

Level of Perceived Emotional Abuse and Affecting Factors in University Students

Ufuk KAYA¹  Sergen IRMAK² 

Buğçe ÖZER³ 

¹ Cyprus Health and Social Sciences University, Faculty of Health Sciences, Department of Nursing, Morphou, Cyprus, ufukbkaya91@gmail.com (Sorumlu Yazar/Corresponding Author)

² Cyprus Science University, School of Foreign Languages, Kyrenia, Cyprus, sergenirmak@csu.edu.tr

³ Independent Researcher, Nicosia, Cyprus, bugceoz@hotmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study was conducted to determine the level of perceived emotional abuse and factors in university students.

Method: The universe of the study was students studying at the Vocational School of Health Services in a private university in Northern Cyprus (N=251). The data were collected by a forms consisting of two parts. In the first part, the Descriptive Characteristics of the students were included, and in the second part, the Perceived Emotional Abuse Scale for Adults took place. The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences program. Necessary ethical approvals were obtained for the implementation of the study.

Results: The total score of the students in Perceived Emotional Abuse was 125.67±43.43. A statistically significant difference was found between the Perceived Emotional Abuse scores of the students and the variables of income-expenditure level, arguments/fights in family, the individual's exposure to family violence, exposure to abuse, self-esteem, self-success, and loneliness.

Conclusion and Suggestions: According to the results of the study, the level of emotional abuse perceived by the students was found to be high, close to the average score. As a result of the statistical comparison of the scale averages and the introductory features, it was determined that there was a statistical significance between the general scale score and the introductory features. These can also be considered as influencing factors. If necessary, abuse should be taught as a course in schools, universities, this issue should be emphasized more in symposiums, trainings and public education should be done.

Üniversite Öğrencilerinin Algıladığı Duygusal İstismar Düzeyi ve Etki Eden Faktörler

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ÖZ

Amaç: Bu çalışma, üniversite öğrencilerinin algıladıkları duygusal istismar düzeyini ve faktörleri belirlemek amacıyla yapılmıştır.

Yöntem: Araştırmanın evrenini Kuzey Kıbrıs'ta bulunan özel bir üniversitenin Sağlık Hizmetleri Meslek Yüksekokulu'nda öğrenim gören öğrenciler oluşturmuştur (N=251). Veriler iki bölümden oluşan form ile toplanmıştır. İlk bölümde öğrencilerin tanıtıcı özelliklerinin yer aldığı Tanıtıcı Özellikler, ikinci bölümde de Yetişkinler İçin Algılanan Duygusal İstismar Ölçeği yer almaktaydı. Veriler, Statistical Package for Social Sciences programında değerlendirilmiştir. Çalışmanın uygulanması için gerekli etik onaylar alınmıştır.

Bulgular: Öğrencilerin Yetişkinler İçin Algılanan Duygusal İstismar Ölçeğinden aldıkları toplam puan 125.67±43.43'tür. Öğrencilerin toplam puanları ile gelir-gider düzeyi, ailedeki tartışma/kavgalar, bireyin aile içi şiddete maruz kalma, istismara maruz kalma, benlik saygısı, başarı düzeyi ve yalnızlık değişkenleri arasında istatistiksel olarak anlamlı fark bulunmuştur.

Sonuç ve Öneriler: Araştırma sonuçlarına göre öğrencilerin algıladıkları duygusal istismar düzeyi yüksek, ortalamaya yakın puan olarak bulunmuştur. Ölçek ortalamaları ile tanıtıcı özelliklerin istatistiksel karşılaştırılması sonucu genel ölçek puanı ile tanıtıcı özellikler arasında istatistiksel anlamlılığın var olduğu belirlenmiştir. Bunlar da etki eden faktörler olarak ele alınabilir. İstismar gerekirse okullarda, üniversitelerde ders olarak okutulmalı, sempozyum, eğitimlerde bu konu daha çok vurgulanmalı, halk eğitimi yapılmalıdır.

