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Testing the Effectiveness of Psycho-Educational Program for Establishing Safe Relationships Based on Intimate Justice Theory

Gülay ÖZSOY ÇİÇEK ¹

Raşit AVCI ²

Abstract

Although romantic relationships are seen in every age range, it is seen that not every romantic relationship has the same quality. Individuals feel more secure and competent when they maintain a secure relationship. On the other hand, individuals who do not have a secure relationship are quite common. Although dating violence is seen in every period, its prevalence continues to increase and unfortunately leads to undesirable results. Although dating violence is first thought of as physical violence by individuals, it also includes verbal violence, psychological violence and sexual violence. In addition, there are studies that show that both women and men are exposed to dating violence. In particular, individuals in the transition period to adulthood, which coincides with their university years, are in the process of choosing a spouse after leaving the family. For this reason, romantic relationships in this period can affect the later periods of the individual's life. Unfortunately, there are individuals who are exposed to dating violence during their university years. This research aimed to test the effect of the psycho-educational program based on Intimate Justice Theory for college students to establish safe relationships. The research utilized the embedded mixed design. The study group was composed of 20 pre-service teachers (10 in experimental group, 10 in control group) in a state university in Turkey in the spring term of 2021-2022 academic year. The research data were collected via the Intimate Partner Violence Attitude Scale and a procedure evaluation form. The experimental group was subjected to a 9-session group psycho-educational program while there was no intervention for the control group. Analysis revealed that the participants in the experimental group had lower posttest scores compared to their pretest scores, but this decrease was not statistically significant. It was observed that the post-test scores obtained from the control group increased. In addition, the participants in the experimental group reported that they benefited from the program with regards to communication skills, maintenance of individuality and providing support in the romantic relationship. The findings were discussed within the framework of the literature for.

Keywords: Dating Violence, Prevention, Psychoeducation, College Students, Romantic Relationship

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¹Ph.D. Student, Ministry of Education, Muğla, Türkiye, gulyozsoy@gmail.com, ORCID:0000-0003-1504-4375

²Assoc. Dr., Muğla Sıtkı Kocman University, Faculty of Education, Department of Psychological Counseling and Guidance, Muğla, Türkiye, rasiatavci@mu.edu.tr, ORCID:0000-0003-4947-3397



2023, 12 (5), 2559-2578 | Araştırma Makalesi

Yakın İlişkilerde Adalet Kuramı Temelli Güvenli İlişki Geliştirme Eğitim Programının Etkililiğinin Sınanması

Gülşay ÖZSOY ÇİÇEK¹

Raşıit AVCI²

Öz

Romantik ilişkiler her yaş aralığında görülmekle birlikte her romantik ilişkinin aynı niteliğe sahip olmadığı görülmektedir. Bireyler güvenli bir ilişki sürdürdükleri zaman kendilerini daha güvenli ve yeterli hissetmektedir. Diğer taraftan güvenli ilişkiye sahip olmayan bireylere oldukça sık rastlanmaktadır. Flört şiddeti her dönemde görülmekle birlikte günümüzde yaygınlığı artarak devam etmekte ve maalesef istenmeyen sonuçlara yol açmaktadır. Flört şiddeti bireyler tarafından ilk olarak fiziksel şiddet olarak düşünülse de sözel şiddet, psikolojik şiddet ve cinsel şiddet türlerini de içermektedir. Ayrıca flört şiddetine hem kadınların hem de erkeklerin maruz kaldığına dair araştırmalar bulunmaktadır. Özellikle üniversite yıllarına denk gelen yetişkinliğe geçiş dönemlerindeki bireyler aileden ayrılmayla birlikte eş seçme süreci içerisinde bulunmaktadır. Bu nedenle bu dönemdeki romantik ilişkiler bireyin hayatının ilerleyen dönemlerini etkileyebilmektedir. Maalesef, üniversite dönemlerinde de flört şiddetine maruz kalan bireyler bulunmaktadır. Bu araştırmada Yakın İlişkilerde Adalet Kuramı temelli geliştirilen güvenli ilişki geliştirme programının üniversite öğrencileri üzerindeki etkililiğinin sınanması amaçlanmaktadır. Bu araştırma için iç içe karma desen kullanılmıştır. Bu araştırmanın çalışma grubunu 2021-2022 eğitim öğretim yılı bahar döneminde Muğla Sıtkı Koçman Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesine devam eden 10 deney ve 10 kontrol olmak üzere 20 katılımcı oluşturulmuştur. Araştırmanın verileri "Yakın İlişkilerde Şiddete Yönelik Tutum Ölçeği" ve süreç değerlendirme formu aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Deney grubuna 9 oturumluk grup psiko-eğitim programı uygulanmış ancak kontrol grubuna herhangi işlem yapılmamıştır. Araştırmadan elde edilen bulgulara göre deney grubundaki katılımcıların son-test puanları ön-test puanlarına göre düştüğü ancak bu düşüşün istatistiksel olarak anlamlı olmadığı anlaşılmıştır. Ayrıca deney grubundaki üyeler programın iletişim becerileri, bireyselliği sürdürme ve destek olmaları için yararlandıklarını söylemişlerdir. Elde edilen bulgular alan-yazın doğrultusunda tartışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Flört Şiddeti, Önleme, Psiko-Eğitim, Üniversite Öğrencileri, Romantik İlişkiler

