



THE EFFECT OF LEARNED HELPLESSNESS ON DEPRESSION IN WOMEN EXPERIENCING DATING VIOLENCE

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Email: adindadestia6@gmail.com

p-ISSN: 2337-4845

e-ISSN: 2620-7486



Received	Revised	Accepted	Published
19 Desember 2025	31 Desember 2025	6 Februari 2026	30 April 2026

Abstract

Dating violence (DV) among young adults is a critical issue that has a significant impact on victims' mental health. This study aims to examine the effect of learned helplessness on depression among female victims of dating violence. A quantitative research design was employed involving 200 female respondents aged 18–25 years in Indonesia. Participants were selected using a non-probability sampling technique, specifically purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria were women who had been in a dating relationship for at least six months and had experienced dating violence within the last 6–12 months. Data were collected through online questionnaires distributed via Google Forms to ensure participant anonymity and accessibility. The instruments used in this study were the Learned Helplessness Scale (LHS) and the Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II). Data analysis was conducted using simple linear regression with the assistance of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. The results showed an R² value of 0.819, indicating that 81.9% of the variance in depression was explained by learned helplessness. The regression coefficient beta (β) was 0.699 with a significance value of $p = 0.000 (< 0.05)$, demonstrating a positive and significant effect. These findings indicate that higher levels of learned helplessness are associated with higher levels of depression among female victims of dating violence. The study confirms that learned helplessness is a strong predictor of depression, highlighting the importance of interventions that focus on restoring empowerment and a sense of self-control in victims.

Keywords: Dating Violence, Depression, Early Adult Women, Learned Helplessness.

Abstrak

Kekerasan dalam pacaran (dating violence/DV) pada dewasa awal merupakan isu krusial yang memiliki dampak signifikan terhadap kesehatan mental korban. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji pengaruh learned helplessness terhadap depresi pada perempuan korban kekerasan dalam pacaran. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain kuantitatif dengan melibatkan 200 responden perempuan berusia 18–25 tahun di Indonesia. Teknik pengambilan sampel yang digunakan adalah non-probability sampling, yaitu purposive sampling. Kriteria inklusi dalam penelitian ini adalah perempuan yang pernah atau sedang menjalin hubungan pacaran minimal selama enam bulan dan mengalami kekerasan dalam pacaran dalam rentang waktu 6–12 bulan terakhir. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui kuesioner daring yang disebarluaskan menggunakan Google Forms untuk menjamin anonimitas dan kemudahan akses bagi partisipan. Instrumen yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah Learned Helplessness Scale (LHS) dan Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II). Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan regresi linier sederhana dengan bantuan Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) versi 26. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan nilai R² sebesar 0,819, yang berarti bahwa sebesar 81,9% variasi depresi dapat dijelaskan oleh learned helplessness. Koefisien regresi beta (β) sebesar 0,699 dengan nilai signifikansi $p = 0,000 (< 0,05)$, yang menunjukkan adanya pengaruh positif dan signifikan. Temuan ini mengindikasikan bahwa semakin tinggi tingkat learned helplessness, maka semakin tinggi pula tingkat depresi pada perempuan korban kekerasan dalam pacaran. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa learned helplessness merupakan prediktor yang kuat terhadap depresi, sehingga penting untuk mengembangkan intervensi yang berfokus pada pemulihan pemberdayaan serta penguatan rasa kontrol diri pada korban kekerasan dalam pacaran.

Kata kunci: Depresi, Kekerasan dalam Pacaran, Learned Helplessness, Perempuan Dewasa Awal.

