude	Man	53	31.9	-	12	0,92
	Woman	72	32.7	1,028	3	4
permissive attitude	Man	53	25.7	0,26	12	0,30
	Woman	72	25.4	1	3	6
cyber bullying	Man	53	12.4	0,87	12	0,38
	Woman	72	11.2	3	3	4

In the research, the total cyber bullying scores of the participants were determined according to the status of having their own computer, having a mobile phone, having a tablet, having internet access, having family control over internet access, parent's profession, parent's education level, parent's income level, type of media used and the type of media used. One-way analysis based on device variables is given in Table 4. Participants who have their own computers have a higher level of exposure to cyberbullying than those who do not have their own computers ( $p = 0.005$ ). Participants who have their own mobile phone have a higher level of exposure to cyberbullying than those who do not have their own mobile phone ( $p = 0.003$ ). Participants who have internet access have a higher level of exposure to cyberbullying than those who do not have internet access ( $p=0.042$ ). Participants who use e-mail have a higher level of exposure to cyberbullying. It was determined that the exposure levels of the participants using other media types (Whatsapp, Instagram) were higher ( $p.= 0.000$ ). It was determined that the cyberbullying levels of the participants using mobile phones were higher ( $p.=0.003$ ) than the participants using tablets and computers.

**Table 4.** One-Way Analyzes Between Participants' Cyberbullying Scores and Categorical Independent Variables

	having/not having a pc	N	Average	ss	T	df	P.
Siber zorbalik	No	74	101.486	728.045	0.84634	123	0,005
	Yes	51	14	761.840			
	having/not having a mobile phone	Number	Average	ss	T	df	P.
	No	26	78.462	644.790	-3,001	123	0,003
	Yes	99	127.374	761.790			
	having/not having a tablet	Number	Average	ss	T	df	P.
	No	108	121.389	765.794	1.556	123	0.122
	Yes	17	90.588	709.287			
	Device Connecting to the Internet	Number	Average	ss	T	df	P.
	No	11	72.727	569.370	-2,05	123	0,042
	Yes	114	121.491	767.507			
	family control	Number	Average	ss	T	df	P.
No	69	121.449	723.406	0,69	123	0,492	
Yes	56	111.964	812.721				

One-way relationships between cyberbullying total scores and the time spent on the internet and the student's age variables were examined with correlation analysis TABLE 5. As a result of the correlation analysis between cyberbullying total scores and internet usage time, there is a positive and moderate relationship between cyberbullying total scores and time spent on the internet. is ( $r= 0.451$ ;  $p= 0.000$ ); A very weak positive relationship was found between cyberbullying scores and the student's age.

**Table 5.** One-Way Analyzes Between Participants' Cyberbullying Scores and Continuous Determinant Variables

		Cyber Bullying Total Score	Internet Usage Time	Student's age
Cyber Bullying Total Score	Correlation coefficient	1	.451	.072
	p.		.000	.426
Internet Usage Time	Correlation coefficient		1	.211
	p.			.019
Student's age	p.			1

Descriptive correlation analyzes showing the relationships between the participants' Cyberbullying scores, which is the dependent variable of the research, and their Parental Attitudes scores, which is the main independent variable of the research, are presented in Table 6. As a result of examining the relationships between parental attitudes and cyberbullying by correlation analysis, the highest correlation between cyberbullying total scores and It was determined that the relationship was between democratic attitude and that this relationship was negative and at a medium level ( $r: -0.552$ ;  $p=0.00$ ). There is a moderate and positive relationship between cyberbullying total scores and authoritarian attitude ( $r: 0.334$ ;  $p=0.00$ ), and a moderate and positive relationship between cyberbullying total scores and permissive parental attitude ( $r: 0.365$ ;  $p=0.00$ ) relationship was determined.

**Table 6.** Relationships Between Cyberbullying and Parental Attitudes

		Democratic Attitude	Authoritarian Attitude	Protective Attitude	Permissive Attitude	Cyber Bullying	sz1	SZZ
Democratic Attitude	Correlation coefficient	1	.493%	.203*	%.397**	%.552**		-.664"
	P.		.000	.023	.000	.000	1000	.000
Authoritarian Attitude	Correlation coefficient		1	.216	.650*	.334	.397**	.448*
	P.			.016	.000	.000	0	.000
Protective Attitude	Correlation coefficient			1	.003	-.076	-.159	57%
	P.				.975	.398	.076	.531
Permissive Attitude	Correlation coefficient				1	.365	.465**	.492*
	P.					.000	.000	.000
Cyber Bullying Total	Correlation coefficient					1	.678**	.576*
	p.						6000	.000
SZ1	Correlation coefficient						1	.805*
	P.							.000
SZZ	Correlation coefficient							1
	P.							

#### 4. DISCUSSION

In the study, it was determined that there was no difference between students' gender exposure levels and their exposure to cyberbullying. When studies on this subject are examined, it is revealed that the rate of exposure to cyberbullying does not differ between male and female students, as in this study (Burnukara, 2009; Peker et al., 2012; Williams et al., 2007). Contrary to the results of this study, girls are more vulnerable to cyberbullying than boys. There are also studies that reach the same conclusion (Campfield, 2008; Çiftçi, 2018; Kowalski and Limber, 2007). In addition to the levels of exposure to cyberbullying, the study

examined the distribution of parenting attitudes by gender and found that only democratic parenting attitudes differed by gender and that the parents of female students had higher levels of democratic parenting than the parents of male students. Research has shown that parenting attitudes have a significant impact on people's lives (Aka, 2011; Gross, 2014). Similar to the results of this study, Aka (2011) stated that parents with warm parenting attitudes attach importance to understanding their children's emotions. Suveg, Zeman, Flannery-Schroeder, and Cassano (2005) also found in their study that parents who suppress their emotions do not encourage their children to express their emotions. According to Gross (2014), children of parents who do not express their emotions may believe that emotional expression is unreliable. Similar to this study, many studies (Aydoğdu and Dilekmen, 2016; Bornstein and Zlotnik, 2008; Şanlı, 2007; Yavuzer, 2000) have revealed that mothers display more democratic attitudes than fathers. Although research shows that parents of female students have a democratic attitude, it is believed that parents of male students should also have this attitude. This study revealed that children from families with democratic parental attitudes were less exposed to cyberbullying. In their study, Yıldız and Erci (2011) found that democratic parental attitudes reduced the child's use of violence in forming positive behaviors and encountering problems. Kaplan et al. (2018) found in their study that democratic parenting attitudes play a protective role on young people's problematic behaviors. People with democratic parenting attitudes generally experience fewer problems (Sümer Gündoğdu Aktürk and Helvacı, 2010). As a result of this research, it was revealed that children from families with authoritarian and permissive parenting were more exposed to cyberbullying. Individuals with protective and authoritarian parenting attitudes do not pay much attention to their children and even ignore their children's needs (Yavuzer, 2005). In a tolerant family, parents give children too much freedom and this attitude causes the child to focus more on problems (Önder and Yılmaz, 2012). The findings of the research show that the media, the time spent on the internet and the democratic attitude

model of the parents have a 42.2% effect on cyber bullying. It was concluded that it has . Research has shown that democratic parental attitudes are effective in cyber bullying (Aydoğdu and Dilekmen, 2016; Bornstein and Zlotnik, 2008; Kaplan and Ak, 2018). In their study, Cassidy-Bushrow et al. (2015) found that the time spent on the internet restricts people's social lives and leads to negative and violent thoughts. Research has shown that people who spend a long time on the internet increase their cyberbullying levels (Caplan, 2006; Cao, Sun, Wan, Hao, Tao, 2011; Davis, 2001). According to the research findings, no relationship was found between the parents' relationship status (married, other) and their exposure to cyberbullying. Similar to this study, Sengupta and Chaudhuri (2011) found that parents' marital status did not affect the levels of cyber bullying and victimization. Contrary to this study, Låftman, Modin, and Östberg (2013) found in their study that children whose parents do not live together are more likely to be cyber victims. According to the results of the research, it was revealed that cyberbullying was higher among mobile phone users than tablet or computer users. In their study, Pekşen Süslü and Oktay (2018) and Serin (2013) found that, unlike this study, there was no significant difference in the results of cyber bullying and cyber harm among high school students according to whether they own a computer, mobile phone or tablet. The study concluded that there was a positive and moderate relationship between overall cyberbullying outcomes and time spent online. When the literature is examined, it is seen that this observation is supported by many studies (Burnukara, 2009; Erdur-Baker, 2010; Hinduja and Patchin, 2011; Özbay, 2013; Serin, 2013; Smith et al., 2008; Walrave). ; and Varis, 2011). Similar to Sticca, Ruggieri, Alsaker, and Perren (2013), in a study by Ybarra and Mitchell (2004), it was found that young people who use the internet for 3 hours or more a day are 2.5 times more likely to be cyberbullies or experience victimization. Frequency of internet use increases cyberbullying and cyber victimization (Baştürk, Akça and Numbermer, 2017; Hinduja and Patchin, 2008; Juvonen and Gross, 2008). Within the scope of the results obtained in this research, it was revealed that those who have

access to the internet are exposed to higher levels of cyberbullying than those who do not have access to the internet.

## 5. RESULTS

The study found no significant relationship between cybercrime situations and gender, age, parental relationship and parental control. There is a positive and moderate relationship between cyber communication and time spent online, participants who use e-mail are more exposed to cyberbullying than participants who use other media (Whatsapp, Instagram), participants who use mobile phones are more exposed to cyberbullying than tablets and tablets. It was observed that they remained and it was concluded that they were larger than computers. According to the results obtained in the research, it was concluded that participants who used e-mail were exposed to cyberbullying more than other participants. As a result of the research, it was determined that the tolerant and authoritarian attitude of parents and the exposure of students to cyberbullying were at a positive and moderate level. However, a negative and moderate relationship was found between parents' democratic attitudes and students' exposure to cyberbullying. This result shows that cyberbullying increases more when students are exposed to authoritarian and permissive parenting, while cyberbullying decreases further for children of democratic parents. It was concluded that the majority of the participants in the study had a computer at home, had their own mobile phone, did not have a tablet, had an internet connection, and that the students used the internet for 3-4 hours. As can be seen from the research results, students' possession of technical tools and the internet affects their cyber victimization and cyber bullying. Another finding is that cyberbullying behavior varies depending on the duration of internet use. Similarly, it was determined that the level of cyberbullying was higher in students who used the internet for 5 hours or more than in students who used the internet for 1-2 hours and 3-4 hours. It has been revealed that in the 21st century, the use of various communication tools, as well as the internet and social

networks, increases cyberbullying. According to the research findings, in order to ensure that individuals can use these tools when they need, teachers and families should be role models and family supervision should be supervised with democratic attitudes without reaching the level of authoritarianism. In order to reduce the impact of cyberbullying, social activities should be increased in the social environment in which individuals live. First of all, researchers should inform families and teachers about the reasons for online use.

## 6. SUGGESTION

It is important for parents to communicate with their children about cyberbullying and make them feel safe. In this way, children will be able to share their negative experiences comfortably. Educating children about cyberbullying will help them understand the dangers. Teaching children empathy and respect will help them strengthen their relationships with their friends.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE/ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ

# Cyber obsessive obsession: A study in nurses department

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## Abstract

Cyber obsessive stalking is a form of cyber violence that comprises a variety of unfavorable behavior patterns and is thought to be an extension of classic persistent stalking in online settings. Research shows that healthcare professionals are vulnerable to cyber-obsessive harassment due to the negative perception that patients are not satisfied with the service they receive and that their treatment processes are inadequately managed. The purpose of this study is to identify the experiences public and private sector nurses have had with cyber-obsessive stalking.

In this cross-sectional study, 165 nurses who work in both the public and commercial sectors make up the study group. Data collecting techniques were the Personal Information Form and the Cyber Obsessive Stalking Scale. The scale, which asks how often cyber-obsessive stalking behaviors have been encountered, has 15 items and includes excessive closeness, threat, and transference components. A statistical package application was used to examine the data that were gathered online.

According to the data of the analysis, 72.7% of the participants had at least one experience with cyber obsessive stalker behavior. While exposure to influence-oriented messages was the most frequent conduct, with a rate of 61.2%, exposure to auto, home, and office listening behavior was the least common cyber obsessive stalking behavior. The extreme closeness component of the scale had the highest mean score, while transference was the most prevalent activity.

Healthcare professionals face risks such as patient dissatisfaction with the care they receive, societal perceptions of poorly managed treatment processes, and, in some cases, the possibility of patients engaging in cyber-obsessive tracking for emotional and/or sexual reasons. The results of this study show that cyber obsessive stalking behaviors are observed among the nurses participating in the study.

**Keywords:** Cyber obsessive stalking, Stalking, Cyber violence

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

“The application of physical force or power to another person in the form of a deliberate threat or reality, resulting in or likely to cause injury, death, or psychological harm to the person exposed” (Krug *et al.*, 2002) is how the World Health Organization (WHO) defines violence. It impacts everyone at every stage of life, regardless of age, gender, socioeconomic status, or cultural background; it is regarded as a significant public health issue because of the long-lasting physical, emotional, social, and economic issues it can lead to (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2021). Physical violence, sexual violence, emotional violence, economic violence, and cyber violence are the five categories into which violence is divided based on how the action takes place (Polat, 2016).

Since more people have access to the internet and online social networks due to the rapid advancement of digital technologies and their integration into all facets of people’s daily lives, interpersonal communication is also changing (Zhu *et al.*, 2021; Crespi and Hellsten, 2022; Polat, 2016). According to Polat (2016) and Dogruer *et al.* (2011), people use the internet and social media platforms for a variety of activities, including information access, education, entertainment, networking, and information sharing. The number of internet and social media users worldwide has been estimated at five billion (DataReportal, 2023a).

Digital technologies have advantages, but they also pose risks, encourage harmful behavior, and have negative social repercussions (Polat, 2016; Quaglio & Millar, 2020; Pittaro, 2007). They also present opportunities for crimes that weren’t previously possible. The Council of Europe defined cyber violence as “the use of computer systems to cause, facilitate or threaten violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm to individuals and may include the exploitation of individuals’ situations, characteristics or vulnerabilities” (Council of Europe, n.d.). Cyber violence also includes cyber harassment, stalking, accessing and publishing personal information in the virtual environment (doxing),

online hate speech, and retaliation.

