

RESEARCH

Empathy and Sexism as Predictors of Childhood Sexual Abuse Myths in University Students

Üniversite Öğrencilerinde Çocukluk Dönemi Cinsel İstismar Mitlerinin Yordayıcıları Olarak Empati ve Cinsiyetçilik

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Abstract

Childhood sexual abuse (CSA) is one of the situations that can negatively affect the emotional, mental and social life of the child. Myths that determine adults' perspectives on CSA may cause the child to experience a new trauma after sexual abuse. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate whether sexism and empathy variables predict childhood sexual abuse myths and whether CSA myths differentiate based on gender. Participants consist of students of a state university in Turkey. In this study, Toronto Empathy Questionnaire, Ambivalent Sexism Inventory, and Childhood Sexual Abuse Myth Scale were used to collect data. Multiple regression analysis method and independent samples t test were used for statistical analysis. Multiple regression results show that there is a meaningful relation between CSA myths and sexism (benevolent and hostile dimensions) and empathy variables ($R = .36$, $R^2 = .13$, $p = .00$). The combination of sexism and empathy variables explains 13% of total variance in students' CSA myths. Moreover, in this study, it was determined that women had fewer myths than men. These results suggest that prevention studies at an individual level are not sufficient to prevent child sexual abuse or treat victims appropriately, and it proves that studies on a social level is absolutely necessary. In this respect, further studies may examine the effects of trainings about these variables on the embracing CSA myths.

Keywords: Childhood, sexual abuse, myths, empathy, sexism, gender

Öz

Çocukluk dönemi cinsel istismarı (ÇDCİ), çocuğun duygusal, zihinsel ve sosyal yaşamını olumsuz etkileyebilen durumlardan biridir. Yetişkinlerin çocukluk dönemi cinsel istismarına bakış açısını belirleyen mitleri, çocuğun istismar sonrası yeni bir travma yaşamasına neden olabilir. Bu nedenle, bu çalışmanın amacı, cinsiyetçilik ve empati değişkenlerinin çocukluk dönemi cinsel istismar mitlerini yordayıp yordamadığını ve ÇDCİ mitlerinin cinsiyete göre farklılaşıp farklılaşmadığını incelemektir. Bu çalışmanın katılımcıları Türkiye'de bulunan bir kamu üniversitesinin öğrencilerinden oluşmaktadır. Çalışmada, veri toplamak için Toronto Empati Anketi, Çelişik Duygulu Cinsiyetçilik Ölçeği ve Çocukluk Dönemi Cinsel İstismarına İlişkin Mitler Ölçeği kullanılmıştır. İstatistiksel analiz için çoklu regresyon analizi yöntemi ve bağımsız örnekler t testi kullanılmıştır. Çoklu regresyon sonuçları, ÇDCİ mitleri ile korumacı ve düşmanca cinsiyetçilik ile empati değişkenleri ($R = .36$, $R^2 = .13$, $p = .00$) arasında anlamlı bir ilişki olduğunu göstermektedir. Cinsiyetçilik ve empati değişkenleri öğrencilerin ÇDCİ mitlerindeki toplam varyansın %13'ünü açıklamaktadır. Ayrıca bu çalışmada kadınların erkeklere göre daha az mite sahip olduğu belirlenmiştir. Bu bulgular, bireysel düzeyde önleme çalışmalarının çocuk cinsel istismarını önlemek veya mağdurları uygun şekilde tedavi etmek için yeterli olmadığına ve toplumsal düzeyde çalışmaların gerekli olduğuna işaret etmektedir. Bu bağlamda, bu değişkenlerle ilgili eğitimlerin ÇDCİ mitleri üzerindeki etkileri daha sonraki çalışmalarda incelenebilir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Çocukluk dönemi, cinsel istismar, mitler, empati, cinsiyetçilik, toplumsal cinsiyet