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¹ Doktora Öğrencisi, Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, Muğla, Türkiye, gulyozsoy@gmail.com, ORCID:0000-0003-1504-4375

² Doç.Dr., Muğla Sıtkı Koçman Üniversitesi, Eğitim Fakültesi, Psikolojik Danışmanlık ve Rehberlik Anabilim Dalı, Muğla, Türkiye, rasitavci@mu.edu.tr, ORCID:0000-00034947-3397

Introduction

Violence is one of the most important social problems. Many forms of violence including school violence, domestic violence and dating violence, can be observed in human affairs. Among these types of violence, dating violence which can be seen in the romantic relationships are very common among college students. According to Furman and Schaffer (2003), romantic relationships contribute to the development of necessary behaviors and provide individuals with important means to better adapt to adulthood. It is also understood that not every romantic relationship may be supportive of individual's growth (Furman, 2002). In such romantic relationships that are not constructive and supportive, it is argued that one of the most fundamental risk factors is dating violence (Gala & Kapadia, 2013). Dating violence is known as a phenomenon that intensifies and disguises itself as it is further discussed in regard to its reasons, risk factors, and negative consequences. Leading to several negative outcomes, dating violence may involve not only one-way violence, but also mutual violence of the two parties in a relationship. Thus, it is thought to be important to understand the meaning of dating violence for developing a safe relationship (Palabıyık, 2019). Dating violence is described as a behavior involving the use of physical strength, restraint, and threat by one member of the couple to harm or hurt the other one in the context of dating (Sugarman & Hotaling, 1989). Dating violence also refers to the observance of at least one of physical violence, psychological violence, and sexual violence in an intimate relationship (Niolon et al., 2017).

Involving the behaviors of physical violence, psychological violence, and sexual violence, dating violence is regarded as a public health issue that impacts both men and women regardless of their social, economic, religious, and cultural background (Angelone et al., 2012). The previous research have showed that prevalence of dating violence among young people varies between 5% and 95% mostly due to measurement-related problems (Baker & Dümen, 2011; Halpern et al., 2004; Marquart et al., 2007; Munoz-Rivas et al., 2007; Olshen et al., 2007; Rivera-Rivera et al., 2007; Sears et al., 2007; Swahn et al., 2008). Hickman et al. (2004) reported that, of the women, 60-83% exhibited psychologically violent behaviors and 3-24% exhibited sexually violent behaviors whereas of the men, 55-80% exhibited psychologically violent behaviors and 13-37% exhibited sexually violent behaviors. Moreover, despite its occurrence in every age range, frequency of dating violence seems to increase among individuals between the ages of 16-30 years and college students (Fidan & Yeşil, 2018). In another study, half of the adolescence reported that they had been victimized by a partner in all their lives (Ybarra et al., 2016). More than two-third of the women and more than half of the men who were subjected to dating violence reported that they had been exposed to violence before turning 25 years old during adolescence or young adulthood for the first time (Black et al., 2011).