As people interact more on the internet and in online social networks, a crime known as cyber obsessive stalking, has increased in frequency (Choi *et al.*, 2022; Silva Santos *et al.*, 2023). The repeated and inappropriate physical, emotional, sexual, and psychological monitoring of a person’s private life, even when it is not wanted, and the invasion of their personal space are considered forms of cyber stalking. Online, via email, messaging services, and blogs, obsessive stalking behaviors take place. Using and other communication tools is another way to express it (Uğur *et al.*, 2022; Reyns *et al.*, 2010).

According to Stevens *et al.*, Kaur *et al.*, and Begotti *et al.* (2022), cyberobsessive stalking is a type of cybercrime in which one person, a group, or an organization uses electronic tools to track and harass another person, a group, or an organization. Online criminals frequently act more brazenly than they ever would in person, all without being caught, deterred, or even noticed (Clark-Gordon *et al.*, 2019; Stevens *et al.*, 2021). According to reports, these behaviors are becoming more frequent because the offenders can conceal their identities behind the anonymity of the internet and feed off the victim’s resentment, desire for power, and lack of control (Pittaro, 2007).

The majority of aggressive, persistently repetitive, and premeditated cyber stalking behaviors are violent. They harass and threaten people verbally, publish sexually explicit photos and videos of the victim, and intrude on the other person’s private life without permission (Pittaro, 2007). Perpetrators carry out these behaviors comfortably by hiding their identities in the cyber environment to get the victims, to exact revenge, or due to their obsessional emotions. Individuals who are subjected to cyber obsessive stalking may experience psychological symptoms and issues such as fear, anxiety, anger, anxiety, disappointment, loss of concentration, decrease in self-esteem, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal ideation, paranoid thoughts, irritability, and nightmares. Short *et al.* (2014), Korkmaz (2016), Uğur *et al.* (2022). The fear experienced by the victims may cause the

process to be prolonged and the perpetrator to attack the victim more (Yorulmaz and Karadeniz 2022).

According to estimates by Tokunaga and Aune (2015), 20% to 40% of internet users worldwide are victims of cyber-obsessive stalking. The prevalence of cyber-obsessive stalking varies between 1% and 82% in different studies due to the lack of a generally agreed-upon definition (Dreßing et al., 2014; Harewell et al., 2021). According to Kalaitzaki, 2022, Begotti et al., 2022, and Kaur et al., 2021, women, adolescents, and young adults are thought to be more vulnerable to victimization.

As in all spheres of life, violence is a phenomenon frequently seen in the field of health. Patients and their relatives can be aggressive verbally or physically toward healthcare workers, which not only negatively affects their psychological well-being but can also lead to injury or even death (Annagür, 2010). Verbal abuse, particularly against healthcare workers, is widespread, according to studies conducted in various nations (Kumar et al., 2019; Zhan et al., 2019; Nagata-Kobayashi et al., 2009; Fujita et al., 2012; Yaşar et al., 2017; zşenler, 2021). Studies have found that violent incidents rise as society's educational level falls. They also found that nurses were more likely than doctors to experience non-physical violence.

The incidence of obsessive monitoring of healthcare workers ranges between 6% and 53%, according to studies (Bulut et al., 2021; Hassan et al., 2019). These studies also show that healthcare professionals may encounter traditional and cyber obsessive monitoring of their patients throughout the course of their professional lives. It is claimed that patients' dissatisfaction with the care they receive, extended hospital stays and/or treatment periods, and their perception that treatment processes are poorly managed put healthcare professionals at risk for obsessive monitoring. The nurse-patient relationship is crucial to the development of cyber obsessive stalking, which is a common phenomenon among nurses Comparcini et al (2016). Particularly, it has been demonstrated that new nurses with less than a year of experience are more susceptible to

online obsessive stalking (Kim and Choi 2021).

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This cross-sectional study aims to ascertain nurses' experiences with cyber-obsessive stalking behavior. The decision of the Acbadem University and Acbadem Health Institutions Medical Research Ethics Committee (ATADEK) dated March 10, 2023 and numbered 2022-04/131 provided ethical approval for the study.

The study's target demographic is nurses who work in both the public and private sectors. Using the snowball sampling technique, the study's sample was selected. The nurses that the researchers worked with were asked to reach out to the other nurses in their area. Of the nurses that were reached in this way, 165 nurses were included in the study because they agreed to participate in it and completed the survey.

Data for the study were gathered using an online survey form. There are two sections to the survey form. There are questions to find out the participants' sociodemographic details in the first section. The "Cyber Obsessive Stalking Scale" (SOTS), created by Spitzberg and Hoobler in 2002 to gauge an individual's exposure to cyber-obsessive stalking behaviors, is included in the second section. Validity and reliability studies were done on the SOTS after it was translated into Turkish by Uur et al. in 2022. The scale has 15 items in total, broken down into three categories: transference (items 11-15), excessive closeness (items 1-4), and threat (items 5-10). On a 5-point Likert scale, each item is rated according to how frequently the behavior occurs (1 = never; 2 = only once; 3 = 2-3 times); Scores range from 4 (for 4-5 times) to 5 (for more than 5 times). Higher scores indicate more frequent experiences of cyberobsessive stalking. The total score ranges from 15 to 75. From Uur et al., permission to use the scale was obtained. JASP 0.17.1 and the R programming language (version 4.0.3) were used to analyze the data. For continuous variables, descriptive statistics, the mean and standard deviation were used; for categorical variables, number and percentage representations were used. Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilks tests were used to verify the assumption of

normality. The independent t-test was used to compare independent variables because the assumption of normality was satisfied. In order to compare more than two groups, one-way analysis of variance was used; post-hoc tests were conducted using the Bonferroni method. Statistical significance was defined as  $p < 0.05$ .

### 3. FINDINGS

Research data shows that nurses are exposed to cyber-obsessive obsession.

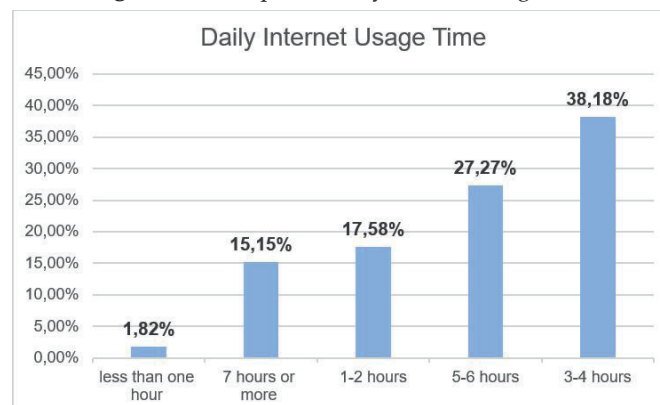
As seen in Table-1, 148 (89.7%) of the participants

were women and 17 (10.3%) were men. The mean age is  $27.8 \pm 7.0$ , the median age is 26 [19-55], and 42.4% ( $n=70$ ) are in the 25-29 age group. 72.1% ( $n=119$ ) of the participants were single, 66.1% ( $n=109$ ) had a bachelor's degree; 62.4% ( $n=103$ ) in the private sector; 91.5% work in hospitals. The proportion of participants who have worked in the profession for 1-5 years is 53.9% ( $n = 89$ ). All participants use the internet, 1.8% ( $n=3$ ) for less than one hour a day; 17.6% ( $n=29$ ) 1-2 hours; 38.2% ( $n=63$ ) 3-4 hours; 27.3% ( $n=45$ ) 5-6 hours; 15.2% ( $n=25$ ) stated that they used the internet for 7 hours or more.

**Table 1.** Descriptive characteristics of the participants

Variables	Groups	Frequency	Percent
Age	24 and below	58	35,2
	25-29 Age	70	42,4
	30-34 Age	18	10,9
	35 and above	19	11,5
Gender	Woman	148	89,7
	Man	17	10,3
Marial Status	Single	119	72,1
	Married	43	26,1
	Other	3	1,8
Educational Status	Health Vocational High School	40	24,2
	Undergraduate	109	66,1
	Postgraduate	16	9,7
Time Spent Working in the Profession	Less Than a Year	12	7,3
	1-5 years	89	53,9
	6-10 years	33	20,0
	more than 10 years	31	18,8
Type of Institution Worked for	Public	62	37,6
	Private	103	62,4
Institution Worked For	Family Health Center	2	1,2
	Hospital	151	91,5
	Others	12	7,3

**Figure 1.** Participants' daily internet usage time



Everyone who took part admitted to using at least one social network. Whatsapp (used 27.0%), Instagram (24.5%), Youtube (20.4%), and Twitter (14.8%) were found to be the most popular social media platforms. The Vine app is not being used by any participants.

As seen in Figure-3, the participants purposes for using social networks are: Communication (18.1%), time consumption (17.7%), maintaining social relationships (13.4%), sharing content (13.4%), research and education (13.4%), observing others' activities (8.2%), gaming (6.3%), joining groups that interest me (3.6%), making friends (1.9%), and receiving recognition from others (0.099%) are the participants' top reasons for using social networks.

As seen in Table-2, 72.7% (n=120) of the participants reported having experienced at least one form of online stalking. Sending messages to influence is the most prevalent cyber obsessive stalking behavior, accounting for 61.2% of the extreme closeness component; changing one's electronic identity or profile accounts for 10.9% of the threat component; and following after the

first online meeting accounts for 21.2% of the transfer component.

The average total score of the participants on the scale was found to be  $20.7 \pm 7.34$ . The mean score of the extreme closeness component ( $8.0 \pm 4.26$ ) is the highest, and the mean score of the transference component ( $5.9 \pm 2.4$ ) is the lowest. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the entire scale was 0.855; 0.817 for the extreme closeness component; 0.878 for the threat component; It was calculated as 0.814 for the transfer component.

The average scores of the scale components and the average total score are higher in women than in men. However, there was no statistically significant difference between the gender of the participants and the average scores of the extreme closeness, threat and transference components and the average total score ( $p > 0.05$ ).

In comparison to married people, single people have higher average scores across all scale components and average overall scores. The relationship between marital status, the mean of extreme closeness, and the mean total score is

Figure 2. Social networks used by participants

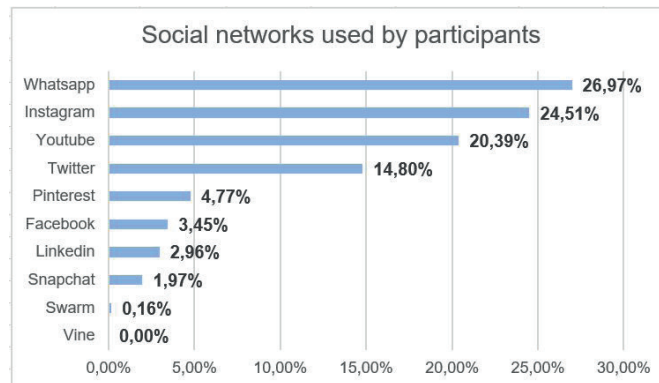
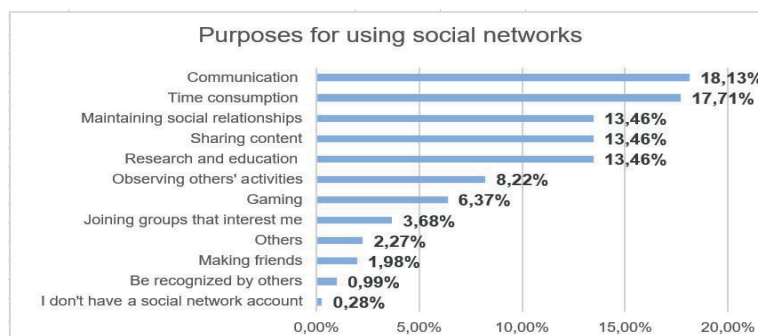


Figure 3. Participants' purposes for using social networks



statistically different ( $p < 0.05$ ). Marital status and threat and transference mean scores, however, did not differ statistically significantly ( $p > 0.05$ ).

Participants who work in the public sector have

higher average total scores and average scores for each of the scale's components. The type of institution attended and the transfer average score differ statistically significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ). The type of institution studied did not, however,

**Table 2.** Proportion of participants who answered anything other than "Never" to the scale questions

		At least once encounter rate
E x t r e m e I n t i m a c y	Sending messages of influence (e.g., poems, songs, electronic greeting cards, praise, etc.).	61,2
	Sending exaggerated messages of affection (e.g., expressions of affection that imply a more intimate relationship than the existing one, etc.).	52,7
	Sending very specific messages (e.g., giving inappropriate information about life, body, family, hobbies, sexual experiences, etc.).	27,3
	Sending overly needy or overly demanding messages (e.g., pressuring to meet, persistently offering to meet, arguing for another chance, etc.).	29,1
T h r e a t e n i n g	Don't sabotage your reputation (e.g., spread rumors about what you've done to your friends, family, partner, etc.).	8,5
	Sabotage your reputation in the school/work environment (e.g., spreading rumors about you, your relationships, or your activities on organizational networks, electronic bulletin boards, etc.).	7,3
	"Bugging" your car, home, office (e.g., placing a eavesdropping or recording device, etc.).	1,8
	Changing your electronic identity or profile (e.g. breaking into your system and changing your signature, personal information or how you identify yourself, etc.).	10,9
	Hacking your electronic identity or profile (for example, using your identity in chat rooms, bulletin boards, pornographic sites or singles sites, etc.).	7,9
	Directing other people toward you in a threatening way (e.g., making speeches on your behalf and suggesting risky sexual behavior, fantasizing about kidnapping, etc.).	4,8
T r a n s f e r	Stalking you after first meeting online (e.g., stalking you while you're driving, at school, at work, at the gym, or at social events, etc.).	21,2
	Intruding (trying to break into) someone's life after the first meeting online (e.g. unexpectedly appearing at work, in front of the door, in the parking lot, trying to force a conversation, etc.).	11,5
	Threatening you after first meeting online (for example, threatening sexual intercourse, rape, physical coercion, or harming your property, pets, family, or friends).	3,6
	Harm you after first meeting online (for example, meeting you through online dating sites and then stalking, harassing, or otherwise monitoring you).	5,5
	Stalking you after an initial meeting online (for example, meeting you through online dating sites (or as an acquaintance) and then harassing, harassing, or otherwise stalking you).	9,1

**Table 3.** Average scores of the participants

Components	$X \pm SS$	[min-max]	Cronbach Alfa
Extreme Intimacy	8,0±4,26	7.00 [4.00-20.00]	0,817
Threatening	6,7±2,54	6.00 [6.00-30.00]	0,878
Transfer	5,9±2,4	5.00 [5.00-25.00]	0,814
Total Points	20,7±7,34	18 [15.00-75.00]	0,855



statistically differ from the excessive closeness and threat mean scores or the mean overall score ( $p>0.05$ ).

