

## ARAŞTIRMA


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## RESEARCH

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## An Investigation of the Homophobia Levels of University Students in terms of Stigma and Gender Roles

Üniversite Öğrencilerinin Homofobi Düzeylerinin Damgalama ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet Rollerini Açısından İncelenmesi

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**ABSTRACT**

This study aimed to examine the homophobia levels of university students in terms of stigma and gender roles. The study sample includes 174 women (72.5%) and 66 men (27.5%), totaling 240 students from the Psychological Counselling and Guidance Department of a state university in a big city. The data were collected through the Personal Information Form, Stigma Scale, Gender Roles Attitude Scale, and Hudson and Ricketts Homophobia Scale. In the analysis of the data, Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient and multiple relational regression analysis were used. The findings suggested that university students who are male have a higher tendency to stigmatize others and homophobia levels and have a relatively traditional attitude than female students. It was found that homophobia level was positively correlated with stigma and sex but negatively correlated with gender roles. Accordingly, men, those with traditional gender roles, and those with high stigmatization tendencies have significantly higher homophobia levels. In addition, stigma and traditional gender roles have been found to predict homophobia in university students. However, the gender variable is not a significant predictor of homophobia.

**Article Info****Keywords**

Homophobia, stigma, gender roles, university student

**Anahtar Kelimeler**

Homofobi, damgalanma, cinsiyet rolleri, üniversite öğrencisi

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**ÖZET**

Bu çalışmanın amacı, üniversite öğrencilerinin homofobi düzeylerini damgalama, toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri ve cinsiyet açısından incelemektir. Araştırmanın örneklemini, bir büyük şehirde bulunan devlet üniversitesinin Psikolojik Danışma ve Rehberlik bölümünde öğrenim gören 174'ü kadın (%72.5) ve 66'sı erkek (%27.5) olmak üzere toplam 240 öğrenci oluşturmaktadır. Veri toplama araçları olarak Kişisel Bilgi Formu, Damgalama (Stigma) Ölçeği, Toplumsal Cinsiyet Rollerini Tutum Ölçeği ile Hudson ve Ricketts Homofobi Ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Verilerin analizinde Pearson Momentler Çarpımı Korelasyon tekniği ile Çoklu İlişkisel Regresyon analizi kullanılmıştır. Bulgulara göre, biyolojik cinsiyeti erkek olan üniversite öğrencilerinin, kadın olanlara göre homofobi ile damgalama eğilimlerinin daha yüksek olduğu ve görece geleneksel tutuma sahip oldukları görülmüştür. Homofobi düzeyi, damgalama ve cinsiyet ile pozitif; toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri ile negatif yönde anlamlı olarak ilişkilidir. Buna göre erkekler, cinsiyet rolü geleneksel olanlar ve damgalama eğilimi yüksek olanların homofobi düzeyleri anlamlı derecede daha yüksektir. Additionally, stigma and traditional gender role predict homophobia in university students; It was determined that the gender variable did not predict the level of homophobia.

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## INTRODUCTION

LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) individuals are alienated in many societies, and they are stigmatized and humiliated due to their identity. It can be considered a crime against humanity when the majority of a society with a heterosexual identity acts intolerantly and displays homophobic reactions to identities that are different from theirs. Homophobia is a type of xenophobia, which is expressed as intense fear from individuals who are different from oneself or who do not conform to norms, and which is defined as phobia towards strangers. Xenophobia is the fear or hatred of individuals who are different from themselves in a way, and it is formed by the thought of believing that what is contrarian is dangerous (Sanberk, Çelik & Gök, 2016). The concept of homophobia, which was first introduced by the American psychotherapist George Weinberg in 1972, generally includes negative prejudices, feelings, attitudes, and behaviors towards people with different sexual orientations such as homosexuality (Herek, 2007; Madžarević & Soto-Sanfiel, 2018). It can also be described as a tendency that includes negative evaluations and hostile attitudes towards homosexuals. These negative evaluations may include cognitive (e.g., humiliating stereotyping), affective (e.g., loathing), and behavioral (e.g., staying away) tendencies (Sielert & Timmermans, 2011).

