

SELF-ESTEEM AND CONFORMISM OF FEMALE STUDENTS AS PREDICTORS OF EXPERIENCED VIOLENCE BY PARTNER

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Abstract

Violence in partner relationship is a serious social problem. People in relationships could be victim to different forms of physical, psychological or sexual violence. There can be numerous consequences of such relationship, so it is crucial to thoroughly examine the problem and prevention measures. The goal of this research is to examine whether partner violence in female students can be predicted based on their self-esteem and conformism. Self-esteem is defined as evaluative part of self-image that is reflected throughout positive and negative feelings towards self and indicates the level of confidence, worth and value, whereas conformism is a personality trait characterized by passive acceptance of standards and values of relevant social group, without prior critical analysis.

The sample consisted of 180 female students from Faculty of Philosophy in Nis, who have been in a relationship within past six months. Questionnaire of experienced violent behavior in partner relationship (Ajdukovic, Löw and Susac, 2011) was used, that contains sub scales for assessment of physical, psychological and sexual violence; self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965) and conformism scale (Pantic, 1981) were used also.

The applied linear regression analysis showed, that the examined indicative variables account for 7.7% variance of experienced psychological violence ($R=.296$, $R^2=.077$, $p<.000$), and that both self-esteem ($\beta = -.197$ $p < .008$) and conformism ($\beta = .183$ $p < .014$) are statistically significant predictors. For experienced physical violence the examined variables account for 12.1% variance ($R=.361$, $R^2=.121$, $p<.000$) and again both self-esteem ($\beta = -.261$, $p < .000$) and conformism ($\beta = .200$ $p < .006$) are statistically significant predictors. The scale used on a sample for sexual abuse assessment turned out to be unreliable, and as such it was omitted from further analysis. Cronbach's alpha coefficients was .518.

Even though there was not high enough percentage of explained variance, the obtained results showed that experienced physical and psychological violence in female students' partner relationships can be predicted based on their self-esteem and conformism. The direction of Beta coefficients showed that contribution of these variables were different. The experienced partner violence in female students will be higher if they have lower self-esteem and higher conformism.

Keywords: *Violence, partner relationship, self-esteem, conformism.*

1. Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is the violence that happens in a close relationship often categorized by cohabitation, marriage, or dating and it represents widespread, but preventable, public health problem. Adolescence and early adulthood are particularly vulnerable times characterized by the exploration of romantic relationships, sexuality, identity, and values. Indeed, 71% of female and 58% of male IPV victims first experience IPV before age 25 years (Breiding, Smith, Basile, Walters, Chen & Merrick, 2014). IPV encompasses physical, psychological, and sexual abuse. Physical violence involves forceful physical contact that may vary from light pushes and slaps to severe beatings and lethal violence. Sexual abuse includes coercive and physical behaviors varying from trying to persuade someone to perform a sexual act against their will, ignoring "no" responses, to physically forced sex acts (Teten, Hall, & Capaldi, 2009; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000) Psychological violence is the dominant, most important and most common form of violence and is used to establish control (Babović, Ginić, Vuković, 2003; Ignjatović, 2011) The term psychological aggression (or emotional abuse) refers to acting in an offensive or degrading manner toward another, usually verbally, and may include threats, shouting, cursing, insulting, degrading, ignoring, forbidding visiting (O'Leary & Maiuro, 2001). Some degree of psychological abuse, at least at a minor or occasional level, is very common (Shortt, Capaldi, Kim, Kerr, Owen, Feingold, 2011). Consequences of IPV victimization and perpetration can be severe and long-lasting and include depression, substance abuse, antisocial behavior, disordered eating, and suicidal ideation (Banyard & Cross, 2008; Bonomi, Anderson, Nemeth, Rivara, & Buettner, 2013). Given the

substantial health consequences, identifying factors that put individuals at risk for involvement in IPV is essential to creating effective prevention strategies. Organized by levels of a dynamic developmental systems perspective, risk factors for intimate partner violence included (a) contextual characteristics of partners (demographic, neighborhood, community, and school factors), (b) developmental characteristics and behaviors of the partners (e.g., family, peer, psychological/behavioral, and cognitive factors), and (c) relationship influences and interactional patterns (Capaldi, Knoble, Shortt, Kim, 2012). In this paper we deal with some of the psychological factors that may be associated with partner violence. More precisely, we wanted to examine the relationship of self-esteem and conformity with the perception of partner violence in relationship.