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INTRODUCTION

Child abuse is defined as physical, sexual, emotional maltreatment or neglect by people who care for the child, establish a relationship of trust, or adults that have a negative impact on the child's health and life (Bulut & Karaman, 2018; Runyan et al, 2002). Child abuse can appear in different classifications. However, in general, we come across the titles of physical abuse, sexual abuse and emotional abuse (Aktay, 2020). In abused children, the definition of emotional abuse was first introduced in the United States of America in 1974 with the term 'mental damage' (Kütük & Bilaç, 2017).

Emotional abuse includes other types of abuse in its content. It can exist alone or can be seen in other types of abuses. Even though the negative effects of sexual and physical abuse may disappear, the effects of emotional abuse can continue forever (Ersanlı et al., 2013). Emotional abuse includes rejection/ignoring, loneliness/isolation, intimidation and guiding/pushing to crime. The combination of all these emotional abuses applied to the child can bring many negative effects in adulthood. Some examples of these negative effects includes social, psychological, and behavioral difficulties, aggression, the tendency to violence, alcohol/drug use, increase risk of diseases (diabetes and cardiovascular diseases, and obesity), deterioration of social relationships, depression, and suicidal behavior (Dinleyici & Şahin Dağlı, 2016). Also, emotional abuse can greatly harm an individual's mental health and emotional development. One of the downsides of emotional abuse is that it's hard to prove. Therefore, it is difficult to intervene from time to time (Fayaz, 2019).

According to the results of Arslan & Balkıs's (2016) study, it was determined that emotional abuse experienced by adolescent individuals due to their parents affects psychological resilience, self-efficacy and problem behaviors (Arslan & Balkıs, 2016). In Hürler's (2018) study, the perceived emotional abuse of Turkish students was lower than that of students from international countries. However, it was stated that both groups were relatively high (Hürler, 2018). In Özkebabçı's study, the average of emotional abuse perceived by university students was found to be close to the average score. It has been stated that the score decreases with increasing age (25 years and above) (Özkebabçı, 2019).

One of the key points in preventing abuse is education. It is known that abuse and neglect can be prevented to a great extent by educating and raising awareness of professionals, families, children, healthcare personnel, and all segments of the society (Bakır & Kapucu, 2017; Kaya et al, 2005). Considering that families or primary caregivers are the first educational institutions in a child's life, the family has a great role in informing children about abuse and neglect (Fayaz, 2019).

Abuse negatively affects almost all age groups, especially the child age group. Situations arising from both family and non-family factors and other types of abuse in childhood continue to live as emotional abuse in the individual in the future. The importance of the subject also emerges here. According to the perceived level of emotional abuse, it is of great importance for the individual to be integrated into the society and to himself. Level studies and determining the factors affecting this level are of great importance in the aid process. This study was conducted to determine the level of perceived emotional abuse and the affecting factors in university students.

Based on the major/minor reasons it reveals in adulthood, we determined the questions of our research as follows.

- 1) What is the level of emotional abuse perceived by the students?
- 2) What are the factors affecting the level of emotional abuse perceived by the students?

METHOD

Population

The research was carried out on university students studying at the Vocational School of Health Services of a private university in Northern Cyprus (N = 251). The students of 23 departments (Oral and Dental Health Support Technician, Operating Room Services, Anesthesia, Biomedical Device Technology, Child Development, Dialysis, Midwifery Technician, Pharmacy Services, Electroneurophysiology, Physiotherapy, First and Emergency Aid, Occupational Health and Work Safety, Laboratory and Veterinary Health, Audiometry Technician, Optician, Orthopedic Prosthesis Orthotics, Pathology Laboratory Technician, Radiotherapy Technician, Medical Documentation and Secretarial, Medical Imaging Techniques, Medical Laboratory Technician, Elderly Care) in the vocational school were included in the study. No sampling method was used, and all students who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study were included. Research data was collected from 6 January to 10 February 2020. The universe of the research was the students studying in Vocational School of Health Services who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. Verbal information about the aim of the study were given and written consents were obtained.

