

How Can Social Work Prevent Dating Violence and Support Healthy Relationships? Evidence from Vietnamese University Students

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ABSTRACT

University dating violence provides an urgent, yet largely under-developed line of academic inquiry in Vietnam. This study investigates pathways through which social work interventions facilitate the prevention of dating violence and promote healthy relationships among Vietnamese university students. We explore structural equation modeling (SEM) and tested four hypotheses on a data-set of 200 undergraduate students, that linked awareness of healthy relationships, attitudes towards gender equality, and availability of perceived support to the exposure and engagement with social work, and the social work programs on 'relationship quality'. We found that through awareness, positive gender attitudes and perceived support predicted exposure and engagement with social work programs, which in turn promoted greater relationship quality within parameters of trust, communication and respect. The valence of our model fit indices were excellent (e.g., RMSEA=0.025; CFI=0.982). Study findings highlight the importance of education for healthy relationships, advocacy for gender equality, and the establishment of supportive connections to address relationship violence prevention as well as support young adult relational wellbeing at university level in Vietnam.

Keywords: Dating Violence; Social Work; Healthy Relationships; Gender Equality; University Students; Vietnam

INTRODUCTION

Violence in dating relationships is a population-level concern attracting greater scrutiny in both global and Vietnamese contexts. Dating violence, which can range across physical, emotional, and sexual behaviours (Hamby et al., 2017; Cheung & Huang, 2022), represents a much broader constellation of behaviours that occur within

serial and ongoing romantic relationships where young people are involved. These behaviours pose a serious threat to young adults over time in so far as they can threaten individual health, safety and well-being. For example, youth immersed in risky relationship behaviours can incur serious negative effects like sadness, anxiety, school coping challenges, substance abuse, and ongoing trajectories toward continued cycles of violence in future dating and intimate relationships. Dating violence, especially occurring in educational settings, remains poorly understood and prevalence rates of such behaviours are difficult to assess considering the potential of romantic love to normalize or explain away abusive behaviours through precedent and gendered associations (e.g., traditions of silence, acceptance, and minimized threats) (Crooks et al., 2019).

In Vietnam, rapid economic development and cultural change have contributed to shifts in attitudes regarding gender, relationships, and family structure. Despite this, patriarchal structures and gendered power imbalances remain and many young people lack a clear and consistent means of constructing a healthy, respectful, and non-violent romantic relationship (Peacock & Barker, 2014). The coexistence of traditional expectations and modern influences can create difficulty in determining which behaviors are socially acceptable in romantic relationships, with serious implications in terms of tolerance for continuance of abusive behaviors.

Social work interventions are designed to engage with these issues by helping young people access knowledge, attitudes, and support systems necessary for healthy relationship formation. Through preventative education, individual and group counselling, community outreach, and policy advocacy, social workers can help combat deleterious gender norms, promote equitable guidelines for relationships, and create environments that encourage the development of safe and respectful relationships (Bent-Goodley, 2014; Jewkes et al., 2015). Research and evidence from around the world suggests that accessing knowledge about healthy relationships, changing attitudes toward gender equity, and strengthening perceived support network are effective intervention strategies to prevent dating violence and improve relationship quality (Foshee et al., 2004; Antle et al., 2011).

Although there is increasing recognition of social work's role in intimate partner violence prevention globally, there is a lack of empirical research on how these dynamics operate with Vietnamese university students. It is unknown how students' knowledge of healthy relationship norms, gender equality attitudes, and support perceptions influence social work intervention engagement, and how social work intervention engagement specifically relates to the quality of their romantic relationships. This knowledge gap reduces Vietnamese social work practitioners, educators, and policymakers' ability to create targeted, evidence-based, culturally-plausible interventions that respond to students' needs.

To help mitigate these gaps, this study will analyze how students' knowledge about healthy relationships is connected to their gender attitudes, their perceived availability of support, and their level of exposure to their social work interventions. The study will also consider if students who participated in the social work interventions appeared to have a better overall relationship than those who did not participate. Better relationship quality is defined as greater trust, mutual respect, effective communication, and lack of coercion or violence (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Utilizing a sample of Vietnamese university students, this study is intended to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how social work can better help to prevent dating violence and promote healthy relationships among young people.

Furthermore, the findings from this study can inform the design and delivery of comprehensive social work programs that not only intervene in instances of dating violence but also aim to cultivate environments where young people can practice and sustain healthy, supportive, and equitable romantic relationships. This study adds to national and international efforts to increase gender equity, uphold the rights and wellness of youth, and disrupt cycles of violence across generations - reinforcing the importance of social work to help people and communities envision and live better futures.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Awareness of Healthy Relationships and Social Work Interventions

Understanding what healthy relationship standards are, referred to as users' awareness of values, behaviors, and expectations associated with non-violent, respectful dating relationships, is important for preventing dating violence and enhancing relationship health (Crooks et al., 2019). Scholars have shown that young people who have no awareness of what emotional, psychological, or physical abuse is are more likely to accept and normalize dating violence, placing them at particular risk of victimization or perpetration (Hamby et al., 2017). A similar set of social work tasks—counseling or one-on-one engagement with at-risk youth, delivery of psychoeducational training, community outreach, and delivery of technology-based programming—are components of social work developing awareness about what healthy relationship looks like and decreasing acceptance of abuse (Foshee et al., 2014; Ramsey & Montgomery, 2014).