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THROUGHOUT history, humankind has tried to make sense of the unknown. However, the concept of myths concerning sexual aggression has first arisen during the 1970s with the feminist movements focus on rape myths (Brownmiller 2013). Myths are false but widely held beliefs which, in this context, excuse sexually aggressive behavior (Burt 1980). For example, even though child sexual abuse (CSA) negatively affects the psychology of boy and girl victims, there might be myths that boys are less affected by CSA (Mendel 1995, Cromer and Goldsmith 2010). Another example is the belief that “Boys are lucky if they have sexual relations with adult women,” which can result in erasing the visibility of the negative impact of CSA on boys. In brief, myths about CSA include the denial of the existence of abuse, extenuating offender’s offense, blaming the children, disbelief in children’s claims, and minimizing the negative effects of abuse on children (Tang and Yan 2004). These can hinder both the prevention of CSA and the provision of necessary social support to the victim; they can also cause secondary traumatization for the victim after the abuse. Secondary traumatization is described as the way in which people, who are supposed to help victims, may re-victimize the victim by blaming them, being insensitive and abusing their rights (Kgalema 2002). In addition to that, individually held myths might cause the victims not to report the crime (Boakye 2009, Popović 2017). Thus, the existing CSA in that society can appear less than it actually is and the provision of necessary legal, social and health supports for the victims in question might be hindered (Cromer and Freyd 2009, Cromer and Goldsmith 2010). Thusly, Tang and Yan (2004) emphasized that CSA myths are obstacles in preventing and intervening in CSA.

Examining the studies about CSA myths in the related literature, it was found out that social media (Popović 2017), society (Cossins et al. 2009, Pereda et al. 2012, Zafar and Ross 2013, Popović 2017, Klettke and Mellor 2018), parents (Ige and Fawole 2011), law enforcement officers (Prince et al. 2018) and even psychologists (Finnilä-Tuohimaa et al. 2008) hold CSA myths. Evidently, myths can exist in many sections of the society regardless of profession or level of education. The existence of myths among the members of law enforcement and/or health workers underscore the importance and complexity of the issue. Indeed, the existence of myths among lines of profession which are supposed to provide support of CSA victims may negatively impact the quality of support and may even result in wrong actions being taken.

Even though believing in CSA myths can be observed in every strata of society, the level of its intensity may vary. For example, gender is an important predictor of having myths. As in rape myths (e.g. Jones et al. 1998), it is known that male participants accept CSA myths more readily than female participants and ascribe more responsibility to the victim for CSA (Finnilä-Tuohimaa et al. 2008, Cossins et al. 2009, Cromer and Freyd 2009). However, some studies have different findings on gender. In their study, Tang and Yan (2004) found out that individuals who are older, married, with low levels of education levels and low monthly income have more myths without their gender making a difference in myth acceptance.

One of the main reasons for gender difference in CSA myth acceptance is the gender difference in showing empathy (Diehl et al. 2014). Empathy is an important element that might affect the individual’s attitudes towards victims. Previous studies have emphasized that empathy skills are able to affect the way individuals interpret sexual assault (Jones et al. 1998, Potts 2009, Osman 2011, Diehl et al. 2014, Long 2018). Osman (2011) claimed that empathy levels towards male victims are higher than female

victims; all participants approaches more empathetically towards female perpetrators than it does to male perpetrators, and male participants show more empathy towards male perpetrators. In his/her study conducted with male university students, Long (2018) found out that empathy predicts the acceptance of rape myths in a negative way. Another study conducted with university students showed that high levels of empathy correlated with low level myths regarding sexual violence (Diehl et al. 2014). Evidently, the higher the empathy level, the lower the acceptance of myths.