The average threat score is higher for high school graduates who attended health-related vocational schools; the average transfer score is higher for undergraduate graduates; and the average total score is higher for undergraduate graduates. The average score of extreme closeness is for postgraduate graduates. The participants' educational status did not, however, statistically differ from the average scores of the extreme closeness, threat, and transference components

or the average total score ( $p>0.05$ ).

Participants who use the internet more than seven hours per day tend to have higher average scores across all scale components and total scores. The mean scores of excessive closeness and transference, as well as the mean overall score, differ statistically significantly ( $p 0.05$ ) from each other. Threat average score and daily internet usage time did not differ statistically significantly ( $p>0.05$ ).

The relationship between scale components was ascertained using the Pearson correlation

**Table 4.** Average scores of the participants according to their gender

Components	Gender		p value*
	Woman	Man	
	X ± SD	X ± SD	
Extreme Intimacy	8,09±4,31	7,53±3,89	0,611
Threatening	6,82±2,67	6,24±0,66	0,368
Transfer	6,02±2,58	5,29±0,77	0,250
Total Points	20,93±7,60	19,06±4,18	0,320

\* Independent t-test

**Table 5.** Average scores of the participants according to their marital status

Components	Marial Status		p value*
	Single	Married	
	X ± SD	X ± SD	
Extreme Intimacy	4,39±0,40	3,47±0,53	0,004
Threatening	2,86±0,26	1,43±0,22	0,235
Transfer	2,81±0,26	0,95±0,15	0,796
Total Points	7,99±0,73	4,57±0,70	0,002

\* Independent t-test

**Table 6.** Average scores of the participants according to the type of institution they work in

Components	Type of Institution Worked		p value*
	Public	Private	
	X ± SD	X ± SD	
Extreme Intimacy	4,50±0,57	4,14±0,41	0,879
Threatening	3,19±0,40	2,08±0,20	0,586
Transfer	3,40±0,43	1,58±0,16	0,020
Total Points	9,19±1,17	5,95±0,59	0,264

\* Independent t-test

**Table 7.** Average scores of the participants according to their educational status

Components	Educational Status			F value	p value*
	Health vocational high School	Undergraduate	Postgraduate		
	X ± SD	X ± SD	X ± SD		
	Extreme Intimacy	7,45±3,22	8,15±4,44		
Threatening	6,85±2,41	6,82±2,76	6,19±0,54	0,454	0,636
Transfer	5,63±1,39	6,09±2,80	5,75±2,05	0,580	0,561
Total Points	19,93±5,27	21,06±8,05	20,63±6,86	0,346	0,708

\*ANOVA One-way analysis of variance

coefficient. Extreme closeness and threat were found to have a low-intensity positive linear relationship ( $r=0.337$ ,  $p0.001$ ), as well as extreme closeness and transference ( $r=0.340$ ,  $p0.001$ ). Threat and transference ( $r=0.692$ ,  $p0.001$ ), extreme closeness and total score ( $r=0.812$ ,  $p0.001$ ), threat and total score ( $r=0.775$ ,  $p0.001$ ), and transference and total score ( $r=0.692$ ,  $p0.001$ ) are all significant correlations. ( $r=0.773$ ,  $p0.001$ ) (Table 9) It was discovered that there was a highly significant positive linear relationship.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

With the global adoption of digital technologies, cyber violence has grown to be a serious issue. One in five people in Turkey claim to have experienced digital violence, according to a study there (ener and abnk, 2021). Cyber obsessive stalking is a relatively new phenomenon that puts people's security and privacy at serious risk.

Studies show that certain professions, including those in healthcare, are more likely to experience both traditional and online obsessive stalking. Because they frequently interact with patients who are experiencing emotional or physical difficulties while practicing their professions, doctors and nurses run the risk of being harassed, especially by patients. Healthcare workers are

frequently the targets of harassment, which can last for a few weeks to several years and take the form of unwanted phone calls, letters, direct contact, threats, secret or open monitoring/surveillance, etc. (Manunza et al., 2018; Bulut et al., 2021).

Misunderstandings may happen as a result of the professional relationship that exists between healthcare workers and patients. Based on empathy and trust, nurses develop a close, professional relationship with the patients they care for; however, occasionally, patients may mistake this professional interest for personal emotional attention. The likelihood of cyber-obsessive stalking of nurses is also increased by patients' dissatisfaction with the medical care they receive, the length of treatment processes, extended interactions with patients or their relatives, and feelings of resentment and anger toward medical-surgical treatments or interventions that patients do not find satisfactory.

According to the analysis, 72.7% of the survey respondents had at least one experience with cyber obsessive stalking behavior. While exposure to messages intended to influence was regarded as the most frequent behavior, with a rate of 61.2%, exposure to messages intended

**Table 8.** Average scores of the participants according to their daily internet usage time

Components	Daily internet usage time				F Value	p value*
	1-2 Hours	3-4 Hours	5-6 Hours	≥7 Hours		
	X ± SD	X ± SD	X ± SD	X ± SD		
Extreme Intimacy	5,88±2,64	7,78±4,23	8,58±4,33	10,44±4,67	6,254	<0.001
Threatening	6,63±2,21	6,60±1,51	6,60±1,40	7,64±5,24	1,169	0,323
Transfer	5,50±1,32	5,73±1,56	5,80±1,65	7,32±5,05	3,298	0,022
Total Points	18,00±4,39	20,11±5,79	20,98±5,83	25,40±12,67	5,425	0,001

\*ANOVA One-way analysis of variance

**Table 9.** Correlation between scale components

Components		Extreme Intimacy	Threatening	Transfer
Extreme Intimacy	r	1	-	-
	p value	-	-	-
Threatening	r	0,337**	-	-
	p value	<0.001	-	-
Transfer	r	0,340**	0,692**	-
	p value	<0.001	<0.001	-
Toplam puan	r	0,812**	0,775**	0,773**
	p value	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

to listen in cars, homes, and offices was the least common type of cyber obsessive stalking behavior. The most frequent component of the scale is excessive closeness behaviors, and transference behaviors are rarely observed. Similar findings were made by Spitzberg and Hoobler (2002), who found that only 3% of participants in their study experienced more severe transference behaviors while a third of them engaged in relatively less risky excessive closeness behaviors.

Mental health has been the primary focus of studies on the (cyber) obsessive monitoring of healthcare workers (Manunza et al., 2018; Bulut et al., 2021). According to a study by McKenna et al. (2003), patients threatened nurses verbally 35% of the time, sexually harassed them verbally 30% of the time, physically threatened them 29% of the time, and stalked them 3.8% of the time in their first years of employment. A Canadian study found that 36.8% of mental health nurses had experienced stalking behaviors, with 23.8% receiving death threats, 58% having their homes followed, and 26% having their places of employment followed (Comparcini et al., 2015). Similar to that, 21.2% of participants in this study engaged in stalking behavior.

Gender and age are the demographic characteristics linked to victimization in studies on cyber obsessive stalking (Kaur et al., 2021; Maple et al., 2011; Pereira and Matos, 2015). There was no correlation between the gender of the participants and their experiences with cyber-obsessive stalking in this study, despite the fact that women's mean scores for the extreme closeness, threat, and transference components as well as the mean total score were higher than men's. Regarding the association between gender and cyber obsessive stalking, there is, however, no agreement among the various studies. According to some studies, both men and women have an equal chance of becoming victims of cyber-obsessive stalking (Dreßing et al., 2014; Gunn et al., 2021). Most studies (Marcum and Higgins, 2021; Sammons and Cross, 2017) indicate that women are disproportionately more likely to be victims, while more studies (Ahlgrim and Terrance, 2018;

Pereira and Matos, 2015) indicate that men are more likely to be perpetrators. A scant amount of research has been done on male victimization (Fissel & Reynolds, 2019).

In this study, participants who worked in the public sector had higher mean scores across all scale components and a mean total score, and a significant link between the type of institution they worked for and transfer was discovered. Despite the fact that there hasn't been any original research on cyber obsessive stalking of healthcare workers, Turkan (2013) found that public hospitals were the most frequently the scene of violence, with private hospitals accounting for just 1% of cases.

Internet use is common among the study's nurses. According to international data showing that an internet user spends more than six hours on the internet (DataReportal, 2023b), 42.5% of respondents use the internet for longer than five hours. Participants who use the internet more than seven hours per day tend to have higher average scores across all scale components and total scores. Excessive closeness and transference were found to be related to daily internet use time, despite the fact that there is no connection between threat and daily internet use time. Two-thirds of healthcare workers use social media regularly every day, according to a study by Balc et al. (2020), and they spend an average of more than two hours online each day. Studies have shown an association between victimization and bullying and the frequency, duration, and variety of social media and internet use (Spitzberg and Hoobler, 2002; Strawhun et al., 2013; Choi et al., 2022).

## 5. CONCLUSION

Although the healthcare professionals participating in this study encounter cyber-obsessive stalking behaviors of their patients, they often cannot disclose sensitive situations for ethical reasons and avoid talking about this issue.

During institutional training in the hospitals where they work or during their high school and university education, it maybe it will be crucial to provide nurses with training on violence-related

issues, especially when addressing the issue of cyber violence. It can be important for anyone who witnesses this behavior to understand how to react and how to report it.

Hospitals are no longer a safe environment for healthcare workers due to increasing violence in the sector. An employee who is distracted from work will not be able to provide quality medical care. In order to prevent these situations from happening, increasing legal penalties can be a deterrent in committing these actions.

To increase understanding of how terrible an act all forms of violence are, education should begin in schools. These situations will be less likely to occur as a result of the education the person receives as a child, which may have a direct bearing on subsequent processes. Public service announcements can be prepared by government organizations and distributed in pertinent areas to increase awareness in addition to the instruction to be provided in schools. Therefore, these methods will lower the number of cases.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE/ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ

# The psychological and legal dimensions of cyber violence in the digital game perspective: The case of league of legends

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## Abstract

With the developing technology, individuals have begun to work and carry out all kinds of transactions through digital platforms. In parallel, digital environments have also begun to meet individuals' entertainment needs, with games becoming digitized and gaming habits evolving in a different direction. This situation has brought with it both the benefits and the online risks of the digital world. Cyber violence, defined as any harmful behavior towards an individual or group through cyberspace, is one of these online risks.

As a preliminary study, this paper aims to examine the extent and methods of cyber violence experienced by male and female users in the online game League of Legends, which is one of the most popular online games in Turkey, and to analyze the psychological and legal aspects of cyber violence in digital games.

In this experimental, descriptive study with blended research methodology, both male and female users played the game alone and as a team at regular intervals for one month. Participants were asked to use their usernames and behavior in the game, indicating their gender. The reactions received by both participants when playing the game well or poorly were analyzed to examine cyber violence from legal and psychological perspectives.

As a preliminary result of the study, it was found that female participants received the most flirtatious offers and were subjected to verbal abuse and insults, even when playing the game well. Male participants, on the other hand, were subjected to verbal abuse and insults when playing the game both well and poorly.

When the participants played the game together, it was found that female participants were subjected to cyber violence the most. This violence is most commonly expressed in the form of verbal abuse and insults. It is believed that examining cyber violence in digital games from legal and psychological perspectives will raise awareness about cyber violence.

**Keywords:** Cyber violence, digital game, law, psychology

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

With the advancement of technology, daily activities of individuals have increasingly shifted towards digital platforms. In today's virtual world, the benefits and drawbacks of digital platforms actively involved in interaction have come to the forefront.

Digital games have become a popular form of entertainment and social interaction in recent years. With the progress of technology, the gaming landscape has undergone significant changes, giving rise to new formats such as online multiplayer games. One of the marketing methods of online digital games is their ability to facilitate socialization. Players often engage in conversations and discussions about various topics outside of the game without even realizing it. This allows players to establish lasting bonds and connections with each other, which is defined as a source of motivation for the game (Bartle, 1996). In addition to providing a foundation for entertainment and socialization, digital games sometimes bring with them certain negative aspects due to the virtual world they create. Cyberbullying has increasingly become a pressing issue in digital games.

Digital games provide a platform where players interact with each other in a virtual environment. In this context, digital games create a conducive environment for cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is defined as the repeated use of information and communication technologies by an individual or a group with the intention of harming others (Belsey, 2007).

Individuals who are primarily affected by cyberbullying actions in digital game platforms are confronted with the psychological, emotional, and social impacts of being subjected to online attacks. Cyberbullying actions can lead to various issues such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem in the victims.

The proliferation of cyberbullying in digital games necessitates the development of awareness, prevention, and intervention strategies. In this context, legal regulations that form the structure of society are also of paramount importance

in preventing cyberbullying. Although the Turkish Penal Code does not explicitly regulate cyberbullying as a distinct crime, some cyberbullying actions are explicitly defined as crimes. The types of cyberbullying encountered on digital game platforms often involve acts of insult and threats. Within this framework, the provisions of the Turkish Penal Code regarding insult and threat crimes and crimes against public peace and order can be applied to the perpetrated cyberbullying actions. However, the issue of proving the commission of these actions in practice is undeniable, as digital games provide an element of anonymity.

League of Legends (LoL), which has gained a significant presence in the cyber world, stands out as a competitive online multiplayer game with millions of players (Brühlmann et al., 2020). However, the intense competition and the environment of anonymity in this game often lead to it becoming a platform where cyberbullying is frequently experienced (Jeges et al., 2021). Attacks between players, such as harassment, insults, threats, or the disclosure of personal information, can have serious consequences for both the victims and the gaming experience (Bertran & Chamarro, 2016).

This article focuses on the psychological and legal dimensions of cyberbullying using League of Legends as an example. When players are exposed to cyberbullying, they may experience various psychological effects. Fear, stress, shame, loss of self-esteem and self-confidence, depression, and anxiety are among the common outcomes of cyberbullying. Additionally, cases of cyberbullying that occur in digital games like League of Legends are an important subject concerning legal responsibility and criminal sanctions. Issues such as aggression between players, actions carried out intending to harm the game, and how such behaviors should be addressed within the legal framework will be examined in this article.



