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The relationship between cyber dating abuse and romantic relationship satisfaction: a dyadic approach

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Abstract
Cyber dating abuse refers to emotional, psychological, or sexual harassment occurring in online environments, causing significant harm to romantic relationships. focuses on analyzing the intrapersonal (actor) and interpersonal (partner) relationships between cyber dating abuse and relationship satisfaction, and to assess the mediating role of relationship quality on this relationship. The research was conducted based on the dyadic approach. The study included 179 Turkish heterosexual couples (N=358). The average age of the women participants was 30.83 years (SD=7.89), while the men participants had an average age of 33.02 years (SD=8.71). The actor effects between cyber dating abuse, romantic relationship quality, and romantic relationship satisfaction were significant for both men and women. However, the partner effect of cyber dating abuse on romantic relationship satisfaction was not significant. The other partner effects tested were also significant. According to the results of the study, cyber dating abuse in relationships affects relationship satisfaction through relationship quality. These results are considered within the context of existing literature.

Keywords Cyber dating abuse · Relationship quality · Relationship satisfaction · Dyadic approach

Introduction

Cyber dating abuse is described as using digital means to cause physical harm, sexual coercion or psychological distress to a partner (Zweig et al., 2014). It is also known as the act of inflicting or controlling the current or ex-lover (Villora et al., 2019a). Cyber dating abuse encompasses behaviors including intimidation, persistent harassment, impersonation, degradation, and verbal hostility via digital platforms such as social media, email, and mobile devices (Wolford-Clevenger et al., 2016). Besides these, humiliating, insulting, cyberstalking, stalking or sexually harassing a partner through online platforms are also examples of cyber dating abuse (Ga´mez-Guadix et al., 2018). The phenomenon of cyber dating abuse is characterized by a reciprocal relationship between the perpetration of criminal acts and victimization, with both parties often engaging in behaviors that contribute to an ongoing cycle of harm, manipulation, and emotional distress, as highlighted in the literature (Reed et al., 2016; Víllora et al., 2019a, b).

Cyber dating abuse is particularly common in young adult populations (Johnson et al., 2014; Wolford-Clevenger et al., 2016). One possible reason is that the adult group engages more with technology, interacts more frequently with others in online settings, and is more likely to be exposed to both bullying and victimization in cyber dating abuse. A study by Toplu-Demirtaş et al. (2020) investigated the pervasiveness of cyber dating abuse and bullying. The study involved 390 university students, and the findings indicated that 67% of those in a relationship had exhibited some form of cyber dating abuse during the past half year. At the same time, studies point to jealousy as a motivation for cyber dating abuse and bullying (Brem et al., 2015; Deans & Bhogal, 2019).

Cyber dating abuse is linked to non-digital dating abuse (Zweig et al., 2013) and serves as a predictor of future occurrences (Temple et al., 2016). Research findings indicate that cyber dating abuse contributes to various forms of abuse such as sexual, psychological and physical dating abuse and

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negatively affects both partners (Brem et al., 2019; Zweig et al., 2013). A study revealed that cyber dating abuse has been associated with both physical and psychological victimization in romantic relationships, as well as with the perpetration of bullying (Lu et al., 2021). Besides this, research has indicated that cyber dating abuse can lead to decreased relationship satisfaction, increased relationship conflict, and relationship problems such as high jealousy (Deans & Bhogal, 2019; Watkins et al., 2018). In this context, it can be stated that cyber dating abuse may have a detrimental effect on the quality of relationships in romantic partnerships.

Cyber dating abuse can negatively affect relationship quality by causing emotional and psychological damage between partners. In addition to being influenced by factors such as early family experiences, romantic relationship quality is a concept that shapes the relationships established with romantic partners and the future course of these relationships (Demir, 2023; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). However, it is suggested that the quality of romantic relationships has a more important impact on an individual's well-being than the existence or non-existence of a romantic relationship (Hudson et al., 2020). Relationship quality has been shown to be a crucial factor that strengthens the mediating role in the association between cyber-dating abuse and relationship satisfaction. Individuals who perceive high romantic relationship quality have more positive views about themselves and their partners than individuals who perceive low romantic relationship quality (Morry et al., 2010). Rusbult et al. (1998) reported that relationship quality helps individuals become more resilient to external negative factors by increasing their commitment to the relationship. Couples with high relationship quality may be more willing to repair their relationship and exhibit sustainable attitudes when they encounter traumatic situations such as cyber dating abuse. Couples with high relationship quality feel a stronger sense of trust and more solid commitment, which limits the negative effects of cyber dating abuse. Cyber dating abuse can undermine key relationship components such as trust, respect and commitment (Borrajo et al., 2015). It can undermine interpersonal interactions and reduce relationship satisfaction, which can affect long-term relationship quality. Therefore, this study concludes that relationship quality is a factor that increases relationship satisfaction by mediating the effects of cyber-dating abuse.

