



ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Turkish Adaptation of Victim Gaslighting Questionnaire: The Validity and Reliability Study

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ABSTRACT

The primary goal of this investigation was to produce a Turkish adaptation of the Victim Gaslighting Questionnaire (VGQ) and to rigorously assess its psychometric characteristics among Turkish adults. Participants were 400 individuals (247 women, 153 men) recruited through convenience sampling. The assessment battery comprised a sociodemographic form, the 14-item VGQ, the 6-item Resilience Assessment Scale, and the 21-item Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS-21). Construct validity was examined in two phases. Exploratory factor analysis yielded a clean two-factor solution that replicated the original instrument's theoretical structure. Sampling adequacy was excellent (Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin = .955), and Bartlett's test of sphericity was highly significant ($\chi^2(91) = 4090.50, p < .001$). In the subsequent confirmatory factor analysis, the two-factor model initially showed acceptable fit; after allowing one theoretically justified error covariance (between items 8 and 11), all goodness-of-fit indices reached satisfactory to good levels (CMIN/df = 3.97, SRMR = .046, CFI = .94, GFI = .90, IFI = .94, RFI = .91, TLI = .93). Factor loadings ranged from .67 to .88 for the Loss of Self-trust dimension and from .69 to .84 for the Peer Disagreement dimension. The Victim Gaslighting Questionnaire showed significant correlations with the Resilience Scale, Stress, Anxiety, and Depression Scales ($r = -.54, .53, .44,$ and $.50,$ respectively; $p < .01$). Reliability analyses revealed excellent internal consistency: $\alpha = .95$ for the full scale, $\alpha = .93$ for Peer Disagreement, and $\alpha = .88$ for Loss of Self-Trust. All corrected item–total correlations fell within the .67–.80 range, providing additional evidence of item quality and scale coherence. Interpretation of the results draws on the current body of work concerning psycho-emotional manipulation and best practices in psychometric scale development.

Introduction

According to Gavin (2011), abuse manifests itself through methods such as deliberately exerting power over another person to control them, humiliating them, intimidating them, or causing them physical harm. Over the past several decades, substantial advancements have emerged in both empirical investigations and theoretical frameworks addressing psychological and emotional violence toward women (Bozkurt, İnel Manav, and Ünal, 2023; Çakır et al., 2016; Çitil Canbay and Çitil, 2022; Follingstad, 2011; Meinck et al., 2017). One type of hidden abuse that stands out among the types of abuse is psycho-emotional manipulation (Gaslighting). The term “to gaslight someone,” which is frequently used in English but has no exact equivalent in Turkish, is a type of psychological trick. Gaslighting, a type of psychological harassment that aims to make victims appear or feel “crazy” and create an “unreal” interpersonal environment, has attracted public attention (Sweet, 2019). Gaslighting is a form of deception that involves both emotional and psychological abuse (Bhatti et al., 2021). Gaslighting is a subtle and harmful form of bullying that has gained notoriety worldwide in recent years (Christensen and Evans-Murray, 2021). Gaslighting involves a psychological abuser, a victim or target, and ongoing psychological abuse (Weintraub, 2021). Gaslighting can occur consciously or unconsciously; regardless, its covert nature often leaves victims unaware of the manipulation they are experiencing.

There is no specific behavior pattern that can define gaslighting. Individuals who engage in psycho-emotional manipulation can often conceal it professionally, making it difficult to identify their intentions (Nazir and Özçiçek, 2022). Gaslighting is an attempt to keep the target under psychological pressure by playing with their perceptions in a way that disrupts their connection with the real world (Thomas, 2018). Gaslighters constantly try to create confusion and chaos with lies, meaningless complaints, and accusations (Barlow, 2021; Stern, 2018). Gaslighters can manipulate and confuse others not only with deceptive strategies such as denial, lies, and contradictory statements, but also with clever nonverbal cues (Sarkis, 2018). Such manipulative behaviors aim to distort the victim's perception of reality and create cognitive dissonance (Abramson, 2014). As a result, individuals exposed to gaslighting begin to question their perceptions, doubt the validity of their experiences, and lose confidence in their judgments (Sweet, 2019). This process often weakens the victim's self-confidence, creates a negative self-image, and evokes a widespread feeling of worthlessness or a sense of being “nobody” (Bosson and Buchanan, 2023).