## 2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1. Cyber Violence

Cyber violence refers to aggressive and harmful behaviors that occur in environments using the internet and digital communication tools (Paat et al., 2019). Such acts of violence often take advantage of internet characteristics such as anonymity, remote communication, and widespread accessibility (Chugh & Guggisberg, 2022). Cyber violence can occur between individuals or by one person against another and can manifest in various forms (Zhu et al., 2023). The proliferation of internet usage and the increased use of technological devices in today's world have brought about various issues, one of which is cyber violence. Cyber violence is defined as "the malicious use of one or more information technology tools, sending inappropriate content such as text, messages, emails, images, etc., with ill intent, harassing individuals or groups in a virtual environment" (Van-Ouytsel et al., 2017). In addition to these definitions, acts such as the dissemination of humiliating, insulting emails and messages, obtaining identity and account information or facilitating access to this information, mocking individuals in the virtual environment, spreading false information, making rude, offensive, threatening comments and allowing their dissemination, computer hacking, monitoring/observing a person's phone or computer, creating an account under a false/fake name to scare or threaten someone, and sending sexually explicit messages or images are also considered as forms of cyber violence (Kričkić et al., 2017).

It is observed that there is no universal definition of cyber violence, and it can evolve in parallel with technological advancements, leading to variations in the definitions provided (Betts, 2016).

One form of cyber violence is threats and harassment, which entail sending or disseminating aggressive messages directed at an individual. These aggressive expressions may encompass threats, profanity, insults, or discriminatory, racist, or homophobic language. Such behaviors can tarnish an individual's

reputation, exert psychological pressure, and undermine their sense of personal security (Niki et al., 2022).

Incitement to suicide represents an extremely perilous form of cyber violence (John et al., 2018). It involves encouraging an individual to commit suicide or disseminating harmful content related to suicide. Incitement to suicide can lead to severe consequences for individuals contemplating suicide, jeopardizing their lives. The dissemination of such content can impact the mental health of affected individuals and yield serious outcomes. Another form of cyber violence is the violation of personal information and privacy. This pertains to breaching an individual's privacy and disclosing their personal information. Actions such as the unauthorized sharing of private photos or videos, theft of personal data, or exploitation of privacy can damage an individual's reputation, lead to psychological issues, and pose security risks. The violation of personal information and privacy can leave lasting effects on victims, negatively affecting their lives.

Cyberbullying is another significant form of cyber violence, encompassing a range of behaviors directed persistently at an individual, such as aggression, humiliation, exclusion, or manipulation. Cyberbullying typically occurs in online environments and can damage a victim's reputation, cause psychological trauma, and, in some cases, lead to suicide. It is a widespread issue, especially among children, adolescents, and other vulnerable groups.

Cyberstalking and tracking are also forms of cyber violence, entailing the monitoring, tracking, and intrusion into an individual's online activities. Internet and digital platforms provide a readily accessible medium for the tracking and collection of personal information. Cyberstalking undermines an individual's sense of security and can create a feeling of privacy invasion. Such behaviors can impact the victim's daily life and cause psychological distress.

These examples represent just a few manifestations of cyber violence. Cyber violence can manifest in various other forms in online

environments and is subject to continuous change. It can have severe impacts on its victims, leading to physical, psychological, and social harm. Consequently, preventing cyber violence, raising awareness, and implementing effective measures are of paramount importance.

## 2.2. Cyber Violence Environments

Cyber violence denotes aggressive and detrimental behaviors occurring in various online settings. These behaviors often manifest themselves in forms such as severe verbal harassment, threats, humiliation, profanity, hate speech, privacy invasion, and manipulation (Strasburger, 1999). Cyber violence can take place in the following environments:

**Social Media Platforms:** Popular social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok are common arenas for cyber violence. Here, individuals, owing to the cloak of anonymity, may exhibit aggressive and hostile behaviors. Actions such as threats, harassment, humiliation, and hate speech can negatively impact users' psychological and emotional well-being.

**Online Games:** Online gaming environments are rife with cyberbullying. In-game chat serves as a means of communication among players, making it susceptible to profanity, insults, harassment, and other aggressive behaviors. The competitive nature of gameplay and the factor of anonymity can contribute to the proliferation of cyber violence (Mishna et al., 2019).

**Messaging Applications:** Messaging applications such as WhatsApp, Messenger, and Snapchat are also platforms where cyber violence occurs. Acts of aggression, harassment, and threats in personal or group chats can have psychological repercussions on victims.

**Forums and Discussion Sites:** Internet forums, discussion platforms, and blog spaces provide outlets for individuals to share their opinions. Nevertheless, these platforms are common breeding grounds for cyber violence. Anonymity often leads to the proliferation of aggression, hate speech, profanity, and hostile written content and comments.

**Online Relationship Platforms:** Friendship websites, dating apps, and online matchmaking platforms can also be venues where cyber violence is observed. Threats, harassment, privacy breaches, and manipulative behaviors can affect victims in such environments.

**Internet Communities and Groups:** Internet communities, focusing on shared interests and bringing people together, can also serve as platforms for cyber violence. Ideological differences, discrimination, hate speech, and aggression may lead to instances of cyber violence (Yılmaz & Demir, 2020).

These environments represent exemplary areas where cyber violence can occur. It is essential to remember that cyber violence can take place on numerous other platforms in the online world. Therefore, creating awareness and implementing effective measures are of paramount importance for the prevention and mitigation of cyber violence and its consequences.

## 2.3. Psychological Dimension of Cyber Violence

The psychological effects of cyber violence include emotional distress, anxiety, depression, loss of self-esteem and self-worth, social isolation, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Galende et al., 2020). Victims of cyber violence may experience emotional distress due to constant threats, humiliation, and aggressive expressions (Jaureguizar et al., 2023). This can manifest as low self-esteem, a sense of shame, and a constant feeling of unease. Additionally, continuous exposure to attacks can trigger symptoms of anxiety and depression (Rousseu et al., 2021). The impact of cyber violence can damage the confidence of victims and make them feel worthless. This can lead to social isolation, as victims may avoid forming relationships with others and feel excluded (Blair & Lee, 2013).

Lastly, individuals subjected to constant stress may experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, which can include nightmares, insomnia, difficulty concentrating, and a constant state of alertness (Piolanti & Foran, 2022). These effects reflect the difficulties and psychological suffering that victims experience, emphasizing the importance of support, counseling, and

psychological assistance. When these effects come together, victims of cyber violence can face significant psychological challenges. Conditions like emotional distress, anxiety, and depression can impact their daily lives, decrease their work and school performance, and negatively affect their overall quality of life.

Loss of self-esteem and self-worth can undermine their belief in themselves and hinder their ability to realize their full potential. Social isolation weakens their social relationships, leaving them without social support and experiencing feelings of loneliness (Hinduja & Patchin, 2018). Post-traumatic stress disorder can lead to symptoms like constant recollection of past events, nightmares, insomnia, fear, and hyper-vigilance.

These effects negatively impact the psychological well-being of victims, highlighting the importance of support systems, professional help, and awareness campaigns to help victims cope with these challenges. Given the serious consequences of the psychological effects of cyber violence, it is essential for both victims to help themselves and for society to increase awareness and education (Kowalski et al., 2012).

When examining the psychological effects of cyber violence in a list format, they can be analyzed as follows:

**Fear and Stress:** Victims of cyber violence may experience fear and stress when subjected to attacks. These attacks can take various forms, such as threatening messages, insults, false accusations, exposure of personal information, or behaviors like continuous tracking and harassment by aggressors. Such attacks generate intense anxiety and fear in victims. Victims feel insecure and vulnerable. The anonymity of cyber attacks, the ability of aggressors to conceal their identities, and the reduced risk of real-world encounters can further exacerbate victims' concerns (Ramikie & Ressler, 2018).

Fear and stress affect victims' sense of security. Cyber violence makes it challenging for victims to cope with the fear of being targeted in the digital realm or in real life. This may lead to restricting one's daily activities, impacting social relationships, and even reducing overall quality

of life. Furthermore, continuous exposure to attacks places victims under constant stress. Attacks negatively affect the mental and emotional health of victims, resulting in common reactions like sleep problems, difficulty concentrating, irritability, restlessness, and constant anxiety (Kushman & Byrne, 2017).

Persistent high stress levels can have a detrimental impact on victims' quality of life and may even lead to serious mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. The psychological effects of cyber violence can vary among individuals, but fear and stress are generally dominant experiences (Wilson et al., 2021).

**Loss of Self-Esteem and Self-Confidence:** Victims of cyber violence may experience a loss of self-esteem and self-confidence following attacks. Aggressors may use demeaning, derogatory, and insulting messages to target victims. Such attacks can make victims feel worthless, inadequate, or unsuccessful (Abtahi, 2022).

Self-esteem represents an individual's sense of value and respect for oneself. Victims of cyber violence may feel devalued and humiliated as a result of the attacks (Smith & Johnson, 2021). Aggressor's rhetoric can significantly damage the self-esteem of victims. Victims may perceive themselves as inadequate or flawed due to the impact of the attacks and even lose faith in themselves (Brown & Marshall, 2019).

Self-confidence refers to an individual's belief in their own abilities, values, and potential. Victims of cyber violence may lose their self-confidence following the attacks. Continuous criticism, humiliation, or negative comments by aggressors can undermine victims' belief in their abilities and worth. Victims may perceive themselves as failures, inept, or unworthy of acceptance (Johnson & Smith, 2020).

**Depression and Anxiety:** Cyber violence can lead to the emergence of serious mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety, in victims (Garber et al., 2016). Victims may lose emotional balance and experience psychological degradation and threats when continually subjected to attacks (Mundy et al., 2021).

Continuous exposure to attacks leads victims to feel insecure and vulnerable. This results in persistent anxiety and high-stress levels. Victims fear future attacks and feel constantly threatened. Due to this constant stress, depression symptoms may manifest (Gage et al., 2013).

The psychological effects of cyber violence may make victims feel worthless, inadequate, or guilty. Aggressors' degrading and humiliating messages damage victims' self-esteem. Victims may lose their self-confidence and experience depressive feelings as a result of the attacks (Dean, 2016).

Anxiety is associated with constantly feeling threatened and anticipating future attacks. Victims of cyber violence may experience constant anxiety and fear. The desire to avoid exposure to attacks or encounters with aggressors can increase anxiety and lead to avoidance of social interactions. Victims may constantly worry about coping with future attacks or similar situations (Nechita et al., 2018).

Depression and anxiety can negatively impact victims' overall quality of life and functionality. Symptoms such as lack of motivation, energy depletion, concentration difficulties, sleep problems, and social withdrawal are common in depression and anxiety (Thompson et al., 2019). This can have adverse effects on victims' work, school, or social relationships (Miller et al., 2018).

#### **2.4. The Legal Aspect of Cyber Violence**

With the advancement of technology, interpersonal interactions in the virtual space have increased, leading to the emergence of cyber violence as a form of violence alongside its positive aspects.

Legal rules that maintain societal order are evolving and changing in parallel with the development of technology. One significant development in the realm of cybercrimes is the European Convention on Cybercrime, also known as the Budapest Convention. The Convention was signed on November 23, 2001, and came into force on July 1, 2004. Turkey became a party to the Convention as of January 1, 2015. The European Convention on Cybercrime

is the first international treaty in the field of combating cybercrimes.

The Convention addresses crimes related to the confidentiality, integrity, and accessibility of computer data or systems (unauthorized access, illegal interception, data interference, system interference, misuse of devices), computer-related offenses (computer-related forgery, computer-related fraud), content-related crimes (crimes related to child pornography), and offenses related to copyright and related rights. The Convention includes provisions on both substantive criminal law and criminal procedural law, as well as provisions on mutual assistance. With Turkey's accession to the Convention, amendments were made to the Turkish Penal Code No. 5237 to regulate crimes committed with or against computer systems. Within this framework, crimes committed with or against computer systems are regulated in the "crimes in the field of informatics" and "crimes against the privacy of private life and the secrecy of private life" sections.

Article 20 of the Turkish Constitution states: "Everyone has the right to demand respect for their private and family life. The privacy of private life and family life cannot be violated. (Repealed third sentence: 3/10/2001-4709/5 art.) (...) Everyone has the right to protect personal data about themselves. This right includes being informed about personal data related to oneself, accessing this data, requesting their correction or deletion, and learning whether they are being used for their intended purposes. Personal data can only be processed in cases stipulated by law or with the explicit consent of the person. The principles and procedures regarding the protection of personal data are regulated by law."

Within the scope of these rights protected by the Constitution, the acquisition and use of an individual's private photos and conversations through information technology are unlawful. Furthermore, under Article 90 of the Turkish Constitution, international agreements to which Turkey is a party are binding.

The concept of cyber violence, being a broad

and not clearly defined term that encompasses a wide range of behaviors, makes it difficult to create a specific legal definition and code that can adapt to advancing technology. There is no specific crime type in the Turkish Penal Code defined as “cyber violence.” However, there are many provisions in the Turkish Penal Code that can be applied to cyber violence behaviors. Crimes such as incitement to suicide (Article 84), harassment (Article 96), threats (Article 106), discrimination (Article 122), disturbing the peace and tranquility of individuals (Article 123), defamation or insults (Article 125), violation of the privacy of private life by monitoring, interfering with communication, and ridiculing the content, and violation of the confidentiality of communication (Article 132), sexual harassment, unlawful disclosure or acquisition of data are examples of specific crime types that can be applied to cyber violence cases. In addition, with an amendment published in the Official Gazette on May 27, 2022, persistent cyberstalking has been regulated as a crime under Article 123A of the Turkish Penal Code. The article stipulates that persistent actions that cause serious discomfort to a person by physically tracking or attempting to establish contact through communication and communication tools, information systems, or third parties, resulting in a person or their close ones feeling unsafe, will be subject to penalties. This regulation is an important step in preventing one of the forms of cyber violence, persistent stalking.

## 2.5. Cyber Violence in Digital Games

In acts of cyber violence within digital games, particularly under the framework of the Turkish Penal Code, offenses such as defamation, threats, and disturbing the peace and tranquility of individuals often come into play. These types of offenses are well-suited for application in the virtual realm. However, in digital games, players are often anonymous, and the difficulty of identifying the perpetrator of cyber violence due to a lack of evidence presents a significant challenge.

Detecting cyber violence behavior through traditional complaint and criminal investigation methods is generally challenging. This is because

data and evidence in information technologies may not be easily controlled. The issue of evidence becomes apparent at this point. It is of great importance for evidence that data is in the possession of the data controller and can be easily destroyed.

In this context, the use of more advanced technologies in this field, worked on by digital forensics experts, is under discussion as a necessity.