In the related literature, there is a limited number of studies on the variables that predict CSA myths; many of them are about myths regarding the rape cases that happened during adulthood. In these studies, it was emphasized that individuals who believe in rape myths display hostile masculinity (Burt 1980, Abbey et al. 2011), assume more masculine gender roles (Burt 1980, Truman et al. 1996, Grubb and Turner 2012) and have lower levels of education (Burt 1980, Postmus et al. 2011). Grubb and Turner (2012) stated that compared to women, men believe in rape myths more, blame the victim more and blame the female victims who do not comply with traditional gender roles more than those who do. As a matter of fact, these studies on rape myths show that for both male and female participants tend to side with the perpetrator; women are blamed and invalidated for failing to comply with “traditional women roles”. On the other hand, previous studies show that having a history of abuse (Miller et al. 2011), showing empathy towards the victim (Muller et al. 1994, Potts 2009, Miller et al. 2011), the sex of the victim being female (Xenos and Smith 2001, Kassing and Prieto 2003, Russell and Hand 2017), having high levels of education (Xenos and Smith 2001), not subscribing to traditional beliefs regarding women’s roles (Xenos and Smith 2001) are seen to make one less likely to blame the victim. Similarly, having a high level of knowledge about CSA affects whether an individual believes in the victim (Goodman-Delahunty et al. 2017) and show a negative attitude towards the situation (Finnilä-Tuohimaa et al. 2008). Whenever the knowledge level about CSA is high, the tendency is to believe in the victim (Tang and Yan 2004, Cromer 2006) and to find the perpetrator guilty (Goodman-Delahunty et al. 2017). Based on this, it can be claimed that not accepting the CSA myths and having fewer myths might have a facilitator effect on protecting and supporting the victim.

In literature, many emphasize that sexual assault is a social phenomenon that can take place in a specific type of society (Stermac et al. 1990, Dobash and Dobash 2003). One of the main factors which reflect society’s view on gender is gender roles. Research about gender roles indicate that there is a relation between gender role patterns and dating violence (Foshee et al. 2001, Dobash and Dobash 2003), domestic violence (Dobash and Dobash 2003), and rape (Burt 1980, Dobash and Dobash 2003). In a study conducted with university students, racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, classism, and religious intolerance were found to be related to the acceptance of rape myths (Aosved and Long 2006). In their study conducted with jury-eligible participants, Klettke and Mellor (2018) pointed out the role of CSA myths and attributions towards gender roles (e.g. wearing sexy clothes) in blaming the victim. These findings show that every violent behavior ranging from violence against children to violence against women are accepted more in a specific social stratum; they also show the effect of gender and culture on the socialization of individuals as well as the formation of their behavior (Flood and Pease 2009). In line with this view, in their study Hall et al. (2000) determined that sexual aggression in collectivist societies is context dependent. Particularly, in a patriarchal

context certain beliefs and perceptions are likely to flourish, which may serve to excuse, normalize, or trivialize some negative conducts or behaviors (Boakye 2009). For example, in patriarchal societies aggression might be considered as part of being male, and this can lead women to accept concede to being the victim (Hall and Barongan 1997). In accordance with this view, in their theoretical discussion of feminism, Dobash and Dobash (2003) identifies a patriarchal social structure as the root of relationship violence. This opinion posits a gender-specific explanation of relationship violence within the context of gender-role socialization, societal inequalities, and power and control. Thus, the feminist approach targets attitudes and beliefs as the key to prevent interpersonal violence, adherence to traditional gender roles, and the behavioral expression of power and control. Addressed from the viewpoint of the Cognitive model along with the Feminist model, myths are a kind of cognitive distortion (Hall and Barongan 1997), and conceptualization of gender roles forms a framework for future behaviors (as cited in Foshee et al. 2001). Central to many of these theories is the idea that cultural beliefs and attitudes legitimize and condone sexual violence (Truman et al. 1996). Considering that humans are social beings and social values, and norms affect individuals, it can be thought that all these theoretical explanations are in line with ecological point of view (Bronfenbrenner 1979). Moreover, CSA myths are correlated with sexism.

Consequently, studying CSA myths is significant for preventing sexual violence, believing the victim's statements (Tang and Yan 2004, Cromer and Freyd 2009), showing a positive attitude towards victims and preventing secondary trauma (Tang and Yan 2004) just like rape myths (Aosved and Long 2006). In the light of aforementioned researches, empathy (Potts 2009) and sexism (e.g. Cromer 2006, Cromer and Freyd 2009) were considered as variables related to CSA myths. Neither in Turkey nor in international literature research that examines sexism and empathy predicting CSA myths has been found. Since Turkey is a patriarchal and collectivist country, determining the variables that predict CSA myths are believed to lead prevention studies to be conducted at both individual and social levels. Indeed, because the students enrolled at faculties of education will work with children and have the duty of identifying, intervening, and preventing CSA in the future (Koçtürk 2018), it is important to study CSA myths of pre-service teachers. Moreover, they will offer this service not only to children but also to families.