It is evident that the national literature in Türkiye is insufficient regarding this type of manipulation, which unfolds insidiously within close relationships, often evading the victim's conscious detection. In Türkiye, emotional manipulation has been addressed using the “Emotional Manipulation Scale in Relations” developed by Yılmaz (2018) and the “Emotional Manipulation Scale” adapted by Aydemir (2021). However, there are no scales that can

assess emotional manipulation in relation to the victim, and existing scales are considered inadequate in terms of addressing the concept of “gaslighting.” This work focused on evaluating the psychometric soundness, including validity and reliability, of the Victim Gaslighting Questionnaire (VGQ; Bhatti et al., 2021)—an instrument designed to detect psycho-emotional manipulation—and to make it available in Turkish while addressing the current scarcity of validated measures of gaslighting in Türkiye.

Materials and Methods

Study Design

The research was structured as a quantitative inquiry with a cross-sectional scope, incorporating both a correlational research framework and a scale adaptation procedure. The use of a cross-sectional design allowed for the simultaneous assessment of participants' perceived levels of emotional violence and the psychometric characteristics of the instrument at a single point in time (Creswell and Creswell, 2023). The study incorporated a correlational approach to investigate associations involving the VGQ subscales and key psychological variables, namely psychological resilience, depression, anxiety, and stress.

Participants

A total of 400 adult participants (247 females and 153 males) were recruited using convenience sampling. Of the participants, 287 (71.8%) were currently in a romantic relationship, while the remaining 113 (28.2%) reported being single. Regarding marital status, 251 participants (62.7%) had never been married, 124 (31%) were married, and 25 (6.3%) were either divorced or separated. Ages of the sample fell between 18 and 65 years, with a mean of 29.04 (SD = 2.02).

In scale adaptation and validation research, sample size adequacy is determined by several factors, including model complexity, the number of observed variables, the number of latent factors, and the strength of factor loadings (Brown, 2015). A commonly accepted guideline suggests that 5–10 participants per scale item generally provide sufficient statistical power (Kline, 2023). Given that the Victim Gaslighting Questionnaire consists of 14 items structured around two factors, the present sample of 400 yields approximately 28.6 participants per item, which substantially exceeds conventional recommendations and can therefore be regarded as highly adequate. Moreover, it is well documented that confirmatory factor analysis produces stable and trustworthy parameter estimates when the sample size surpasses 200 participants (MacCallum et al., 1999).

Measurements

Victim Gaslighting Questionnaire (VGQ): The Victim Gaslighting Questionnaire (VGQ; Bhatti et al., 2023) adapted herein is composed of 14 items distributed across

two factors. During its original construction, the authors first conducted a pilot administration and computed corrected item-total correlations, which ranged between 0.32 and 0.70—all positive and satisfactory. The assumption of normality was confirmed by a non-significant Shapiro–Wilk test ($p = .381$). Results from Velicer’s MAP test clearly indicated a two-factor structure. Subsequent exploratory factor analysis employed Maximum Likelihood extraction. Factorability of the correlation matrix was supported by a KMO index of .908 and a highly significant Bartlett’s test, $\chi^2(105) = 811.43$, $p < .01$. From an original set of 15 items, one item showing substantial cross-loadings was removed, yielding the final 14-item instrument. The two extracted dimensions were termed “Peer disagreement” (9 items) and “Loss of self-trust” (5 items). Content validity was affirmed by seven subject-matter experts (three professors and four Ph.D.-level researchers). Reliability analyses revealed strong internal consistency: Cronbach’s $\alpha = .934$ for the full scale, $\alpha = .927$ for the first subscale, and $\alpha = .854$ for the second subscale.

Resilience Appraisal Scale (RAS): The Resilience Assessment Scale (RAS), which evaluates personal capacity for recovery, underwent cultural adaptation for Turkish populations by Sarıçam et al. (2013). Results from confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated good model fit, with the following indices: $\chi^2(47) = 117.28$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .060, CFI = .97, NFI = .95, RFI = .95, IFI = .97, GFI = .96, and SRMR = .049. All standardized factor loadings fell within the range of .38 to .70. Cronbach’s alpha coefficients indicated satisfactory reliability: .81 for the overall scale, .66 for social support, .73 for emotional coping, and .71 for situational coping. Corrected item-total correlations ranged from .38 to .57.