In addition to criminal law, various legal institutions may come into play in terms of private law before and after being subjected to cyber violence.

The Turkish Civil Code No. 4721 includes numerous provisions for the protection of personal rights. The law allows a person whose personal rights have been violated to request the prevention of the violation of personal rights, termination of the ongoing attack, and determination of the unlawfulness of the attack's effects, even if it has ended. Therefore, any use or sharing of personal data without consent is unlawful as long as there is no legal justification. The publication of information or documents from an individual's confidential or private space on social media without their consent is an attack on an individual's personal rights and private life.

Tools like in-game chats, tweets, blog posts, and forum discussions on digital gaming platforms, as well as Facebook posts, provide avenues through which individuals can be subjected to degrading, hurtful, and hostile content, consisting of written, visual, and auditory elements. Moreover, individuals can also have their emotional well-being violated by content that contains explicit or sexually harassing elements (Kaya, 2015). Furthermore, these actions fall within the scope of the Turkish Penal Code as constituting the offense of sexual harassment.

In such actions, the term “e-communication bullying” is used to describe acts where individuals insult, demean, and inflict primarily psychological harm on others through social media platforms (Süslü B., 2016).

As part of the efforts to combat cyber violence, an investigation can be initiated by filing a criminal complaint against the individual responsible for the cyber violence. In terms of private law, it is also possible to initiate legal proceedings to prevent the attack, bring the attack to an end, and establish the unlawfulness of the attack. Additionally, apart from these avenues, if a victim experiences emotional distress, pain, and suffering as a result of the cyberbullying acts they have been subjected to, they can seek moral damages to alleviate the harm. If there has been a financial loss due to these actions, the victim can also seek financial compensation.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This experimental, descriptive research was conducted by grouping observed negative reactions of players towards the (gender) indexed players (experimental set-up) during the game according to a type of reaction. To create a setup with players of indexed (gender) identity to observe reactions towards them in the online gaming environment, two users of both genders, played the game individually and in teams at regular intervals for a duration of one month. The games were played on weekends, the days with the highest activity on the gaming platform. Participants were asked to use gender-specific usernames and behaviors while indicating their gender. The username for the male participant was set as “xxDarkinAlix,” and for the female participant, it was “Magical Hande.” These names do not represent the real names of the participants. Researchers observed the games by observing the rooms in which the participants played. During this process, reactions to participants’ good and bad gaming performances were examined, and cyber violence was analyzed from legal and psychological perspectives. In the research, observers played a total of 7 games, with 3 games played together by a male and a female observer, and 4 games played separately. The unit of observation in the study is the 70 individuals present in the examined games.

A blended (qualitative and quantitative) research methodology was used to describe the results.

Cyber violence behaviors occurring within the game were observed (and grouped thematically

as), and the exposure of participants with usernames corresponding to different genders to cyber violence behaviors was examined. Additionally, types of cyber violence occurring in the text-based chat section of the gaming platform were investigated (as thematic coding of free text by 2 independent raters). Results were presented quantitatively (89) by type of cyber violence. Some limitations of the research stem from the chosen method and the selected game. The demographic information of the players does not constitute the focus of the research because the game does not provide access to such information, and making inferences from this data is not possible. However, the players were selected by researchers from both genders and their usernames and played characters were determined accordingly. All players register for the game using nicknames.

### 4. PARTICIPANT PROFILE

The observers included in the research were selected from individuals aged 18 and above, specifically university students. These participants are individuals who have been playing League of Legends (LoL) for an extended period and are knowledgeable about the game. Due to the generally anonymous nature of playing the game with pseudonymous identities, the age and gender of other users examined within the game cannot be determined.

### 5. FINDINGS

In the research process, participants were subjected to cyberbullying, whether they played the game well or poorly. One notable detail during the research was the female participant receiving additional flirtatious offers compared to the male participant. (e.g., requests for acquaintance, etc.)

Participants experienced cyberbullying from opponents when they performed well and from teammates when they performed poorly. Cyberbullying within the game primarily manifested itself in the form of profanity, insults, and threats. In addition, participants who did not respond to the cyberbullying they faced within the game were subjected to even more cyberbullying.

Under the category of insults, participants experienced the individual detrimental effects of cyberbullying more intensely, particularly through profanity and content targeting their family values.

**Image 1.** Cyber violence experienced by female participants in the game



As seen in Image-1, the female participant faced cyberbullying from the opposing player when consistently defeating them. Following the participant being subjected to severe profanity, the opponent's response to the question "Whom are you talking to, by the way?" with "to you" indicates the extent to which cyberbullying was applied heavily within the game.

**Image 2.** Another instance of cyber violence behavior faced by the female participant



When the female participant defeated another opponent within the game, she was once again subjected to verbal abuse from the opposing player. It has been observed that the teammate with the nickname "Mustafa Utku" directed the statement "Senna is enjoying being fucked, you son of a bitch" towards the female participant. It was revealed that when playing the game alongside the male participant, the female participant experienced less cyber violence. However, this situation still led to the continuation of the impact of cyber violence.

**Image 3.** Example of cyber violence experienced by male participant



As observed in Image-3, during the game, when the male participant played well, it was noted that a player with the nickname "3mlrrcc" from the opposing team made offensive remarks towards the male participant, stating 'zigg really I will f\*\*\*\* your mo\*\*\*\*'. The player continued to systematically curse at the male participant, especially targeting family values and using derogatory language towards the mother figure.

**Image 4.** An example of cyber violence involving threats and insults faced by the male participant



As seen in Image-4, the opponent using the nickname 'holyquinn' made a statement 'I'll kill your sl\*\*\* mot\*\*\*' in reaction to the good game performance of the male participant using the nickname 'xxDarkinAlix'. This statement includes insults to the participant's mother and threats directed towards their close ones.

Image 5. Cyber Violence Cascade



Image 6. Cyber Violence Cascade

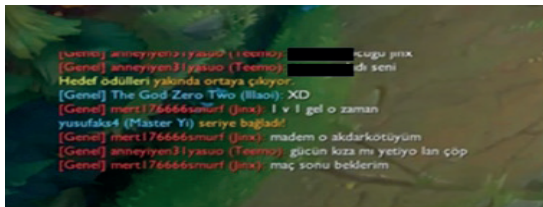
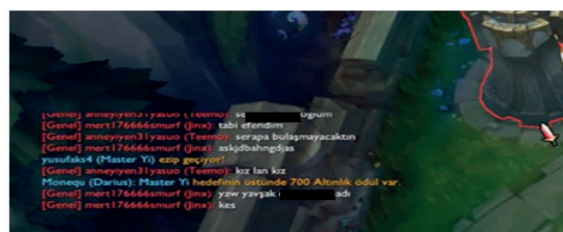
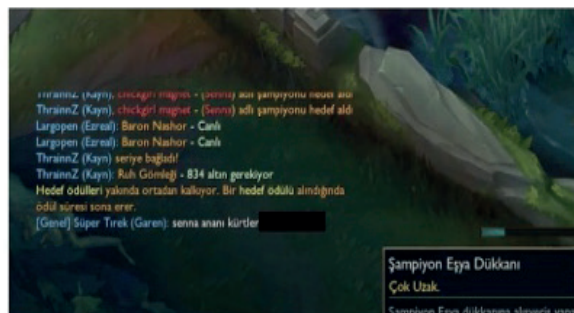


Image 7. Cyber Violence Cascade



As seen in Image-5, Image-6, and Image-7, a user named 'yasuo' engaged in profanity towards another player who identified their gender as a female in the game, due to a move made by another player. The user with the username '\*\*\*yasuo' continued the cascade by using derogatory language to protect the individual. Another user, 'mert17', also responded with profanity towards the user '\*\*\* Yasuo.' This situation highlights the cycle of violence.

Image 8. Racist/discriminatory approach towards the female participant



As seen in Image-8, due to the poor game performance of the female participant, a teammate using the nickname 'Süper Tirek' made racist remarks, saying 'Senna did Kurds f\*\*\* your mother.' This profanity is both an

attack on the female participant and a specific ethnic group.

Image 9. In-game censored discourse and racist/discriminatory nickname usage



As seen in Image-9, the statement "look at the f\*\*\* place" made by the player using the nickname 'KürtTerbiyecisi4' (KurdishSlayer4) was censored by the game system. In this context, it was observed that certain profanity and insult expressions frequently used by the in-game artificial intelligence were automatically censored. At this point, researchers could not determine the exact meaning of the expression, but it is presumed to be a sexist profanity. In the same visual, it was identified that the player using profanity in their nickname included derogatory references to a specific ethnicity.

Image 10. Flirty approach towards female participant in the game



As observed in Image-10, the player using the nickname 'mother ea\*\*\*1yasuo' persistently asked questions aimed at determining the age of the participant based on the participant's nickname 'Sihirli Hande.' Some of the questions were like "How old are you?" and "Can we be in a relationship?" followed by making persistent attempts to engage in conversation and eventually proposing to meet. In the interview with the female participant, it was noted that she felt uncomfortable due to the behavior she experienced based on her gender and expressed that she had been subjected to multiple friendship proposals on digital gaming platforms in general.



**Table 1.** General act of in-game cyber violence

Cyber Violence Types	Number of Applications of the Relevant Type
Swearing	53
Threatening	3
Racist Approach	3
Flirtatious Approach	5
Insult	13
Provocation	3
Swearing Towards Gameplay	4
In-Game Censored Swearing	7

In the examined games, there were a total of 35 players, and in the acts of cyberbullying conducted in the chat section, a total of 53 instances of profanity, 13 instances of insults, 3 instances of racist/discriminatory approaches, 3 instances of threat statements, 7 phrases automatically censored by the gaming platform, 4 in-game complaints containing profanity, 1 flirtatious approach, and 3 instances of profanity aimed at provoking the opposing player were identified

## 6. DISCUSSION

The evolution of digital games has gained momentum in individuals' lives, paralleling the advancement of new media technologies. Games played for various reasons such as socialization, learning, and leisure have undergone a profound transformation in line with the process of digitization. This transformation is not only observed in the format of games but also in the style of gameplay. The progress of technology is a significant factor that has economically propelled digital games, turning them into an influential global industry. These games have evolved beyond being mere entertainment tools, becoming a sector with significant economic potential. However, with this growth, one of the encountered challenges is the rise of cyberbullying. The expansion of the internet has broadened the player network of digital games. In this context, games with high player counts, such as League of Legends (LoL), with 70 million

players worldwide, have become environments where cyberbullying is frequently observed. The expansion of the player network has increased in-game communication and interaction but unfortunately has also brought along negative behaviors (Martin, 2011).

The playing habits of players within the research group in the game League of Legends can vary over time or depending on the attitudes of teammates. However, there is a general framework of gameplay practices that emerges from the beginning of the game. Players need to be in constant communication from champion selection onwards because success in the game, being a team game, relies on making correct decisions together as a team. Players usually prefer to choose the regions and champions they are best at. Therefore, when multiple players in the same team want the same thing, sometimes insults and profanity can emerge. (Hinduja, 2016)

However, it has been observed that the practice of trying to suppress such negative expressions in an uncivilized manner without attempting to resolve issues through discussion is now an unacceptable behavior. Using threatening expressions and profanity, such as stating an intention to intentionally feed the opponent, is a situation not tolerated by both players and game developers. A significant factor in this situation is the increased visibility of female players. The gaming community has become increasingly less accepting of gender discrimination and negative behaviors. Additionally, the category labeled "swearing during gameplay" in the existing table (Table-1) is evaluated in the context of players expressing frustration with the characteristics of the characters they play and their individual failures within the game. Therefore, it has been concluded that not every swear word expressed in the game can be considered within the scope of cyberbullying. After all, cyberbullying involves violent behaviors carried out through digital platforms against the well-being of an individual or a group.

According to the findings identified in the research, it has been observed that players most frequently engage in profanity and insults

towards their teammates and the opposing team. Additionally, these expressions often revolve around family values and the mother figure. Players have even used severe profanity towards the producer of the game under investigation. In addition to insults and profanity, certain users were identified with racist terms in their nicknames, and expressions of profanity and derogation towards a specific race were also observed.

Within the game, the female participant has been subjected to cyberbullying more than the male participant. Particularly, expressions reflecting a sexist perspective towards the female participant have been observed in the game. These expressions include profanity, insults, and flirtatious approaches. In contrast, it was observed that players who were uncomfortable with expressions directed towards the female participant and defended her against other players also engaged in cyberbullying containing insults and profanity towards other players. At this point, it was observed that cyberbullying actions continued in a cascade, and players took preventive action against cyberbullying with cyberbullying. When examined psychologically, these behaviors stem from the fact that aggression can be easily applied not only physically but also in digital environments, as the player does not face a physical reaction and can express themselves more comfortably within the game. Additionally, although the participants are adult university students, they have expressed that the cyberbullying they experience disturbs them psychologically. Based on this, it is highly dangerous for children, especially within vulnerable groups, to be exposed to cyberbullying actions that can have similar or even more destructive effects while playing this game.

Legally, it is possible to consider expressions of insult as a violation of personality rights. However, it cannot be said that the material elements of the crime of insult regulated within the scope of, for example, the Turkish Penal Code are accepted for every offensive expression and profanity. Indeed, some offensive expressions and profanities may not align with the

definition of the crime of insult. Additionally, cyberbullying actions carried out through digital games that include the element of anonymity create a significant problem in terms of proving the violation and the commission of the crime from a legal perspective. In this context, players can easily carry out violent actions through digital platforms due to the lack of deterrence corresponding to their actions in the physical world.

As observed in the research, especially the free and easily downloadable nature of the game facilitates its accessibility to players of all kinds. While this easy access makes it possible for the game to reach players of all kinds, it also creates a suitable environment for the applicability of cyberbullying. The rapidly growing popularity of digital games and their easy accessibility have expanded player networks, thereby providing a fertile ground for the spread of cyberbullying. Especially in games with a high number of players, intra-team conflicts and negative behaviors can be more common.

The general tendency of players to want to choose the regions where they excel and their preferred champions can lead to various preference disputes and conflicts that can result in cyberbullying. With the widespread availability of free games, the player base accessing these games has increased, bringing together players with different skills and experience levels in the same gaming environment. This situation has increased the potential for conflict and tension, contributing to the emergence of cyberbullying. In conclusion, the free and easily accessible nature of games that appeal to broad audiences can be an effective factor in the spread of cyberbullying. The potential for disagreements and conflicts among players to become triggers for cyberbullying underscores the responsibility of the digital gaming industry to address these issues and promote respectful communication among players.