College students who are in the transition from adolescence to adulthood may fail to protect themselves from dating violence due to the lack of experiences and the social environment in which they interact with other college students. When college students have involved in a new social environment, they get to live, study, and socialize along with their peers, therefore becoming vulnerable against it impacts on their well-being (Duval et al., 2020). As a consequence of that vulnerability, dating violence is becoming widespread in the dating relationships of college students and seems to involve

physical violence, sexual violence, violence threat, and psychological violence (Barnett et al., 2005). Research shows that university campuses are regarded as high-risk places for all kinds of dating violence (Jozkowski et al., 2015; Moynihan et al., 2011; Paul & Gray, 2011). In the study conducted by Yee and Smith (2022), it is emphasized that it is important to investigate the campus sexual violence experiences of college students. Makepeace (1981), the first researcher to investigate dating violence among college students, reported that 8-14% of the college students exacted violent behaviors including pushing and threatening while 35-48% of them knew someone who had a relationship with such violent content. Several studies on college students later argued that the prevalence of dating violence that involves physical, psychological, and sexual violence is in the range from 10% to 50% (Amar & Gennaro, 2005; Barrick et al., 2013; Kaukinen et al., 2012; Nabors et al., 2006; Straus, 2004). According to other research on dating violence, it was estimated that only one-third of college students in the US reported dating violence (Stappenbeck & Fromme, 2010); however, it varied between 17% and 45% college students from 33 universities in 17 countries (Straus, 2004). Similarly, studies conducted with college students in Turkey showed 8-46% of the college students were subjected to dating violence (Karatay et al., 2018; Kütük et al., 2018; Özcebe et al., 2002; Selçuk et al., 2018). These studies have provided evidence that dating violence occurs in a wide range of frequency. Therefore, it is very important to examine the means of reducing dating violence.

It has been shown that dating violence causes several physical and psychological conditions (Amar & Gennaro, 2005; Campbell, 2002; Eshelman & Levendosky, 2012; Exner-Cortens et al., 2013; Kaura & Lohman, 2007; Silverman et al., 2001; Stein et al., 2009; Sutherland, 2011). Additionally, exposure to dating violence is associated with anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicide attempts, and several physical health issues (Gibb et al., 2004; Messman-Moore et al., 2000). Ultimately, the most undesirable consequence of dating violence is that the individual ends their life (Peterson et al., 2018). Leading to such critical outcomes, dating violence is associated with various risk factors, and young people with those risk factors are likely to be going through an unsafe relationship. Here, the risk factors are meant to include false beliefs about dating violence, depression or anxiety, violent behaviors towards peers, substance abuse, sexual intercourse at early ages and maintaining a sexual life with several different people, indirect learning about dating violence, destructive conflicts with a partner, and being a victim or witness of domestic violence (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015). Although many studies have been performed to identify risk factors of dating violence, protective factors have yet to be addressed adequately (Wolfe et al., 2008). Brown (2004) listed protective factors as psychological resilience, coping skills, establishment of safe relationships, family engagement, no previous violent experiences, and social support.

Research has shown the importance of studies on reducing those risk factors that lead to dating violence and increasing the protective factors. In the literature, there has been programs to prevent dating violence developed and implemented for high school adolescents and college students who are young adults (Antle et al., 2011; Ball et al., 2012; Cornelius & Resseguie, 2007; Foshee et al., 1998; Jaycox et al., 2006; Schwartz et al., 2006). With increasing number of studies on dating violence in Turkey, studies seem to be mostly descriptive (Cinal, 2018; Dikmen et al., 2018; Savoly et al., 2014; Toplu-Demirtaş et al., 2013; Yıldırım, 2016). It has been observed that dating violence is

associated with anxiety, hopelessness (Dikmen, Özaydın, & Yılmaz, 2018), exposure to childhood abuse (Salman, 2015), and self-esteem (Yıldırım, 2016). Experimental research on the prevention of and intervention with dating violence in Turkey is quite limited. In these few studies, Sezgin (2015) investigated how developing healthy relationships among adolescent girls affected their attitudes toward dating violence. In another research, Üstünel-Balcı (2018) designed a feminist theory-based program for preventing dating violence among college students. Finally, Gündüz (2019) tested the effect of a relational-cultural theory program on dating violence for female college students. However, the program developed by Sezgin (2015) is criticized because it is not based on a theoretical basis. On the other hand, since the program developed by Üstünel-Balcı (2018) is based on feminist theory, it emphasizes power, control and gender roles. However, it is suggested that awareness should be raised about supportive relationships in order to prevent dating violence (Fruzzetti & Levensky, 2000). In addition, the program developed by Gündüz (2019) was prepared only for women.