Depression Anxiety Stress Scale–21 (DASS-21): The 21-item Turkish DASS was administered to evaluate participants’ symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress; derived from the original 42-item scale by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995) and validated in Turkish by Sarıçam (2018). Exploratory factor analysis conducted during the adaptation process confirmed a 21-item, three-factor structure corresponding to depression, anxiety, and stress dimensions. Confirmatory factor analysis provided evidence of acceptable model fit in a non-clinical sample (GFI = .906, CFI = .905, TLI = .896, RMSEA = .065, SRMR = .067). In a clinical sample, the three-factor model exhibited even stronger fit indices: $\chi^2(39, N = 101) = 74.57$, $p < .001$, GFI = .951, CFI = .956, TLI = .925, RMSEA = .044, SRMR = .046. Internal consistency was satisfactory, with Cronbach’s alpha values of .87 for the depression subscale, .85 for anxiety, and .81 for stress. Group discrimination analyses revealed that the scale successfully separated clinical and non-clinical populations, underscoring both its validity and reliability in measuring depression, anxiety, and stress symptomatology in Türkiye.

Data Analysis

The data were gathered online using Google Forms between June 2023 and June 2024. Informed consent was presented on the opening page of the survey, and

participation remained voluntary throughout. Completion time averaged 11 minutes per participant.

Analyses were conducted with SPSS 23.0, AMOS, and JASP 0.18.3.0. Multivariate normality assumptions were confirmed by skewness and kurtosis values falling within ± 1.5 (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013). Confirmatory factor analysis employed maximum likelihood estimation; goodness-of-fit was evaluated using χ^2/df , CFI, GFI, IFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR.

Internal consistency was assessed via both Cronbach’s α and McDonald’s ω , whereas temporal stability was examined through test–retest Pearson correlations. Evidence of convergent validity was obtained via Pearson correlation coefficients. Statistical significance was determined using a stringent threshold of $p < 0.01$.

Results

Construct validity

The dimensional structure and construct validity of the scale were examined using EFA supplemented by CFA. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) constitutes an inductive, data-driven procedure employed when the latent structure underlying a set of observed variables remains unspecified. The technique freely estimates all factor loadings and inter-factor correlations, permitting the data to dictate both the optimal number of latent dimensions and the pattern of indicator–factor relations. Factor retention decisions typically rest on empirical criteria (e.g., eigenvalues greater than 1.0, parallel analysis, Velicer’s MAP test) combined with theoretical interpretability. Rotation—either orthogonal (e.g., varimax) or oblique (e.g., promax, geomin)—is subsequently applied to enhance the interpretability of the extracted solution (Fabrigar et al., 1999; Browne, 2001).

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), by contrast, represents a deductive, hypothesis-testing approach embedded within the structural equation modeling framework. Researchers pre-specify the entire measurement model, including (a) the exact number of latent factors, (b) which manifest variables serve as indicators of each factor, (c) which loadings are constrained to zero, and (d) whether factors are allowed to covary. Model fit is evaluated against the observed covariance matrix using absolute, parsimony-corrected, and incremental fit indices (e.g., $\chi^2/df \leq 3$, RMSEA $\leq .06$, SRMR $\leq .08$, CFI and TLI $\geq .95$; Hu and Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2023). Modification indices and formal model comparison statistics (e.g., $\Delta\chi^2$, AIC, BIC) facilitate rigorous testing and refinement of competing theoretical structures.

In scale development and validation research, EFA is conventionally conducted on an initial subsample to derive a plausible measurement model, which is then cross-validated via CFA in an independent subsample to establish configural, metric, and scalar invariance where required (Brown, 2015; Worthington and Whittaker, 2006).

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

EFA was employed to examine the dimensional structure of the Turkish VGQ. Prior to extraction, the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin index of .955 indicated excellent data suitability for this analytic approach. Bartlett’s test of sphericity was also highly significant, $\chi^2(91) = 4090.499$, $p < .001$, verifying that the correlation matrix deviated substantially from an identity matrix and was therefore appropriate for factor extraction.

Factor retention decisions were guided by the conventional eigenvalue-greater-than-1 rule in conjunction with visual inspection of the scree plot. Both criteria converged on a two-factor solution (Table 1).

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

CFA was subsequently applied to test the two-factor structure that emerged from EFA. The baseline model yielded the following goodness-of-fit indices: $\chi^2/df = 4.631$, CFI = .932, GFI = .883, IFI = .932, RFI = .898, TLI = .919, RMSEA = .078, SRMR = .049, with all standardized factor loadings between .67 and .88.