## 7. CONCLUSION

As a result, the research conducted on the League of Legends (LoL) game revealed that the most prevalent forms of cyberbullying exhibited by players were swearing, insults, and derogatory remarks. Behaviors related to cyberbullying, such as the continuation of these actions in the physical environment or behaviors leading to suicide, were not detected. In terms of gender, the rate and form of cyberbullying varied. In this context, it was observed that female participants received the most flirtatious offers within the game. Additionally, acts of cyberbullying within the game included actions that led to the exclusion of participants from the game.

Acts of cyberbullying experienced in digital games, particularly given the anonymity in which they occur, pose a danger, especially for young individuals with an age range between 13 and 25. Cyberbullying in digital games is facilitated by the anonymity, as well as spatial and temporal differences, making the perpetration of violent actions easier. Cyberbullying in digital games can lead to anxiety, stress, and a decrease in self-esteem, which are not less destructive than physical violence.

## 8. IMPLICATIONS OF THIS STUDY

In light of all this data, to address this global issue, increasing the number of conscious users who can use digital platforms wisely and effectively, are aware of what they need to do to protect their data shared on platforms, and support the implementation of legal regulations and sanctions will contribute to ensuring data security or minimizing the problems when applied. Besides media literacy, the necessity of introducing digital literacy for personal data in the digital environment and raising awareness and consciousness through education from an early age emerge as important concepts. Information on what should and should not be done to protect personal data on different platforms, general knowledge about data security, and education should be provided through collaboration with the private sector, non-governmental organizations, print and visual media, universities, and schools at

all levels. Personal data breaches can have significant material and spiritual effects on individuals and, at times, can be used as a means to inflict psychological traumas by serving as a tool for violent acts.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE/ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ

# The equivalence of violence against women on social media: Acts constituting digital violence and their place in the Turkish Penal Code

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## Abstract

This study aims to explore women's perceptions of digital violence across different age groups, educational backgrounds, and marital statuses. It also investigates their awareness of digital violence on social media and their coping strategies when exposed to such acts. Additionally, their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors regarding whether digital violence constitutes a crime were examined. Within the scope of the research, a survey form as a preliminary study was applied over the internet throughout Türkiye.

According to the findings, 51.2% of the participants answered that they did not think they were exposed to acts of digital violence on social media. The findings revealed that 43.9% of the participants, who initially indicated that they had not experienced acts of digital violence on social media, stated that they were exposed to certain acts of violence such as being insulted and sworn at, falling victim to fraud, receiving threats and blackmail, enduring harassing messages, discovering fake accounts created in their name with personal photos, etc., 47.7% of the participants stated that "Digital/Cyber Violence" is treated as a separate crime in the Turkish Penal Code. In response to the question 'What would you do if you were exposed to the above action(s)?' 83.3% of the participants marked the item 'I would block the related person from my social media accounts', 48.3% 'I would change the passwords of my social media accounts'.

Consequently, looking at the answers of the women who participated in this survey, it was concluded that they were not aware that they were subjected to digital violence and that the actions they were exposed to were acts of digital violence. In this context, digital violence should be treated as a serious problem, and awareness, prevention and coping methods should be implemented.

**Keywords:** Digital violence, cyber violence, violence against women, social media, Turkish Penal Code

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (2002) defines violence as the intentional use of physical force or power, whether through threats or actions, against oneself, another person, or a group or community, that either results in or is likely to result in injury, death, psychological harm, or loss. Violence against women, on the other hand, is defined by the United Nations. Accordingly, violence against women is gender-based behaviors that hurts and harms women, that results in or is likely to result in the oppression of women in public or private life, and arbitrary restriction of their freedoms (UN, 20.12.1993). Types of violence used to be seen in certain ways. However, with the development of technological tools, a new type of violence, digital violence, emerged alongside traditional types such as physical, psychological, economic, and sexual violence. Although there is no consensus on a specific concept in the literature, terms like ‘cyber violence,’ ‘online violence,’ ‘cyberbullying,’ and ‘online harassment’ are occasionally used to refer to digital violence. In the current study, the term ‘digital violence’ is used.

Digital violence is a phenomenon that includes actions that cause harm, including threats, intimidation, humiliation, manipulation, control, hate speech, and reputational damage to another person or group through the use of technological tools (Şener & Abınık, 2021: 5). A review of the previous research indicated that women are more likely to encounter gender-related acts of digital violence and are negatively affected by such situations (Pew Research Center, 22.10.2014). For instance, according to a survey by Amnesty International (2018), 41% of women have experienced online harassment at some point in their lives. In the Digital Violence in Türkiye Survey conducted by the Social Information and Communication Association in collaboration with KONDA as part of the “Combating Digital Violence” project, 51% of women reported receiving written, audio, or video harassment messages, and 46% reported being stalked in digital environments (Şener & Abınık, 2021: 4).

The main issue with digital violence against

women is its frequent occurrence despite being largely unrecognized and invisible. Accordingly, this study explores women’s perceptions of digital violence, their levels of awareness of potential exposure to violence on social media, and their managing and coping strategies when faced with digital violence. Furthermore, women’s knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors regarding whether acts of digital violence constitute a crime were also investigated. Finally, some recommendations are provided for preventing digital violence against women and mitigating its negative consequences.

## 2. DIGITAL VIOLENCE

### 2.1. Definition

As communication technologies have developed, internet and social media usage has steadily increased and continues to increase. As people of all ages and socio-cultural backgrounds use social media, platforms where individuals spend extended periods have emerged. Thus, acts of violence that are visible in daily life have adapted and diversified in the virtual world. Today, this type of violence, known as ‘Digital Violence,’ has become a concept integrated into our lives with the advancement of communication technologies. Digital violence threatens every internet user.

Digital violence includes all kinds of harassment, threats, blackmail, and hateful discourse directed at individuals or groups through hardware (mobile phones, computers, tablets, etc.) and online platforms (social media, blogs, digital games, etc.) where a person can interact with others (Sarışın, 2022: 267).

Acts of digital violence occur through two types of information technologies. In the first, offenders send instant messages, obscene harassment, slander, or create websites to publish such content. The second method involves sending harassing messages to the victim via mobile phones (Polat, 2017: 33).

Platforms where digital violence can take place are social media, websites, blogs, messaging services, search engines, dating apps, comment sections of online newspapers, online forums,

and chat rooms in digital games, etc. As technology continues to advance, new platforms may also emerge.

It is argued that information and communication technologies facilitate the perpetrator's use of violence for the following five reasons:

- Anonymity: Perpetrators can hide their real identity on the internet.
- Distance of action: The act of violence can be carried out remotely without physical contact.
- Automation: Technology aids perpetrators in tracking the targeted person and executing related actions.
- Accessibility: Digital violence can occur using cell phones and social media.
- Extensiveness: Violent messages and posts can spread rapidly to the masses. In addition, such messages may remain online for a long time, creating secondary victimization (Şener & Abınık, 2021: 6).

The main problem with digital violence, defined with different concepts in the literature, is its invisibility, lack of clear definition, and limited recognition, despite its frequent occurrence among victims (Sarışın, 2022: 262). The difference between digital violence and other types of violence is that harmful acts are performed through information technologies. There is no clear distinction between the concepts of digital violence, cyber violence, virtual violence, and online violence; consequently, these terms are often used interchangeably. Examples of digital violence include forcing individuals to communicate against their will, subjecting them to inappropriate or sexually explicit messages, and using personal information for blackmail (Cirban Ekrem & Er Güneri, 2021: 365).

According to the study conducted by Willard classified digital violence into eight categories based on perpetrator behavior: flaming, harassment, denigration, outing and trickery, exclusion, impersonation, sexting, and cyberstalking. In addition to Willard's classification, Kowalski et al. included 'happy slapping' and 'sexting' to address emerging needs,

emphasizing the sharing of sexually explicit photographs without an individual's consent in virtual environments (Özer Öksüzöğlü, 2021: 70).

Accordingly, the main forms of digital violence include:

- a) Disseminating messages or pictures containing insulting, defamatory, or threatening content
- b) Creating fake identities or social network accounts to deceive people romantically (catfishing)
- c) Intentionally trying to provoke others by using controversial language (flaming)
- d) Acting as a third person (masquerading/impersonation)
- e) Spreading rumors
- f) Sending disturbing sexually explicit pictures or videos (sexting)
- g) Spreading images of the victim being beaten on the internet
- h) Posting provocative and offensive messages to create anger and upset in other people
- i) Harassing/threatening other people by persistently using electronic communication tools (cyberstalking)
- j) Sharing humiliating personal information with third parties (outing). Actions seen as digital violence can be expanded (Maviş, 2021: 2460).

## 2.2. Scope of Digital Violence

Due to the advancement in technology, more different approaches regarding the scope of digital violence are presented in the literature. With the continuous increase in digital violence, the boundaries of private space on social media are constantly shrinking. Due to the limited number of studies, the boundaries of digital violence remain undefined. (Yıldırım, 2019: 33).

### • Privacy Violations

It is the access to private data without the individual's consent. It occurs as taking,

accessing, using, manipulating, and/or distributing photos/videos without the consent of the individual.

- **Surveillance and Monitoring**

Refers to the surveillance and/or monitoring of online and offline activities. Performed through persistent monitoring by using spyware or keyboard recorders.

- **Damage to Reputation/ Credibility**

Involves creating or editing fake photos or videos, identity theft, and the dissemination of private information with the intent to damage other people's reputations.

- **Harassment**

Involves unauthorized sending or receiving of sexually explicit material, and direct threats of violence, including threats of sexual or physical violence.

- **Direct Threats and Violence**

These activities involve gendered blackmail or extortion; identity, money, or property theft; and victim selection (including planned sexual assault).

- **Targeted Attacks on Communities**

Involves hacking websites, social media accounts, or email accounts of certain organizations and communities; surveillance and monitoring of their activities; direct threats of violence against community members; and disclosure of confidential information such as shelter addresses (Yıldırım, 2019: 36).

### 2.3. Causes of Digital Violence

Causes of digital violence include hiding behind usernames, the power of anonymity, the attractiveness of affecting the environment anonymously, lack of observed consequences for the aggressor, a desire for popularity, projecting past experiences differently, low self-esteem, and prior victimization. Despite the absence of physical contact between the aggressor and victim, the latter experiences psychological harm. Young people exposed to digital violence

often experience intense feelings of depression, low self-esteem, fear, sadness, disappointment, shame, and more. Children and adolescents often perceive digital violence behaviors, enacted through virtual characters they've created by their imagination, as a game and may not take responsibility for their actions (Korkmaz, 2016: 77).

### 2.4. Impacts of Digital Violence

The consequences of digital violence, which essentially does not involve physical interaction, but is created solely through electronic means, can be extremely challenging. It was emphasized that such acts of bullying are likely to cause psychological problems. Those exposed to digital violence reported damage to their mental health. Victims typically experience burnout, anger, and grief. Consequently, these individuals are likely to experience clinical symptoms, such as depression, anxiety, lack of concentration, and suicidal tendencies. Consistent with this, previous studies highlighted that digital violence is associated with depression and suicide (Maviş, 2021: 2469).

### 2.5. Digital Violence Against Women

Digital violence against women is a risk facilitated by new communication technologies and has the potential to go viral through these platforms. Specifically, this concept refers to all threats, harassment, blackmail, and marginalizing discourse against a person or group through interaction hardware such as phones, computers, and tablets, as well as interactive media including SMS, e-mail, social media, blogs, or digital games. The phenomenon of 'othering', which has emerged with the existence of society, especially concerning women, has opened a new window for itself with the development of technology. Violence against women is becoming increasingly widespread in the digital environment through the development of new media, resulting in a cycle of reconstruction of social prejudices against women. The constant circulation of gender stereotypes in the digital environment heightens the risk of digital violence against women online. In this context, digital violence, similar to traditional violence, serves



to perpetuate and reinforce patriarchy, gender roles, and the domination of women. However, digital violence, similar to offline violence, is a rising risk that exacerbates the gender equality gap, a goal the United Nations aims to achieve by 2030 (Sarışın, 2022: 262).

### 3. SOCIAL MEDIA

Social Media refers to internet-based applications that enable members to create and share content with visitors and across various platforms. Social media is widely used by both individuals and institutions due to its ease of access, content creation, and instantly reaching capacity to a broad audience (Barutçu & Tomaş, 2013: 8).

In this regard, social media applications allow individuals to create and share posts including videos, photos, articles, and news. The most common platforms on social media are blogs, vlogs, websites, gaming websites, as well as sharing sites such as YouTube, Instagram, Flickr, Wikipedia, Facebook, Myspace, Pinterest, and Twitter (Çınar, 2021: 38).

Applications considered social media can be grouped under the following seven categories (Onant & Alikılıç, 2008):

- Email groups
- Blogs (diaries)
- Vlogs (video diaries)
- Forums (Google groups, yahoo groups, etc.)
- Corporate intranet (in-house network)
- Extranet (websites)
- Fast message services
- Social networks (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.)

### 4. LEGAL SITUATION IN TÜRKİYE

Digital violence is not regulated as an independent crime type in the Turkish Penal Code (TPC) No. 5237, but online attacks in some cases can be subject to punishment. In this regard, acts constituting digital violence are not treated as a single offense under Turkish criminal law but

are addressed individually. Particular attention should be paid to certain types of offenses such as insult, threat, blackmail, disturbing the peace and tranquility of persons, sexual harassment, violation of privacy, recording of personal data, unlawful data transfer or seizure. Turkish lawmakers have amended several of these offenses and introduced enhanced sanctions for digital violence (Maviş, 2021: 2476).

Initially, the crimes of 'entry into the information system,' 'blocking, disrupting, destroying, or altering data,' and 'misuse of debit or credit cards,' categorized under 'cyber-crimes' in the Turkish Penal Code, were examined. Subsequently, other types of crimes were evaluated.

●Article 244 of the Turkish Penal Code – The crime of obstructing, disrupting, destroying, or altering the information system:

Three different crimes are regulated under this article. The behaviors of "blocking and disrupting the information system", "damaging the data in the information system" and "obtaining unfair advantage by using the information system" are sanctioned as different crime types in different paragraphs of this article (Öztürk & Ateş & Erdoğan, 2020: 50).