Romantic relationship satisfaction, a variable frequently examined in research, is the individual's subjective happiness and satisfaction because of the evaluation of the relationship (Le & Agnew, 2003). In the context of romantic relationships, the quality of the relationship is often associated with positive emotional experiences, which can result in enhanced relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, a fulfilling relational environment can facilitate the development of a strong emotional bond between partners. Conversely, an unfavorable relational quality may precipitate factors such as distrust, communication barriers, and emotional detachment. These detrimental factors can contribute to a decline in relational satisfaction. In this study, Social Exchange Theory was utilized to establish a connection between cyber dating abuse, relationship quality, and relationship satisfaction. Social Exchange Theory explains how individuals evaluate their romantic relationships by comparing the rewards they gain with the costs they bear (Nakonezny & Denton, 2008). In the context of cyber dating abuse, individuals experiencing high costs, such as digital monitoring, harassment, or control, may reassess their relationship satisfaction and overall relationship quality. The Social Exchange Theory suggests that individuals in romantic relationships act with the motivation of the benefit of the expected results (Blau, 1964). While the costs mentioned in the theory are the factors that prevent the performance of a series of behaviors in a romantic relationship, the rewards can be expressed as the pleasures, satisfactions, and satisfactions that a person experiences in marriage (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Individuals in romantic relationships are more satisfied with their romantic relationships when they have positive cost-reward outcomes (Homans, 1974). In addition, Social Exchange Theory offers a valuable theoretical perspective on relational dynamics and is particularly effective in explaining patterns of harmful behavior in intimate contexts, including abuse within romantic and domestic settings (Lawler, 2001). Based on the Social Exchange Theory, Lott (1987) emphasized that individuals will get more satisfaction from their relationships when they get positive results in their romantic relationships. However, when one partner is dominated by negative emotions, the romantic relationship can be characterized by indecision and conflict, which can lead to violence in the relationship over time. In the context of Social Exchange Theory, cyber dating abuse can be seen as a relationship cost that outweighs the perceived rewards. When individuals experience digital monitoring, control, or coercion, the emotional burden and distress increase, leading to a decline in relationship quality and satisfaction (Borrajo et al., 2015). As the theory suggests, when the costs of maintaining a relationship exceed its rewards, individuals may experience lower satisfaction and even reconsider the relationship itself. According to Thibaut and Kelley (1959), partners in a romantic relationship evaluate the benefits for their relationship against the costs, aiming to maximize positive outcomes and at the same time minimize negative outcomes. In this context, cyber dating abuse behaviors such as controlling behaviors and repeated monitoring of a partner in a romantic relationship cause some important costs. If the costs incurred at this point outweigh the benefits that occur in romantic relationships, it can result in a decline

in romantic relationship satisfaction. When the research is examined, it is seen that individuals exposed to cyber dating abuse, which contains behaviors such as monitoring, controlling, harassing or threatening and forcing a partner with the effect of digital media, negatively affect relationship satisfaction (Reed et al., 2016). In conclusion, Social Exchange Theory offers a solid framework for examining the impact of cyber dating abuse on relationship outcomes. Cyber dating abuse may negatively affect individuals' perceived satisfaction and relationship quality by increasing emotional and psychological burden in romantic relationships. This aligns with the theory's principle that individuals try to maximize rewards and minimize costs in relationships, suggesting that when the burden of cyber dating abuse outweighs the perceived benefits, relationship dissatisfaction becomes more likely.

Even though the primary focus of the social sciences is typically on individuals, a significant proportion of theoretical concepts, including love, conflict, cooperation, aggression, attachment, and communication, are predicated on the interaction between two people. Individuals in dyadic relationships affect each other's behaviors (Woody & Sadler, 2005). In this context, dyadic data should be evaluated together to analyze interpersonal processes more accurately (Kenny et al., 2006). Dyadic research facilitates a more holistic assessment of such interactions as it reflects the mutual contributions of the two individuals involved in the relationship. In these approaches, both participants are viewed as both 'actors' and 'partners,' and their interactions are examined together (Kenny et al., 2006). In this study, in which cyber dating abuse, relationship quality, and relationship satisfaction were examined together, both partners participated in the research, and the mutual interactions of the partners were analyzed. When previous dyadic studies are examined, it is seen that variables such as attachment between partners in romantic relationships, dyadic empathy, psychological partner aggression (Péloquin et al., 2011), marital satisfaction and anxiety in couples (Maroufizadeh et al., 2018), spouses' division of domestic labor and marital satisfaction (Tartakovsky, 2023). In addition to the utilization of dyadic research in romantic relationships, there are also studies examining the relationships between healthcare providers and their patients (Christopoulos et al., 2015) and carers and patients (Liljeroos et al., 2014). In this study, cyber dating abuse, relationship quality, and relationship satisfaction variables were analyzed using a dyadic approach, a distinction that sets this study apart from others in the field.

In this study, cyber dating abuse, relationship quality, and relationship satisfaction were examined. Although previous studies have pointed out the dual relationships between these variables (Lancaster et al., 2019; Woerner et al., 2024), there is no research in which these three variables are examined together. Accordingly, the current study was designed to better explain the mediating role of relationship quality in the relationship between cyber dating abuse and relationship satisfaction. By investigating this mediating mechanism, we aim to further explain the effect of cyber dating abuse on romantic relationships.