Considering the studies recently conducted on homophobia in our country, it was seen that male and female students have negative opinions about homosexual athletes in some parameters despite having positive thoughts about them (Saraç & Rahim, 2009), the representations of sexual orientations differ according to the participants' acquaintance levels with homosexual/bisexual/transgender people (Şah, 2011). High homophobia and low acquaintance levels are associated with more negative definitions (Şah, 2012), the opinions of male and female students differ towards homosexual male athletes but there is no difference in their opinions against homosexual female athletes (Saraç, 2013). Homophobia scores of university students differ significantly in terms of sex and gender role (Sanberk, Çelik & Gök, 2016), and the level of homophobia increases as the democratic attitude of their parents which the students perceive decreases (Emrem, 2017). Homophobia levels of school counselors and their attitudes towards homosexual people differ in terms of their level of acquaintance with homosexual people (Arık, 2017), there is a significant and negative relationship between the athlete identity levels of male athletes and their total attitude scores towards lesbians, gays and lesbians and gays (Saraç & Toprak, 2017) and the group guidance program applied to teachers reduces teachers' homophobia attitude scores for a long time (Ummak & Bilgin, 2017).

When the relationship between masculinity and internalized homophobia in homosexual men is examined conformity to masculine norms and threats to masculinity contingency were stronger predictors of internalized homophobia (Thepsourinthone, Dune, Liamputtong & Arora, 2020). In another study, it was found that the long-term effects of homophobic stigmatization in adolescence continue into adulthood (Bos, Carone, Rothblum, Koh & Gartrell, 2021). Homophobic attitudes and exposure to homophobic bullying are predictors of homophobic bullying (Orue & Calvete, 2018). Homophobia with masculine norms had a significant positive correlation (Nancy, 2022).

Stigma is the characterization of a person as defective or worthless by the society in which they live because they do not conform to the criteria of the society (Karagöl, Çalışkan & Beyazyüz, 2013). Despite being scientifically proven by studies that sexual orientation is not a medical disorder, homosexuals are still defined and stigmatized as sick or abnormal in societies, and efforts

to change their identities into heterosexuals continue. Even if people are enlightened, their prejudices about sexual identities do not change quickly, and the adoption of groundless information is faster (Bilgiç-Çelik & Hotun-Şahin, 2012). Homosexual individuals, one of the groups that are subjected to prejudice and discrimination, come up against many social and psychological problems such as alienation and stigma (Herek, 2007), being exposed to verbal and physical assault (Herek, 1989), and not being able to disclose their sexual orientation (Herek, 1995). Moreover, individuals grow up by internalizing the gender roles of the societies in which they grow. While this situation brings along the discrimination between men and women, it can also result in the learning of prejudices about different sexual identities.

Sex is the classification of an individual as male or female in terms of genetic, hormonal, and anatomical characteristics. Gender is the psychological and cultural side of biological sex. Attitudes, behaviors, and personality traits associated with the social role of male or female refer to gender roles (Shechner, 2010). Gender includes the status of women and men in society, the appropriate roles for them, their duties and responsibilities, their position, how society perceives the individual, and their expectations (Sancar et al., 2006). Gender roles are expressed independently of biological sex and role patterns constructed through femininity and masculinity in the socialization process (Dökmen, 2004; Seçgin & Tural, 2011). Violation of gender roles is seen as a violation of the roles defined for males and females. For this reason, sexual identities such as gay and lesbian are not welcomed because they do not conform to approved gender roles (Karaman, Alagöz & Fidan, 2022). However, sex is determined by nature while gender is determined by culture. Accordingly, contrary to biological sex, gender differences are formed by social structuring and it is possible to change it (Öngen & Aytac, 2013).

When the related literature is reviewed, it is seen that there are significant relationships between homophobia and sex (Fisher et al., 2017; Hatibovic, Bobowik, Faundez & Sandoval, 2017; Mestvirishvili et al., 2017), sexism (Castromonte & Grijalva, 2017; Sakallı, 2002; Stark, 1991), gender role (Sanberk, Çelik & Gök, 2016) and negative attitudes (Şah, 2012; Güney, Kargı & Chorbacı Oruç, 2004). Studies that are carried out on homophobia in Turkey are very limited when compared to the ones conducted in the Western literature. Despite being the subject of more and more studies in recent years as the concept of homophobia needs to be investigated more scientifically, anti-homosexual attitudes are generally discussed from a psychological and sociological point of view in these studies. However, LGBT individuals encounter discriminatory behaviors and prejudices in all areas of life (Orta & Camgöz, 2018). In particular, examining the concept of homophobia, which is not sufficiently examined in the domestic literature, together with the variables of stigmatization and gender roles will fill an important vacancy by making an original contribution.

The primary purpose of this study is to investigate the homophobia levels of university students in terms of the levels of stigma and gender roles. In line with this purpose, the following subgoals have been set off;

1. Is there a significant difference between the female and male university students' scores of homophobia, stigma, and gender roles?
2. Do university students' levels of stigma, gender roles, and sex predict their homophobia levels significantly?