Self-esteem is defined as a subjective experience of one's own value, expressed by attitudes about yourself; that is, the degree to which a person believes that he/she is competent, successful, significant and valuable (Copersmith, 1967). According to Coopersmith, self-esteem has four constructs: (a) success, comprised of power, significance, virtue, and competence, internally defined by one's perception of accomplishment; (b) values or importance one places on a situation; (c) aspirations or personal and public goals an individual establishes for self; and (d) defenses or ability to resist devaluation of one's self-esteem. Block and Robins (1993), observing the importance of the link between the real and the desired image of themselves, suggest that self-esteem is defined as the degree to which a person sees himself as a closer to the ideal, that is, away from an unwanted image of himself. Considered a personality trait, it is referred to as general self-esteem and been shown to be a stable variable throughout adulthood (Neiss, Sedikides, & Stevenson, 2002). Coopersmith (1967), based on a three-year longitudinal study, concludes that the general estimate of one's own value reaches in early adolescence and remains relatively stable and durable over a period of several years. It also states that sudden changes can reduce (or increase) self-esteem, but it returns to the normal level when the conditions get 'normal' and a typical level. Depending on whether our experiences, starting from early childhood, generally positive or negative, we will build our own view of ourselves. Low self-esteem shows that people have many negative beliefs about themselves (Newark, Elsässer, and Stieglitz, 2016). The longitudinal study of Block and Robins (1993), which monitored changes in the development of self-esteem from adolescence to adulthood, provides information on differences in the self-esteem of men and girls. Although the results pointed to the invariability of self-esteem over the years, there was a tendency for a young man to increase self-esteem and to decrease in girls. The authors this difference explains the greater cultural pressure on young men to be more active, more productive, while the role of women in the society is much more passive.

Conformism is defined as accepting the behavior of a group or majority because a group requires and expects such behavior or because it simply presents it as a way of behaving. Conformism, therefore, exists not only when there is a direct or indirect pressure of the group, but also when, the behavior of the majority is accepted without thinking and without assessing its justification (Rot, 1999). Conformity is usually quite adaptive overall, both for the individuals who conform and for the group as a whole. Conforming to the opinions of others can help us enhance and protect ourselves by providing us with important and accurate information and can help us better relate to others (Stangor, Jhangiani, Tarry, 2014). There are only small differences between men and women in the amount of conformity they exhibit, and these differences are influenced as much by the social situation in which the conformity occurs as by gender differences themselves (Stangor, Jhangiani, Tarry, 2014). In some studies, however, it has been confirmed that women are more conformable than men (Costanzo and Shaw, 1966, according to: Šuković, 1986). The observed gender differences in conformity have social explanations—namely that women are socialized to be more caring about the desires of others—but there are also evolutionary explanations. Men may be more likely to resist conformity to demonstrate to women that they are good mates (Stangor, Jhangiani, Tarry, 2014). Margaret Mead (Mead, 1949, according to Rot, 1999) considers that the greater conformity in women is an integral part of the gender roles, acquired and imposed since childhood. In almost all cultures, girls learn to listen, to obey and not to stand out independently.

2. Design

The research was conducted in 2018 at the Faculty of Philosophy in Nis. The sample consisted of 180 students, aged 19-25 ($M=20.94$, $SD=1.44$). In the last six months, all students had experience of a partner relationship before testing. This was a condition for completing the questionnaire on the experience of violence. Prior to testing, all respondents received a formal consent to participate in the research.

3. Objectives

The subject of this research is to investigate the relationship between self-esteem, conformism and experienced violence in partner relationship. The specific goals were:

- Examine the expression of self-esteem and conformism of female students and their experience of partner violence-psychological, physical and sexual
- Examine the correlations between self-esteem, conformism and the experience of partner violence
- Examine whether partner violence in female students can be predicted based on their self-esteem and conformism.

4. Instruments

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). The scale consisted of 10 items. Participants were requested to indicate the extent of their agreement or disagreement with each of these 10 statements using a 5-point scale from 1-strongly disagrees to 5-strongly agree. Example items: "Generally speaking, I'm satisfied with myself". Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .769.

Conformism scale (Pantic, 1981). The scale consisted of 5 items. Participants were requested to indicate the extent of their agreement or disagreement with each of these 5 statements using a 5-point scale from 1-strongly disagree to 5 - strongly agree. Example item: „I try to be as less as possible different from the others “. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .669.