Cyber dating abuse is a phenomenon that is frequently observed in relationships, but its effects are not fully understood. Research that has previously addressed this issue shows that cyber dating abuse hurts relationship satisfaction (Dardis et al., 2020; Reed et al., 2015). However, the psychological and emotional mechanisms underlying this effect are still largely unexplored. Previous studies have mainly concentrated on the direct association between cyber dating abuse and relationship satisfaction. Such a direct examination offers a limited perspective in understanding the effects of the behavior and ignores variables that shape or mediate the effect (Ramayah et al., 2018). As Ramayah et al. (2018) suggest, the role of a mediating variable serves as a key tool in understanding the mechanisms through which a particular effect emerges. In this framework, examining the mediating role of relationship quality may provide deeper insights into explaining how cyber dating abuse affects relationship satisfaction.

Furthermore, mediating role analyses help to understand not only the direction of the association between two variables but also the psychological processes underlying this relationship (Hayes, 2013). For instance, the absence or low levels of abusive behaviors may enable partners to be more understanding and tolerant toward each other, thereby contributing to higher relationship quality (Rusbult et al., 1998). Relationship quality encompasses individuals' levels of trust, commitment, and satisfaction toward their partners (Dainton & Gross, 2008), and these factors can directly shape the effect of relationship satisfaction (Halmos et al., 2021). In this context, the current study aimed to address the mediating role of relationship quality between cyber dating abuse and relationship satisfaction and to explain how individuals experience the negative impacts of such abusive behaviors on the relationship. In line with this objective, the current research aims to shed light on the underlying mechanisms that influence both individual and couple factors' relationship satisfaction.

The reason for testing the model separately for men and women in this study is to reveal how different perceptions and experiences between genders may affect the association between cyber dating abuse and relationship satisfaction. There are many studies in the literature that men and women may perceive and experience cyber dating abuse in different ways (Alsawalqa & Alrawashdeh, 2022). It is emphasized that women are more emotionally and psychologically

affected by situations such as cyber dating abuse, while men tend to exclude or control such abuse. Wolak et al. (2007) stated that women are more frequently exposed to emotional abuse in online environments and this has negative effects on the quality of their relationships. Men, on the other hand, perceive such behaviors as less severe or less interactive and generally tend to ignore such situations. Thus, gender differences play a critical role in understanding the consequences of cyber dating abuse. In addition, many studies have addressed the issue that relationship dynamics differ between genders and that these differences may change the effects on relationship quality and satisfaction. For example, it has been suggested that women evaluate relationship satisfaction more on the basis of emotional closeness and trust, while men seek more individual space and independence in their relationships (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). These gender differences may also shape the effects of cyber dating abuse on relationship quality, as men and women may perceive and respond differently to such abuse. Therefore, separate analyses for men and women enable a more detailed exploration of the gender-specific effects of cyber dating abuse.

Understanding cyber dating abuse and its effects on romantic relationships may help to build more secure and fulfilling relationships. In addition, it can be stated that in studies on romantic relationships, partners are generally considered unilaterally. Considering that romantic relationships are a bilateral interaction, examining both partners in the form of mutual effect in a bilateral approach by participating in the research may also fill a gap to explain more in-depth effects on relationship dynamics.

The present study

This research is based on examining the effects of cyber dating abuse on couples. The independent variable of the study, cyber dating abuse, refers to the application of digital tools to track the location of partners, control their online activities, threaten the partner, and sexual coercion (Fissel et al., 2022). Studies show that cyber dating abuse frequently coexists with more traditional types of intimate partner aggression (Temple et al., 2016). Furthermore, an increasing number of studies suggest that experiencing such abuse may adversely affect individuals' psychological health and overall quality of life (Fernet et al., 2019). Furthermore, studies indicate that cyber dating abuse is more often linked to health risk behaviors (Cano-Gonzalez et al., 2022). Conversely, studies suggest that dating abuse tends to reduce the quality of romantic relationships and overall partner contentment (Burrus & Cobb, 2011; Derrick et al., 2014; Lawrence & Bradbury, 2007). Recent findings highlight that individuals experiencing cyber dating abuse tend to report lower satisfaction within their romantic relationships (Simmering-McDonald, 2012; Woerner et al., 2024). Consequently, it can be hypothesized that there is a negative relationship between cyber dating abuse and relationship satisfaction, with higher levels of cyber dating abuse potentially leading to diminished relationship satisfaction. Based on the findings discussed above, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Cyber dating abuse will be negatively related to relationship satisfaction.