1. Introduction

Early adulthood is a crucial period for forming intimate relationships, a phase that, according to Erikson's psychosocial theory, focuses on balancing intimacy with isolation. While dating is often seen as a romantic journey toward a long-term commitment, the reality for many is far from ideal. Despite the ideal of a safe and supportive space built on love and affection, dating violence (DV) is a widespread and often overlooked phenomenon (Safitri, 2013). This is particularly concerning as data from the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection (KemenPPPA) in 2025 reveals that the most frequent perpetrators of violence against women are boyfriends or friends, not husbands or fathers. Statistics from the national information system (Simfoni PPA) reveal a stark gender disparity: approximately 85% of reported violence victims in Indonesia are female, while males account for only 15%. Dating violence manifests in various forms, including physical abuse (hitting, kicking), psychological and emotional abuse (threats, insults), and sexual abuse (forced sexual acts) (Luhulima, 2000). The rise of technology has also led to cyber sexual harassment (Januri et al., 2023). This study specifically focuses on women due to the significant disparity in risk and impact compared to their male counterparts. National reports, such as those from the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan, 2024), consistently show that women account for the vast majority of victims in personal relationship contexts, with dating violence being one of the most reported forms of abuse. Beyond the higher prevalence, the consequences for women tend to be more severe and psychologically destructive. This vulnerability is deeply rooted in patriarchal cultures and gender stereotypes that normalize male dominance while portraying women as submissive (Wahyuni & Sartika, 2020).

Despite the severe harm inflicted, many women remain in abusive relationships due to external pressures, including societal expectations surrounding marriage, economic and emotional dependence, and explicit or implicit threats from their partners (Putri, 2012). Recurrent exposure to intimate partner violence creates a vicious cycle that progressively erodes victims' psychological well-being, with depression emerging as one of the most prevalent outcomes. Depression among survivors of domestic violence is commonly characterized by persistent feelings of emptiness, diminished interest or pleasure in daily activities, and pervasive negative cognitions about the self and the future (Beck, 1967).

These psychological consequences are further intensified by the "cycle of violence," a recurrent pattern consisting of three distinct phases. The first phase, tension-building, is marked by escalating conflict, emotional intimidation, and heightened anxiety, during which victims often attempt to placate their partners to prevent further aggression. This phase is followed by acute battering, in which physical, psychological, or sexual violence is directly perpetrated, resulting in immediate trauma and fear. The final phase, often referred to as reconciliation or the honeymoon phase, is characterized by temporary remorse, apologies, or affectionate behavior from the perpetrator, fostering false hope and emotional attachment in the victim (Zimmer-Gembeck, 1989).

Repeated cycling through these phases exposes victims to chronic and unpredictable stressors, significantly increasing vulnerability to depressive symptomatology. Over time, this ongoing exposure contributes to emotional exhaustion, learned helplessness, social withdrawal, and prolonged isolation, thereby entrenching depressive states and reducing the likelihood of leaving the abusive relationship (Campbell, 2002).

When victims are repeatedly exposed to uncontrollable violence, they begin to believe that their actions have no influence on their situation. This is strongly linked to a pessimistic attributional style (Abramson et al., 1978), where victims blame themselves for the abuse (internal), see the problem as permanent (stable), and generalize this failure to all areas of their lives (global) (Sweeney et al., 1986). In this state, the victim becomes psychologically paralyzed; the inability to leave is not a choice, but a cognitive consequence of believing that escape is futile.

This constant exposure to violence, threats, and control can lead to a state known as learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975). In this psychological condition, victims come to believe they have no control over their situation and that any attempt to escape is futile. This belief is a key factor in why victims, despite the obvious harm, struggle to leave. Learned helplessness is strongly linked to a pessimistic explanatory style or attributional style (Abramson et al., 1978). Individuals with this style tend to blame themselves for negative events (internal), see problems as permanent (stable), and generalize failure to all areas of their lives (global) (Sweeney et al., 1986). The violence from their partners acts as a trigger, activating and reinforcing these negative thought patterns. This psychological state directly contributes to the development of depression, a condition characterized by low motivation, hopelessness, and negative cognitions about oneself, the world, and the future (Beck, 1967). The findings from the present background analysis underscore learned helplessness as a potential predictive factor in the development of depression among victims of dating violence, rather than merely a psychological condition correlated with depressive outcomes. Although not all victims inevitably experience depression given the influence of pre-existing psychological vulnerabilities the combination of repeated exposure to abuse and a pessimistic attributional style substantially increases the likelihood of depressive symptomatology. Importantly, victims' persistent inability to leave abusive relationships, despite clear awareness of the associated harm, reflects

an internalized pattern of perceived powerlessness. This enduring sense of diminished control functions as a central psychological mechanism through which learned helplessness predicts depressive outcomes, thereby reinforcing its role as a key independent variable in understanding depression among survivors of dating violence. While not every victim of dating violence will develop this condition as it is influenced by pre-existing psychological tendencies the combination of repeated abuse and a pessimistic attributional style significantly increases the risk. The inability of victims to leave, despite knowing the harm, strongly suggests that they are psychologically trapped by a sense of powerlessness.