Intimate Justice Theory can be used to reduce dating violence among college students. Intimate Justice Theory covers three ethical aspects, equality, fairness, and care, and nine ethical concepts that involve the context of abuse and violence in intimate relationships (Rotter & Houston, 1999). The aspect of equality is about equal rights and responsibilities, mutual respect, free choice, and maintenance of individuality whereas the aspect of fairness refers to coming to an agreement in the relationship, sharing common purposes, and adaptation to differences. The third aspect, care, involves listening to the partner without judgement, sharing, and providing support during challenging experiences (Jory & Anderson, 1999). The theory aims the prevention of violence and abuse especially in intimate relationships. Accordingly, features of the relationships that support growth constitute the main point of the theory. The program based on the Intimate Justice Theory focuses on the concepts of respect, freedom, accountability, mutuality, reciprocity, accommodation, empathy, attachment, and nurturance. In these considerations, it can be assumed that the theory contributes to enhance protective factors for developing a safe relationship.

Emphasizing the protective factors for developing a safe relationship, the theory encourages the consultants to invite their clients to a confrontation about abuse of power in emotional systems, to challenge, explore and educate them (Jory & Anderson, 1999). Within that context, while the client confronts disempowerment and abuse of power in a relationship, they also attempt to change their established beliefs about how they should treat their partner (Jory et al., 1997). With limited number of experimental studies on prevention of dating violence in Turkey, we have not located any research based on the Intimate Justice Theory. The present research is therefore considered important for testing the effect of interventions developed based on the Intimate Justice Theory for college students in Turkey. Consequently, this research aimed to test the effect of the Intimate Justice Theory-based program on establishing safe relationships. For this purpose, the following research questions were sought:

1. Is there a significant difference between pretest and posttest scores of the experimental group students?
2. Is there a significant difference between pretest and posttest scores of the control group students?

3. Is there a significant difference between follow-up test and posttest scores of the experimental group students?
4. What are the views of experimental group students on the psycho-educational procedure and skills of developing a safe relationship?

Methods

Research Design

To examine the effect of the psycho-educational program developed for college students based on the Intimate Justice Theory to improve participants' skills of establishing a safe relationship, an embedded mixed design which refers to the concurrent or sequential use of quantitative and qualitative methods was utilized. In this design, qualitative and quantitative data are included to better understand the phenomenon in the interest, which increase in return power the research (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2015). A few stages were implemented in the research: First, in the quantitative part, the pretest-posttest control group quasi-experimental design was utilized. Later, the research findings were expanded by means of qualitative data. Independent variable of the research was the psycho-educational program for establishing a safe relationship, and the dependent variable was the safe relationship skills. The psychoeducational program was performed on the experimental group whereas no intervention was on the control group. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from the experimental group before and after the implementation of the psycho-educational program. Quantitative data were collected from the control group concurrently with the experimental group. Quantitative data of the research were obtained via "Intimate Partner Violence Attitude Scale - Revised". The qualitative data were collected via a procedure evaluation form. This research was carried out in accordance with the permission obtained from Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee [Approval Reference Number 210008].

Study Group

The study group of the research was composed of 20 participants (10 in experimental group, 10 in control group) enrolled in Faculty of Education in a state university located in Aegean Region of Turkey in the spring term of 2021-2022 academic year. The announcement poster prepared later included information about the program content, conditions of participation and session process. A pre-interview was done to select participants. The applicants were accepted with exclusion criteria. Those who apparently were receiving psychiatric assistance, taking psychiatric medication, had traumatic experiences, and just ended their romantic relationship before pre-interview were excluded from the study. In addition, a balance was ensured between the participants of experimental and control groups with regards to age and gender variables to avoid their possible impact on the research outcome. The study was initiated with 24 participants (12 in experimental group, 12 in control group), but 2 participants in the experimental group stated that they could not participate in the sessions and left the study. Since 10 participants remained in the experimental group, 2 participants were randomly omitted from the control group. Consequently, the experimental and control groups were each composed of 9 women and 1 man whose ages were in the range of 18-23 years.

Measures

Personal Information Form

A personal information form was used to assess participants gender, age, and major. Furthermore, it included some questions whether they were receiving psychiatric therapy, medication and had had traumatic experiences as these situations could impact the research.