Another variable negatively affected by cyber dating abuse is relationship quality. When the studies in the literature are examined, although studies examining cyber dating abuse and relationship quality together (Jaurequi et al., 2024; Lancaster et al., 2019) are limited, there are studies examining dating abuse and relationship quality (Capaldi & Crosby, 1997; Viejo et al., 2016). Prior research indicates that individuals exposed to abusive behaviors in romantic relationships often perceive their partnerships as less fulfilling and healthy. High-quality romantic relationships are typically characterized by elements like mutual trust, emotional closeness, and perceived benefits, while poor relationship quality is often marked by feelings of tension, unhappiness, and emotional strain (Rogge et al., 2017). From this point of view, it can be said that relationship satisfaction, which is extremely important in romantic relationships, will be affected by relationship quality. Our study suggests that relationship quality plays a mediating role in the relationship between cyber-dating abuse and relationship satisfaction. Mediation is defined as the effect of one variable transmitting the effect of another variable to another outcome (MacKinnon, 2012). In this context, relationship quality is a determinant factor in mediating the effects of cyber dating abuse on relationship satisfaction. MacKinnon (2012) explains how the mediation model can transfer the effect of an independent variable (cyber dating abuse) to a dependent variable (relationship satisfaction) with the help of a mediator (relationship quality). Our research suggests that when relationship quality is high, the negative effects of cyber dating abuse on relationship satisfaction are attenuated. This suggests that relationship quality enables individuals to become more resilient to cyber dating abuse through elements such as trust, commitment, and emotional support. As a result, high levels of cyber dating abuse may result in low levels of relationship quality, and low levels of relationship quality may result in low levels of relationship satisfaction. Therefore, we propose the following:

H2: Relationship quality mediates the relationship between cyber dating abuse and relationship satisfaction.

Methods

Participants and procedure

To determine the sample group of the study, Power Analysis was used in line with previous research and literature. This power analysis was applied based on the recommendations of Schoemann et al. (2017), and the total number of repetitions in the analysis was determined as 5000 and 20,000 Monte Carlo drawings were made per each repetition. Furthermore, the confidence interval was determined to be 95%, and the target power level was set at 0.80. These parameters were chosen to optimize the sample size and to accurately assess the statistical power of the study. As a result of the analysis, it was calculated that the minimum total sample size that can be used for a mediator analysis conducted with a dyadic approach should be 320. The study included 179 Turkish heterosexual couples (N = 358). The average age of the women participants was 30.83 years (SD = 7.89), while the men participants had an average age of 33.02 years (SD = 8.71). 11.7% of women were university students, 65.9% were employed, and 22.3% were unemployed; 4.5% of men were students, 92.2% were employed, and 3.4% were unemployed. Of all couples, 59.2% had no children, 17.3% had 1 child, 15.1% had 2 children, and 8.4% had 3 or more children. With respect to the length of their current relationships, 49.7% of the couples had been together for up to 5 years, 21.8% for up to 10 years, and 28.5% for more than 10 years. In terms of relationship status, 31.3% of the couples were in an informal relationship, while 68.7% were married.

The research surveys were distributed to participants using a convenience sampling method. The authors reached out to individuals known to be in a romantic relationship via WhatsApp and Instagram social media channels. These individuals were asked to complete the relevant surveys themselves and to have their romantic partners do the same. The couples involved in the research process were notified about their right to leave the study or stop their participation at any time. All couples participating in the study provided informed consent on a voluntary basis. In this research, the principles of the 1975 Helsinki Declaration, revised in 2000, were followed. The approval of the Scientific Research and Ethical Review Board of [Omitted] University was obtained for the studies (Report Number: 20231202445).

Measures

Cyber dating abuse The Cyber Dating Abuse Scale, as developed by Borrajo et al. (2015) and subsequently adapted into Turkish by Uğur et al. (2022), serves as a tool to gauge instances of cyber abuse within dating relationships. Comprising 7 items, the instrument contains two parallel questions for each. One set of questions addresses bullying in the context of dating abuse (e.g., "I have threatened my partner or ex-partner with physical harm through digital technologies."), while the other set focuses on victimization within dating abuse (e.g., "My partner or ex-partner has threatened me with physical harm through digital technologies."). The scale's items inquire about the frequency of abusive incidents in online environments over the past year. Participants are prompted to indicate the number of times they have been subjected to abuse, as well as the number of times they have perpetrated abuse. Utilizing a 6-point Likert scale, responses range from 1 (never) to 6 (always), allowing for nuanced categorization of the frequency of occurrences. The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient is 0.78 for the bullying dimension and 0.87 for the victimization dimension (Uğur et al., 2022). The internal consistency of the bullying subscale used in this study was calculated for both men and women. For this study, values for female bullying are Cronbach's alpha (α) = 0.81, McDonald's omega (ω) = 0.80, Guttmann's lambda (λ6) = 0.92; values for male bullying are α = 0.92, ω = 0.91, λ6 = 0.95.