Although the relationship between helplessness and depression has been extensively explored in general psychological literature, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, there remains a profound lack of studies empirically examining the influence of learned helplessness on depression within the specific context of female dating violence (DV) survivors in Indonesia. Previous research has predominantly focused on general clinical populations or domestic violence within marital contexts, thereby overlooking the unique dynamics faced by young adult women in dating relationships, which often lack the same legal protections as marriage. Furthermore, the majority of existing literature remains correlational; very few have rigorously analyzed the predictive power or the magnitude of influence of learned helplessness as the primary cognitive mechanism that traps victims in a depressive state amidst local sociocultural pressures.

This research gap serves as a compelling foundation for the current study. This research is vital because it moves beyond mere associative relationships to examine how much of the variance in depression is directly dictated by learned helplessness. Given that survivors are a highly vulnerable group, this study provides essential insights into how external societal pressures such as the social stigma of remaining single or economic dependence (Putri, 2012), interact with internal helplessness to solidify depressive states. Therefore, this research aims to thoroughly investigate the influence of learned helplessness on depression in women who are victims of dating violence. Understanding the degree of this influence rather than just the association is vital for developing targeted psychological interventions. Ultimately, this study aims to provide an empirical foundation for more effective, trauma-informed counseling strategies that focus on reclaiming agency and restructuring the cognitive filters that keep women trapped in abusive cycles.

2. Research Method

Participants

The participant recruitment procedure in this study employed purposive sampling, a non-probability technique selected to ensure participants met specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. The inclusion criteria consisted of female participants aged 18–25 years, who were currently or previously involved in a dating relationship for a minimum duration of six months, and who had experienced forms of dating violence, including physical, verbal, emotional, or sexual violence, within the past 6–12 months. Participants were identified through institutions providing services for women experiencing violence, support groups, and online platforms related to dating violence. Information about the study was disseminated via social media, social organizations, and volunteers involved in violence prevention.

In addressing the sensitive nature of the topic, the researcher prioritized the psychological well-being of the participants to prevent emotional distress or triggering. Prior to data collection, an informed consent process was conducted, explicitly notifying participants about the sensitive nature of the questions and their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. To mitigate potential emotional discomfort, the questionnaire was designed with a sensitive approach, and the researcher provided a debriefing section at the end of the survey. Specifically, participants were informed that they could discontinue the questionnaire immediately if they experienced discomfort, without the need to provide justification. This section included a list of professional psychological support contacts and emergency hotlines for survivors of violence, such as national mental health services and crisis hotlines, ensuring that participants had immediate access to professional assistance if needed. Participants were also encouraged to seek support from trusted individuals or mental health professionals should distress arise after participation. Furthermore, strict anonymity and data confidentiality were maintained to provide a safe space for participants to share their experiences.

This recruitment strategy was intended to reach individuals with relevant experiences while ensuring voluntary participation. The age range of 18–25 years was selected as it represents the early adulthood stage, during which women are more likely to engage in serious intimate relationships and face an increased risk of dating violence (Erikson, 1968). A minimum relationship duration of six months was chosen because relationships at this stage typically involve emotional attachment, which may make it more difficult for individuals to leave abusive relationships (Breslin & Yates, 2009). The violence experience timeframe of 6–12 months was determined to ensure that the psychological impacts of abuse remained relevant and had a measurable influence on learned helplessness and depression (Seligman, 1975; Campbell et al., 2002). Because the total population size was unknown, the minimum sample size was calculated using the Lemeshow (1997) formula for an unknown population:

$$n = Z^2 \times p(1 - p) / d^2$$

$$n = (1,96)^2 \times 0,5(1 - 0,5) / (0,1)^2$$

$$n = 3,8416 \times 0,25 / 0,01$$

$$n = 0,9604 / 0,01$$

$$n = 96,04$$

With a confidence level of 95% ($z = 1.96$), an assumed proportion of $p = 0.5$, and a margin of error of $d = 0.1$, the minimum required sample size was 96 participants. However, a total of 200 respondents who met all inclusion criteria were successfully recruited, and all collected data were included in the analysis to enhance the robustness and statistical power of the study.