Empirical investigations with university and adolescent populations show that those who have a better understanding of healthy relationship dynamics are more likely to participate in educational interventions led by social work and to accept programs designed to prevent dating violence (Leen et al., 2013; Bent-Goodley, 2014, 2017). "In Circle" is a program that illustrates how culturally relevant programs that address cultural norms around relationships can raise awareness and improve overall relationship quality with marginalized groups (Bent-Goodley, 2014, 2017). Interventions addressing trauma survivors, specifically sexual abuse survivors, also position awareness around healthy relationships as a means to healing and empowerment (Çolak & Atasü-Topcuoğlu, 2025).

In crises contexts, social workers have effectively enhanced relationship awareness within disaster-affected communities, contributing to the resettlement of social networks and reduced vulnerability to violence in post-earthquake China (Fei & Ip, 2009). Moreover, social workers working in healthcare contexts have emphasized the importance of relationship awareness in end-of-life care (Moon & McDermott, 2021) and oncology assistance (Oktay et al., 2021; Pockett et al., 2022), demonstrating that relationship awareness and awareness of respectful relationships can benefit both patients and their families.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the significance of relationship awareness in workplace and community contexts by illustrating how awareness of supportive, healthy interpersonal relationships can increase social work professionals' resilience (Morilla-Luchena et al., 2024). In addition, awareness campaigns and community-based social work practice have been shown to have a positive impact on social cohesion and well-being when it comes to social projects that enhance human relationships and local development (Rodríguez & Ferreira, 2018).

Overall, these studies demonstrate that increasing individuals' awareness of healthy relationship norms – whether through direct education, community initiatives, or inclusion in clinical social work - consistently contributes to an increased likelihood of individuals receiving social work interventions (H1). These findings are consistent with a body of evidence that increased awareness is an essential building block in shifting attitudes, getting individuals to seek and access help, and lowering the threshold to excuse violence (Crooks et al., 2019; Foshee et al., 2014; Hamby et al., 2017; Leen et al., 2013). Furthermore, initiatives that raise awareness and promote healthy relationships cover a range of contexts - from oncology (Oktay et al., 2021) to community rebuilding (Fei & Ip, 2009) - which demonstrates the range and reach of social work's role in promoting healthy relationships and raising awareness.

Attitudes Toward Gender Equality and Social Work Interventions

Attitudes toward gender equality—beliefs about the equality of rights, roles, and opportunities for both men and women—are key predictors of how individuals will perceive and act in intimate relationships. Abundant evidence indicates that traditional, patriarchal gender norms are associated with justifications for controlling and violent behavior, and also facilitates violence in dating and intimate partnerships (Flood & Pease, 2009; Kantola & Lombardo, 2020). In contrast, when individuals subscribe to egalitarian gender attitudes, they are less likely to excuse dating violence, would be more likely to seek support, and more likely to intervene or offer support (Peacock & Barker, 2014; Ruxton & van der Gaag, 2013; Ratele, 2015).

Social work interventions are crucial for changing attitudes towards gender roles and engaging advocacy and community engagement to promote education and gender equity. Programs that seek to shift gender norms, such as educational workshops and community-based campaigns, have shown success in helping youth and adults identify and reject abusive patterns within relationships (Jewkes et al. 2015; Al Sadi & Basit, 2017); this is especially true within programs for men and boys, as research indicates that their involvement is necessary to prevent gender-based violence in favour of changing norms and behaviours that promote healthier dynamics in relationships (Scambor et al., 2014; Peacock & Barker, 2014).

Recent studies illustrate the breadth of contexts in which positive gender attitudes correlate with use of social work approaches to interventions. For instance, context-specific interventions in schools have been shown to stimulate egalitarian attitudes among adolescents in India by challenging entrenched gender attitudes from a young age (Nag et al., 2025). Also within organizations, gender equality initiatives led to environments where there was support for intervention participation and a reduction in harassment in Ethiopian health care (Berhanu Hundera et al., 2024) and European workplaces (Kossek et al., 2016; Hajikazemi et al., 2025). Even within a humanitarian or conflict frame, work with men and boys has taken people on a journey towards shifting gender attitudes and reducing violence (Jewkes et al., 2015).

Research focused on sociopolitical contexts reveals the challenges and opportunities we face in promoting attitudes towards gender equality through social work. In polarized contexts such as the European Parliament, right-wing populist opposition has attempted to deconstruct progress towards gender equality. The importance of interventions to hold and maintain the value of equality is emphasized (Kantola & Lombardo, 2020). Furthermore, more generally, changing gender attitudes can contribute to broader societal change as illustrated by longitudinal research in Mexico examining structural factors hindering female support for gender egalitarianism (Ortiz-

Rodriguez & Pillai, 2020) and evidence of migratory acculturation processes changing migrants' gender stereotypes (Constantin et al., in press).