## METHODS

### Research Design

This study, which aims to investigate to what extent university students' scores of stigma and gender roles attitude and their sexualities predict their homophobia levels, is designed as a correlational study.

### Participants

The participants of the study consisted of 240 college students, 174 of whom were female (72.5%) and 66 of whom were male (27.5%), who were studying at the Department of Psychological Counseling and Guidance Department at a state university in a big city. The ages of the students in the study group ranged from 18 to 41 ( $\bar{X}=20.71$ ;  $sd=2.16$ ) and 59.6% of them stated that they lived and grew up in the city, 24.2% in the district, 3.3% in the town and 12.9% in the village. Of the participants, 65.8 % stated that they are acquainted with or know individuals having different sexual identities. 79.6% of these students indicated that they belong to a nuclear family, 18.3% belong to an extended family and 2.1% belong to another family type. It was understood from the declarations of the students that the fathers of 80.4% of the students were employed and the mothers of 84.6% of them were unemployed.

### Data Collection

**Personal Information Form** This form included questions regarding the participants' age, gender, family type, whether or not they have a homosexual, etc acquaintance, and whether their parents work or not.

**The Stigma Scale.** The Stigma Scale was developed by Yaman and Güngör (2013) to measure stigma tendency. The scale consists of 22 items and 4 sub-dimensions of labeling, psychological well-being, discrimination alienation, and prejudice. The highest score that can be obtained from a 5-point Likert-type scale (1=I completely disagree, 5=I completely agree) is 110 and the lowest score is 22. Getting a score lower than 55 on the scale indicates that the participant has a low level of stigma tendency and a score higher than 55 indicates that the participant has a high level of stigma tendency. The scale item correlations varied between .31 and .52. The Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of the scale is 0.84, the Spearman-Brown correlation coefficient is 0.85, and the Guttman split-half value is 0.85.

**The Homophobia Scale of Hudson and Ricketts.** It was developed by Hudson and Ricketts (1980) to measure attitudes towards homosexual individuals. The scale has 25 items in its original form. However, the 24-item form which, was adapted into Turkish by Sakallı and Uğurlu (2001), was used in this particular research. Getting a high score on this 6-point Likert-type scale (1=I completely disagree, 6=I completely agree) shows that the participant has a high level of homophobia. 10 items in the scale are scored reversely (5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 13, 17, 18, 23 and 24). The internal consistency coefficient of the scale is .94.

**Gender Roles Attitude Scale.** The scale was developed by Zeyneloğlu and Terzioğlu (2011) to determine the university students' attitudes towards gender roles. The scale consists of 5 sub-dimensions of equalitarian, female, role in marriage, traditional and male gender roles. The scale is a 5-point Likert-type scale (1=I completely disagree, 5=I completely agree) with 38 items. The items about traditional attitudes are scored reversely. The lowest score, which is obtained from the

scale, shows that the participant has a traditional attitude towards gender roles, and the highest score, which is obtained from the scale, indicates that the participant has an equalitarian attitude. The scale item correlations varied between .39 and .92. Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of the scale is .92.

### Data Analysis

The research is designed as a correlational study. The data collection tools of the research are the Personal Information Form, The Stigma Scale, The Gender Roles Attitudes Scale, and The Homophobia Scale of Hudson and Rickett. The data of the research was analyzed by using the SPSS 22 program. First, skewness and kurtosis values were examined. In Table 1, kurtosis and skewness values between -1.5 and +1.5 indicate that the data are normally distributed (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics of scale and subscales**

<i>Variables</i>	<i>N</i>	$\bar{X}$	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>
Homophobia	240	74.15	26.61	.37	-.49
Stigma	240	41.68	9.14	.37	-.15
Gender roles	240	158.14	12.97	-.84	-.01
Sex (Dummy)	240	.28	.45	1.02	-.98

Therefore, following the t-test analysis, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Analysis was conducted to investigate the probable relationships between the variables in addition to Multiple Regression Analysis, which was carried out to investigate whether the students' levels of stigma and gender role attitudes and their sexes predict the homophobia level. Sex was added to the regression analysis as the dummy variable, and its common effect was obtained in this way. The results of the multiple correlation test present that the stigma and gender tolerance values are .553 for stigma, .486 for gender roles, and .782 for the dummy variable. When Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values are considered, it is seen that VIF values are 1.808 for stigma, 2.059 for gender roles, and 1.278 for the dummy variable. TO values are lower than .10 and VIF values are lower than 10 so the variables meet these assumptions. The results of the analysis show that the Durbin-Watson coefficient, which ranges between 1.5 and 2.5, is 1.989 in this study. This value is considered normal, and it was concluded that there was no autocorrelation. A value of .05 was taken as a criterion for the significance level of the findings.