Given that GFI and RFI were marginally below .90, a theoretically justifiable modification was introduced by allowing the error terms of items 8 and 11 to covary. The revised model (illustrated in Figure 1) exhibited satisfactory fit across all indices: $\chi^2/df = 3.97$, CFI = .94, GFI = .90, IFI = .94, RFI = .91, TLI = .93, and SRMR = .046.

Table 1. EFA results for VGQ

Items	Components	
	1	2
GAS1	.727	
GAS2	.740	
GAS3	.716	
GAS4	.781	
GAS5	.806	
GAS6		.837
GAS7		.730
GAS8		.743
GAS9		.730
GAS10		.821
GAS11		.807
GAS12		.773
GAS13		.826
GAS14		.811
Total variance%	7.797	60.209

As presented in Table 1, items assigned to the first factor exhibited standardized loadings ranging from .72 to .81, whereas items loading on the second factor showed values between .73 and .84. All loadings were substantial and statistically significant. The two-factor solution accounted for 68.1% of the total variance, with Factor 1 contributing 60.21% and Factor 2 contributing 7.80%.

Concurrent validity

Pearson zero-order correlations between the Victim Gaslighting Questionnaire (total and subscales) and both resilience and DASS-21 scores were computed as indicators of concurrent validity; these are detailed in Table 2.

Reliability

Internal consistency reliability coefficients of the Loss of self-trust subscale, Cronbach $\alpha = .884$; McDonald $\omega = .887$; for the Peer disagreement subscale, Cronbach $\alpha = .933$, McDonald $\omega = .934$; for the scale as a whole, Cronbach $\alpha = .949$; McDonald's $\omega = .949$.

Item analysis

Values of corrected item–total correlations across all 14 items are displayed in Table 3.

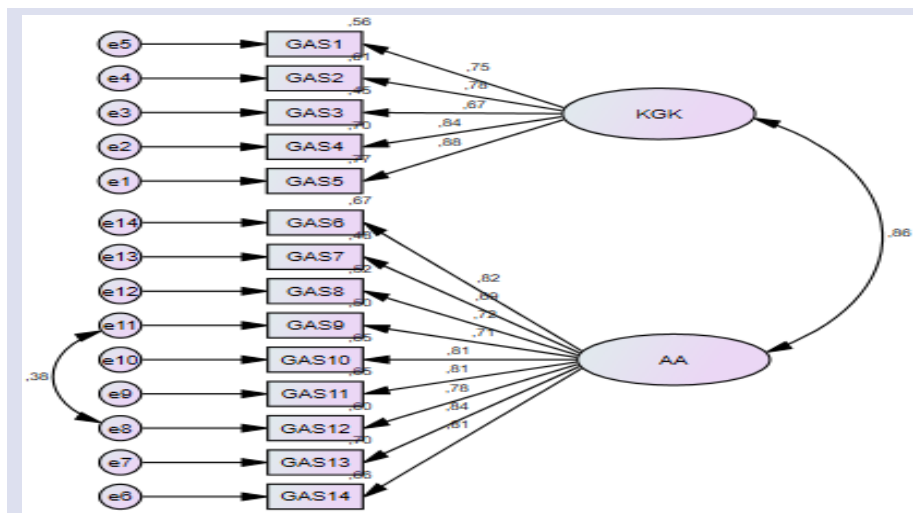


Figure 1. VGQ's Path Analysis Diagram

As shown in Figure 1, the item factor loadings of the scale items range from .67 to .88 based on the DFA results.

Table 2. Correlation findings between VGQ, RAS, and DASS-21

Variables	1.LST	2.PD	3.VGQ	4.R	5.S	6.A	7.D
1. Loss of self-trust	-	,796**	,911**	-,573**	,435**	,360**	,434**
2. Peer disagreement		-	,975**	-,479**	,541**	,448**	,505**
3.VGQ			-	-,537**	,529**	,438**	,505**
4.Resilience				-	-,440**	-,414**	-,451**
5.Stress					-	,766**	,767**
6.Anxiety						-	,749**
7.Depression							-
Mean	12.238	24.348	36.585	18.543	16.200	14.583	15.445
SD	5.044	9.319	13.678	6.000	4.693	4.950	5.048

** $p < .01$ As shown in Table 2, correlation values between the victim gaslighting and the resilience, stress, anxiety, and depression were calculated as follows ($r = -.54, .53, .44, .50, p < .01$).