Intimate Partner Violence Attitude Scale-Revised

Developed by Fincham et al. (2008) and adapted by Toplu-Demirtaş et al. (2017) into Turkish language, the scale measures attitudes of college students toward both psychological and physical forms of dating violence. As a 5-points Likert scale, the scale is composed of 3 subscales and 17 items. Abuse, control, and violence subscales include 8, 5, and 4 items, respectively. With reverse-coded items, the scale is in parallel with the attitudes toward physical and psychological violence. According to the confirmatory factor analysis reported by Demirtaş et al. (2017), the model showed acceptable fit [$\chi^2/df = 2.24$; RMSEA = .08 (90% CI = .07-.09); SRMR = .08; CFI = .79]. Standardized factor loadings vary between .41 and .89 for violence, .25 and .63 for control, and .30 and .69 for abuse. Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficients for scale's reliability were calculated to be .72, .62, and .65, respectively (Toplu-Demirtaş et al., 2017). These results showed that Turkish version of the scale was valid and reliable.

Procedure Evaluation Form

This form was administered to the experimental group at the end of the procedure. The form aimed to find out to what extent the participants benefited from the program, whether they found it fit for their individual goals, and their learning gains from the program. The questions of the form were prepared by the researchers to cover the learning outcomes within the program content.

Experimental Procedure

This research was carried out in accordance with the permission obtained from Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee [Approval Reference Number 210008]. The research aimed to examine the effect of the Intimate Justice Theory-based psycho-educational program in improving their skills of establishing a safe relationship for college students. During the program development and preparation of the session contents, three ethical aspects and nine ethical concepts of the Intimate Justice Theory were taken into consideration. Accordingly, each concept and its content were utilized to create 9 sessions of 90 minutes. The content of the psycho-educational program was designed to enable participants to adopt the concepts of respect, freedom, accountability, mutuality, reciprocity, accommodation, empathy, attachment, and nurturance. Each session was initiated with a summary as a reminder of the previous one and ended with a summary and evaluation of the current session. In addition, warm-up activities were performed to increase motivation and facilitate transition to the agenda of the session. Finally, activities were prepared in accordance with the purpose of each session. The psycho-educational program was tested in a pilot study. The sessions conducted during the pilot study were evaluated by the researchers. Following the pilot study, the nine-session program was led by a

psychological consultant who was a postgraduate in the department of Psychological Counseling and Guidance and was evaluated by the first and second authors. The pilot study was conducted in virtual classroom due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Warm-up activities and activities within the sessions were reviewed. After the review of session contents, changes were made to the activities for improving the skills of accountability, empathy, and mutuality. The program originally planned with 12 sessions in the beginning was reduced to 9 sessions after the pilot study. Then the announcement of the program was made. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the applicants. During the preliminary interviews, after the demographic information, the problems they experienced in their romantic relationships, their communication styles and expectations from the program, etc., were written by the researchers in accordance with the content of the program. After the interviews, the answers obtained were evaluated and the people who were thought to need the program were included in the group. Among the people included in the group, there were members who received psychological help for the first time as well as members who previously provided individual support. However, all of the members participated in group work for the first time to develop their secure relationship skills. During the preliminary interview, the applicants were informed about the general aims and group principles of the group. Follow-up testing was performed six weeks after the sessions were completed. The nine-session psycho-educational program included the following content:

- Help participants get informed of the psycho-educational program and identify their individual goals,
- Ensure that participants are informed of a safe relationship,
- Enable participants to realize that individuality and freedom are not over in a romantic relationship and to set their individual boundaries,
- Help participants fulfill their responsibilities of not doing psychological and physical harm and correcting the mistakes and accidents in the romantic relationship,
- Assist participants in increasing their strength at cooperating and making mutual decisions in the romantic relationship,
- Help participants increase their awareness of frequent problems in a romantic relationship and improve their conflict resolution skills,
- Help participants improve their communication skills and express their feelings,
- Assist participants in their ability to behave empathically in the romantic relationship, and increase their awareness of supporting their partners in predicaments,
- Increase participants' awareness of the act of bonding, and the areas in which they are strong and vulnerable in the romantic relationship,
- Help participants set boundaries with their partners in the romantic relationship,
- Help participants set sexual boundaries with their partners in the romantic relationship, and

- Enable participants to realize their learning gains from the group experience.