Data Collection and Forms

The data were collected with a data collection form consisting of two parts. In the first part, the demographic characteristics of the participants (age, gender, presence of children, income-expenditure level, place of residence, family type, presence of siblings, frequent arguments/quarrels in the family, violence, communication problem, and abuse in the family – total 17 questions). Also, it had some other questions such as getting the education, wanting to receive education, thinking about being exposed to abuse, finding yourself valuable, finding yourself successful, the tendency to loneliness, and comfortable trusting. Furthermore, the "Perceived Emotional Abuse Scale for Adults" was included in the second part of the data collection form. The data collection form took 5-10 minutes to complete for each participant.

Perceived Emotional Abuse Scale for Adults: It was made by (Ersanlı et al., 2013). Its Turkish validity and reliability were determined in 2013 by Ersanlı et al. The scale consists of 61 items in total. It was a Five-point Likert type scale; 'Totally agree' (5 points), 'agree' (4 points), 'indecisive' (3 points), 'disagree' (2 points), and 'strongly disagree' (1 point). According to this scoring, the lowest score that can be taken from the scale is 61, and the highest is 305. The higher the score, the higher the level of emotional abuse perceived by the individual. The internal reliability coefficient of the test was determined as Cronbach alpha $\alpha=.95$. The cronbach alpha value of the scale was determined as .91 in this study.

Ethical Approvals

The ethics committee of the Near Near University approved it (2019/74-930). Written consent was obtained from participants who agreed to participate in the study. Also, written permission was obtained from the authors who developed the Perceived Emotional Abuse Scale for Adults.

Statistical Analysis

The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program. Kolmogorov Smirnov Z test was applied to determine the compatibility of the data to normal distribution. The characteristics of the participants and the scale were determined by the frequency and mean analysis. Since the data did not conform to a normal distribution, the Mann-Whitney U test and Kruskal-Wallis H tests were used to compare situations, depending on the number of variables. The data were evaluated and interpreted at 95% confidence interval and $p < 0.05$ significance level.

RESULTS

It has been determined that the average age of the 251 students was 20.35 ± 2.58 , 53.8% of them were women, 95.6% of them did not have children, 59.8% of them had equal income and expenditure levels, and 83.7% lived in the district. Also, it was determined that 73.7% of the students had a nuclear family, 91.2% had at least one sibling, 76.5% did not experience frequent quarrels at home, and 78.1% did not experience any violence from the family (Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive Characteristics of Students (n = 251)

Property	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Age (Average) 20.35 ± 2.58	251	100.0
Gender		
Female	135	53.8
Male	116	46.2
Presence of Children		
Have	11	4.4
Not having	240	95.6
Income-Expense Level		
Little	62	24.7
Equivalent	150	59.8
Surplus	39	15.5
Living Place		
District	210	83.7
Village	41	16.3
Family Type		
Nuclear family	185	73.7
Extended family	52	20.7
Broken family	14	5.6
Sibling Existence		
Yes	229	91.2
No	22	8.7
Frequent Argument/Struggle in the Family		
Yes	59	23.5
No	192	76.5
Violence from the Family		
Yes	49	19.5
No	196	78.1
Not sure	6	2.4
Total	251	100.0

It was determined that 72.5% of the students had a good communication, 68.9% did not receive training on abuse, and 85.3% wanted to receive training on the subject, and 51.8% were not exposed to abuse. It has been determined that 81.3% of the students found themselves valuable, 69.3% found themselves successful, 43.8% had a tendency to loneliness, and 68.9% did not trust people comfortably (Table 2).

Table 2. Descriptive Characteristics of Abuse (n = 251)

Property	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Communication Status		
Good	182	72.5
Middle	68	27.1
Bad	1	0.4
Education Status on Abuse		
Yes	78	31.1
No	173	68.9
Willingness to Get Training on Abuse		
Yes	214	85.3
No	37	14.7
Thinking he/she Has Been Abused		
Yes	71	28.3
No	130	51.8
Not sure	50	19.9
Finding Oneself Worth		
Yes	204	81.3
No	17	6.8
Not sure	30	12.0
Finding Yourself Successful		
Yes	174	69.3
No	28	11.2
Not sure	49	19.5
Tendency to Loneliness		
Yes	110	43.8
No	108	43.4
Not sure	32	12.7
Trusting People situation		
Yes	47	18.7
No	173	68.9
Not sure	31	12.4
Total	251	100.0

The total score that the students got from the Perceived Emotional Abuse for Adult Scale was 125.67 ± 43.43. The minimum score was 61 and the maximum score was 293 (Table 3).

