



**Associations of Quality of Family Communication and Well-Being
with Marital Attitudes among Turkish Emerging Adults**

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between Turkish emerging adults' marital attitudes, and their quality of family communication and well-being. The study participants consisted of 386 (266 female, 120 male) never-married emerging adults, selected by the method of convenience sampling. Hierarchical multiple linear regression technique was used for data analysis. The results revealed that emerging adults' quality of family communication and well-being were both predictors of marital attitudes. A higher level of well-being and quality of family communication were associated with more positive attitudes toward marriage.

Keywords: marital attitude, family communication, well-being,
emerging adults, premarital factors

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Introduction

Although there has been a decline in the number of marriages in recent years in Turkey (Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat), 2020), young people do not fear marriage (Akbaş et al., 2019; Bağ, 2019), and only a small portion of them consider marriage as unnecessary (İşmen-Gazioğlu, 2006). Köroğlu (2013) determined that the vast majority of young people attach importance to marriage. While many young people in Turkish culture regard marriage as valuable, Willoughby (2010) found that marital attitudes in late adolescence are not static. Similarly, Willoughby et al. (2015b) pointed out that marital beliefs change over time during emerging adulthood. These findings are an indication that new studies are needed to understand how emerging adults' marital attitudes develop and change, and to determine the variables associated with marital attitudes.

In the last decade, there have been many studies in Turkish culture examining marital attitudes of university students, many of whom are in the period of emerging adulthood (Arslan, 2019; Bayoğlu & Atli, 2014; Karabacak & Çiftçi, 2016; Keldal, 2016; Keldal & Atli, 2020; Kocabiçak, 2019; Öz-Soysal et al., 2016). Bayoğlu and Atli (2014) developed a scale to measure young people's marital attitudes. Similarly, Öz-Soysal et al. (2016) focused on measuring marital attitudes and adapted the Marital Attitude Scale developed by Braaten and Rosén (1998) to Turkish culture. In their study conducted on young adults, Karabacak and Çiftçi (2016) revealed that there are significant relationships between irrational romantic relationship beliefs and marital attitudes. Keldal (2016) focused on the relationship between personality traits and marital attitudes while Keldal and Atli (2020) found that virginity, physical attributes (which are important in mate selection), and femininity gender role variables are significant predictors of marital attitudes. In his study on young people, Arslan (2019) determined that marital attitudes significantly correlated with interpersonal styles and forgiveness. Kocabiçak (2019) revealed that marital attitudes are associated with separation-individuation, individualism and collectivism. In studies conducted on marital attitudes in Turkish culture, family-related factors and well-being variables were quite limited. In this context, the aim of this study is to examine the relationship in Turkish culture between emerging adults' quality of family communication and well-being levels, and their marital attitudes.

Family Factors and Marital Attitudes

Barr and Simons (2018) argued that the most important factor among those that are believed to develop young people's marital beliefs may be the family of origin. In previous studies (Alqashan & Alkandari, 2010; Ellison et al., 2011; Huang & Lin, 2014; Jennings et al. 1992; Sassler et al., 2009; Shimkowski et al., 2018), the relationship between family structure and marital attitudes has been examined. In their study with young Kuwaiti people, Alqashan and Alkandari (2010) determined that those with intact parents had more positive marital attitudes compared to those with divorced parents. Huang and Lin (2014) revealed that Taiwanese young people with intact parents had more positive attitudes compared to young people whose parents were divorced. Similarly, in two studies conducted in the USA, Jennings et al. (1992), and Shimkowski et al. (2018) showed that young people who have intact families have more positive marital attitudes compared to those with divorced parents. In their study conducted with women, Ellison et al. (2011) found that the two-parent family structure was pos-

itively associated with marital salience. They also argued that women from a two-parent family consider marriage as a more short-term goal than those from other family structures. Sassler et al. (2009) found that parental divorce is associated with an increased rate of cohabitation compared to marriage.

Another issue that researchers have emphasized is the relationship between parental conflict and marital attitudes. Jennings et al. (1992) found that the marital attitudes of those who have parental conflict at home are more negative compared to those who do not have parental conflict at home. Christensen (2014) revealed that there is a positive relationship between parental conflict and negative marital attitudes. Huang and Lin (2014) found that young people experiencing higher levels of parental conflict were associated with less positive marital attitudes. In their study conducted with Turkish emerging adults, Sağkal and Özdemir (2019) also found that there is a negative relationship between interparental conflict and marital attitudes.