Content and Operation of the Psychoeducation Program

In the first session, the group members and the leader met by making an acquaintance activity. Group rules were discussed by the group leader by giving information about the general aims of the group. Members shared their individual goals with the group. After the group leader gave information about what a secure relationship is, he ended the process by asking the members' ideas about the session. The second session started with the summary of the previous session and the announcement of the session agenda. In the session, a statement was made using metaphors on the importance of respect and not ending personal freedom. Then, in order for the members to realize the limits in romantic relationships, an I-You-We activity was held and shared in the group. The session was ended with a summary of the session and feedback from the members. In the third session, it was started by explaining that the responsibility in the romantic relationship will be discussed. Their responsibilities in the romantic relationship were listened to. By explaining what psychological and physical violence is to the members, the responsibility of not causing physical and psychological harm was emphasized. However, it was emphasized that there may be mistakes in the relationship process and the responsibility of correcting these mistakes. Members were asked for their ideas on how to correct their mistakes in the relationship. Homework on responsibility was given. The process was concluded by evaluating and summarizing the session. In the fourth session, it was announced that the previous session would be summarized and the partnership issue would be studied in the session. Information was given about the decision-making processes and the importance of joint decision-making was emphasized. The session was summarized and evaluated and said goodbye. In the fifth session, common problems in the relationship were shared by the members in the group. In the romantic relationship, compatible and incompatible areas with the partner were expressed. Information about conflict resolution was given by the group leader. Forms were distributed to the members, and they were asked to write down the issues that they could not give up and show flexibility in the relationship. Afterwards, they were asked to share what they wrote and talked about them. In the sixth session, since empathy will be discussed in the session, a warm-up activity on emotions was started. With the help of animations, the ability to empathize with the partner was studied. After the animations, feedback was received and the session was terminated. Since the seventh session will work on the subject of commitment, the question of what does loyalty mean to you was asked, and after the answers were heard, the subject of commitment was explained to the members. Forms were distributed to the members and they were asked to write and share the areas where they were strong and vulnerable in the relationship. Since individual boundaries were included in the previous sessions, this session focused on determining the boundaries of third parties. For this, first, animations were made using the form and on the shares obtained from the forms. In the eighth session, the previous session was summarized and information was given about the physiological needs in the relationship. Members listened to how this affected the relationship. After the field, it was mentioned about determining the sexual boundaries in the relationship. The concepts of sexual violence and approval were mentioned. The information form on sexual boundaries was reviewed with the members. Members were asked to prepare brochures on sexual violence and saying no. After completing the brochure, the session was terminated. Finally, the ninth session

started with a safe relationship themed warm-up activity. After the event, the group leader summarized all the sessions. Members shared their achievements. To say goodbye, the members were asked to write letters to each other and share them in the group. After sharing, the process was terminated.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected from the participants were analyzed on SPSS 22.0 software package. First, Shapiro-Wilk test was used to see whether the data showed normal distribution. As a normal distribution was observed, the research questions were examined with the dependent and independent samples t-Test (Büyüköztürk, 2020). For qualitative data, a content analysis approach was utilized. Content analysis aims to provide a construct by allowing for the identification of codes and themes over related concepts to explain the data obtained with qualitative methods (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018).

Results

Quantitative Findings

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics in experimental and control groups in the Intimate Partner Violence Scale-Revised. As shown in Table 1, mean posttest and follow-up test scores of the participants in the experimental group decreased. The participants in the control group increased their posttest scores. A t-test was performed to understand whether the differences between mean pretest, posttest, and follow-up test scores were statistically significant. As shown in Table 2, pretest scores of the experimental and control groups were examined with the independent samples t-Test. The difference between the scores of the two groups was not found to be statistically significant ($t=-1.05$; $p>.05$). This finding implies that the experimental and control groups were formed by participants of equivalent attributes.