Table 3. Perceived Emotional Abuse Scale for Adults Total Score (n= 251)

Number (n)	Percentage (%)	Total Score	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
251	100.0	125.67	43.43	61	293

In comparing the students' characteristics and their average scores from the Perceived Emotional Abuse for Adult Scale, a statistically significant difference was determined between the average scores and some variables of "Income-Expense Level" and "Frequent Argument in the Family/Fighting Situation" (p < 0.05) (Table 4).

As Table 4 showed, the lowest scores belong to the ages of 18-20 (123.96 ± 43.24), women (124.84 ± 41.53), having children (107.72 ± 39.42), equal income-expenditure level (119.72 ± 41.41), living in the district (125.60 ± 43.63), having a nuclear family (124.02 ± 41.96), siblings (124.86 ± 42.70), no frequent quarrels in the family (118.92 ± 36.87), and no family violence (116.65 ± 34.49). However, the highest score belongs to those who are subjected to family violence (158.73 ± 47.97).

Table 4. Comparison of the Introductory Characteristics of the Students With the Total Scores of the Perceived Emotional Abuse Scale for Adult Scale (n = 251)

Property	Num. (n)	Per. (%)	Total Score	SD	Min.	Max.	X ² -U	p
Age								
1.18-20 years old	173	68.9	123.96	43.24	67	293	X ² 2.306	0.680
2.21-23 years old	58	23.1	129.32	46.11	61	278		
3.24-26 years old	9	3.6	132.44	45.25	69	188		
4.27-29 years old	8	3.2	132.25	35.53	76	186		
5.30 year and older	3	1.2	125.67	24.97	88	136		
Gender								
1.Female	135	53.8	124.84	41.53	67	293	U	0.953
2.Male	116	46.2	126.64	45.71	61	278	7796.5	
Presence of Children								
1.Have	11	4.4	107.72	39.42	61	162	U	0.146
2.Not having	240	95.6	126.50	43.51	61	293	978.0	
Income-Expense Level								
Little	62	24.7	134.20	36.37	71	243	X ² 8.928	0.012*
Equivalent	150	59.8	119.72	41.41	61	264		
Much	39	15.5	135.02	56.69	67	293		
Living Place								
1. District	210	83.7	125.60	43.63	61	293	U	0.918
2. Village	41	16.3	126.04	42.93	61	241	4261.0	
Family Type								
1. Nuclear family	185	73.7	124.02	41.96	61	278	X ² 0.686	0.710
2.Extended family	52	20.7	129.61	47.21	67	293		
3. Broken family	14	5.6	132.92	49.62	70	243		
Sibling Existence								
1.Yes	229	91.2	124.86	42.70	61	293	U	0.484
2.No	22	8.7	134.09	50.85	72	278	2291.5	
Frequent Argument/Struggle in the Family								
1.Yes	59	23.5	147.66	54.88	61	293	U	0.000*
2.No	192	76.5	118.92	36.87	61	245	3917.0	
Violence from the Family								
1.Yes	49	19.5	158.73	47.97	75	293	X ² 33.961	0.000*
2.No	196	78.1	116.65	37.49	61	278		
3.Not sure	6	2.4	150.50	52.77	91	230		

X²: Kruskal-Wallis, U: Mann-Whitney U, Num: Number, Per: Percentage, Min: Minimum, Max: Maximum *p < 0.05

In comparing the students' introductory features on abuse and other issues with their average scores, a statistically significant difference was determined between the mean scores and the variables of "Thinking of Exposure to Abuse", "Self-Valuing", "Self-Success" and "Tendency to Loneliness" (p < 0.05) (Table 5).