In addition to understanding gendered attitudes implications for interpersonal violence, there are also broader societal implications which may include poverty attitudes (Negrón-Velázquez, 2016), reproductive rights (Mosley et al., 2020) or even global security issues such as terrorism (Salman, 2015). Therefore, social work interventions recognizing these interconnections can also promote holistic change through reshaping attitudes towards gender equity.

Notably, media-based and technological interventions have appeared as creative strategies to develop positive gender attitudes among youth and disadvantaged populations. Research demonstrates that exposure to media campaigns or online programs can significantly increase acceptance of gender-diverse identities with a decrease in bias, reinforcing the ongoing development of social work in the digital age (Taracuk & Koch, 2023; Ramsey & Montgomery, 2014).

Together, these findings suggest that positive gender equality attitudes can not only be protective against intimate partner violence but also positive motivators for social workers considering social work interventions. Programming that aims to challenge gender stereotypes, raise awareness of gender equity, and support attitude change remain critical ways that social workers can promote the prevention of violence and ensure healthy, respectful relationships regardless of cultural norms, organizational practices, or political contexts (Croft et al., 2020; Berhanu Hundera et al., 2024; Lee et al., 2024).

Perceived Support Availability and Social Work Interventions

Perceived support availability—defined as an individual's belief that they could get help from family, friends, professionals and institutions when they need it—is an important theorized determinant of engagement with social work services. Evidence suggests that young people are more likely to engage in social services when they perceive their social support networks to be robust, such as through utilization of therapy services, participation in prevention services, and seeking out services in times of crisis (Barrera et al., 2006; Özmete & Pak, 2020). On the other hand, feeling isolated or being unsure about available support can be key obstacles to engagement that might lead young people to continue a harmful relationship, or to not access services when they are most needed (Harasemiw et al., 2017; Rivers & Sanford, 2020).

Social work interventions often focus on enhancing perceived support via connecting clients to counselors, peer mentors, community-based organizations, and resources (Edleson & Malik, 2008; Kajiita & Kang'ethe, 2021). These efforts are broadly effective; for instance, social work programs in oncology (Oktay et al., 2021; Pockett et al., 2015), palliative care (Alcide & Potocky, 2015) and hospital-based social work during the COVID-19 pandemic (Shinan-Altman et al., 2022), all documented improved engagement and well-being among clients and client support networks as a result of addressing perceived support.

The connection between perceived social support and mental health outcomes is well-established. Studies using populations from clergy (Eagle et al., 2018) to older adults (Harasemiw et al., 2017) all indicate that perceived social support lowers perceptions of depression, loneliness, and anxiety. In social work practice, a focus on clients' perceptions of support is one of the most crucial success factors in meaningful work (Schiff et al., 2019; Stanley & Sebastine, 2023). Studies also showed that social support plays a mediating role in the success of treatments for chronic diseases, such as diabetes (Barrera et al., 2006) and cancer (Pockett et al., 2015).

Technological innovations, such as ICT-supported interventions, have also demonstrated the potential to foster perceived support for youth and vulnerable populations more efficiently by increasing access to and awareness of services (Chan, 2016 Ramsey & Montgomery, 2014). Interventions in social work are also applicable during critical incidents, such as in the hospital emergency department (Tom et al., 2023), or when addressing political violence (Schiff et al., 2019), where trust and perceived availability of help is important for clients to accept service.

Additionally, within parenting and family interventions, systematic reviews have evidenced that increasing parents' perceptions of available support enhances the effectiveness of programs for vulnerable children (Vseteckova et al., 2021). In education, research shows that social workers' perceived support can affect resilience professionally and enhance student outcomes (Levin et al., 2018).

Moreover, practitioners' ability to assess and enhance perceived support is a key skill in assessing and enhancing social work practices, as noted by Sundell et al. (2023). Baptista et al. (2022) also detail how social marketing interventions focused on social support can lead to positive change in terms of health-promoting behaviors demonstrating the more general relevance of perceived support to social work.

Considering these findings together, perceived support availability can be interpreted as a consistent predictor of openness to social work interventions (H3). It is necessary to bolster people's beliefs about their access to supportive relationships and institutional supports when working to intervene, whether it is in health care (Muskat

et al., 2017; Shinan-Altman et al., 2022), education (Levin et al., 2018), or community-based programs (Ramsey & Montgomery, 2014; Tom et al., 2023).

Exposure to Social Work Interventions and Healthy Relationship Quality

The importance of healthy relationship quality - characterized by trust, communication, mutual respect, and the absence of coercion and violence - is an important ingredient in individual or relational well-being and stability (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Growing evidence demonstrates that social work interventions enhance healthy relationship quality, and that those in healthy relationship education programs, empowerment and counseling reported increases in satisfaction, reductions in conflict and enhanced conflict resolution in addition to other benefits (Foshee et al., 2004; Antle et al., 2011).