A few recent studies have examined the relationship between parents' marital attitudes and those of their children. Willoughby et al. (2012a) found that, "when father and mother give more importance to marriage being a goal for their child, their young adult children are more likely to report marriage being an important goal in their life" (p. 236). In their study with emerging adults and their families, Willoughby et al. (2012b) determined that emerging adults reported a younger age for ideal timing of marriage when compared with both their mothers and fathers, and that they considered marriage a more significant goal than their mothers and fathers did. One study focused on the relationship between parental attitudes and marital attitudes. Willoughby et al. (2015a) revealed that higher perceived helicopter parenting in emerging adults is associated with having strong beliefs that being single has more advantages than being married and with a delay expected in marital timing.

In recent studies, researchers have focused on the relationship between the presence of siblings and marital attitudes. Hall and Willoughby (2018) determined that there are significant differences in ideal courtship length, ideal engagement length and importance given to marriage among the following categories: those having an opposite-sex sibling; those having only a same-sex sibling, and those having no siblings. In this study, those who had a same-sex sibling had a longer ideal courtship length than those who did not have a sibling. Those who had an opposite-sex sibling had a shorter ideal engagement length than those who had a same-sex sibling. In addition, those who had an opposite-sex sibling gave more importance to marriage compared to those who had a same-sex sibling. In a study conducted with young adults, Cassinat and Jensen (2020) concluded that a sibling's marital centrality and an individual's marital centrality are positively linked, and also that sibling closeness increases marriage expectation odds. In his study conducted in Turkey, Arslan (2019) revealed that those with married siblings have more positive marital attitudes compared to those with unmarried siblings.

Well-being and Marital Attitudes

To date, many researchers have examined the connection between relationship status and well-being (Blekesaune, 2018; Diener et al., 2000; Kamp-Dush & Amato, 2005; Kim & McKenry, 2002; Lee & Ono, 2012; Mikucka, 2016; Musick & Bumpass, 2012; Perelli-Harris et al., 2019; Shapiro & Keyes, 2008; Stack & Eshleman, 1998; Soons & Kalmijn, 2009; Williams, 2003). Although the associations between relationship status and well-being is well-documented, we know little about the relationship between well-being and premarital factors.

Only a few studies have focused on this issue. Mastekaasa (1992), in his study conducted on single individuals, determined that both life satisfaction and well-being have a positive relationship with the probability of marrying. Kim and Jung (2015) reported that life satisfaction is a positive and significant predictor of marital attitudes. In their study with emerging adults, Yoo and Lee (2019) found that a higher level of positive well-being increased marital intention, and that this well-being level was associated with lower expected marital age. Arocho (2021) showed that greater well-being increases the marital expectation odds. In addition, Arocho and Purtell (2020) reported in their study with unmarried young adults that increased psychological well-being reduced the chance of divorce. Contrary to these findings, Arocho (2019) concluded that well-being is not significantly associated with marriage, cohabitation or remaining single.

The Current Study

As we said before, the purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between Turkish emerging adults' marital attitudes, and their quality of family communication and well-being levels. Although the role of the family in forming marital attitudes has been examined in previous studies in Western societies, there are few studies (Maden, 2015; Sağkal & Özdemir, 2019) on this in Turkish culture. For this reason, we aimed to examine the role of quality of family communication, which we consider important for the formation of marital attitudes, in Turkish culture.

Even though there is a limited number of studies in the literature on the relationship between marital attitudes and well-being, they have revealed that well-being is associated with marital attitudes. In Turkish culture, only one study (Sümbül, 2018) has examined marital attitudes in terms of perceived happiness. In this context, we believe there is both a need for understanding the role of well-being in the formation of marital attitudes and a need for the existing literature to be expanded.

In addition, it is known that marital attitudes are associated with union formation behavior (Sassler & Schoen, 1999). In particular, we believe that examining the variables associated with marital attitudes in Turkish culture is important for understanding the union formation behavior of adults. Thus, we sought the answer for the following research question:

Research Question: Is there a significant relationship between emerging adults' marital attitudes, and their quality of family communication and well-being levels?

