

A SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE ON TRAIT ANGER AND ANGER EXPRESSION IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Merve Karaburun

Department of Psychology, Bursa Technical University, Bursa (Turkey)

Abstract

Intimate partner violence constitutes a significant socioeconomic and public health issue. Consequently, recognizing variables that may elevate the vulnerability to physical attack is crucial for both prevention and intervention. Extensive research indicates that anger is a significant risk factor for interpersonal violence. The aim of this study is to examine trait anger and anger expression styles in terms of demographic variables in individuals in romantic relationships, which present early examples of domestic violence dynamics. The sample of the study consisted of 262 participants between ages 18-56, of which 49.6% (130) were women and 50.4% (132) were men. Participation in the study was on a voluntary basis and consisted of people. Data collection instruments included a sociodemographic information form and the trait anger and anger expression scale. Data were collected online through Google form, and the analyses was conducted using SPSS 27.0. The study found that gender was not significantly associated with trait anger, but women scored higher on the Anger/In and Anger Control subscales. This suggests that women tend to direct their anger inward, while men tend to express their anger more. However, these tendencies may vary with individual and cultural differences. A meta-analysis of theses in Türkiye concluded that anger levels did not differ according to gender. Women are more successful in anger management, and their anger levels are found to be lower than men. The 18-25 age group scored higher on both Trait Anger and Anger/In and Anger/Out subscales, but no significant difference was found on the Anger Control scale. University graduates scored higher on Trait Anger and Anger/In subscales, but better results on the Anger Control scale. Low socioeconomic status increases stress and anger, resulting in higher levels of trait anger. The data are consistent with general trends in the literature, but some findings may be influenced by the cultural context. Social norms in Türkiye may contribute to women's introverted anger expressions and young individuals experiencing more anger.

Keywords: *Anger, anger expression, romantic relationships.*

1. Introduction

Relationship violence is a serious societal and public health problem. Therefore, identifying factors that may increase the susceptibility to physical assault is important for both prevention and treatment. There is a lot of research indicating that anger is a risk factor for interpersonal violence (Taylor & Novaco, 2005). For this reason, researchers have primarily defined and conceptualized anger in various ways. According to Mikulincer (1998), anger out is a way of openly expressing anger felt towards others or the environment. On the other hand, anger in is the individual's tendency to think/construct the feeling of anger without openly expressing it. Internalized and externalized anger are considered unhealthy, while anger control is healthy anger expression styles (Spielberger, 1988). Trait anger is considered as a concept that reflects how often situational anger is generally experienced by the individual. Trait anger is the state of being angry in general. State anger is explained as the state of anger in which the person experiences feelings of tension, anger and rage as a result of the prevention of the person's goal-oriented behavior or the person's perception of injustice (Spielberger, 1988). According to Berkowitz (1989), one of the most important characteristics that distinguishes people with trait anger from others is that they are very ready to perceive aggression, threats, and dangers in their environment. Studies have shown that individuals with high trait anger exhibit higher levels of physical aggression compared to those with low trait anger, both in natural (Deffenbacher et al., 1996) and laboratory settings (Parrott et al., 2000). Beasley and Stoltenberg (1992) reported that men who use violence against their wives report higher levels of trait anger than married men who do not use violence, and similarly, Leonard and Senchak (1996) reported that trait anger predicts aggression toward the female partner and linked trait anger and aggression in both marital and premarital couples.

In the light of this information obtained from the literature, the aim of this study is to examine trait anger and anger expression styles in terms of demographic variables in individuals in romantic relationships, which present early examples of domestic violence dynamics.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants and instruments

The sample of the study consisted of 262 participants between ages 18-56, of which 49.6% (130) were women and 50.4% (132) were men. Participation in the study was on a voluntary basis and consisted of people. The "Sociodemographic Information Form" and the "Trait Anger and Anger Expression Scale" were used in the study.

Sociodemographic Information Form: The Sociodemographic Information Form was prepared by the researchers to obtain demographic information about the participants. It includes questions about variables such as gender, age, education level, income level, and marital status.

Trait Anger-Anger Expression Style Scale: In the study, the "Trait Anger-Anger Expression Style Scale", developed by Spielberger (1983) and adapted to Turkish by Özer (2006), was used to determine the students' trait anger and anger expression style levels.

2.2. Procedure

In this study, data were collected from voluntary participants to evaluate the trait anger and anger expression in romantic relationships. The collected data were stored in a computer, and the SPSS 27.0 statistical package program was used for data analysis. The data obtained from 273 participants were examined, outliers were analyzed and removed, and the final analysis was conducted on 262 participants. First, descriptive statistics, including frequency and percentage distributions, were calculated to summarize the demographic characteristics of the participants. For continuous variables, mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis values were examined, and the normality assumption was evaluated using the Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationships between variables. Finally, an independent samples t-test and ANOVA was conducted to determine group differences in the dependent variables. For all analyses, the significance level was set at $p < .05$.