Table1. Descriptive Statistics of Experimental and Control Groups in the Intimate Partner Violence Scale-Revised

Intimate Partner Violence Scale-Revised	Experimental Group			Control Group		
	<i>N</i>	\bar{x}	<i>Sd</i>	<i>N</i>	\bar{x}	<i>Sd</i>
Pretest	10	29.6	6.26	10	26.7	6.07
Posttest	10	27.3	5.38	10	28.7	6.62
Follow-up Test	10	27.2	4.94	-	-	-

Table 2. Arithmetic Mean, Standard Error, and Independent Samples t-Test Values Regarding the Pretest Scores of Experimental and Control Groups

Group	<i>N</i>	\bar{x}	<i>Sd</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Experimental	10	29.6	6.26	1.05	.30
Control	10	26.7	6.07		

Paired sample t-test was used to test the effect of the program in safe relationship. As can be seen in Table 3, the difference between the mean pretest and posttest scores of the experimental group was not statistically significant ($t=1.08$; $p>.05$), and similarly, the difference was not found to be statistically significant in the control group ($t=-1.03$; $p>.05$). It can be concluded from this finding that the decrease in posttest scores of the

participants in the experimental group was caused by the program for establishing a safe relationship, but this decrease was not statistically significant.

Table 3. Results of paired sample t-tests

Group	Measure	N	\bar{x}	Sd	t	p
Experimental	Pretest	10	29.6	6.26	1.08	.31
	Posttest	10	27.3	5.38		
Control	Pretest	10	26.7	6.07	-1.03	.33
	Posttest	10	28.7	6.62		

Similarly, a paired sample t-Test was performed to examine whether there was a statistically significant between mean posttest and follow-up test scores of the participants in the experimental group (See Table 4). There was no statistically significant difference between mean posttest and follow-up test scores of the participants in the experimental group ($t=.06$; $p>.05$).

Table 4. Results of the follow-up test in the Experimental Group

Measure	N	\bar{x}	Sd	t	p
Posttest	10	27.3	5.38	.06	.95
Follow-up Test	10	27.2	4.94		

Qualitative Findings

After the nine-session psychoeducation program was completed, individual interviews were conducted with the members of the experimental group through the end-of-process evaluation form. With the end-of-process evaluation form consisting of semi-structured questions, the members were asked to share their experiences in the group, to report the elements of the psychoeducation program that they thought were more useful and less useful, and to give information about the effect of the program on their secure relationship skills. In order to increase the validity and reliability of the qualitative data obtained from the experimental group members, the thematic analysis approach developed by Nowell et al. (2017) was used. Starting from this approach, researchers first tried to reveal the meaning and patterns of the data by reading repeatedly. The researchers determined the first codes after the readings. In the third stage, the themes were obtained by using the inductive approach. In the fourth stage, the researchers worked to improve the themes by reviewing the themes. In the fifth stage, each theme was analyzed and analyzed theoretically. Finally, a record of the analysis of the qualitative data was created by the researchers. As can be seen in Table 5, the codes 'understanding the partner', 'effective communication', and 'transparency' were identified from the statements of the experimental group in the procedure evaluation form. Since those codes were covered by communication skills, they were grouped under the theme of communication skills. Similarly, codes identified as 'setting the boundaries', 'maintenance of individuality', and 'ability to say no' were grouped under the theme of 'ability to achieve individuality and freedom'. Finally, codes 'reconciliation' and 'sharing responsibilities' were addressed under the theme of

‘providing support in the romantic relationship’.

Table 5. Codes and Themes Generated from the Procedure Evaluation Form

Quotes from participant statements	Codes	Themes
<i>‘I am trying to understand what the other party feels more’</i>	Understanding the partner	
<i>‘I am trying to use the “I” language in the relationship’</i>	Effective communication	Communication skills
<i>‘I am able to express the things I am uncomfortable about more easily and right away’</i>	Transparency	
<i>‘I have understood that everyone is an individual and has boundaries’</i>	Setting the boundaries	
<i>‘I am explaining my boyfriend in a better way that it is my own life’</i>	Maintenance of individuality	Ability to achieve individuality and freedom
<i>‘I am able to clearly express the things I do not want sexually and say no decisively’</i>	Ability to say no	
<i>‘I have understood that I can find the common ground and make mutual plans’</i>	Reconciliation	Providing support in the romantic relationship
<i>‘The relationship is made of two persons, and I have as many responsibilities as what I expect from my partner’</i>	Sharing responsibilities	