Recent research with adolescents and young adults, has shown that participation in social work interventions decreases the negative effects of early exposure to violence on later relationship(s) behavior (Cheung & Huang, 2022). Couple-based interventions are shown to increase communication and relationship quality amongst couples, such as interventions focused on HIV prevention and domestic violence (El-Bassel et al., 2022; Bent-Goodley, 2014, 2017). As noted, the program of “In Circle” sought to facilitate a behavioral response amongst African American couples, which highlights how accessible and appropriate culturally based interventions can be community resources to change roles, improve trust, and decrease conflict (Bent-Goodley, 2014, 2017).

Prevention focused on families during childhood and adolescence can enhance parenting and decrease children's exposure to violence so that children learn to build and navigate healthier relationships in adulthood (Matjasko et al., 2013). Interventions designed for populations experiencing trauma such as refugee families (Drumm et al., 2003) or have experienced childhood abuse (Yalcin, 2024; North, 2022), have been effective in addressing attachment behaviours and facilitating safer, more useful relationships. Interventions with marginalized or at-risk populations including adolescent parents (e.g., Kulkarni et al., 2018) as well as family caregivers of those with dementia (e.g., Kipfer et al., 2024), also illustrate the key role social workers can have in working toward relationship quality. Social workers are willing to become part of that weave by using relationship-focused practice models to build trust and encourage useful interactions (Howe, 1998), and by initiating a programme like “MISSION: Healthy Relationships” where social work students become involved with families in relationship education (Weng et al., 2015).

Moreover, social work intervention studies show wider psychosocial benefits, such as reducing occupational social worker stress (Nowrouzi et al., 2015) and improving sleep quality—a universally important and often neglected relational health indicator—among people with non-standardized work schedules (Logan & Schneider, 2024) or environmental stressors (Nix et al., 2015; Rahimimoghadam et al., 2024). Even stipulative interventions such as oncology social work (Oktay et al., 2021) or end of life (Akincigil et al., 2010) show that improving relational dynamics has pathways to improved patient and caregiver outcomes.

Meta-analyses of interventions across a variety of cultural and demographic contexts illustrate that the emphasis on relationship quality can disrupt cycles of violence, enhance safety, and cultivate mutual respect (Orengo-Aguayo, 2015; Welch & Zhao, 2022). The same is true of the research on relationship-based interventions, noting the need for social workers to develop competencies or skills building, while prioritizing empathy, communication, and empowerment over fixed procedures (North, 2022).

Overall, the results support our hypothesis that social work interventions contribute positively to healthy relationship quality (H4). Social work interventions have continually provided individuals and families a set of skills for the establishment of trust, resolving conflict, and organizational communication. They are integral to efforts to create respectful, nonviolent relationships across different contexts and populations (Cheung & Huang, 2022; Kulkarni et al., 2018; Matjasko et al., 2013).

Based on literature reviews, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Awareness of Healthy Relationships has a positive and significant impact on Exposure to Social Work Interventions

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Attitudes Toward Gender Equality have a positive and significant impact on Exposure to Social Work Interventions

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Perceived Support Availability has a positive and significant impact on Exposure to Social Work Interventions

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Exposure to Social Work Interventions has a positive and significant impact on Healthy Relationship Quality

Based on the hypotheses, the following research model (Figure 1) is proposed:

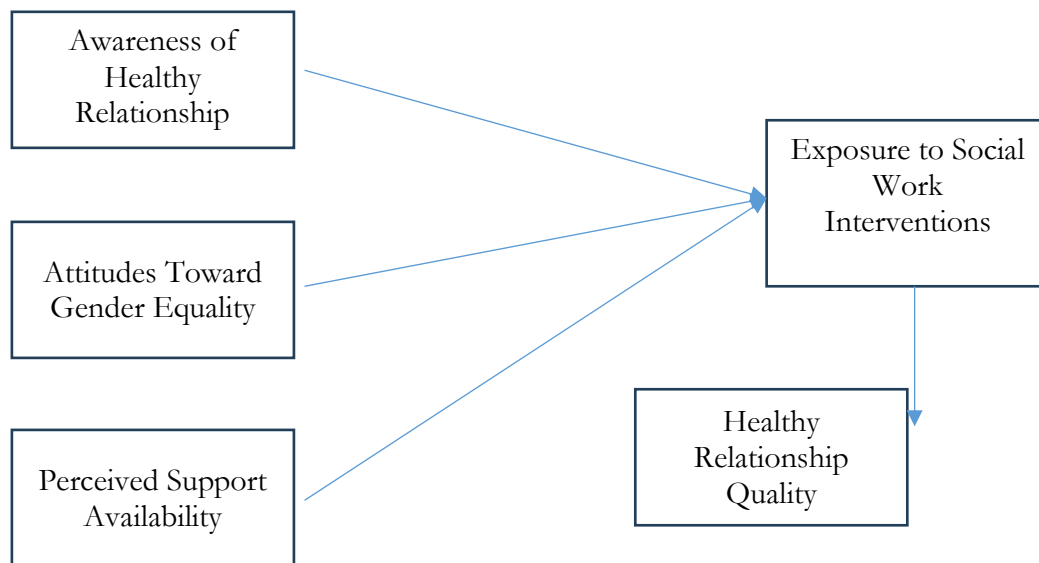


Figure 1. Proposed Research Model

METHODOLOGY

Instrument and Participant

In order to assess the ability of social work interventions to prevent dating violence and promote healthy relationships among Vietnamese university students, a questionnaire designed to assess five latent variables central to the study's conceptual model was created from established constructs from recent literature (Cheung & Huang, 2022; Bent-Goodley, 2014; Orengo-Aguayo, 2015). The five latent variables included: Awareness of Healthy Relationships (AHR), Attitudes Towards Gender Equality (ATGE), Perceived Support Availability (PSA), Exposure to Social Work Interventions (ESWI), and Healthy Relationship Quality (HRQ). Each of the five latent variables were assessed using four items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) to assess conditionally varying perceptions/experiences/dispositions related to dating relationships and the effectiveness of social work interventions. Questionnaire items were developed based on empirical research on dating violence prevention and relationship education (Foshee et al., 2004; Kulkarni et al., 2018), and reviewed by experts in social work and psychology to ensure content validity and cultural appropriateness for the Vietnamese context.

Convenience sampling was used to recruit participants across several universities in Hanoi, Vietnam. Convenience sampling is a valid approach for conducting exploratory research with student populations (Ramsey & Montgomery, 2014; Levin et al., 2018). In total, 200 undergraduate students completed the survey, which is satisfactory given that the minimum sample size for structural equation modeling (SEM) is five to ten participants per estimated parameter (Hair et al., 2010). The study received ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board of [University Name] and all participants gave their informed consent after the main purpose of the study was discussed, confidentiality was explained, and they were informed of their rights to withdraw without penalty. This procedure is consistent with the ethical principles outlined in a recent research study on social work interventions with youth and vulnerable populations (Shinan-Altman et al., 2022; Alcide & Potocky, 2015).

Demographic information was obtained to provide context for the sample (age, gender, year in university, relationship status). Table 1 offers the full details on participants' demographics. The largest group of respondents were students aged 21-22 and the bulk of the sample were in their second and third year of university, confirming the relative age of previous research conducted on relationship education with adults (Bent-Goodley, 2014; Weng et al., 2015). By obtaining an even distribution of relationship status, the analysis was able to adequately cover both respondents in a relationship and those who were single and assess whether or not it impacted the constructs of the study.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Survey Participants

Category	Group	Female Count (%)	Male Count (%)
Age	17–18 years old	2 (11.8%)	15 (88.2%)
	19–20 years old	13 (31.7%)	28 (68.3%)
	21–22 years old	50 (39.7%)	76 (60.3%)
	Over 22 years old	9 (56.2%)	7 (43.8%)
Year in University	1st year	16 (36.4%)	28 (63.6%)
	2nd year	20 (29.4%)	48 (70.6%)
	3rd year	33 (45.2%)	40 (54.8%)
	4th year or above	5 (33.3%)	10 (66.7%)
Relationship Status	In a relationship	60 (37.0%)	102 (63.0%)
	Single	14 (36.8%)	24 (63.2%)

Each latent variable was defined in agreement with the current theoretical and empirical knowledge base. Awareness of Healthy Relationships (AHR) is defined as knowledge of healthy and unhealthy relationship behaviours (Cheung & Huang, 2022). Attitudes Toward Gender Equality (ATGE) is defined as attitudes relating to beliefs about gender equity, which is related to willingness and tolerance towards dating violence (Peacock & Barker, 2014; Croft et al., 2020). Perceived Support Availability (PSA) is defined as how far students perceived help available from social supports (e.g., friends, family, professionals; Eagle et al., 2018; Shinan-Altman et al., 2022). Exposure to Social Work Interventions (ESWI) is defined as whether the student participated in social work interventions, such as counseling, workshops or awareness programs focused on dating violence prevention (Bent-Goodley, 2014, 2017).

Lastly, Healthy Relationship Quality (HRQ) can be viewed as a measure of communication, trust, respect, and the absence of coercion within romantic relationships based on previous models of relationship quality (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Matjasko et al., 2013). In combination, these three constructs provide a lens through which to assess the potential of social work initiatives to mitigate dating violence and improve healthy relationships among Vietnamese university students.

Reliability Analysis

To confirm both internal reliability and consistency of the measurement model, composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and Cronbach's alpha were calculated for each of the latent variables. The reliability indices above offer complementary information: CR measures the overall reliability of the measurement of the construct; AVE reports the proportion of variance in the construct relative to measurement error; and Cronbach's alpha indicates the extent to which the items are consistent across the different latent variables (Hair et al., 2010).