Relationship satisfaction scale *The Relationship Satisfaction Scale was initially developed by Hendrick (1988), and its Turkish adaptation was later carried out by Curun (2001). The scale comprises a total of 7 items (e.g., "How satisfied are you with your relationship in general?"). The scale uses a Likert-type scale with 7 levels, where participants rate from 1 to 7. Two of the scale's items are scored in reverse. The scale consists of a single dimension, and higher scores indicate an increase in relationship satisfaction. The internal consistency coefficient of the scale is 0.86 (Curun, 2001). For this study, values for women are α = 0.88, ω = 0.88, λ6 = 0.90; values for men are α = 0.79, ω = 0.78, λ6 = 0.86.*

Perceived romantic relationship quality scale Fletcher et al. (2000) first created the scale, and its Turkish adaptation was carried out by Sağkal and Özdemir (2018). The unidimensional scale consists of a total of six items (e.g., "How much do you trust your partner in your relationship?"). The scale does not include any reverse-coded items, and the scale is 7-point Likert type (1 = not at all, 7 = extremely). Total scale scores vary between 6 and 42, and higher points indicate better perceived overall romantic relationship quality. In

the scale, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient is 0.86 (Sağkal & Özdemir, 2018). For this study, the calculated values for women are α = 0.87, ω = 0.87, λ6 = 0.88; the calculated values for men are α = 0.89, ω = 0.89, λ6 = 0.89.

Data analysis

In the current research, the predictability of relationship satisfaction with cyber dating abuse and relationship quality variables was examined. A reciprocal-relational model was developed in which both the effects of women and men on each other and their effects on themselves were tested directly and indirectly.

First, the data obtained from women and men were matched and the final data set was reached in this way. For data analysis, IBM SPSS Statistics 23 was utilized to conduct the preliminary analysis of the data, including reliability, descriptive, and correlational analyses. Several reliability indices -such as Cronbach's alpha (α), McDonald's omega (ω), and Guttmann's lambda (λ6)- were computed to evaluate the consistency of the measurement tools employed in this research. Additionally, metrics like Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR), derived from convergent validity procedures, were reviewed to confirm the accuracy and consistency of the constructs under investigation. Following the reliability analyses and model specification, discriminant validity was evaluated through the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) approach. In addition, since a cross-sectional design was used in the study, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was performed to examine potential common method bias. As a result of this analysis, the total variance ratio was obtained as 38%. Common method bias is mentioned when the total variance ratio is above 50% (Harman, 1976). Consequently, no common method bias was identified in this investigation. Then, gender differences were examined for cyber dating abuse, relationship quality, and relationship satisfaction variables using paired groups t-test (see Table 1).

Finally, dyadic analysis techniques were utilized using path analysis to test the structural model using AMOS. The item-parceling technique (Little et al., 2002) used in single-factor measurements was included in the analysis. To evaluate the overall fit of the data, various fit indices such as CFI, TLI, IFI, NFI, and SRMR were taken into consideration (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The Actor-Partner Interdepence Model (APIM), one of the binary analysis approaches, and the Actor-Partner Interdepence Mediation Model (APIMeM) as an extension of APIM were used. In these models, bootstrap analysis was also conducted to determine the mediating actor effects between cyber dating abuse-bullying, relationship quality, and relationship satisfaction (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). Actor effects show the mediating effect of women's and men's relationship quality in the relationship between cyber dating abuse-bullying and their own relationship satisfaction.

Results

Descriptive statistics, gender differences, and correlations

The summary statistics for the study variables, gender differences, and relationships between variables are shown in Table 1. According to the paired groups t-test, there is no significant difference between men and women in cyber dating abuse ($t = -1.038$, $p = .301$). However, men reported significantly higher relationship quality ($t = -4.334$, $p = .000$) and relationship satisfaction ($t = -3.025$, $p = .003$) than women.

When the actor relationships between the variables are examined, it is seen that cyber dating abuse is negatively related to both relationship quality (Women: $r = -.448$, $p < .01$; Men: $r = -.201$, $p < .01$) and relationship satisfaction (Women: $r = -.368$, $p < .01$; Men: $r = -.358$, $p < .01$) in both men and women participants. However, again in actor relationships, relationship quality and relationship satisfaction were positively related in both men and women participants (Women: $r = .818$, $p < .01$; Men: $r = .776$, $p < .01$). Within-pair collinearity analyses revealed that all relationships were significant and moderate. Therefore, this shows that the variables of these partners are not independent of each other.

Actor-partner independence mediator model (APIMeM)

At this stage, first, the measurement model of the data obtained from both men and women was tested. The measurement model consists of three latent variables (cyber dating abuse, relationship quality, and relationship satisfaction)

Table 1 Descriptive statistics, gender differences and correlation results

	Descriptive Statistics and Reliabilities							Correlations		
	Women		Men							
Variables	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	AVE	CR	*t*-Test	1	2	3
1. Cyber dating abuse	7.49	1.94	7.72	3.41	0.59	0.91	-1.038	**0.538****	-0.448**	-0.368**
2. Relationship quality	36.70	4.92	38.26	4.44	0.56	0.88	-4.334**	-0.201**	**.479****	0.818**
3. Relationship satisfaction	41.93	5.86	43.10	5.27	0.57	0.90	-3.025**	-0.358**	0.776**	**.569****