As Table 5 illustrated, the lowest scores was for good communication status (124.58 ± 42.39), getting training about abuse (123.92 ± 44.28), wanting to receive training on abuse (124.33 ± 43.01), not exposed to abuse (116.11 ± 39.25), finding self-valued (119.90 ± 40.26), self-success (117.29 ± 39.83), who had no tendency to loneliness (119.73 ± 43.38), and who were not sure about trusting people (118.58 ± 35.86). But, the highest score was for individuals who do not find themselves valuable (160.82 ± 51.45).

Table 5. Comparison of Students' Introductory Characteristics on Abuse and Other Issues with the Total Scores of the Perceived Emotional Abuse Scale for Adult Scale (n = 251)

Property	Num. (n)	Per. (%)	Total Score	SD	Min.	Max.	X ² -U	p
Communication Status								
1. Good	182	72.5	124.58	42.39	67	264	X ² 0.947	0.623
2. Medium	68	27.1	128.29	46.57	61	293		
3. Weak	1	0.4	146.00					
Education Status on Abuse								
1. Yes	78	31.1	123.92	44.28	61	243	U 6476.0	0.611
2. No	173	68.9	126.46	43.15	67	293		
Willingness to Get Training on Abuse								
1. Yes	214	85.3	124.33	43.01	61	293	U 3429.5	0.293
2. No	37	14.7	133.55	46.29	61	241		
Thinking You Have Been Abused								
1. Yes	71	28.3	131.95	46.82	61	293	X ² 16.604	0.000*
2. No	130	51.8	116.11	39.25	67	245		
3. Not sure	50	19.9	141.62	43.35	70	264		
The Situation of Self-Dignity								
1. Yes	204	81.3	119.90	40.26	61	264	X ² 18.924	0.000*
2. No	17	6.8	160.82	51.45	91	278		
3. Not sure	30	12.0	145.03	45.92	67	293		
Finding Yourself Successful Status								
1. Yes	174	69.3	117.29	39.83	61	264	X ² 22.644	0.000*
2. No	28	11.2	151.50	58.42	75	293		
3. Not sure	49	19.5	140.69	36.24	67	231		
Tendency to Loneliness								
1. Yes	110	43.8	133.17	43.38	61	293	X ² 8.510	0.014*
2. No	109	43.4	119.73	43.38	69	278		
3. Not sure	32	12.7	120.15	41.08	61	231		
Comfortable Trust in People								
1. Yes	47	18.7	138.12	50.03	72	278	X ² 3.351	0.187
2. No	173	68.9	123.56	42.34	61	293		
3. Not sure	31	12.4	118.58	35.86	71	230		

X²: Kruskal-Wallis, U: Mann-Whitney U, Num: Number, Per: Percentage, Min: Minimum, Max: Maximum *p<0.05

DISCUSSION

In this study, it was aimed to determine the level of emotional abuse perceived by university students and the factors affecting this level. In this section, it is aimed to discuss the subject with the support of the literature.

In this study, 28.3% (n=71) of the students thought that they were exposed to abuse. In the study of Bilgen & Karasu, it was determined that 89.7% of the mothers abused/neglected their children even at least one time (Bilgen & Karasu, 2017). According to the report published in 2018 by Acıbadem Mehmet Ali Aydınlar Center for Combating Crime and Violence, Application and Research Center (ASUMA) and the Association for Prevention of Violence and Rehabilitation (IMDAT); The total number of children (ages 0-17) who were subjected to abuse, neglect and violence increased from 74.064 in 2014 to 83.552 in 2016. In the same report, it was stated that the percentage of convicts of child sexual abuse increased from 42.5% in 2006 to 58.8% in 2016 (Asuma & İmdat, 2018).

In this study, the scale score of university students who thought they were exposed to abuse was found to be higher than the students who thought they were not exposed to abuse. This is because; emotional abuse

is seen together with any type of abuse. The abuse that a person experiences at any time in his life continues to exist vividly, despite his advanced age. Situations such as doubting oneself, establishing a relationship, or not being sure of oneself in situations that need to be expressed are also coming accordingly (Ersanlı et al., 2013). A similar result has emerged in our study. The scale score of university students who are not sure about being abused was determined to be higher than the group who thought they were abused and did not think.