## RESULTS

In this section, firstly, homophobia, stigmatization and gender roles attitude scores, which are the variables in the study, were analyzed in terms of sex. After the relationships between these variables had been analyzed, findings on whether university students' homophobia levels are predicted by stigma, gender role attitudes and sex were presented. Table 2 shows the results of the t-test conducted to determine whether the scores of the participant university students obtained from the Homophobia Scale of Hudson and Ricketts, Stigma Scale, and Gender Roles Attitude Scale differ by gender.

**Table 2. t-test results of the scores of homophobia, stigma, and gender role attitudes by sex**

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>N</i>	$\bar{X}$	<i>d</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Homophobia	Female	174	68.88	25.63	-5.247	.000
	Male	66	88.03	24.18		
Stigma	Female	174	39.82	8.59	-5.389	.000
	Male	66	46.56	8.81		
Gender Role Attitudes	Female	174	161.86	10.56	8.127	.000
	Male	66	148.35	13.68		

\*:  $p < .05$ , \*\*:  $p < .01$

When Table 2 is considered, it is seen that the scores of homophobia ( $t = -5.25$ ,  $p < .05$ ), stigma ( $t = -5.39$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and gender roles attitude ( $t = 8.13$ ,  $p < .05$ ) differ significantly according to the sexuality. The mean scores of homophobia ( $\bar{X} = 88.03$ ) and stigmatization ( $\bar{X} = 46.56$ ) of male students are higher than the mean scores of homophobia ( $\bar{X} = 68.88$ ) and stigmatization ( $\bar{X} = 39.82$ ) of female students. When the mean scores of gender roles are analyzed, the mean scores of female students (161.86) are higher than the mean scores of male students (148.35). Accordingly, it is seen that male students have higher homophobia and stigmatization tendencies and have more traditional attitudes than female students.

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis which was conducted to investigate the relationships between the participants' scores of stigma, gender roles, and sexualities, and their scores of homophobia are presented in Table 3. When Table 3 is considered, it is seen that there are positively (linear) significant relationships between scores obtained from the Homophobia Scale of Hudson and Ricketts and the Stigma Scale. This finding shows that the scores obtained from the Homophobia Scale of Hudson and Ricketts go up in parallel with the ones obtained from the Stigma Scale. When Table 2 is considered again, it is seen that there are negatively (linear) significant relationships between scores obtained from the Homophobia Scale of Hudson and Ricketts and the Gender Roles Attitude Scale.

**Table 3. Mean, standard deviation, and correlation values for the study variables**

<i>Variables</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
Homophobia (1)	-			
Stigma (2)	** .61	-		
Gender Role Attitudes (3)	** -.57	** -.67	-	
Sex (Dummy) (4)	** .32	** .33	** -.47	-

\*:  $p < .05$ , \*\*:  $p < .01$

This finding shows that the scores obtained from the Gender Roles Attitude Scale go down as the scores obtained from the Homophobia Scale of Hudson and Ricketts go up. Finally, it is observed that there are positive (linear) relationships between the scores obtained from the

Homophobia Scale of Hudson and Ricketts and the variable of sex. Accordingly, homophobia is correlated with being a male.

When Table 3 is considered, it is seen that correlation values between the independent variables were at significant levels. The results of the Multiple Linear Regression Analysis, which was conducted to determine the predictive power of the scores obtained from the Stigma Scale and Gender Roles Attitude Scale on the scores obtained from the Homophobia Scale, are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4. Standard multiple regression analysis results of the prediction of homophobia**

<i>Variables</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Binary r</i>	<i>Partial r</i>
Constant	106.667	28.93	-	3.687	.000	-	-
Stigma	1.221	.193	.419	6.321	.000	.614	.381
Gender role attitudes	-.534	.145	-.260	-3.675	.000	-.569	-.233
Sex	3.715	3.317	.062	1.120	.264	.322	.073

$R = .65, R^2 = .43, R^2_{adjusted} = .42, F_{(3, 236)} = 58.303, p = .00$

When Table 3 is considered, the variables of stigma and gender role attitudes together give a high and significant relationship with the scores of homophobia ( $R^2=0.43, p<.01$ ). These two variables together explain approximately 42% of the total variance in homophobia. According to the standardized regression coefficient ( $\beta$ ), the relative importance of the predictor variables on homophobia are stigma and gender role attitudes. However, the variable of sex does not predict homophobia significantly ( $p=.264$ ).