Discussion

Research findings showed that group psycho-educational program based on the Intimate Justice Theory caused a decrease in dating violence scores of the college students, but the decrease was not significant. There are few experimental studies in Turkey that address this matter. First, the program developed by Sezgin (2015) for establishing healthy relationships was effective on adolescent girls’ scores of being exposed to relational aggression, abusing physically, sexually, and verbally-emotionally whereas it was not effective in the long run in the levels of abusing sexually, and verbally-emotionally. In the study carried out by Üstünel (2018), a significant decrease was observed in college students’ scores of hostile sexism, accepting attitudes towards women’s use of physical violence and accepting attitudes towards men’s use of psychological violence. Yet, there was no significant change in the scores of conflict resolution skills. Finally, in the study conducted by Gündüz (2019) with female college students, there was a decrease in the scores of dating violence, negative conflict resolution style, and submissive conflict resolution style while an increase was observed in the scores of positive conflict resolution style and relationship quality. In the international literature, there seems to be greater number of studies aimed at preventing the dating violence. Moynihan et al. (2015) aimed to prevent sexual dating violence among college students. They found significant changes in experimental group students’ attitudes toward providing peer support and helping. Similarly, Borsky et al. (2016) tested the effectiveness of one-session interviews conducted by the researchers on

dating violence in the participants' behavior of intervening with the violence when they witness it. The research concluded that there were positive changes in the intervention behavior, but no changes were found in the attitudes toward empowerment and dating violence.

Dating violence threatens integrity of the individual and hinders their growth (Cornelius & Resseguie, 2007). Dating violence can be threatening at every stage; however, the individual may not be aware of the violent behavior or not associate such behaviors with violence in college years (Shen et al., 2012). It is consequently possible to argue that it is important to increase college students' awareness of dating violence.

Qualitative data obtained via the procedure evaluation form contributed to the psycho-educational program in improving the communication skills. One can suggest that activities for improving empathy and effective communication in the psycho-educational program were useful in the communication skills of the participants. In the literature, there is evidence that communication skills have influence on romantic relationships (Buluş and Bağcı, 2016; Crapo et al., 2019). Moreover, as Haskan-Avcı (2013) stated, the experimental group in the marriage preparation program achieved the program objectives which were about communication obstacles, effective communication, and points to consider for communication during a conflict.

Another finding obtained from the qualitative data in the research was the awareness of maintenance of individuality and freedom. Findings showed that activities especially aiming for respect and freedom probably contributed to the development of awareness of maintenance of individuality and freedom. Ultimately, codes 'reconciliation', 'sharing responsibilities', and 'mutual experiences' were grouped under the theme of 'support in the romantic relationship'. As indicated by the literature, it can be argued that both maintenance of individuality and being a couple in a relationship support personal development and increase marriage satisfaction (Baygöl & Avcı, 2016).

Given the qualitative findings from the experimental group, it is possible to suggest that the program assisted the participants in communication skills, maintenance of individuality, and sharing responsibilities. However, as shown by the quantitative data, the change was not significant. This difference between quantitative and qualitative findings can be explained as the psycho-education program provides information and awareness about the content of dating violence, types of dating violence and what should be included in the content of a secure relationship, but it did not provide the desired effect in reducing dating violence behavior. In addition, since the psycho-education program was implemented during the Covid-19 pandemic period, the possibilities of the participants in the experimental group to transfer the program contents to their romantic relationships may have been limited. Moreover, this finding can be explained by missing skills of the group leader, participants' failure to reflect the session activities on their own lives, choice of theory, and choice of measure. In addition, more activities on empathy and effective communication skills may need to be performed although these skills were part of the program as learning outcomes. The Intimate Justice Theory, which is the basis of the program, argues that partner violence is associated with gender, and the theory is sensitive to the male dominance (Jory et al., 1997). Moreover, the theory aims to help perpetrator of violence learn to develop relationships based on accountability and respect (Jory & Anderson, 2000). In light of this information, the fact that number of women and violence victims included in the

program was higher may have reduced its effectiveness. It could be more useful that the nine skills which are the learning outcomes of the program are acquired by the perpetrator of violence.

Limitations

The research has certain limitations. The first one is that the psycho-educational program for establishing a safe relationship was conducted with a limited number of participants from the faculty of education. After all, it is necessary to carry out studies for participants in different stages of development. The correlation between the psycho-educational program for establishing a safe relationship and conflict resolution, empathy, and attachment styles can be investigated. Studies with different theoretical foundations can be performed to prevent dating violence.

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