Studies conducted in Turkey indicate that the knowledge level of teacher candidates (Doğan and Bayar 2018) about CSA is not at the desired level (Çakar and Okuyan 2017, Aksoy and Sural 2018, Bacioğlu and Kaya 2020). The majority of them did not receive any training on child abuse and neglect during their undergraduate years (Aksoy and Sural 2018, Bacioğlu and Kaya 2020). In terms of gender, female pre-service teachers score higher than males in recognizing the risk and knowledge of child abuse and neglect (Pesen and Epçaçan, 2021). Moreover, although pre-service teachers' attitudes towards reporting CSA are low, as their level of knowledge increases, pre-service teachers' confidence increases and their negative attitudes towards reporting CSA decrease (Bacioğlu and Kaya 2020). The knowledge and risk recognition levels of pre-service teachers with a rational decision-making style on child abuse and neglect may also change (Pesen and Epçaçan, 2021). On the other hand, the knowledge levels of teacher candidates studying at universities in regions with different cultural characteristics in Turkey also differ (Bacioğlu and Kaya 2020). However, since the nature of the study is

not a causal study, it is not known whether the differentiation in the knowledge level of teacher candidates is due to cultural factors.

Thus, the initial aim of this study is to examine whether sexism and empathy variables predict in a meaningful way the CSA myths of the students enrolled at faculties of education. To this end, an answer was sought for the question of “Do sexism and empathy variables predict CSA myths of the students of education faculty in a meaningful way?” The second aim of this study is to determine whether individuals’ CSA myth levels are different based on gender. In this respect, an answer was sought for the question of “Is there a meaningful difference between CSA myths of the students enrolled at faculties of education based on gender?”

Method

Sample

In this study, the minimum sample size was calculated with the G*Power 3.1.9.4 program to determine the sample size. Accordingly, the minimum sample number required for 95% statistical power and 0.05 margin of error was calculated as 119. However, considering the evaluations about missing values and extreme values, 275 university students were reached. In this study, “convenience sampling method” was used to designate the participants. Convenience sampling is a type of non-probability or non-random sampling where members of the target population that meet certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate are included for the purpose of the study (Dörnyei 2007). The participants of this research consist of 275 students, 186 (67.6%) female and 89 (32.4%) male, being enrolled at various undergraduate programs at the education faculty of a public university. The mean age of these students was found to be 22.1 (sd = 1.5). The income level of these participants varies between 250-13000 TL (sd = 1265.134).

Measures

In this study, Toronto Empathy Questionnaire to determine the empathy levels (TEQ; Spreng et al. 2009), Ambivalent Sexism Inventory to determine the sexism levels (ASI; Glick and Fiske 1996) and Childhood Sexual Abuse Myth Scale to determine CSA myths (CSAMS; Koçtürk and Kızıldağ 2018) of the participants were used.

Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ)

Developed by Spreng et al. (2009) and adapted to Turkish by Totan et al. (2012) to measure an individual’s empathy levels, the original form of Toronto Empathy Questionnaire consists of 16 items. Turkish adaptation of the form, however, consists of 13 items and one dimension. Items are rated on a 5-point scale with responses ranging from 1 (Completely disagree) to 5 (Completely agree). Scale adaptation study was conducted with university students, and one-factor structure of the original form was verified in the Turkish sample. As a result of the confirmatory factor analysis of the scale, it was found out that fit index values were sufficient (Totan et al. 2012). Getting a high score from the scale points to a high level of empathy. Statements like “Other people’s misfortunes do not disturb me a great deal”, “I become irritated when someone cries”, “When I see someone being treated unfairly, I do not feel much pity for them” are

examples of scale items. In this study, internal consistency coefficient of TEQ was found .80.

Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI)

In order to measure sexism, the Turkish version of ASI was used. Originally developed by Glick and Fiske (1996) ASI was adapted to Turkish by Sakallı-Uğurlu (2002). Original form of ASI consists of 22 items and two factors, namely, “benevolent sexism and hostile sexism”. Items are rated on a 6-point scale with responses ranging from 1 (Completely disagree) to 6 (Completely agree). As a result of the confirmatory factor analysis conducted by Glick and Fiske (1996), it was found out that the factor structure that represents Ambivalent Sexism Inventory the best consists of hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. While benevolent sexism includes protective paternalism, complementary gender differentiation and heterosexual intimacy; hostile sexism comprises of dominative paternalism, competitive gender differentiation and heterosexual hostility. Higher scores from ASI indicate high levels of benevolent and hostile sexism. Statements like “Most women interpret innocent remarks or behavior as sexist”, “Every man ought to have a woman he adores in his life”, “Men are incomplete without women” are examples of scale items. In this study, internal consistency coefficient of this scale was found .88.

Childhood Sexual Abuse Myth Scale (CSAMS)

CSAMS was developed by Koçtürk and Kızıldağ (2018) to determine individuals’ CSA myths in Turkey. The scale consists of 22 items and two factors: “reporting and reliability” and “abuser’s characteristics”. Corrected correlation coefficients for test retest reliability were .89 for the first dimension and .89 for the second dimension (Koçtürk and Kızıldağ 2018). Items are rated on a 5-point scale with responses ranging from 1 (Completely disagree) to 5 (Completely agree). The fit index values are RMSEA = .084, SRMR = .07, RMR = .06, NFI = .91, NNFI = .94, CFI = .95, IFI = .95, RFI = .90, AGFI = .80, GFI = .84; therefore, the scale’s indices were found to be significant. A high score from CSAMS points to a high level of individual CSA myths. Statements like “Most children, who claims to be sexually abused, are lying”, “Children are not sexually abused by blood relatives”, and “Whether someone is abusive or not can be understood by their appearance” are examples of scale items. Internal consistency coefficient of this scale was found .92 in this study.

Procedure

This study, in line with its purpose, was conducted with the students of the Faculty of Education of Adiyaman University. In order to collect data for this study, required permissions were obtained from the related administrative units and Faculty of Education Ethics Committee (with the Adiyaman University Ethics Committee Decision dated 18.12.2018 and numbered 2018/9-19). After obtaining the permission from the Ethics Committee, researchers tried to reach all students of the faculty of education during the fall semester of 2019 and informed them about the study during lectures. All the students at Adiyaman University Faculty of Education tried to be reached and they went to the classrooms during the lesson and gave information about the research. Students were asked if they want to participate in the study; informed

consent was obtained from the participants. Some students did not participate in the study either because they said they did not have the time or because they were absent during the data collection process. Thus, the participation rate is 98%. The reason behind this high participation level is believed to be the subject of the study being children and one of the researchers being a faculty member at the same university.

Participants were not asked for personal information such as their names while completing the scales. Implementation of the scale with the consenting participants took approximately 15 minutes. After the data collection process, a brochure including correct information about CSA myths, which was prepared by the researchers for the students to be informed correctly about the CSA, was distributed. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study, its possible risks, and the support to be provided against these risks with the informed consent form.

Statistical analysis

Correlation test and multiple linear regression analysis between the variables were performed to reveal whether the CSA myths of the Faculty of Education students were predicted by the sexism and empathy variables. In addition, t-test was performed for independent samples to determine whether there is a significant difference in CSA myths according to gender. In this study, relational survey methods were used. Relational models are models which aim to identify existence or level of coordinate change between two or more variables (McMillan and Schumacher 2006). Starting from here, multiple regression analysis method and independent samples t test for determining whether there is a difference in CSA myths based on gender were used. Empathy, one of the independent variables, was included in the analysis with its one-dimensional structure and the sexism variable with its two dimensions as "benevolent sexism and hostile sexism". Empathy and sexism variables were analyzed simultaneously to the regression model because they have similar importance and temporal ordering in terms of predicting CSA myths.

For data analysis, SPSS 18 was used. Before performing multiple regression analysis, the given extreme values, normality analyses, and regression analyses were examined to see whether they correspond to collinearity and multivariate normality assumptions. Examining the skewness and kurtosis coefficients of the data, data distribution was accepted as normal, since skewness values are between -.06 and 1.40 and kurtosis values are between .48 and 2.26. Examined skewness and kurtosis coefficients being between -3 and +3 (Tabachnick and Fidell 2007) shows that data distributions are normal. In order to see whether there is autocorrelation between variables, Durbin-Watson statistic was examined ($DW = 1.93 < 4$) and it was found out that there is no autocorrelation between variables. At the same time, the assumptions of regression analysis were controlled by examining tolerance and variance inflation factors (VIF) (highest = $1.33 < 5$). Based on this, it was concluded that there is no multicollinearity between variables (Gravetter and Wallnau 2007). Margin of error in the study is .05.