Table 3. Results of item analysis of the VGQ

Items	Rj	Items	Rj
GAS1	,684	GAS8	,695
GAS2	,736	GAS9	,723
GAS3	,601	GAS10	,764
GAS4	,768	GAS11	,789
GAS5	,819	GAS12	,790
GAS6	,775	GAS13	,798
GAS7	,656	GAS14	,766

Corrected item–total correlations, shown in Table 3, ranged from .60 to .82 for the items comprising Factor 1 and from .66 to .80 for the items associated with Factor 2.

Discussion

The current research sought to make the Victim Gaslighting Questionnaire (VGQ) available in Turkish while systematically evaluating the psychometric soundness of the adapted instrument. Results indicate that the Turkish adaptation exhibits strong evidence of validity and reliability, fully meeting established standards in the psychometric literature.

An excellent Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin index of .955, coupled with a highly significant Bartlett’s test of sphericity, verified the presence of substantial common variance and satisfied the preconditions for factor analysis outlined by Tabachnick and Fidell (2013). Findings from EFA endorsed a two-dimensional structure identical to the source scale, providing compelling evidence for the transcultural robustness of victim gaslighting in Türkiye.

The subsequent confirmatory factor analysis further strengthened the evidence for structural validity. The obtained fit indices (CMIN/df=3.97, SRMR=.046, CFI=.94, GFI=.90, IFI=.94, RFI=.91, TLI=.93) fall within the acceptable to good fit thresholds proposed by Hair et al. (2019) and Hu and Bentler (1999), indicating that the two-factor structure demonstrates an adequate model fit. Item factor loadings ranging from .67 to .88 for Loss of Self-trust and from .69 to .84 for Peer Disagreement further support the convergent validity of both dimensions. These values exceed the commonly accepted minimum loading criterion of .50, suggesting that each item sufficiently represents its respective latent construct. The fact that the original structure was retained with only one modification also

implies that the phenomenon of gaslighting manifests similarly across cultural settings.

Reliability findings also confirm the scale’s sound psychometric performance. Cronbach’s alpha coefficients ($\alpha = .88$ for Loss of Self-trust; $\alpha = .93$ for Peer Disagreement; $\alpha = .95$ for the total scale) are fully comparable to, and often higher than, the figures reported by the instrument’s developers (Bhatti et al., 2023), demonstrating that the Turkish version of VGQ provides consistent measurement across individuals. Item–total correlations ranging from .67 to .80 meet the recommended threshold ($> .30$), indicating that items contribute meaningfully to the construct and represent homogeneous yet non-redundant content. The particularly high reliability of the Peer Disagreement dimension may reflect cultural patterns related to interpersonal communication and conflict expression in Turkish society, where relational dynamics and social feedback often play a central role.

The criterion-related validity findings also support the theoretical coherence of the scale. Significant correlations between VGQ and measures of relationship satisfaction (RAS) and mental health indicators (DASS-21) ($r = -.54, .53, .44, .50, p < .01$) align with the literature suggesting that gaslighting behaviors undermine emotional well-being, weaken psychological resilience, and increase symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression (Sweet, 2019). These results indicate that victim gaslighting operates as a risk factor for psychological maladjustment in the Turkish context, consistent with international findings. Collectively, these findings establish the Turkish VGQ as a well-validated instrument ready for use in both academic research and

professional practice in identifying gaslighting experiences in Türkiye and can be confidently used in future clinical, relational, and psychological research.

Conclusion

The present study successfully adapted the Victim Gaslighting Questionnaire (VGQ) into Turkish and provided robust empirical evidence of its psychometric soundness. The Turkish form exhibits excellent validity and reliability, a stable two-factor structure, high internal consistency, and theoretically expected associations with resilience and psychological distress. These findings confirm that the instrument accurately captures the experience of psycho-emotional manipulation among victims within the Turkish cultural context and is suitable for both research and applied clinical settings.