A statistically significant difference was found between the variables of income-expenditure level, frequent family arguments/fighting, and family violence and scale total scores. The low level of income and expenditure of the society in general, the fact that violence in the family is seen as a tool in the upbringing and education of the child, or the frequent arguments/fights of the parents, and the children witnessing those problems are emerging as important problems.

There are some risk factors for emotional abuse. These; Parental depression, mental health problems, alcohol / substance addiction, suicide attempt, low self-esteem, low social behavior, financial difficulties, learning difficulties in the child, domestic violence, lack of empathy, and social stress (Dinleyici & Şahin Dağlı, 2016; Doidge et al., 2017; Nelson et al., 2017). It is an indisputable issue that the child who was subjected to violence or witnessed the violence was subjected to physical abuse. It cannot be denied that the child who is exposed to physical abuse also experiences emotional abuse. In the study of Koç et al., It was determined that 24.7% of children were exposed to physical abuse and 11.22% of them also had emotional abuse (Koç et al., 2012).

The scale scores of the students who do not find themselves valuable, who are not successful, and who have a tendency to loneliness were found to be higher than other variables within themselves. At the same time, statistical significance was determined between scale total scores, and these variables. Disruption in the social relations of abused people, psychological disturbances, negative effects on identity formation, the formation of a defensive lifestyle, and aggressive behaviors can occur (Cerniglia et al., 2017; Ersanlı et al., 2013). The abused child feels worthless, helpless, defenseless, and unsuccessful. These negative emotions continue in adulthood. In adulthood, the individual experiences psychological, social, and behavioral difficulties (Dinleyici & Şahin Dağlı, 2016).

Abuse is a problem that requires a multidisciplinary approach and concerns all segments of society (Küçük et al., 2017). Emotional abuse is especially important because it is difficult to diagnose and is seen together with other types of abuse and neglect. The emotional abuse applied by the individual who has power and rights over the child in childhood significantly affects the psychological development of the child. The reason for this is that especially during adolescence, the child is far from parental support and supervision, and is deprived of love and care (Burç, 2014; Grossman et al., 2017).

Parental rejection, humiliation, intimidation, loneliness, immorality, exploitation, inaccessibility, unemotional, insecure inconsistent behaviors can lead to depression, passive or aggressive attitude, nail sucking, abduction, eating disorders, fear, suicide, loneliness, learning disorders, behavioral disorders, constant anxiety, delay in mental development, feeling worthless and unsuccessful cause feelings and behaviors in child/adolescent (Kocaer, 2006; Paslı, 2019; Sanchez-Garcia et al., 2018).

The basis for preventing abuse and neglect is education and awareness. In this context, with the aim of training; home visits, family training, the establishment of parent-focused centers in risky areas, constant communication with the pediatrician, increasing family-child contact, getting the support of social service institutions, providing free transportation or training for prenatal and postnatal child care, case management and psychotherapy can be applied (Fry et al., 2018; Kılıç & Özçetin, 2018).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

According to the results of the study, the level of emotional abuse perceived by the students was determined as near to moderate level. Participants' 'Income-Expense Level', 'Frequent Argument/Struggle in the Family', 'Violence from the Family', 'Thinking You Have Been Abused', 'The Situation of Self-Dignity', 'Finding Your Successful Status' and 'Tendency to Loneliness' variables were determined as factors affecting emotional abuse. The important point to note here is that most of the variables are related to family problems, violence and income level. Many of these problems that occur in childhood continue to live in the individual in adulthood.

Recommendations;

Emotional abuse lasts a lifetime when compared to other types of abuse. Professional support should be sought in this regard when deemed necessary.

Abuse, which is an important public health problem, should be addressed with more up-to-date data. If necessary, it should be taught as a course in schools and/or universities, this issue should be emphasized more in symposiums, trainings and congresses, and public education should be done.

LIMITATIONS

This study is limited to the Vocational School of Health Services students who are studying at a university where the data collected.

Financial Support

No financial support.

Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

Design: U.K., Data Collection or Processing: U.K., S.I., B.Ö., Analysis or Interpretation: U.K., Literature Search: S.I., B.Ö., Writing: U.K., S.I., B.Ö.

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