## DISCUSSION

In this study, the findings about three variables of this study, primarily homophobia, stigma, and gender role attitudes, have been evaluated according to the sex of the participants. The result of the analysis has presented that university students who are biologically male have a higher tendency to stigmatize with homophobia than females and they also have a relatively more traditional attitude than female students. Bakır Ayğar, Gündoğdu & Ayğar (2015) investigated the attitudes of the students studying at the faculty of education towards homosexuals and they concluded that female students' attitudes were more positive and their homophobia levels were lower than male students. When stigmatization tendency is discussed, it stands out that males are similarly more stigmatizing than females (Güngör, 2013; Sevim, 2018). Mitrani-Akdaş (2008), and Sungur & Yalnız (1999) found in their studies that male participants in the studies had higher negative attitude scores towards both female and male homosexuals than female participants. This may be due to male participants' perception of LGBT identities as a threat to their identity, or it may be due to suppressed homosexuality. When the attitudes towards homosexual individuals are looked over, it has been seen that people generally have negative attitudes, thoughts, manners, and feelings towards homosexuals of the same sexuality, and it has been found that males have a much more negative approach to homosexuality and male homosexuality than women (Çabuk 2010; Çelik & Şahin 2012; Davies 2004; Sadıç & Beydağ, 2018).

In this particular study, male participants with higher levels of stigma and homophobia have a relatively more traditional attitude in terms of the relationship between sex and gender roles. Eslen-Ziya and Koç (2016) focused in their research on the experience of being a homosexual man in Turkey and they presented that males' lives and discourses about being a male are shaped by culture and are influenced by traditional gender roles. Kara (2019) conducted a study about the relationship between gender roles and homophobia and found that there are positive and significant relationships between traditional roles in groups with high homophobia levels. In another study, data shows that male participants were significantly more homophobic and sexist than female participants (Stark, 1991).

Stigmatization is quite a harmful experience for individuals and societies (Yaman & Güngör, 2013). In the social culture that consecrates heterosexism and accepts individuals who stay outside the heterosexual matrix as sexual minorities, discriminatory practices resulting from homophobia are increasing gradually and homosexuality is becoming a stigmatized category (Özcan Elçi, 2018; Göregenli & Karakuş, 2011). Therefore, we investigated the homophobia levels of university students in terms of stigmatization and gender roles in our study and we concluded that there was a positive and significant relationship between homophobia and stigmatization, as was expected. Metin Orta and Metin Camgöz (2018) dealt with 35 scientific articles on homophobia with a sample in Turkey, and they obtained a general result suggesting that attitudes towards homosexuals are negative in Turkey.

When the relationship between homophobia and gender roles attitude is a matter of fact, it is observed that there is a significantly negative relationship between them. Accordingly, the participants start to have traditional gender role attitudes as their level of homophobia goes up. Traditional gender role refers to the roles and responsibilities that are imposed by society on females and males (Zeyneloğlu, 2008). Spoden (1993) claims that homophobia is associated with the strict gender role stereotypes that society assigns to the sexes. Stark (1991) stated that traditional gender roles are associated with high levels of homophobia; Polimeni et al. (2000) expressed that males with high levels of homophobia have traditional gender roles; Sanberk, Çelik and Gök presented that homophobia scores of masculine individuals increased significantly; Hetzel (2011) concluded that there was a relationship between the traditional gender role and the concept of heterosexism, which rejects and stigmatizes non-heterosexual identities (Herek, 1990).

According to another finding obtained in this research, stigmatization predicted homophobia positively while gender roles predicted the attitude negatively. It was also found that the variable of sex was not a significant predictor. The existence of homophobia brings along stigmatization in societies the majority of which are heterosexual, and this was also concluded in the light of the studies that were conducted. In addition, it can be stated that gender predicts homophobia negatively and this is a positive change in terms of gender roles.

In other words, it can be mentioned that the adoption of androgenicity-based gender roles provides a reduction in the level of homophobia. However, when the studies conducted are investigated, it is seen that the homophobia levels of males are higher than females (Okutan & Büyükşahin-Sunal, 2011; Sanberk, Çelik & Gök, 2016; Kara, 2018; Madžarević & Soto-Sanfiel, 2018; Balcı, Durmuş & Timur, 2019); Yalçın, 2019). Tuna (2019) conducted a study and investigated psychological counselors' and psychologists' attitudes toward lesbian and gay individuals and the predictors of their attitudes. Similar to our study, it was concluded that there



was no significant difference between the attitudes of the participants in terms of sexuality. Therefore, this finding may be related to the fact that the samples of both studies consisted of psychological counselors or psychologists and the majority of the participants were female.

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### **Author Contributions**

The authors contributed equally to this article.

### **Conflict of Interest**

No conflict of interest has been declared by the authors.

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