●Article 245 of the Turkish Penal Code – The crime of misuse of debit or credit cards:

In the preamble of the article, the legal value to be protected by the relevant offense is stated as preventing debit or credit card holders from being harmed by the unlawful use of such cards. Accordingly, the first paragraph of the article criminalizes the offense of unlawfully benefiting with a debit or credit card belonging to someone else; the second paragraph criminalizes the offense of producing, selling, transferring, purchasing, or accepting a fake debit or credit card by associating it with bank accounts belonging to other people; and the third paragraph criminalizes the offense of unlawfully benefiting with a fake or forged debit/credit card (Öztürk & Ateş & Erdoğan, 2020: 51).

● **Article 125 of the Turkish Penal Code – The crime of insult:**

Under Article 125 of the TPC, a person who attributes a concrete act or fact that may harm the honor, reputation, and dignity of a person, or a person who attacks the honor, reputation, and dignity of a person by swearing is liable for the crime of insult. Through the crime of insult, which is probably the most common type of digital violence, protecting the dignity of persons is aimed. Many cases of digital violence involve attributing acts or facts or swearing, which are the material elements of the crime of insult. One of the common types of digital violence is posting humiliating or insulting content on fake social media accounts created in the victim's name. If there is an element of publicity in the concrete case, the penalty will be increased in accordance with Article 125/4 of the TPC. Since it is common for digital violence to be public, the penalty will be increased in many cases (Maviş, 2021: 2477).

● **Article 123 of the Turkish Penal Code – The Crime of Disturbing the Peace and Tranquility of Persons:**

The crime of disturbing the peace and tranquility of persons occurs when a person makes a phone call, makes noise with the sole intention to disturb one's peace and tranquility, or engages in any other unlawful act for the same purpose. For this offense to occur, the acts specified in this article must be persistent or systematic. Persistence is a factor often observed in digital violence. Examples include sending the same messages to the victim over and over again, and too many posting on social media. Sharing a disliked photo of a person on social media does not constitute the crime of disturbing the peace and tranquility of persons, since it does not occur more than once, but it is sufficient to constitute digital violence. From this point of view, it can be argued that the crime of disturbing the peace and tranquility of persons does not cover all forms of digital violence (Maviş, 2021: 2485).

● **Article 106 of the Turkish Penal Code – The Crime of Threatening:**

According to Article 106 of the TPC, a person, who threatens another person or their relative

with harm to their life, body, or sexual integrity is criminally liable. Acts of digital violence may qualify as elements of the crime of threatening, depending on the specific circumstances. Frequent use of electronic communication tools to harass/threaten the victim is an important form of digital violence. The anonymity in digital violence can lead to more severe punishment if these acts constitute the crime of threatening. Regarding this, under Article 106/2-c of the TPC, the penalty is increased if the offense is committed by disguising oneself by sending unsigned letters or using specific signs. If digital violence is carried out as an 'indirect threat,' it may be treated as a qualified case. A typical example of this type of threat is when the perpetrator posts an anonymous threatening message on a website that the victim will come across (Maviş, 2021: 2482).

● **Article 105 of the Turkish Penal Code – The Crime of Sexual Harassment:**

Article 105 of the TPC states that those who sexually harass a person shall be punished. However, the article does not specify the acts considered as sexual harassment. In the article's justification, the legislator noted that 'sexual harassment can involve sexual behaviors that do not constitute a violation of a person's physical integrity. Therefore, the distinction between sexual harassment and sexual assault lies in the fact that sexual harassment involves behaviors that do not physically violate the person. In this context, actions such as offering sexual intercourse, exposing sexual organs, or making sexual gestures constitute sexual harassment. Many acts of digital violence can constitute the crime of sexual harassment. Particularly, the acts called 'Sexting' can be considered within this scope. Sexting can be briefly defined as "the sharing of sexually explicit images," which includes sending nude photos or videos to the victim through electronic communication means (Maviş, 2021: 2483).

● **Article 132-138 of the Turkish Penal Code - Crimes Against Private Life and Private Sphere of Life in the Turkish Penal Code:**

○ **Article 132 of the TPC, the Crime of Violation of the secrecy of communication protects the confidentiality of communication.** Unlawful disclosure of communication content is a form of digital violence and is punishable if the typical elements are met. For example, the unlawful disclosure of the contents of the communication between two people by the perpetrator may fall within this scope. Similarly, according to Art. 132/3, it is also a crime for the perpetrator of digital violence to disclose communication content in which they are involved, and the legislator requires this disclosure to be public. Especially in certain cases of digital violence called flaming and outing, the person involved can be held criminally liable if there is public disclosure. In Flaming, a provocative tone is used to mock the victims, creating a controversial atmosphere and angering them. On the other hand, Outing refers to disclosing content such as text messages and emails shared in confidence with the perpetrator (Maviş, 2021: 2485).

○ **Article 133 of the TPC, the crime of interception and recording of conversations between persons involves intercepting and recording such conversations.** This offense typically occurs in direct face-to-face communication without any intermediary. Considering that digital violence is often performed through communication tools, it is highly unlikely that offenses under Article 133 will occur. Instead, digital acts of violence are more likely to involve the disclosure of recorded non-public conversations, as regulated in Article 133/3 (Maviş, 2021: 2486).

○ **Article 134 of the TPC, the crime of violation of privacy,** is a general norm compared to other crimes in this section of the law. In cases of offenses against private life and the private sphere of life, penalties are not imposed specifically for the violation of privacy, which serves as a general norm, but rather for other related crimes. When other types of offenses are not applicable, acts of digital violence may be subject to punishment under the crime of privacy. Specific forms of digital violence, such

as happy slapping, may be considered a criminal offense as a violation of privacy. In this type of digital violence, an assailant physically assaults the victim while a witness records the incident. These videos, in which the victim is humiliated, are uploaded to the internet and rapidly viewed by tens of thousands of people.

## 5. METHODOLOGY

The main method employed in the study is a preliminary survey. Before responding to the survey, the participants read and approved a consent form attached at the beginning of the survey. A total of 209 women who met the criteria of being over the age of eighteen were reached. Participants were not restricted to a specific occupational group, marital status, education level, etc. The survey began with three demographic questions, followed by twenty-four multiple-choice questions. Some of these questions allowed participants to mark multiple items. Participants were not obliged to identify themselves in the survey. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were asked two non-compulsory questions: one about measures to prevent digital violence and another about describing a witnessed case of digital/cyber violence. These questions aim to assess the awareness level of women who use the internet in Türkiye about the digital violence they are/ may be exposed to on social media, which acts constitute digital violence, their strategies to cope with digital violence, as well as their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors regarding whether acts of digital violence constitute a crime. The data collected were used to create graphs.

## 6. DATA

In this section, the data collected from 209 female participants of different ages, marital status, and education levels were evaluated. According to the findings, 65.6% of the participants were using social media for 8 years or more, whereas 22% were using it for 6-8 years. Furthermore, the frequency of daily social media use outside of work was analyzed, with 27.3% using it for 2-3 hours, 25.8% for 3-4 hours, and 23% for 1-2 hours. These data suggest that frequent daily social media use may expose users to digital world risks.

6.1. In response to the question ‘Which social media applications do you actively use? (You can mark multiple options)’, 97.1% of the participants marked WhatsApp, 95.2% Instagram, and 57.4% chose Twitter.

6.2. As seen in Figure 1, in response to the question ‘Are your social media account(s) open to everyone?’ 83.3% of the participants chose ‘No, my accounts are locked’, while 16.7% selected ‘Yes, my accounts are open to everyone’.

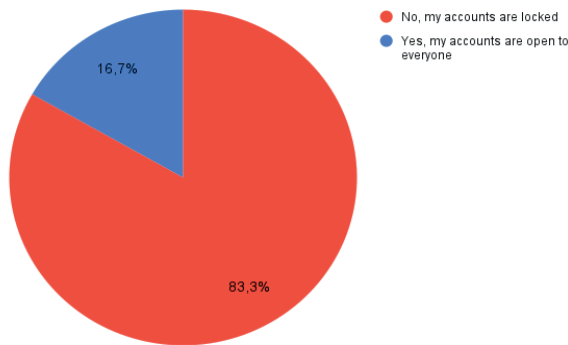


Figure 1. Responses to question 6.2.

6.3. As shown in Figure 2, in response to the question ‘Do you accept follower requests from people you do not know on social media?’, 52.2% of the participants answered “I never accept”, 45.5% answered “I sometimes accept”, and 2.4% said, “I always accept”.

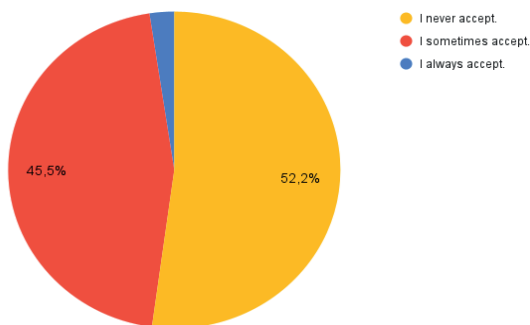


Figure 2. Responses to question 6.3.

6.4. In response to the question ‘Do you think women in Türkiye are safe in their use of social media?’ 76.6% of the participants responded, “I do not think so”, while 19.6% answered “I am undecided”.

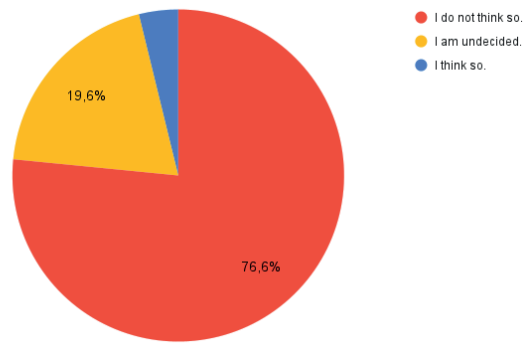


Figure 3. Responses to question 6.4.

6.5. As seen in Figure 4, in response to the question ‘Have you ever experienced moments when you did not feel safe while using social media?’ 74.6% of participants answered ‘Sometimes there are times when I do not feel safe’.

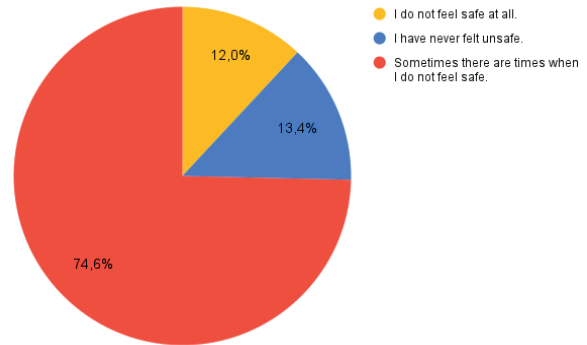


Figure 4. Responses to question 6.5.

6.6. Participants were asked to assess whether the actions specified in the following statements constitute digital violence.

6.6.1. In response to the statement ‘Following a person on social media, commenting on their photos, or liking their posts is digital violence’ 42.1% of the participants disagreed, 28.7% mostly agreed, 14.8% were undecided, and 14.4% completely agreed.

6.6.2. In response to the statement ‘Making comments that damage a person’s reputation or sharing misleading information on social media is digital violence’ 88.5% of the participants answered ‘completely agree’ and 11.5% answered ‘mostly agree’.

6.6.3. In response to the statement '**Frequent humorous or critical comments by your followers about your physical characteristics are digital violence**', 68.4% of the participants completely agreed, 25.4% mostly agreed, 4.8% were undecided and 1.4% disagreed.

6.6.4. In response to the statement '**Hacking or stealing someone's social media accounts is digital violence**', 95.2% of the respondents completely agreed and 3.3% mostly agreed.

6.6.5. In response to the statement '**Sharing private conversations, content, and images between individuals with third parties is digital violence**' 85.2% of the participants completely agreed, 12.9% mostly agreed, and 1.4% were undecided.

6.7. The answers of the participants to the question '**Have you been exposed to any of the following actions/activities on social media, and if so, which actions were you exposed to? (You can mark multiple items)**' were as follows:

- 67.9% of the participants marked the item 'I received message requests from people I don't know',
- 43.5% marked the item 'I received unwanted messages on social media',
- %26.3% marked the item 'I received harassing messages (visual, auditory, and/or written)',
- 24.4% marked the item 'I was persistently followed by someone',
- 15.8% marked the item 'My social media account(s) was stolen',
- 12% marked the item 'Fake account(s) were created with my name and/or photos',
- 11.5% marked the item 'I was subjected to false accusations about myself',
- 11% marked the item 'I was defrauded',
- 5.3% selected the option 'I was threatened and/or blackmailed'.

6.8. As illustrated in Figure 5, in response to the question '**Have there been moments when you thought you were subjected to acts of digital**

**violence in the social media environment?**' 51.2% of the participants answered 'No, there were not'.

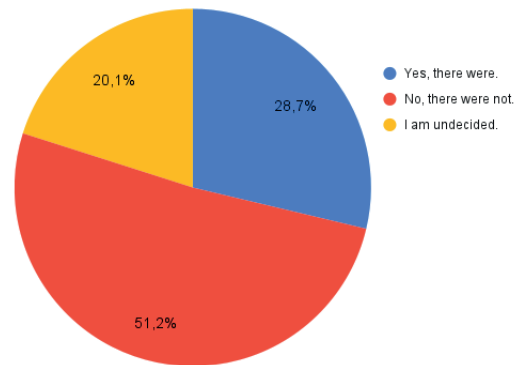


Figure 5. Responses to question 6.8.

6.9. In response to the question '**If you have been exposed to the above actions, on which platforms have you been exposed the most? (Answering this question is optional)**', 169 out of 209 respondents provided answers. Based on the responses, 85.8% of the participants were exposed to acts of digital violence on Instagram, 23.7% on Facebook/Messenger, 18.9% on WhatsApp, and 17.8% on Twitter.

6.10. In response to the question '**Do you think Digital/Cyber Violence is regulated as a separate crime in the Turkish Penal Code?**' 46.4% of the participants answered 'Yes', 43.1% answered 'No Idea', and 10.5% answered 'No'.

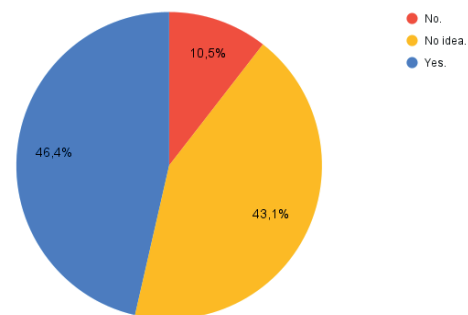


Figure 6. Responses to question 6.10.