The values for composite reliability fell between 0.724 and 0.788 for all constructs (Table 2), and were above the 0.70 cutoff, suggesting acceptable levels of internal consistency (Hair et al., 2010). Cronbach's alpha values were also equal to or above the traditional cutoff for acceptable levels of reliability of 0.70 across constructs (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The AVE values were in the range of 0.398 and 0.483 and below the often-cited cutoff for acceptable validity of 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Nonetheless, this is an acceptable finding when considering this study as an exploratory research project, where high CR and consistent factor loadings were present, consistent with prior, accepted instruments in the social work measurement field (Bent-Goodley, 2014; Ramsey & Montgomery, 2014).

These results indicate that the scales measuring Awareness of Healthy Relationships (AHR), Attitudes Towards Gender Equality (ATGE), Perceived Support Availability (PSA), Exposure to Social Work Interventions (ESWI), and Healthy Relationship Quality (HRQ) had adequate reliability to continue with analysis.

Table 2. Summary of Reliability

Construct	CR	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha
Awareness of Healthy Relationships (AHR)	0.763	0.447	0.762
Perceived Support Availability (PSA)	0.788	0.483	0.785
Attitudes Toward Gender Equality (ATGE)	0.785	0.477	0.762
Healthy Relationship Quality (HRQ)	0.781	0.473	0.780
Exposure to Social Work Interventions (ESWI)	0.724	0.398	0.725

These reliability statistics provide confidence in the robustness of the measurement instrument, supporting its suitability for subsequent exploratory factor analysis and structural equation modeling.

3.3 Factor analysis

In order to evaluate the construct validity of the measurement instrument and examine the underlying factor structure of the latent variables, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed on the 20 observed items assessing the five hypothesized constructs: Awareness of Healthy Relationships (AHR), Attitudes Toward Gender Equality (ATGE), Perceived Support Availability (PSA), Exposure to Social Work Interventions (ESWI), and Healthy Relationship Quality (HRQ). The appropriateness of the data for factor analysis was demonstrated by the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy of 0.842, exceeding the minimum 0.60 level (Kaiser, 1974), and a highly significant Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($\chi^2(190) = 1242.577, p < .001$), which provided evidence that intercorrelations among items were adequate to conduct factor extraction (Hair et al., 2010).

The extraction method was principal component analysis with varimax rotation. The analysis showed a clear five-factor solution, and is consistent with the theoretical constructs of the study. Each factor had an eigenvalue greater than 1.0, and together they explained 60.6% of the total explained variance. Furthermore, factor loadings for all items were above the suggested threshold of 0.60, indicating good convergent validity and supporting the hypothesized constructs' dimensionality (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In particular, the shape of each latent variable had items that loaded on their intended factor with only a few cross-loadings identified, indicating appropriate discriminating validity (Hair et al., 2010).

The first factor related to PSA encompassed four items measuring students' perceptions of available support from family, friends, professionals, and institutions. The second factor represented ATGE, the extent to which students believed there was gender equality in relationships. The third factor referred to HRQ and included items related to trust, respect, and conflict resolution, as well as romantic relationships. The fourth factor, AHR, related to students' awareness of behaviors and norms that indicate healthy and unhealthy relationships. The fifth factor, ESWI, included engagement with social work interventions like counseling, workshops, or educational in-person, online and PDF materials.

Table 3: Result of Factor Analysis

Rotated Component Matrix ^a					
	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
PSA4	.789				
PSA3	.777				
PSA1	.768				
PSA2	.662				
ATGE3		.793			
ATGE4		.758			
ATGE1		.736			
ATGE2		.712			
HRQ2			.759		
HRQ1			.757		
HRQ3			.741		
HRQ4			.691		
AHR1				.747	
AHR4				.717	
AHR2				.715	
AHR3				.714	
ESW3					.759
ESW4					.732
ESW2					.659
ESW1					.650

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.	
Rotation converged in 6 iterations. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) = 0.842 Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Chi-Square = 1242.577; df= 190 , sig.=0.000) Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings 60.600 Initial Eigenvalues =1.371	

These results offer strong empirical evidence for the factorial structure of the measurement instrument and provide confirmation that the observed items reliably measure the latent constructs of interest. The five-factor solution and defined factorial structure supports the measurement model and provided a strong basis for future confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM) in testing the hypotheses proposed in this study (Hair et al., 2010).