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative design to examine the effect of learned helplessness on depression among female victims of dating violence. Data were collected online at a single point in time from participants who met the predefined inclusion criteria. Statistical analyses were conducted to test the proposed research hypotheses. Learned helplessness was treated as the independent variable (X) and measured using the Learned Helplessness Scale (LHS) developed by Quinless and Nelson (1988). The LHS consists of 20 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale, designed to assess perceptions of helplessness, hopelessness, and lack of control. For the purpose of this study, the instrument underwent linguistic and cultural adaptation conducted by the researcher to ensure the items were contextually relevant to the target population. This adaptation process included a pilot study involving 30 female survivors of dating violence. The analysis demonstrated excellent internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.977. Operationally, learned helplessness was defined across three attributional dimensions: internal-external, stable-unstable, and global-specific.

Depression served as the dependent variable (Y) and was assessed using the Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II) (Beck, Steer, & Brown, 1996). The BDI-II is a 21-item self-report instrument utilizing a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 0 to 3, with total scores indicating the severity of depressive symptoms. This instrument also demonstrated very high reliability during the pilot study with 30 participants, yielding a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.984. Depression was operationally defined through three symptom domains: affective, somatic, and cognitive. Following ethical approval, participants were recruited using a purposive sampling technique through an online survey administered via Google Forms. The survey link was disseminated through direct messages on social media platforms and shared within communities and organizations focused on women's issues and dating violence. A total of 200 respondents who met all inclusion criteria completed the questionnaire, and all collected data were included in the analysis, consistent with the sample size reported in the results. Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26. Prior to hypothesis testing, assumption tests, including normality and linearity, were conducted to ensure compliance with regression requirements. The research hypothesis that learned helplessness has a positive and significant effect on depression was tested using simple linear regression analysis. The level of statistical significance for all analyses was set at $p < 0.05$, in line with the findings reported in the results section.

3. Result and Discussion

Description of Respondents' Demographic Data

This study involved a total of 200 respondents who provided information regarding their demographic characteristics. All respondents met the inclusion criteria of the study, namely women aged 18–25 years who were currently in a dating relationship for at least six months and had experienced dating violence such as physical violence, verbal and emotional abuse, and sexual violence within the past 6–12 months.

Table 1. Results of Demographic Data Analysis

Demographic Data	N	Persentase
Age		
18 - 19	14	7%
20 - 21	81	40,5%
22 - 23	54	27%
24 - 25	51	25,5%
Highest Educational Attainment		
Elementary School	0	0%
Junior High School	0	0%
Senior High School	21	60,5%
Diploma/Bachelor's Degree	79	39,5%

Relationship Duration		
1 - 6 months	21	10,5%
7 - 12 months	98	49%
13 - 18 months	67	33,5%
19 - 24 months	14	7%
Frequency of Violence		
Occasional (1-2 times)	81	40,5%
Rare (3-5 times)	53	26,5%
Frequent (more than 6 times)	66	33%
Types of Violence		
Physical violence (hitting, slapping, pushing, etc.)	13	6,5%
Emotional violence (threatening, isolating from friends/family, manipulation, etc.)	88	44%
Verbal violence (insulting, yelling, using abusive language, etc.)	85	42,5%
Sexual violence (forced sexual activity, sexually explicit verbal harassment, non-consensual touching, etc.)	14	7%

Based on Table 1, the majority of respondents were young adults, with the largest proportion in the 20–21 age group (40.5%), followed by those aged 22–23 years (27%) and 24–25 years (25.5%). Only 7% of respondents were aged 18–19 years. This age distribution indicates that the study focused on individuals in a critical phase of romantic relationship development, as described by Santrock (2012). All respondents had attained at least a senior high school level of education. A total of 60.5% had completed senior high school, while 39.5% held a diploma or bachelor’s degree. No respondents reported having only elementary or junior high school education, indicating that the sample consisted of relatively well-educated individuals.