The availability of a culturally sensitive and psychometrically solid measure of gaslighting fills a significant gap in the assessment of covert psychological abuse, a phenomenon that frequently remains undetected in romantic, familial, and social relationships. By offering mental health practitioners, couple and family therapists, and researchers a reliable tool for screening and evaluation, the Turkish VGQ can facilitate earlier identification of harmful relational dynamics, inform targeted interventions, and contribute to the development of prevention initiatives. Ultimately, this adaptation is expected to increase professional and public awareness of gaslighting, promote timely support for affected individuals, and advance scientific understanding of emotional abuse in Türkiye.

Limitation

Despite the study's contributions, several clinically and methodologically salient limitations merit careful consideration. The sample was heavily skewed toward university-educated young women, introducing a demographic homogeneity that restricts the interpretive scope of the findings. Such a narrow sampling frame reduces confidence in the instrument's applicability to broader populations, including older adults, men, rural communities, and individuals from socioeconomically marginalized backgrounds. This constraint is particularly consequential from a clinical standpoint, as it limits inferences regarding the measure's sensitivity and specificity in populations with diverse relational histories or differing levels of psychosocial risk.

Furthermore, the absence of recruitment from clinical settings precludes conclusions about the scale's performance among individuals who have experienced intimate partner violence or other forms of chronic relational harm—contexts in which gaslighting-related dynamics are most clinically relevant. Future validation efforts should therefore adopt more rigorous sampling strategies, incorporating both community-based and clinically referred samples, to more definitively assess the Turkish VGQ's diagnostic utility, structural stability, and cross-group measurement invariance.

Implications for Future Research

The Turkish adaptation of the Victim Gaslighting Questionnaire (VGQ) offers clinicians a culturally relevant tool for recognizing and evaluating subtle forms of emotional manipulation within close relationships. With its concise structure of 14 items and solid reliability indicators, the scale can be easily used in routine assessments across a range of settings, such as individual therapy, couple and family counseling, and services working with domestic violence cases.

Practitioners who work with clients reporting unclear or contradictory difficulties—such as persistent self-doubt, uncertainty about their own perceptions, or depressive and anxiety symptoms without an obvious cause—can use the VGQ to assess gaslighting experiences in a more structured way. Identifying these patterns early through the scale may help prevent a deepening of psychological distress and guide clinicians toward timely interventions that address reality testing, strengthen personal boundaries, and support the gradual restoration of self-confidence.

In couple and family therapy settings, the scale provides an evidence-based means of evaluating relational dynamics without depending exclusively on self-reports that may have been shaped by manipulation. When used together with partner statements or observational information, it can assist therapists in differentiating ordinary relationship conflicts from patterns of systematic psycho-emotional abuse.

The instrument also has potential applications in psychoeducational and preventive initiatives. Mental health organizations, universities, women's shelters, and family counseling centers in Türkiye may integrate the Turkish VGQ into awareness programs and risk-assessment procedures. Such use can support earlier identification of gaslighting dynamics and help reduce the long-term societal consequences of this often overlooked form of psychological violence.

Finally, the availability of a validated Turkish measure is expected to enhance the systematic documentation of gaslighting within clinical practice. By providing a common framework and standardized terminology, the instrument can help clinicians record the nature, frequency, and impact of emotionally manipulative behaviors in a more consistent and comparable manner. This standardized documentation is also likely to support the development of research-informed policies aimed at improving mental health services, strengthening protective practices, and guiding prevention strategies at both institutional and national levels. In addition, the presence of an empirically supported tool may contribute to legal-psychological evaluations by offering professionals a clearer basis for assessing emotional abuse in forensic contexts, including custody disputes, protective order applications, and cases involving intimate partner violence. Such integration ultimately has the potential to raise awareness of gaslighting as a significant public health concern and enhance the overall quality of psychosocial interventions.

Declarations

Acknowledgments

Not applicable.

Conflict of Interest

The authors disclose no potential conflicts of interest.

Ethics Statement

The study was performed in line with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Sivas Cumhuriyet University Non-Interventional Clinical Research Ethics Committee (decision no: 2023/03-49).

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Author Contributions

NHE, HS conceptualized the study, "NHE, HS developed the methodology and ensured compliance with ethical standards, HS performed the statistical analysis, HS curated the dataset and created the visualizations HS wrote the original draft, HS supervised the research and provided critical revisions." and NHE conducted the experiments and collected the data." NHE and HS reviewed and edited the manuscript for intellectual content and clarity.

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Data Availability

The data used to support the findings of this study can be made available upon request to the corresponding author HS.

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