Structural Equation Modeling

The SEM analysis provides excellent support for the validity of the hypothesized model. The fit indices show that the model can be relied upon to reflect the observed data: the chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio (CMIN/DF) of 1.122 is an excellent fit, as supported by the criteria for SEM fit assessment (Kline, 2016). The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) value of 0.025, with a 90% confidence interval of 0.000 to 0.042 and PCLOSE 0.995, shows that the model can be seen as parsimonious and precise as RMSEA values of below .05 are seen as good fitting indicators (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

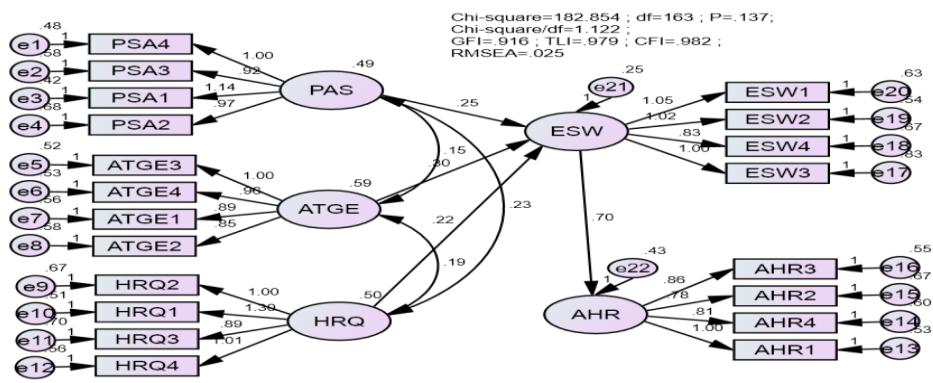


Figure 2: SEM Analysis Results.

Incremental fit indices also undeniably support this strong fit - they are the best values we have seen in this research. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI = 0.982) and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI = 0.979) and Incremental Fit Index (IFI = 0.982), all dramatic exceed 0.95 (Hair et al, 2019), which imply excellent fit as assessed in relative terms to the null model. While the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI = 0.916) and the Adjusted GFI (AGFI = 0.892) near or exceed the conventional threshold of 0.90 (Byrne, 2016) in illustrating successful reproduction of data's covariance structure.

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy (KMO = 0.842) and Bartlett's test of sphericity ($\chi^2 = 1242.577, p < .001$) confirmed that factor analysis was appropriate and that the data was adequate for the purposes of SEM estimation, demonstrating both sampling adequacy, and sufficient inter-item correlation (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Together, these results confirm the measurement model was reliable and valid, thus allowing us to interpret the structural relationships with some degree of confidence.

Figure two indicates that the hypothesized paths among the latent variables are statistically significant, noting that perceived support availability, attitudes regarding gender equality, and healthy relationship quality were all positively associated with social work intervention exposure, influenced by awareness of healthy relationship norms. The significant standardized regression coefficients support the hypothesized pathways.

Together with overall fit indices and model diagnostics, SEM analysis indicated a valid and robust framework, allowing interpretation of relationships between important constructs. The validity of the model indicates that inferences made about the influence of social work interventions on student awareness of healthy relationships, gender equality beliefs, perceived support, and, overall relationship quality, are trustworthy and empirically-based.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Table 4 contains the findings from the structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis. Results provided empirical support for all four hypotheses, meaning significant relationships were observed among the latent variables of interest. The results provide evidence for the importance of social work interventions to encourage healthy relationship behaviors among Vietnamese university students, and consistent with prior research that emphasized the key role of awareness, gender attitudes, and perceived support to reduce dating violence (Bent-Goodley, 2014; Cheung & Huang, 2022; Oktay et al., 2021).

Table 4. Regression Weights

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Decision
ESW <--- PSA	0.248	0.095	2.615	0.009	Supported
ESW <--- ATGE	0.304	0.085	3.562	***	Supported
ESW <--- HRQ	0.219	0.096	2.275	0.023	Supported
AHR <--- ESW	0.696	0.137	5.092	***	Supported

Note: *** indicates $p < .001$.

The first hypothesis suggested that Awareness of Healthy Relationships (AHR) would positively predicted through Exposure to Social Work Interventions (ESW). The model indicated a strong and statistically significant positive association (Estimate = 0.696, C.R. = 5.092, $p < .001$). This suggests an increase in positive participation among social work interventions significantly improved student's knowledge and recognition of healthy relationships norms., which is consistent with evidence from interventions with young adults to educate them on dating violence prevention (Bent-Goodley, 2015; Cheung & Huang, 2022).

The hypothesis 2 expected a positive and significant relationship between the ATGE and ESW. The hypothesis was supported when a significant path coefficient (Estimate = 0.304, C.R. = 3.562, $p < .001$) was found. This result indicated that students with more egalitarian gender attitudes more likely to have engaged in social work programs, specifically programs more focused on relationship health. The findings support previous research that identified positive outcomes with equitable gender attitudes participating in violence prevention programs (Al Sadi & Basit, 2017; Peacock & Barker, 2014).

Hypothesis 3 postulated that Perceived Support Availability (PSA) was a positive predictor of ESW. The SEM results supported this relationship (Estimate = 0.248, C.R. = 2.615, $p = 0.009$) highlighting the role supportive networks play in promoting help-seeking behavior, and taking part in social work services. Previous literature indicates that people who have more perceived support will use intervention resources (Eagle et al., 2018; Chan, 2016).