Relationship duration varied, with nearly half of the respondents (49%) reporting relationships lasting 7–12 months. A substantial proportion had relationships lasting 13–18 months (33.5%), while fewer respondents reported durations of 1–6 months (10.5%) and 19–24 months (7%). The findings indicate that dating violence occurred with varying frequencies among respondents. Approximately 40.5% reported experiencing violence occasionally (1–2 times), 33% frequently (more than six times), and 26.5% rarely (3–5 times). In terms of violence type, emotional violence (44%) and verbal violence (42.5%) were the most commonly reported forms. Sexual violence (7%) and physical violence (6.5%) were reported at much lower rates, highlighting the predominance of non-physical forms of violence in this sample.

Results of Data Analysis

Descriptive statistical analysis is a method used to process and present data by describing or summarizing the characteristics of the collected data. This analysis aims to simplify complex data into more interpretable information through statistical measures such as the mean, minimum and maximum values, and standard deviation (Ghozali, 2019). Based on data collected from 200 respondents, the following results were obtained.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Learned Helplessness	200	31	78	62.01	9.956
Depression	200	25	58	44.60	7.694

Based on Table 2, the descriptive analysis results for each variable are as follows:

- a. For the Learned Helplessness variable, data from 200 valid respondents (N = 200) showed a minimum score of 31 and a maximum score of 78. The mean Learned Helplessness score was 62.01, with a standard deviation of 9.956.
- b. For the Depression variable, data from 200 valid respondents (N = 200) showed a minimum score of 25 and a maximum score of 58. The mean Depression score was 44.60, with a standard deviation of 7.694.

Overall, the descriptive analysis indicates that all 200 respondents had complete and valid data for both variables, with no missing values, as indicated by the Valid N (listwise) value of 200. The researchers also categorized each variable to classify respondents into groups based on their obtained scores.

The Learned Helplessness Scale (LHS) has a theoretical score range of 20 to 80. However, because the scale does not provide standardized interpretive categories, categorization in this study was based on the empirical data distribution using the mean and standard deviation method (Azwar, 2017). The mean score was 62.01, with a standard deviation of 9.956. The resulting categories are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Learned Helplessness Score Categories

Score Categories	Score	N	Presentase
Very Low	$X \leq 52$	36	18%
Low	$53 \leq X \leq 62$	69	34%
High	$63 \leq X \leq 71$	50	25%
Very High	$X \geq 72$	45	22,5%
Total		200	100%

Overall, most respondents (59.5%) fell within the Low to High categories, indicating that the majority did not fall at the extreme ends of the distribution.

Table 4. Depression Score Categories

Score Categories	Score	N	Presentase
Minimal Depression	0-13	-	-
Mild Depression	14-19	-	-
Moderate Depression	20-28	2	1%
Severe Depression	29-63	198	99%
Total		200	100%

Based on the Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II) interpretation (Beck et al., 1996), all respondents in this study fell within the moderate to severe depression categories. The mean score of 44.60 further indicates that, overall, the sample experienced severe levels of depression, consistent with the context of dating violence.

Assumption Testing

Normality Test

The normality test was conducted to determine whether the data were normally distributed (Priyatno, 2018). Data are considered normally distributed if the significance value is greater than 0.05.

Table 6. Normality Test Results

Variable	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	Interpretation
Learned Helplessness	0.200	Normally Distributed
Depression	0.200	Normally Distributed

Using the One-Sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, the obtained significance value was 0.200, which is greater than 0.05, indicating that the data met the normality assumption.

Linearity Test

The linearity test was conducted as a prerequisite for simple linear regression analysis to determine whether a significant linear relationship existed between the independent and dependent variables.