3. Results

There was no statistically significant difference between the total mean scores of the gender groups and the total mean scores of the Trait Anger Scale; $t(260) = 0.917$; $p = 0.18$. There was a statistically significant difference between the total mean scores of the gender groups and the total mean scores of the Anger/In subscale; $t(260) = -2.253$, $p = 0.01$. According to the result, the mean scores of women ($M = 17.15$) were higher than the mean scores of men ($M = 18.34$), and the Cohen's d effect was small to medium size (-0.278). There was no statistically significant difference between the total mean scores of the gender groups and the total mean scores of the Anger/Out subscale. There was a statistically significant difference between the total mean scores of the gender groups and the total mean scores of the Anger Management subscale; $t(260) = -3.440$, $p < 0.00$. According to the result, the mean scores of women ($M = 21.52$) were higher than the mean scores of men ($M = 23.46$), and the Cohen's d effect was medium-sized (-0.425).

There was a statistically significant difference between the total mean scores of the Trait Anger Scale of the age groups; $F(4, 257) = 8.008$, $p < 0.01$. According to the results of the Tukey Multiple Comparison Test conducted to determine the difference between the groups, the total mean score of the Trait Anger Scale of the 18-25 age group was higher than the other age groups. There was also a statistically significant difference between the total mean scores of the Anger/In subscale of the age groups; $F(4, 257) = 5.868$, $p < .00$. According to the results of the Tukey Multiple Comparison Test conducted to determine the difference between the groups, the total mean score of the Trait Anger Scale of the 18-25 age group was higher than the 26-35 age group. There was also a statistically significant difference between the total mean scores of the Anger/Out subscale of the age groups; $F(4, 257) = 9.388$, $p < 0.00$. According to the results of the Tukey Multiple Comparison Test conducted to determine the difference between the groups, the Trait Anger Scale total mean score of the 18-25 age group was higher than all other age groups. There was no statistically significant difference between the Anger Control subscale total mean scores of the age groups; $F(4, 257) = 2.445$, $p = 0.04$.

There was a statistically significant difference between the total mean scores of the education groups on the Trait Anger Scale; $F(3, 258) = 3.37$, $p < .01$. According to the result of the Tukey Multiple Comparison Test conducted to determine the difference between the groups, the total mean score of the

University group on the Trait Anger Scale was significantly higher than the Postgraduate group. There was a statistically significant difference between the total mean scores of the education groups on the Anger/In subscale; $F(3, 258) = 4.26, p = .00$. According to the result of the Tukey Multiple Comparison Test conducted to determine the difference between the groups, the total mean score of the University group on the Anger/In subscale was significantly higher than the High School group. There was no statistically significant difference between the total mean scores of the Anger/Out subscale. There was a statistically significant difference between the total mean scores of the education groups on the Anger Control subscale; $F(3, 258) = 2.95, p < .05$. According to the results of the Tukey Multiple Comparison Test conducted to determine the difference between the groups, the total mean score of the Anger Control subscale of the Master's group was significantly higher than the Primary/Secondary School group.

There was a statistically significant difference between the Trait Anger Scale total mean scores of the income level groups; $F(4, 257) = 2.502, p = .043$. According to the results of the Tukey Multiple Comparison Test conducted to determine the difference between the groups, the Trait Anger Scale total mean score of the group with an income level below the minimum wage was significantly higher than the group with an income level twice the minimum wage and above.

4. Discussion and conclusion

In this study, gender was not significantly associated with trait anger, while women scored higher on the Anger/In and Anger Control subscales. No significant difference was found on the Anger/Out subscale. Gender differences in anger expressions are a frequently discussed topic in the literature. Most studies have shown that women tend to direct their anger inward (e.g., self-blame, passive-aggressive behaviors), while men tend to express their anger more (e.g., physical or verbal aggression) (Archer, 2004). However, some studies have indicated that these tendencies may vary with individual and cultural differences (Fischer & Evers, 2011). In a meta-analysis of theses conducted in Türkiye, it was concluded that anger levels did not differ according to gender (Manap & Kış, 2019). Again, according to a study conducted in Turkey, women's anger levels were found to be lower than men (Gülveren, 2008; Albayrak, 2009). In another study, women's anger levels were found to be higher than men (Kılıç, 2012). Findings that women are more successful in anger management are also supported in the literature. For example, Deffenbacher (2003) showed that women use anger regulation strategies more frequently.

The 18-25 age group scored higher than other age groups on both Trait Anger and Anger/In and Anger/Out subscales. However, no significant difference was found between age groups on the Anger Control scale. The fact that young adults have higher anger levels may be related to the fact that emotional regulation skills are still developing, especially during the transition from adolescence to early adulthood (Blanchard-Fields, 2007). It is a common finding in the literature that anger decreases with age and individuals develop more effective coping mechanisms (Gross et al., 1997).

University graduates scored higher than other groups on Trait Anger and Anger/In subscales. However, graduates showed better results on the Anger Control scale. This inverse relationship between education level and anger can be explained by the fact that education improves individuals' problem-solving and emotional regulation skills (López et al., 2005). However, mechanisms such as higher expectations of individuals with higher education levels and increased anger when these expectations are not met may also be effective.

Those with incomes below minimum wage scored higher on the Trait Anger scale. Many studies have shown that low socioeconomic status increases stress and anger, resulting in higher levels of trait anger (Gallo & Matthews, 2003). Lack of social support, financial stress, and daily life difficulties may increase anger levels in low-income groups.

The data are largely consistent with general trends in the literature. However, some findings may be influenced by the cultural context. Social norms in Türkiye may contribute to women's introverted anger expressions and to young individuals experiencing more anger. This suggests that social norms may cause women to introvert their anger expressions. In addition, the positive effect of higher education on anger control may be associated with the psychological resilience provided by education.

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