Questionnaire of experienced violent behavior in partner relationship (Ajdukovic, Löw and Susac, 2011). The scale contains sub scales for assessment of psychological (19 items), physical (7 items) and sexual violence (4 items). Participants were asked to indicate how many times their partner behaved in these ways on a scale of 0 (not once) to 5 (very often, several times a week). Examples of the items are: "The young man insulted me (psychological violence)", "The young man twisted my arm and roughly pulled my hair (physical violence)", "The young man threatened me to coerce me into sexual intercourse (sexual violence". Cronbach's alpha coefficients were: a sub scale for assessing psychological violence .891; a sub scale for assessing physical violence .897; a sub scale for assessing sexual violence .518. Due to low reliability on the sample, the scale for assessing sexual violence is exempt from further analysis.

5. Results

The following tables show obtained the results.

Table 1. Descriptive statistic.

	N	MIN	MAX	M	SD
Self-esteem	180	2,50	5.00	4.08	0.55
Conformism	180	1.08	4.15	2.22	0.56
Experienced psychological violence	180	0.00	2.74	0.43	0.52
Experienced physical violence	180	0.00	3.43	0.18	0.52

The obtained data show that the mean value for self-esteem is shifted to higher values (AS = 4.08) on the scale from 1 to 5. The mean value for conformism is grouped around lower values, (AS = 2.22). The mean values for experienced psychological and experienced physical violence are very low and amount to 0.43 (experienced psychological violence) and 0.18 (experienced physical violence).

Table 2. Correlations between self-esteem, conformism and experienced psychological and physical violence.

		Experienced psychological violence	Experienced physical violence
Self-esteem	r	-.23	-.30
	p	.001	.000
Conformism	r	.22	.25
	p	.001	.000

All examined correlations show statistical significance. A negative correlation between the height of self-esteem and experienced psychological and physical violence in partner relationships was identified. Positive correlation exists between conformism and experienced psychological and physical violence. All examined correlations are relatively low.

Table 3. *Self-esteem and conformism as predictors experienced psychological and physical violence.*

	Experienced psychological violence		Model	Experienced physical violence		Model
	Beta	p		Beta	p	
Self-esteem	-.197	.008	R=.296	-.261	.000	R=.361
Conformism	.183	.014	R²=.077 p<.000	.200	.006	R²=.121 p<.000

The results of linear regression analysis show that both self-esteem and conformism are significant predictors of experienced psychological and physical violence. The direction of the Beta coefficient indicates that the lower self-esteem increases the probability of the experienced of psychological and physical violence. On the other hand, the greater conformity increases the probability of the experienced of psychological and physical violence. Examined predictors could explain 7.7% variance of experienced psychological violence and 12.1% variance of experienced physical violence.

6. Discussion and conclusion

The main goal of this paper was to investigate the relationship between self-esteem, conformism and experienced psychological and physical violence female students in romantic relationship by partner. The main goal was broken down into several specific and narrower goals: first to determine the correlations of variables, and then to investigate whether partner violence in female students can be predicted based on their self-esteem and conformism.

The results of descriptive statistics are in favour of the high agreement with the items that are the manifestations of self-esteem. The level of agreement with the items that are the indicators of conformism indicates low conformism female students. The level of agreement with the items that are the indicators of experienced psychological and physical violence is extremely low. This means that the female students have little experience with these forms of violence in partner relationships. The results are in line with the results of the research on the Croatian sample of high school students using the same questionnaire for assessing partner violence (Ajdukovic, Low, Susac, 2011). The average frequency of experienced psychological and violence is found in the lower part of the possible results on the questionnaire.

After examining the correlations between self-esteem, conformism and partner violence, we noticed a relatively similar connection between self-esteem and conformism with experienced psychological violence, and self-esteem and conformism with experienced physical violence. The results show a negative correlation between of self-esteem and the experienced psychological and physical violence. In other words, female students with lower self-esteem experience more violence by partners. As for the association between low self-esteem and violence victimization, several examples are observed within literature (O'Moore & Kirkham, 2001; Slee & Rigby, 1993, Papadakaki, Tzamalouka, Chatzifotiu, Chliaoutakis, 2009). Conformism is in a positive relation with experienced psychological and physical violence. This would mean that people who are more submissive to the authorities and accept the opinion of the majority can more often experience violence by partner.

After reviewing the results of the linear regression analysis, it was determined that both self-esteem and conformism are statistically significant predictors of experienced psychological and physical violence by partner. Even though there was not high enough percentage of explained variance, the obtained results showed that the experienced partner violence in female students will be higher if they have lower self-esteem and higher conformism.

Based on the results of this research, it could be concluded that, in order to reduce the experience of partner violence, the programs for the prevention and suppression of violence in partner relationships should develop and strengthen self-esteem in girls and at the same time encourage them to increase autonomy and independence in thinking and acting.

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