and six observed variables. The measurement model of the data obtained from women showed a good fit; $\chi^2_{(6,\ N=179)}$= 38.866; CFI =0.95; GFI =0.93; IFI =0.95; NFI =0.94; SRMR =0.03. The measurement model of the men's data also showed a good fit; $\chi^2_{(6,\ N=179)}$= 30.817; CFI =0.96; GFI =0.95; IFI =0.96; NFI =0.96; SRMR =0.04. In addition, HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio) analysis was performed to assess discriminant validity in structural equation modelling. HTMT is a method proposed to test the discriminant validity between the constructs in the models and is frequently preferred especially in PLS-based modelling (Henseler et al., 2015). Within the scope of this analysis, the correlations of the items under each construct with each other and the ratio of their correlations with the items under other constructs were calculated. The analysis was performed separately for both male and female samples. The fact that each of the HTMT values obtained remained below 0.90 indicates that there is sufficient separation between the constructs and that the model provides discriminant validity. The complete HTMT values of male and female participants are presented in the supplementary table. After the measurement model, the actor-partner independence mediator model was tested.

In this stage, the mediating role of romantic relationship quality in the relationship between cyber dating abuse and romantic relationship satisfaction was tested with the Actor-Partner Independence Mediator Model (APIMeM) path analysis. The initial model proposed includes both actor-partner effects and intermediary actor-mediary partner effects, thereby accounting for both direct and indirect influences. The model fit indices of the actor-partner independence mediator model were acceptable; $\chi^2_{(6,\ N=179)}$= 30.817; CFI =0.94; TLI =0.91; IFI =0.94; NFI =0.92; SRMR =0.05. The actor effects between cyber dating abuse, romantic relationship quality, and romantic relationship satisfaction were all significant for both men and women. However, the partner effect of cyber dating abuse on romantic relationship satisfaction was not significant. The other partner effects tested were also significant. Figure 1 shows the structural model and standardized path coefficients examining the relationship between romantic relationship satisfaction and cyber dating abuse and romantic relationship quality. This first model includes actor-partner effects and mediating actor-mediating partner effects. In addition, indirect actor effects are given in Table 2.

Discussion

This research explores the impact of cyber dating abuse on romantic relationship satisfaction through actor-partner effects and examines the mediating influence of relationship quality in this connection. The dyadic method was used in data analysis to examine actor-partner effects simultaneously in the relationship between variables (Kenny et al., 2006, Kenny & Cook, 1999). Existing studies have explored cyber dating abuse, relationship satisfaction, and relationship quality (Hassebrauck & Fehr, 2002; Lu et al., 2021). However, research adopting a dyadic approach in romantic relationships remains limited. By utilizing a dyadic approach, this research adds valuable insights to the existing body of literature on romantic partnerships.

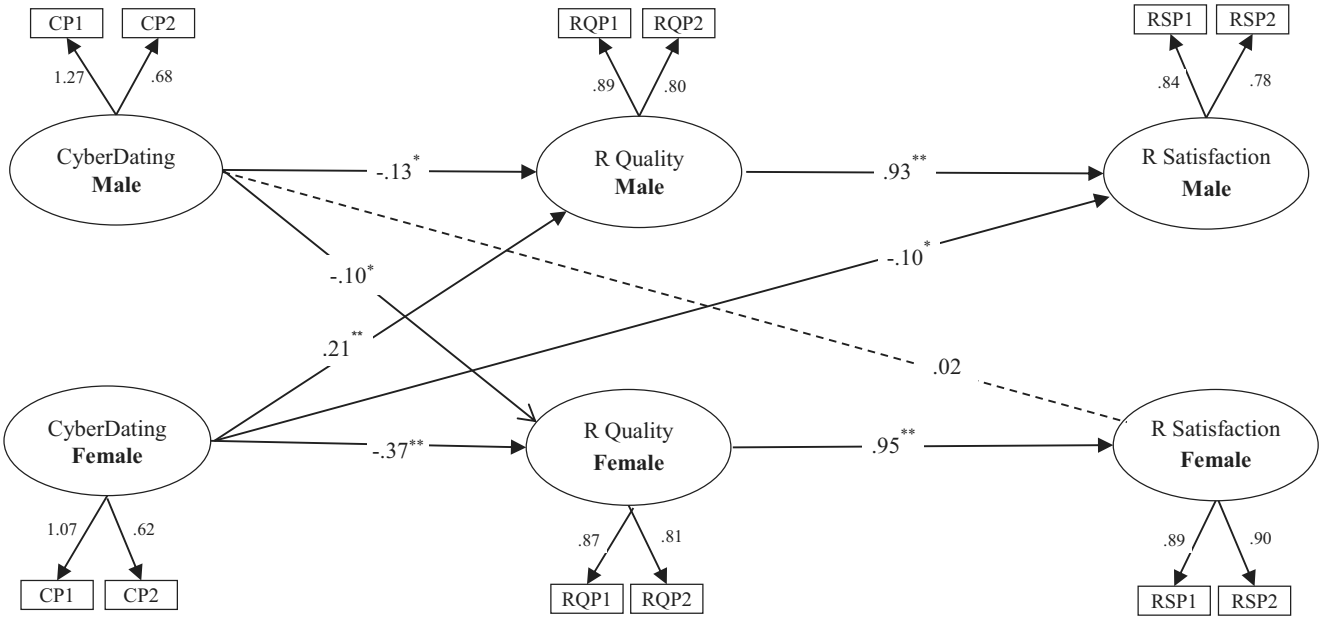

Fig. 1 Actor-partner independence mediator model. Note. $^{*}p<.05$, $^{**}p<.01$, *CP*: parcels of cyber dating abuse, *RQP*: parcels of romantic relationship quality, *RSP*: parcels of romantic relationship satisfaction