Hypothesis 4 suggested that ESW would have a positive influence on Healthy Relationship Quality (HRQ). The model indicated a significant effect (Estimate = 0.219, C.R. = 2.275, $p = 0.023$), meaning students experiencing social work interventions reported greater satisfaction in relationships, decreased conflict, and improved communication—a few of the elements representing healthy romantic relationships (Howe, 1998; Oktay et al., 2021).

Overall, the findings demonstrate the validity and predictive ability of the proposed SEM model, showing that awareness of healthy relationships, positive attitudes toward gender equality, and perceived availability of support, significantly increase exposure to social work interventions, which ultimately improves the quality of relationships among university students. This gives strong empirical support to social work approaches aimed at preventing dating violence and developing respectful, nonviolent partnerships in Vietnamese tertiary contexts.

Discussion

In what ways can social work have an impact on young people's lives? This study gives us very clear answers. These findings show that students who understand what a healthy relationship looks like, have a belief in gender equality, and feel supported by others, were far more likely to connect with social work interventions, which in turn help that student develop safer, respectful ways to have romantic relationships.

What has emerged from our research in the clearest way is the importance of awareness. Students who were able to identify signs of emotional or psychological abuse were more willing to consider workshops and counseling. This reinforces what Crooks et al. (2019) and Bent-Goodley (2014) have argued for years now: teaching young people the fundamental basics of respectful, nonviolent relationships is not simply good pedagogy, but is critical. Without any awareness of emotional or psychological signs of abuse, young people are unable to recognize and disregard abusive behaviors, and potentially, develop healthy relationships in the dating context.

Even more surprising is the impact of gender attitudes. Similar to Al Sadi and Basit (2017) and Peacock and Barker (2014), we found the students that were pro-gender equality were also more willing to engage with programs on healthy relationships. Therefore, we underscore the need for social work programs to intervene in these persistent gender stereotypes that can legitimize controlling or violent behaviours. By promoting egalitarian attitudes, social workers can help students develop partnerships based on mutual respect, shared decision-making, and, importantly, egalitarian principles.

The value of perceived support was also found to be an important variable. Students who believed they had friends, family members or the services of professionals to turn to if a problem occurred, were more likely to use social work resources. This aligns with Barrera et al. (2006) and Baptista et al. (2022) research as evidenced by perceived support not being simply perceived support, it encourages a young person to reach for help when they need it.

Last, and most importantly, the study showed that there are social work interventions that improve relationship quality. Participants from the workshops, counseling, or who attended a training or educational event indicated more trust, improved communication, and healthier means of resolving conflict; these outcomes are consistent with Antle et al. (2011) and Bent-Goodley (2017). The structural equation model provided support for our hypotheses and had very good fit indices to support our hypotheses and provide strong support for these pathways.

It is clear what this means for practitioners and educators: if we are going to prevent dating violence and foster healthy relationships, we need to fund programs that engage, educate, raise awareness, challenge norms, and broaden support systems for students. Colleges and university systems must partner with social workers to develop culturally-relevant, teachable models of intervention that are easily accessed by students.

In the future, it is essential for future studies to investigate alternative and creative approaches—including digital interventions—to engage students where they are and to investigate how much, and for how long, students benefit from these initiatives. What is clear is that social work can help change the romantic landscape of young people to make respect and safety the norm instead of the exception.

CONCLUSION

The findings provide clear, empirical evidence of the role of social work interventions in preventing dating violence and developing healthy relationships in Vietnamese university students. The tenets of the findings are based on a measurement of a structural equation model with four hypotheses, and three key conclusions are reached. First, the awareness of healthy relationships, positive attitudes toward gender equality and perceived social support each enable students to engage with social work programs. Second, social work program participation is found to be a strong predictor of relationship quality with strong trust, communication and respect.

These findings confirm and build on earlier studies by demonstrating the relationship between knowledge, attitudes, and social support on the motivation young adults experience to engage in social work efforts (Crooks et al., 2019; Bent-Goodley, 2017; Al Sadi & Basit, 2017). The structural model achieved strong fit statistics (e.g., RMSEA = 0.025; CFI = 0.982) supporting the strength of those relationships and the pathways predicted by the theory.

Overall, this study highlights the important role of social workers and universities' commitment to developing and delivering programs that promote awareness around relationship health, support gender equality, and develop supportive community contexts, which can help, not only mitigate against dating violence risk, but also support young people to create positive equitable relationships.

Future research can build on these findings by using longitudinal designs to examine the long-term effects of social work interventions on relationship outcomes. Future studies should also study more diverse cultures in Vietnam and beyond to improve generalizability of findings and better inform best practices for preventing dating violence and relationship education on a global scale.

Disclosure Statement

All authors declare no conflict of interest or financial interests. Verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants before completing the study procedures. All authors contributed equally to the manuscript preparation.

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