Table 7. Linearity Test Results

Variable	Deviation from Linearity Sig.	Interpretation
Learned Helplessness– Depression	0.430	Significant Linear Relationship

The Deviation from Linearity significance value was 0.430 (> 0.05), indicating a significant linear relationship between Learned Helplessness and Depression.

Hypothesis Testing

Simple Linear Regression Analysis

After confirming that the assumptions of normality and linearity were met, hypothesis testing was conducted using simple linear regression analysis (Sugiyono, 2022).

Table 5. Simple Linear Regression Results

Model	β	R Square	Sig.
Constant	1.224	0.819	0.000
Learned Helplessness	0.699	—	0.000

The regression equation is expressed as: $Y = 1.224 + 0.699X + e$

This indicates that:

- a. The constant ($\alpha = 1.224$) represents the level of depression when Learned Helplessness is zero.
- b. The regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.699$) is positive, indicating that for each one-unit increase in Learned Helplessness, Depression increases by 0.699 units.

The significance value was less than 0.05 ($p < 0.001$), indicating that Learned Helplessness has a positive and statistically significant effect on Depression among women experiencing dating violence. The R value of 0.819 indicates that 81.9% of the variance in Depression can be explained by Learned Helplessness, while the remaining 18.1% is influenced by other factors not examined in this study.

Discussion

The present study examined the role of learned helplessness in predicting depressive symptoms among women who experience dating violence. The results of the simple linear regression analysis revealed that learned helplessness accounted for a substantial proportion of variance in depression ($R^2 = .819$), indicating that 81.9% of the variability in depressive symptoms could be explained by this psychological construct. This level of explained variance exceeds the threshold commonly interpreted as strong in behavioral research (Hair et al., 2014), underscoring the robustness of the proposed model. The regression coefficient further demonstrated a positive and statistically significant relationship between learned helplessness and depression ($\beta = .699$, $p < .001$). This finding indicates that higher levels of learned helplessness are associated with increased depressive symptoms among women exposed to dating violence. Thus, the alternative hypothesis was supported, confirming that learned helplessness functions as a significant psychological predictor of depression within this population. It is important to clarify that depression in this study refers to elevated depressive symptoms as measured by self-report instruments, rather than clinically diagnosed depressive disorders.

These findings are theoretically consistent with the Reformulated Learned Helplessness model (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978), which serves as the theoretical foundation for the Learned Helplessness Scale (LHS) developed by Quinless and Nelson (1988). This framework posits that it is not merely the exposure to uncontrollable aversive events, but rather the individual's attributional style, internal, stable, and global, that leads to chronic depression. Within the context of dating violence, victims often perceive abuse as unpredictable and inescapable. Repeated failed attempts to resist or terminate the relationship may condition individuals to internalize these failures, believing that their actions have little influence on outcomes. This interaction between external sociocultural forces, such as patriarchal norms (Ramadhan, 2017), and internal psychological vulnerabilities, like emotional dependency (Leone & Conroy, 2019), creates a cycle of chronic victimization where helplessness becomes an internalized cognitive filter. Within the context of dating violence, women are often exposed to recurrent episodes of physical, emotional, verbal, or sexual abuse that are perceived as unpredictable and difficult to escape.

Over time, repeated failed attempts to resist or terminate abusive relationships may condition individuals to believe that their actions have little influence on outcomes, thereby fostering learned helplessness. Women who experience dating violence are frequently embedded in complex relational dynamics characterized by power imbalances and emotional dependency. Externally, patriarchal cultural norms often position women in subordinate roles, legitimizing male dominance and reinforcing unequal power relations within intimate partnerships (Ramadhan, 2017; Megawati et al., 2019). Internally, victims may develop heightened emotional dependence on their partners, which perpetrators exploit through manipulation, intimidation, and emotional control (Leone & Conroy, 2019). This interaction between external sociocultural forces and internal psychological vulnerabilities creates conditions conducive to chronic victimization.