Table 2 Indirect effects on romantic relationship satisfaction

	Coefficient	95% Confidence Interval	
		LL	UL
Indirect effects			
Actor effects			
Cyber dating abuse-bullying -> Relationship quality -> Relationship satisfaction (female actor effect)	-.350	.205	3.649
Cyber dating abuse-bullying -> Relationship quality -> Relationship satisfaction (male actor effect)	-.120	.952	3.505

Social Exchange Theory offers a foundation for interpreting romantic relationship dynamics. It explains how partners balance the rewards and costs within their relationship (Blau, 1964). The theory states that when negative emotions are more dominant in one of the partners in a romantic relationship, conflict and violence may occur, and in this direction, romantic relationship quality and romantic relationship satisfaction may be negatively affected by this situation. In this context, analyzing how cyber dating abuse correlates with both the perceived quality and satisfaction within romantic relationships -through the lens of Social Exchange Theory- may contribute to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the mechanisms that shape individuals' experiences in intimate partnerships. This theoretical perspective allows for the interpretation of relational dynamics in terms of cost-benefit evaluations and perceived reciprocity, which are particularly relevant when examining patterns of digital abuse and emotional outcomes in modern romantic contexts.

In this study, firstly, a paired group t-test was performed to assess if cyber dating abuse, relationship quality, and relationship satisfaction varied by gender. Based on the analysis, no notable difference was found between men and women in terms of cyber dating abuse. Previous studies also show that cyber dating violence does not differ between men and women (Hancock et al., 2017; Wolford-Clevenger et al., 2016). This can be explained by the extensive use of social media tools by both genders with the advances in technology, and thus, situations such as jealousy and conflict over social media have become common for both genders. Based on these findings, it can be interpreted that abusive behaviors do not differ depending on whether they are male or female. In addition, according to paired t-test results, men perceived significantly higher relationship quality and achieved higher relationship satisfaction compared to women. In one study, this is explained by the fact that men have a more positive perspective on romantic relationships, while women have a more negative perception of their own intimacy in relationships (Ubando, 2016). Furthermore, a meta-analysis indicated that women tend to report marginally lower satisfaction levels in romantic relationships compared to men (Jackson et al., 2014). In conclusion, being male appears to influence relationship satisfaction and relationship quality to a larger extent. Disparities in the perspectives and expectations of both genders regarding romantic relationships may account for this finding.

The results of the study show that cyber dating abuse and relationship satisfaction are significantly correlated for both genders. Individuals with higher levels of cyber dating abuse have lower levels of relationship satisfaction. Cyber dating abuse represents a modern type of intimate partner violence, where digital technologies or communication tools are employed to manipulate or emotionally pressure a partner within a relationship (Brown & Hegarty, 2018). Cyber dating abuse can occur in different situations and is associated with different variables such as gender, jealousy, aggression, substance use, etc. (Bhogal & Wallace, 2022; Toplu-Demirtaş et al., 2022). Although there are different types of cyber dating violence, all types of cyber dating violence decrease couples' satisfaction in their relationship (Marcus, 2004).

Borrajo and his colleagues (2015) state that cyberdating abuse is common among young couples and mostly occurs in situations of jealousy. Due to jealousy, couples report decreased relationship satisfaction (Elphinston et al., 2013). Based on the model tested in the study, it was observed that the path between women's cyber dating abuse to men's relationship satisfaction is significant. In another research, relationship satisfaction was discovered to be affected by the restrictive behaviors of the partner (Rochlen & Mahalik, 2004). On the other hand, the path between men's cyber dating abuse to women's relationship satisfaction is not significant. Based on these findings, it is seen that men's cyber dating abuse behaviors do not affect women's relationship quality. It can be concluded that women cannot make sense of the abusive behaviors they experience during the relationship or that women do not meet their relationship satisfaction through men's behaviors.

Research has shown that cyber abuse and relationship quality are negatively related, and individuals who undergo cyber dating abuse tend to indicate diminished relationship quality compared to individuals not exposed to cyber dating abuse (Lancaster et al., 2020). Cyber dating abuse is considered a variant of intimate partner violence and affects not only relationship quality but also relationship satisfaction, mental health problems, and relationship commitment

(Daskaluk, 2016). Cyber dating abuse is not only limited to physical or overt psychological effects but can also trigger emotional mechanisms in the relationship. In particular, emotional factors such as trust and commitment may mediate the impact of cyber dating abuse. Gottman and Silver (1999) emphasize that trust forms the basis of healthy dynamics in relationships and protects the emotional health of the relationship. In our research, it is shown that the emotional traumas caused by cyber dating abuse can be overcome more easily if the relationship quality is high. Trust, attachment, and emotional support function as protective factors against the negative effects faced by individuals. In this context, in relationships with high relationship quality, the effect of cyber dating abuse on relationship satisfaction is lower. On the other hand, when the literature is examined, researchers have revealed that there are significant and positively correlated relationships between relationship quality and relationship satisfaction (Brewer & Abell, 2017; Murray et al., 1996).