Method

Participants

The participants consisted of 386 (266 female, 120 male) emerging adults who had never married. All of them were attending Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University, located in a city in central Anatolia. In the formation of the study group, convenience sampling strategy was employed. The ages of the emerging adults participating ranged from 19 to 25. 165 of the participants had a romantic relationship at the time. Detailed information is presented in Table 1. 69% of the participants were female and 43% had a romantic relationship. 91% of the participants' parents were still married. The average age of the individuals in the sample group was 22.01. On average, ideal marital age was calculated as 26. 21.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Proportion (%)
Gender			
Female			69
Male			31
Relationship status			
Having a romantic relationship			43
Having no romantic relationship			57
Age	22.01	1.18	
Ideal marital age	26.21	2.85	
Female	25.93	2.21	
Male	26.81	3.85	
Parents' marital status			
Married			91
Divorced			5
Separated			2
Other			2

Procedure

Before the data collection, the required permissions were obtained from the administrators of Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University. The data were collected from the participants in the classroom. Informed consent forms were obtained from the participants before data collection, and only volunteers participated in the study. The researchers gave a brief explanation to the participants about the aim of the study, and those who wanted to get feedback were later informed via e-mail. Each participant was asked to complete the 51 items in the form. The response time to the items in the data collection tool took approximately 20 minutes.

Measures

İnönü Marital Attitude Scale (IMAS): In this study, the İnönü Marital Attitude Scale, developed by Bayoğlu and Atli (2014), was used to measure marital attitudes of adults. This one-dimensional five-point Likert scale consists of 21 items. The response format of the IMAS ranges from “1 = Strongly disagree” to “5 = Strongly agree” (sample item: Marriage is important as an indicator of commitment between two people). High scores from the scale indicate more positive marital attitudes.

Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS): In this study, well-being was measured by the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale, developed by Tennant et al. (2007) and adapted to Turkish culture by Keldal (2015). This one-dimensional scale consists of 14 items (sample item: I have been feeling optimistic about the future). The response format of this five-point Likert scale ranges from “1 = Strongly disagree” to “5 = Strongly agree”. High scores from the scale are considered as indicative of a high level of mental well-being.

Family Communication Scale: The quality of family communication was measured with the Family Communication Scale, one of the scales from the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale IV package, which was developed within the framework of the circumplex model of marital and family systems. The adaptation of the scale to Turkish culture was carried out by Türkdoğan et al. (2018). The response format of the five-point Likert scale ranges from “1 = strongly disagree” to “5 = strongly agree”. While the scale had 10 items in its original version, the adapted version of the scale has a structure consisting of eight items (sample item: family members try to understand each other’s feelings). In this study, confirmatory factor analysis was carried out again on the factor structure consisting of 10 items. As a result of the confirmatory factor analysis, the factor loading of the items was calculated to be between .56 and .86. Hair, Black, Babin and Anderson (2013) stated that standardized loading values should be .5 or higher and ideally .7 or higher. In this context, all our calculated coefficients were over .5. According to the goodness of fit statistics of the scale, they were calculated as Normed $\chi^2 = 3.52$, CFI = .97, AGFI = .91, SRMR = .03 and RMSEA (90% CI) = .08 (.07-.10). Thus, the original structure of the scale preserved its validity in this sample. For this reason, the data in this study was collected with the original form consisting of 10 items. High scores from the scale indicate high quality of family communication.

Controls: We used gender, relationship status and age variables as control variables in this study. In previous studies, variables of gender (Huang & Lin, 2014; Keldal & Atli, 2020; Willoughby & Dworkin, 2009), relationship status (Karabacak & Çiftçi, 2016) and age (Gassanov et al., 2008; Leonhardt & Willoughby, 2018) were reported to be related to marital attitudes. Dichotomous variables were coded as gender (female = 0, male = 1) and relationship status (0 = having no romantic relationship, 1 = having a romantic relationship).

Data Analysis Plan.

A hierarchical multiple linear regression technique was employed to seek the answer to the question in the study. The two-step model was used to predict marital attitudes. In the first block, gender, relationship status and age, which were the demographic control variables, were included in the analysis. The second block consisted of predictors of interest for the current study.

Before starting the data analysis, normality, linearity, homoscedasticity of residuals, independence of residuals, outliers, multicollinearity and singularity, and the assumptions of the regression analysis were checked (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2012). After these checks, the data set was determined to meet these assumptions. The significance level in the study was accepted as .05.

Results

Table 2 contains the bivariate correlations between continuous variables. According to these bivariate correlation coefficients, there was a moderate correlation between marital attitudes and well-being ($r = .38, p < .01$), and a low level positive relationship between marital attitudes and quality of communica-

tion ($r = .29$, $p < .01$). It was calculated that there was a moderate correlation between the two predictive variables, ie quality of family communication and well-being ($r = .36$, $p < .01$), and there was no significant correlation between the age variable and the predictive variables. These findings are also an indication that there was no multicollinearity problem.