Results

Demographic information of the participants is presented in Table 1. Findings regarding the correlation between sexism and empathy variables and CSA myths of the students, and descriptive statistics are presented in Table 2. Simple correlation coefficients in

Table 2 show that there is a positive relation between CSA myths and benevolent sexism ($r = .23$), hostile sexism ($r = .265$) and a negative relation between CSA myths and empathy ($r = -.22$). In addition to that, there is a positive relation between benevolent sexism and hostile sexism ($r = .44$) and empathy ($r = .09$). Lastly, there is a positive relation between hostile sexism and empathy ($r = -.181$). These correlation values are on the low and medium level (0.30-0.00 low, 0.70-0.30 medium; Büyüköztürk 2007). It is also seen that these relations are meaningful on a $p = .00$ level. Based on that, it can be claimed that the relations between variables has an acceptable meaning level.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the participants

Variable	n (275)	%
Grade level		
Freshmen	62	22.5
Sophomores	40	14.6
Juniors	66	24
Seniors	107	38.9
Marital status		
Married / engaged	20	7.3
Being in a romantic relationship	70	25.5
Single	185	67.3

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for the correlation between sexism, empathy and childhood sexual abuse myths

	1	2	3	4	\bar{x}	Sd	Kurtosis	Skewness
1. Myth	1				32.30	10.84	1.40	2.26
2. Benevolent sexism	.23	1			39.39	10.41	-.09	-.50
3. Hostile sexism	.27	.44	1		37.00	11.20	-.06	-.48
4. Empathy	-.22	.09	.18	1	54.47	6.43	-.76	.87

$p < .05$.

Multiple regression analysis results regarding prediction of CSA myths of university students are presented in Table 3. Multiple regression results in Table 3 shows that there is a meaningful relation between CSA myths and sexism (benevolent and hostile dimensions) and empathy variables ($R = .36$, $R^2 = .13$, $p = .00$). Moreover, the combination of sexism and empathy variables explains 13% of total variance in students' CSA myths. According to the standardized regression coefficient (Beta), relative order of importance of predictive variables on CSA myths is empathy, benevolent sexism, and hostile sexism. Examining the t test results regarding the meaningfulness of regression coefficients, it is seen that both sexism and empathy variables are meaningful predictors of CSA myths. Also, t test results for independent samples about whether university students' CSA myths differentiate according to gender are presented in Table 4.

Table 3. Multiple regression findings regarding prediction of childhood sexual abuse myths

	B	SE	β	t	p	Binary r	Partial r
Constant	39.19	6.07		6.46	.000		
Benevolent sexism	.20	.67	.19	2.95	.003	.18	.17
Hostile sexism	.14	.63	.14	2.18	.030	.13	.12
Empathy	-.36	.99	-.22	-3.67	.000	-.22	-.21

$R^2 = .13$ ($p = .000$)

As presented in Table 4, university students' CSA myths meaningfully differentiate based on gender [$t(275) = -3.01, p = .001$]. CSA myths of female students ($\bar{x} = 30.96$) are lower than those of male students ($\bar{x} = 35.10$). This finding can be interpreted as the proof of a meaningful relation between CSA myths and gender. As a result, it can be claimed that in this study women have fewer myths compared to men.

Table 4. Findings related to childhood sexual abuse myths according to gender

Gender	n	X	Sd	df	t
Female	186	30.96	9.86	275	-3.01*
Male	89	35.10	12.23		

* $p < .001$.

Discussion

In this study, whether sexism and empathy variables predict CSA myths and CSA myths differentiate based on gender was examined. Based on the findings, empathy and sexism variables predict CSA myths in a meaningful way and CSA myth levels differentiate meaningfully based on gender. In the related literature there is a limited number of studies about variables that predict CSA myths, and many of them are about myths concerning. Therefore, the findings of this study were addressed and discussed within this context.