6.11. In response to the question '**In your opinion, which crime(s) may occur as a result of the action(s) that constitute digital violence? (You can mark multiple items)**'

- 91.4% of the participants marked 'Threatening',
- 89.5% 'Blackmail',

- 87.6% 'Violation of Privacy',
- 82.3% 'Disturbing the peace and tranquility of people',
- 81.8% 'Insulting',
- 78.9% 'Recording, unlawful disclosure, or seizure of personal data',
- 77% 'Sexual harassment',
- And 74.2% marked 'Persistent stalking'.

6.12. As seen in Figure 7, to the question 'Do you think that legal regulations are sufficient to punish acts of digital violence?' 75.1% of participants answered 'No, I do not think so, legal regulations should be increased', 21.1% answered 'Undecided' and 3.8% answered 'Yes, I think so'.

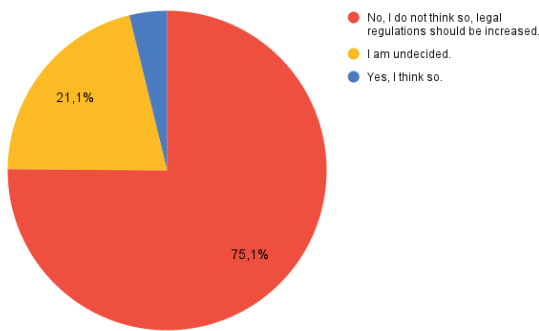


Figure 7. Responses to question 6.12.

6.13. In response to the question 'Have you initiated or would you initiate a legal process if you were subjected to digital violence?' 67.5% of the participants marked 'I did/would', while 32.5% chose 'I did not/would not'

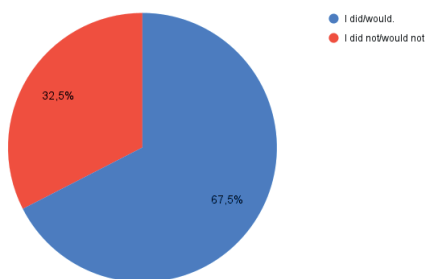


Figure 8. Responses to question 6.13.

6.14. As shown in Figure 9, in response to the question 'Do you believe that the legal process

would progress effectively if you had been subjected to digital violence and initiated a legal process?' 38.8% of the participants responded as 'partially believe', 34% 'partially do not believe', 23% 'completely do not believe', and 4.3% chose 'completely believe'.

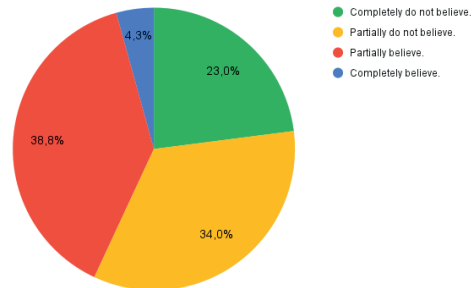


Figure 9. Responses to question 6.14.

6.15. One section of the survey asks participants, 'You can optionally tell us about a case of digital/ cyber violence you have witnessed.' As shown in Figure 10, the responses of the participants also include their experiences with legal proceedings.

1. My Instagram account was stolen and my followers were asked for money. I applied to the prosecutor's office, but they decided not to prosecute, saying "if we knew who did it, we would have taken action", although even the e-mail address was largely clear, there were screenshots.
2. My Instagram account was imitated, the same person opened an account on WhatsApp and used my name and photos. He tried to defraud me. I filed a criminal complaint with the prosecutor's office. but the relevant accounts could not even be closed. Only time passed and the person gave up when he realized that he could not defraud me.
3. While the divorce case was going on, my client was constantly receiving insulting and threatening messages from anonymous accounts on Instagram, on the grounds that he was cheating on his wife. We initiated the necessary procedures and filed a criminal complaint, but it was decided that there was no need for prosecution.
4. My Instagram account was stolen. I filed a criminal complaint with the prosecutor's office. But a decision was made not to prosecute.

Figure 10. Selected quotes from participants' responses to question 6.15.

6.16. In response to the question 'Which of the following person(s) have you been subjected to disturbing behavior on social media? (You can mark multiple items)' 66% of the participants marked 'someone I do not know', 56.5% 'anonymous/fake account', 13.4% 'ex-lover', and 12.9% marked 'ex-friend'.

6.17. In response to the question 'What would you do if you were exposed to the above action(s)? (You can mark multiple items)' 83.3% of the participants marked the item 'I would block the related person from my social media accounts', 48.3% 'I would change the passwords

of my social media accounts', 43.1% 'I would ignore/delete the message', 42.6% 'I would hide my social media account', and 42.1% marked the item 'I would file a complaint with the police/prosecutor's office'.

## 7. DISCUSSION

In this part, the data obtained within the scope of the study and other studies in the literature will be interpreted together and the outputs obtained from the data will be shared.

In this study, 97.1% of the participants stated that they actively use Whatsapp, 95.2% say they use Instagram, and 57.4% say they actively use Twitter. The 'Digital 2023 Türkiye' report (2023) by We Are Social identified Instagram as the most commonly used social media platform among internet users, with a rate of 90.6%. Recent studies and our survey results align with this finding.

83.3% of the participants stated that their social media account profiles were locked. A locked account means respondents restrict access to their content, allowing only specific people to view it. The high rate of 83.3% aligns with previous studies. In a field study, the reasons for this situation were provided. Participants mentioned feeling safer and more comfortable with locked accounts, and they want to control who can follow their social media accounts (Yıldırım, 2019: 53). Among participants with locked social media accounts, 67.8% reported experiencing various acts of violence, including insults and swearing, fraud, threats, harassment, and the creation of fake accounts using their names and photos. The 67.8% figure is both significant and concerning. Combining both research findings, women use locked social media accounts to protect themselves; However, it is concluded that a significant portion of women are still exposed to digital violence.

A majority of the participants stated that they do not accept follower requests from people they do not know. This result suggests that participants are selective on social media and try to reduce the risks of potential digital violence. Among the participants who never accept follower requests from people they don't know

on social media, 56.8% were subjected to acts of violence, including insults and swearing, fraud, threats, harassment, and the creation of fake accounts using their names and photos, etc. It is obvious that while rejecting follower requests from unknown individuals is a measure of digital security, it hasn't completely prevented women from experiencing digital violence. Consequently, methods and techniques to prevent digital violence should be implemented to prevent women from becoming victims of digital violence.

In response to the question 'Do you think women in Türkiye are safe in their use of social media?' 76.6% of the participants responded, "I do not think so", while 19.6% answered "I am undecided". As seen in Figure 4, in response to the question 'Have you ever experienced moments when you did not feel safe while using social media?' 74.6% of participants answered 'Sometimes there are times when I do not feel safe'. Based on the responses to both questions, the majority of participants feel that they and other women are not safe on social media. In a previous field study, the reasons why women do not feel safe on social media were explained under four categories: constant accessibility, pressure from power forces, social pressure, and sexist perspective (Yıldırım, 2019: 62). These findings indicate that women can be subjected to acts of digital violence on social media platforms. The fact that women do not feel safe in digital environments highlights the potential for social media to be used as a medium for violence and attacks against women. As a result, we believe that women may face violence in digital environments, and effective policies should be developed to prevent these acts of violence while increasing research in this area.

Acts of digital violence may take various forms; however, it would not be accurate to categorize every action on social media as digital violence. The purpose of asking question number 6.7. in the survey was to evaluate the findings for this question together with participants' answers to other survey questions and to determine the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of the participants about digital violence on social

media. Accordingly, **‘Have you been exposed to any of the following actions/activities on social media, and if so, which actions were you exposed to?’** while some of the options included in the question directly constitute violence and/or a crime, some acts can be considered as violence and/or a crime depending on the manner and intensity with which the perpetrator carries out the act. For example, receiving messages on social media from unknown individuals may not necessarily be considered a direct case of violence. The content of the message would be the most determining factor in such cases. Therefore, each specific case should be evaluated individually.

However, acts such as threatening, sending harassing messages, belittling, humiliating, constantly monitoring the person using technology, creating fake accounts in the name of the person, obtaining and sharing other people’s personal information, limiting the person’s access to technology, spreading false information about the person, discrediting the person on the internet, etc. (Şener & Abınık, 2021: 5) are considered direct forms of violence. Many of these acts are defined as crimes under the Turkish Penal Code.

The answers given to question number 6.8. by participants who responded ‘No, there were not’ and the answer of question 6.7. were analyzed collectively. The findings revealed that 43.9% of the participants, who initially indicated that they had not experienced acts of digital violence on social media, stated that they were exposed to certain acts of violence such as being insulted and sworn at, falling victim to fraud, receiving threats and blackmail, enduring harassing messages, discovering fake accounts created in their name with personal photos, etc. Indeed, there appears to be a contradiction between these two sets of results. This discrepancy underscores a significant issue: the knowledge and awareness among participants regarding the categorization of the acts they experience as digital violence are regrettably low. These findings reaffirm the common problem of digital violence being frequently experienced by users, yet it remains largely unrecognized, invisible,

poorly understood, and inadequately addressed.

In response to the question ‘If you have been exposed to the actions of question 6.7., on which platforms have you been exposed the most?, 169 out of 209 respondents provided answers. Based on the responses, 85.8% of the participants were exposed to acts of digital violence on Instagram, 23.7% on Facebook/Messenger, 18.9% on WhatsApp, and 17.8% on Twitter. According to the Digital Violence in Türkiye Survey conducted by the Social Information and Communication Association in collaboration with KONDA as part of the “Combating Digital Violence” project, Instagram (53%), Facebook (35%), and Twitter (19%) were identified as the platforms where the most acts of digital violence took place (Şener & Abınık, 2021: 4). Recent studies are consistent with our survey results. However, as mentioned in Section 6.1, Instagram is the most used social media platform by the participants. Consequently, as the most common -social media platform and the platform with the most cases of digital violence are the same, it can be argued that easier access to the internet and increased use of social media platforms increase women’s risk of being subjected to digital violence.

As mentioned before, ‘Digital Violence’ is not regulated as a separate form of crime in Turkish law; however, acts of digital violence may appear as an act of one of the crime types set in the Turkish Penal Code and accordingly, different crimes may occur.

Questions numbered 6.12, 6.13, 6.14 in the survey were asked in order to measure the participants’ level of trust in the legal process and the judiciary. Despite a majority of the participants believed that legal regulations are not sufficient, they indicated they would initiate a legal process if exposed to digital violence. Responses regarding their belief in the effectiveness of the legal process varied, with a higher number partially or completely not believing compared to those who partially or completely believed. The survey results in this regard are consistent with the previous studies. In a field study conducted by (Yıldırım, 2019: 75), participants expressed doubt about the effectiveness of legal actions, but they stated they would initiate legal proceedings



in case of such acts. The results indicated that, while women would initiate a legal process after experiencing digital violence, they had limited faith in the judiciary in this context.

One section of the survey asks participants, 'You can optionally tell us about a case of digital/cyber violence you have witnessed.' As shown in Figure 10, the responses of the participants also include their experiences with legal proceedings. Responses to this item suggest that the absence of results from judicial proceedings for incidents participants have experienced or witnessed contributes to the belief that the judicial process is ineffective.

One of the characteristics of digital violence against women is anonymity. Anonymity means that the perpetrator is not recognized or identifiable by the victim when committing acts of digital violence or its subcategories (Akman, 2023) In response to the question about the perpetrators of digital violence, participants mainly selected 'anonymous/fake account' and 'someone I do not know.' Therefore, we found that acts of digital violence are facilitated by anonymity.

In response to the question 'What would you do if you were exposed to the above action(s)? (You can mark multiple items)' 83.3% of the participants marked the item 'I would block the related person from my social media accounts', 48.3% 'I would change the passwords of my social media accounts', 43.1% 'I would ignore/delete the message', 42.6% 'I would hide my social media account', and 42.1% marked the item 'I would file a complaint with the police/prosecutor's office'. The purpose of this question was to understand how individuals respond after being subjected to digital violence. The majority of the participants stated that they would block the perpetrator. This finding can be interpreted that women try to prevent the continuation of violence by at least blocking the person rather than doing nothing, both for self-protection and to warn their acquaintances (Şener & Abunık, 2021: 27). Regarding the other responses to this question, participants stated that they would change their social media account passwords, they would ignore the message, fourthly they

would hide their social media accounts, and they would file a complaint with the police/prosecutor's office. Accordingly, it can be argued that when women are subjected to acts of digital violence, they initially take individual actions to secure themselves, but then seek help from third parties, such as initiating legal proceedings or applying to non-governmental organizations.

## 8. CONCLUSION

With the development in technology, the use of the internet and consequently social media has increased. According to the "Digital 2023 Türkiye" report prepared by We Are Social, 83.4% of Türkiye's population are internet users, 73.1% are active social media users, and the daily time spent on social media is 2 hours and 54 minutes (Türkiye Digital, 2023). Based on these data, frequent daily use of social media has both advantages and disadvantages. This also reflects the ongoing risk of encountering the negative aspects of the digital world. The risks that new media users can face emerge as 'Digital violence'. Although there is no consensus on a specific concept in the literature, different terms such as "cyber violence", "online violence", "cyberbullying", "online harassment" are often used synonymously. Previous research showed that, like other forms of violence, the majority of 'Digital Violence' victims are women. Based on the findings of studies, despite frequent exposure to digital violence, most victims did not recognize the situation. Our survey yielded a similar result. Regarding this, 43.9% of participants who claimed they had not experienced digital violence on social media reported exposure to various violent acts, including insults, fraud, threats, blackmail, harassing messages, and the creation of fake accounts using their names and photos, etc. It is obvious that although experienced frequently, digital violence often remains unnoticed. Locking social media accounts or rejecting follower requests from unknown individuals does not prevent women from experiencing digital violence. Although many participants believed that legal regulations were insufficient, they stated they would initiate a legal process if subjected to digital violence, despite doubting the effectiveness of this process.

Consequently, participants have low trust in the judiciary. Measures that can be taken against acts of digital violence include the following:

- Digital violence should be considered a serious problem.
- Digital violence and its types should be clearly defined.
- Public awareness-raising campaigns and digital literacy training programs should be expanded.
- Methods and strategies to prevent digital violence should be implemented.
- Criminal acts of digital violence should be more clearly defined in law.
- Complaint buttons for digital violence on social networks should be more active and there should be an expert group that reviews these complaints.

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