Violence in dating relationships rarely occurs as a single isolated incident. Rather, it tends to follow a cyclical pattern involving a tension-building phase, an acute violent episode, and a temporary reconciliation or "honeymoon" phase (Wilson, 2019). Although the post-violence phase may provide brief relief, it often reinforces victims' hope that the relationship can improve, thereby perpetuating attachment to the perpetrator. As this cycle repeats, victims are continuously exposed to aversive conditions that appear uncontrollable, accelerating the internalization of helplessness beliefs. The development of learned helplessness among victims is further influenced by attributional style. According to Abramson et al. (1978), individuals with a pessimistic explanatory style tend to attribute negative events to internal, stable, and global causes. In the context of dating violence, victims may blame themselves for the abuse, believe that it will persist indefinitely, and generalize feelings of helplessness across multiple life domains. Such attributional patterns intensify the psychological impact of violence and increase vulnerability to depressive symptoms.

The present findings suggest that learned helplessness acts as a central cognitive-emotional mechanism linking dating violence to depression. Victims who perceive themselves as powerless are more likely to experience hopelessness, diminished motivation, and emotional withdrawal core features of depression. Consistent with previous research, respondents reported feelings of emptiness, anxiety, fear, social isolation, sleep disturbances,

and appetite changes, all of which align with depressive symptomatology observed in survivors of intimate partner violence (Campbell, 2002; Herman, 1997). Descriptive analysis revealed variability in the scores of learned helplessness among respondents. In the absence of standardized normative categories for the Learned Helplessness Scale (LHS), these scores reflect a spectrum of perceived control rather than fixed diagnostic levels. Interestingly, even among respondents who yielded lower scores on the learned helplessness spectrum, the BDI-II criteria (Beck et al., 1996) indicated moderate to severe depressive symptoms across the entire sample. This pattern suggests that while learned helplessness is a significant predictor, it does not function in isolation. The experience of dating violence itself constitutes a severe traumatic stressor capable of eliciting depressive symptoms, regardless of the degree to which an individual has internalized beliefs of helplessness.

The unexplained variance in the regression model (18.1%) further suggests the influence of additional factors not examined in the present study. These may include limited social support, maladaptive coping strategies, prior trauma history, genetic vulnerability, or the duration and severity of abuse (Kendler et al., 2001; Thoits, 2011). Therefore, while learned helplessness plays a dominant role, depression among women experiencing dating violence is best understood as a multifactorial outcome arising from both psychological and contextual determinants. Importantly, this study focused on women who were actively experiencing dating violence, a population inherently at high risk for severe mental health consequences. Exposure to chronic interpersonal trauma may lower the threshold for depressive symptom development, rendering individuals vulnerable even when personal beliefs about control remain partially intact (Follingstad et al., 2017; World Health Organization, 2021). This finding emphasizes the need for early psychological intervention that addresses both trauma exposure and maladaptive cognitive patterns such as learned helplessness. Overall, the findings of this study provide strong empirical support for learned helplessness as a key explanatory mechanism underlying depression among women who experience dating violence. Interventions aimed at reducing depressive symptoms in this population should prioritize restoring perceptions of personal agency, challenging maladaptive attributions, and enhancing adaptive coping strategies. Addressing learned helplessness may not only alleviate depressive symptoms but also empower victims to seek safety and disengage from abusive relationships.

4. Conclusion

The results of this study unequivocally demonstrate that learned helplessness has a positive and significant influence on depression among female victims of dating violence, with 81.9% of the variance in depression being explained by this psychological condition. This finding is enriched by important nuances, such as the fact that the influence of learned helplessness is most pronounced in the context of verbal violence compared to other types of abuse. Furthermore, this influence is stronger in the more mature age group (24-25 years) and among women with higher education (Diploma/Bachelor's degree), as well as when the perpetrator is the current boyfriend. These variations indicate that the impact of violence is not isolated; rather, it is amplified by psychological and social factors. Verbal abuse systematically destroys the victim's sense of self, while higher educational attainment triggers profound cognitive dissonance. Additionally, certain socio-cultural conditions that normalize violence can directly worsen the victim's feeling of powerlessness. Ultimately, this research not only enriches the theoretical understanding of the dynamics of learned helplessness within the context of dating violence but also provides a crucial foundation for practical interventions aimed at restoring the victim's sense of agency and self-control.

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