Similar to rape myths, CSA myths being predicted by empathy variable addressed in this study is in line with research results in the related literature (Diehl et al. 2014, Long 2018). Previous studies showed that empathy negatively predicts acceptance of rape myths (Long 2018) and high levels of empathy is related to low levels of myths regarding sexual violence (Diehl et al. 2014). In addition to that, in a study conducted by Osman (2011), empathy levels towards male victims are higher than empathy levels towards female victims, the whole group shows more empathy to female perpetrators than male perpetrators, while the male participants show more empathy to male perpetrators. These findings point to the importance of gender difference in myth acceptance and to the importance of empathy in evaluating CSA cases. Regarding this, Diehl et al. (2014) state that the main reason behind the gender difference in an individual's myth acceptance might be the gender difference in showing empathy. In this study, CSA myths being predicted in a negative way by high levels of empathy show that myths cannot just be evaluated as "lack of knowledge", in addition to an individual's knowledge level, personal characteristics also play a role in myth acceptance. In other words, of the two people with insufficient CSA knowledge level (other circumstances being constant), the one with higher empathy would have a lower myth acceptance. Theoretically speaking, this result can be explained by the effect of personal characteristics and individual histories on attributes regarding the unknown. These findings are compatible with defensive attribution hypothesis (Muller et al. 1994). According to defensive attribution hypothesis, people blame the victims or not according to their similarities with the victim and the probability of experiencing the same incident in the future (Muller et al. 1994). In other words, individuals who feel close to the victim blame the victim less and thereby avoid blaming themselves should the same happens to them in the future.

Sexism variable that is discussed in its capacity to predict CSA myths was examined in hostile and benevolent sexism dimensions in this study. It was concluded that both variables predict CSA myths in a positive way. Hostile sexism denotes perceiving women as weaker than and subservient to men, seeing women secondary or hierarchically inferior, and it also means women experiencing gender apartheid; whereas benevolent sexism (even though it looks like a positive thing) is sexism that supports traditional stereotypes and patriarchy; and it is mostly harmful to women (Sakallı-Uğurlu 2002). That benevolent sexism affects myth acceptance in a similar way to hostile sexism, which is one of the results of this study, supports the view regarding benevolent sexism being a ploy to cover hostile or a prejudice for individuals to feel better about themselves (Sakallı-Uğurlu 2002). Considering that Turkey is a patriarchal society and benevolent sexism stems from patriarchy (Sakallı-Uğurlu 2002), no matter what purpose and intent, sexism leads to the strengthening of the heteronormative structure and the strengthening of the masculine hegemonic system despite the changing sociological contexts (Şahin and Birincioglu 2020).

CSA myths might be accepted differently by men and women. For instance, men accept CSA myths more readily than women; and they attribute more responsibility to the victim for CSA (Finnilä-Tuohimaa et al. 2008, Cossins et al. 2009, Cromer and Freyd 2009). In addition, Grubb and Turner (2012) stated that men accept rape myths and blame the victim more than women. They maintained that female victims who do not comply with traditional gender roles are blamed more than other female victims. Similarly, another study concluded that masculine gender roles and anti-femininity predict beliefs and attitudes that support rape (Truman et al. 1996). In literature, it is also emphasized that having a history of abuse (Miller et al. 2011), showing empathy towards the victim (Potts 2009, Miller et al. 1994), victim being a woman (Xenos and Smith 2001, Kassing and Prieto 2003, Russell and Hand 2017), high education level (Xenos and Smith 2001), and not having beliefs regarding traditional female roles (Xenos and Smith 2001) decrease the level of blaming rape victims. Gender role patterns are also stated to be related to dating violence (Foshee et al. 2001, Dobash and Dobash 2003), domestic violence (Dobash and Dobash 2003), and rape (Burt 1980, Dobash and Dobash 2003). Klettke and Mellor (2018) pointed at the role of CSA myths and attributions towards gender roles (e.g, wearing sexy clothes) on victim blaming. These findings show that every violent behavior ranging from violence against children to violence against women are accepted more in a specific social stratum; they also show the effect of gender and culture on the socialization of individuals as well as the formation of their behavior (Flood and Pease 2009). Parallel to this view, in their studies Hall et al (2000) concluded that in collectivist societies sexual aggression is context dependent. Evaluating all these findings from an ecological point of view (Bronfenbrenner 1979), it can be said that conducting studies about the formation of environment for criminal activity (Hall and Barongan 1997) and on attitudes towards victim/perpetrator in criminal behavior is important. Hall and Barongan stated that feminine and multicultural socialization, as it emphasizes empathy, might be a protective factor against physiological, cognitive, affectual, and developmental sociocultural risk factors of committing a crime. Thus, they suggested that a lifelong feminine and multicultural education might decrease and prevent sexually aggressive behaviors.