In this study, the mediating role of romantic relationship quality in the relationship between cyber dating abuse and romantic relationship satisfaction was tested using path analysis. The path analysis shows that relationship quality, as an actor effect, plays a mediating role in the relationship between cyber dating abuse and relationship satisfaction. Therefore, it is concluded that more cyber dating abuse in a relationship decreases relationship quality and negatively affects relationship satisfaction.

Limitations

This research has some limitations. Firstly, the research employed a cross-sectional approach, which limits the ability to establish definitive conclusions regarding causal links. This is because the cross-sectional design provides only correlated data and may ignore changes over time. Second, the data were obtained through self-report from voluntary participants. This method may lead us to underestimate the impact of social desirability and biased responses. The tendency for participants to express themselves more positively may lead to distortions in responses. Furthermore, convenience sampling was employed, potentially restricting the applicability of the findings due to its lack of a representative sample. Participants were selected only among accessible individuals, restricting the generalizability of the results to a wider population. Therefore, probability sampling methods could be used to create a more representative sample. Finally, as the sample consisted solely of Turkish couples, the findings may not easily transfer to other cultural settings. Future studies can be conducted with larger and more diverse samples.

Implications

Despite its limitations, this study provides valuable insights into couple dynamics and relationship satisfaction. The study studied the influence of cyber dating abuse on both individual and partner outcomes related to romantic relationship satisfaction, while also investigating the mediating effect of relationship quality in this dynamic. The findings of this study allow family and couples counselors to more comprehensively address cyber dating abuse and relationship satisfaction in both individual and group interventions. By considering the effects of cyber dating abuse on relationships, counselors can develop strategies that support couples to have healthy digital interactions with each other. In individual therapy sessions, clients can be made aware of this type of abuse and learn methods to increase relationship satisfaction. In group interventions, activities that strengthen communication between couples, aim to improve relationship quality, and develop healthy boundary-setting skills can be carried out.

In addition, when preparing psycho-educational programs to increase relationship satisfaction, relationship quality and the effects of cyber dating abuse should be included in the program. Such programs can help individuals and couples identify cyber dating abuse, recognize the negative effects of this behavior on relationship quality, and set boundaries when necessary. In this context, experts can conduct awareness-raising activities for couples to maintain both face-to-face and digital interactions healthily. Thus, increasing the satisfaction of individuals in their relationships and maintaining healthy relationship dynamics will be supported.

This study contributes to the academic literature as one of the few investigations that explores the complex effects of cyber dating abuse on romantic relationship satisfaction. In the framework of future studies, it is recommended to use experimental or longitudinal research designs in addition to the dyadic approach in future studies. Such designs may provide more in-depth information about the role of cyber dating abuse in relationships by revealing the causal relationships between the variables examined more clearly.

Conclusion

This study explores the actor-partner effects of cyber dating abuse on romantic relationship satisfaction using a dyadic approach. The mediating role of relationship quality was also investigated. It was found that no meaningful difference existed between men and women in cyber dating abuse. However, it was seen that women perceived

significantly higher relationship quality than men. The actor relationships between variables were also examined, and it was found that cyber dating abuse is inversely associated with both relationship quality and relationship satisfaction for both genders. Finally, the actor-partner independence mediator model was tested. According to analysis, the actor effects between cyber dating abuse, romantic relationship quality, and romantic relationship satisfaction were all significant for both men and women. Furthermore, the mediation model demonstrated that romantic relationship quality played a mediating role in the relationship between cyber dating abuse and romantic relationship satisfaction. While this research utilized a dyadic approach, further experimental and longitudinal studies are crucial for achieving a more comprehensive grasp of the cause-and-effect dynamics among the variables.

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Author contributions All authors contributed to the study's conception and design. Conceptualization and formal analysis were performed by HYK, YK. Investigation and methodology were performed by HYK, YK, ST, NO, YK, SAS, and MED. Data curation, resources, software, supervision and validation were performed by HYK, ST, NO and YK. The first draft of the manuscript was written by HYK, YK and MED. All authors commented on previous versions of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Data availability Data will be available on request.

Declarations

Conflict of interest No conflict of interest exists for this manuscript for any of the authors.

Ethical approval The study protocol has been approved by Yildiz Technical University Scientific Research and Ethical Review Board (ID: 20231202445). The study was performed in accordance with the ethical standards laid down in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its following updates.

Consent to participate Informed consent was obtained from all the individual participants that were included in the study.

Pre-registration statement This study was not pre-registered.

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