From an ecological point of view, changes in beliefs like sexism on a personal level might also have an effect on familial, social, and cultural levels (Aosved and Long 2006).

It is determined that in schools, one of the systems that affect individuals, 65.3% of the teachers are not trained on the matter of CSA and 90.7% of them have insufficient level of knowledge for identifying CSA (Márquez-Flores et al. 2016). It is determined that teachers have false beliefs such as most CSA cases include violence and various distortions regarding the abuser profile. This result shows that, similar to the pre-service teachers in this study, teachers' knowledge level regarding CSA is insufficient (Márquez-Flores et al. 2016). Keeping in mind the importance of teachers' roles in preventing, identifying, and appropriately approaching to CSA cases and the possibility of causing secondary trauma for the victim (Koçtürk 2018), it would be useful to train pre-service teachers during their undergraduate education about CSA with a feminine point of view. Keeping also in mind that mental health workers such as psychologists, who provide service to the victims, also have myths and negative attitudes (e.g. Finnilä-Tuohimaa et al. 2008), it might be beneficial to provide psychoeducation to the members of all segments of the society starting with the members of professions that provide direct service to children to overcome the myths and ensure the spread of correct information about abuse. Studies might be conducted based on the fact that providing empathy trainings might be useful for approaching the victims with a positive attitude (Potts 2009). Online (Man-Ging et al. 2015) or face to face training programs (O'Donohue et al. 2003) might be provided for the occupational groups working with children; sexist beliefs and myths that they have regarding victims, perpetrators, and CSA cases might be changed (Potts 2009, Postmus et al. 2011) and their empathy levels can be increased (Potts 2009).

This study has some limitations. First, this study was conducted only with university students, who are pre-service teachers. CSA myth levels of other occupational candidates, who will work with or provide service to children, and other variables (e.g. class, trauma history) that predict CSA myths might be examined. Secondly, this study was conducted at a medium sized university. Even though the structure of the university still reflects the patriarchal structure of Turkey, future studies might be conducted at different universities located at different regions of Turkey. Lastly, in this study factors such as participants' trauma history, education level, personally knowing a CSA victim/perpetrator were not examined. Considering the effects of these factors on empathetic approach towards the victims, these factors might be evaluated in the future studies.

Conclusion

With this study, which was conducted in Turkey for the first time, it was determined that empathy and sexism predict CSA myths and it varies based on gender. These results suggest that prevention studies on a social level are necessary. Within this context, future studies might examine the effects of trainings targeting these variables on the acceptance of CSA myths. Also, considering the effect of patriarchy and sexism on the formation of CSA and the way people approach the victims, multicultural education (i.e. gender-equal education) beginning from childhood via social fields like family and school, media and social structures might be encouraged. For this, large-scale social campaigns against gender discrimination and informative on CSA might be created, and legislative regulations might be developed. For example, it may be made compulsory for prospective teachers to receive training on CSA before entering their professional life. Moreover,

deterrent measures against gender discrimination can be taken. Lastly, as known, empathy is situational rather than a personal characteristic. In other words, individuals can show an empathetic attitude based on a given situation and sometimes they cannot show empathy to anyone (e.g. Brown et al. 2012). In this respect, future research can examine which participant characteristics increase empathetic attitudes towards CSA victims; in other words, what the intermediary variables that affect the relations between empathy level and CSA myths are (e.g. history of abuse, education level, familiarity with the CSA victim/perpetrator).

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