Table 2: Bivariate Correlations, Means and Standard Deviations for Continuous Variables

Variable	<i>M (SD)</i>	1	2	3	4
1.Marital attitude	78.78 (17.47)	.95 ^a			
2.Family communication	38. 29 (9.07)	.29**	.93 ^a		
3.Well-being	53.70 (8.72)	.38**	.36**	.87 ^a	
4. Age	22.01 (1.18)	.03	.02	.04	-

α = Cronbach's alpha coefficient, ** $p < .01$

Table 3 includes the regression analysis results. According to these, both of the models were found to be significant (First block $F(3, 382) = 13.09$, $p < .001$, second block $F(5, 380) = 21.18$, $p < .001$).

Table 3: Hierarchical Regression Analysis Results Predicting Marital Attitudes

	Model I			Model II			
Predictor variables	<i>B</i>	SE <i>B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	SE <i>B</i>	β	sr^2
Gender	4.31	1.90	.11*	3.50	1.77	.09*	.01
Relationship status	10.39	1.74	.29**	7.53	1.71	.21**	.04
Age	-.21	.75	-.01	-.27	.70	-.02	-
Family communication	-	-	-	.37	.09	.19**	.03
Well-being	-	-	-	.50	.10	.25**	.05
<i>R</i>		.31			.47		
<i>R</i>²		.09			.22		
<i>Adjusted R</i>²		.09			.21		

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

The demographic control variables in the first block explained 9% of the variance of marital attitudes. With the well-being and quality of family communication variables added in the second block, the model explained 21% of the variance of marital attitudes. The variables of gender ($B = 3.50$, $t = 1.97$, $p < .05$, but marginal $p = .048$), relationship status ($B = 7.53$, $t = 4.41$, $p < .01$), quality of family communication ($B = .37$, $t = 3.93$, $p < .01$) and well-being ($B = .50$, $t = 4.84$, $p < .01$) significantly contributed to the final model. The two variables of most interest in this study, quality of family communication and well-being, turned out to be significant predictors of emerging adults' marital attitudes. According to these results, when controlling for gender, relationship status and age, higher levels of well-being and quality of family communication were associated with more positive marital attitudes.

When examining regression coefficients for control variables in the final model, it was found that being male and having a romantic relationship were associated with more positive marital attitudes. The age variable was not found to be a significant predictor of marital attitudes. To further explain the variance of emerging adults' marital attitudes, the semi-partial correlation (sr^2) coefficients were calculated to determine the unique contributions of each variable in the final model. According to these, the most important contribution came from the well-being variable.

The moderating role of relationship status and gender in the association between family communication and marital attitudes was examined. As a result, it was determined that only the interaction between relationship status and family communication is significant ($B = -.37$, $SE = .18$, $\beta = -.12$, $t = -2.06$, $p < .05$). As a result of simple post-hoc slope analysis, for those who did not have a romantic relationship ($B = .51$, $SE = .12$, $\beta = .27$, $t = 4.38$, $p < .05$), there was a positive relationship between quality of family communication and marital attitudes. There was no significant relationship for those who had a romantic relationship ($B = .15$, $SE = .14$, $\beta = .08$, $t = 1.03$, $p > .05$). These findings are presented below in Figure 1.

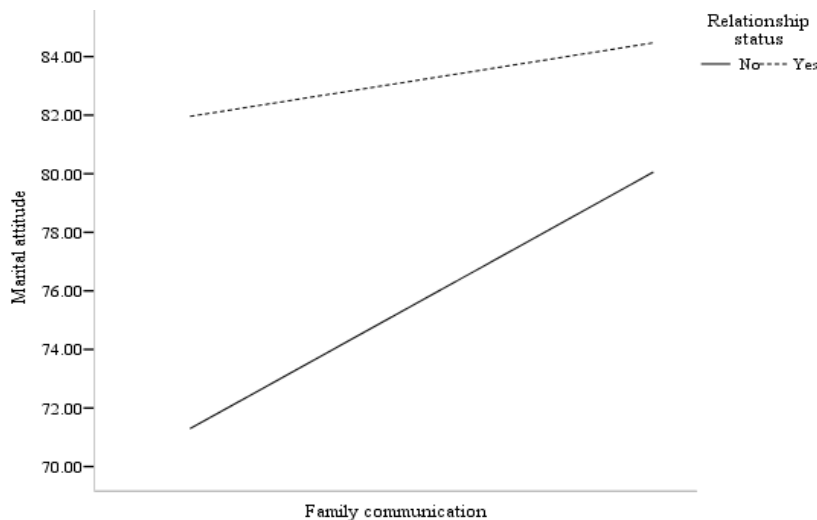


Figure 1: The Association between Quality of Family Communication and Marital Attitudes as Moderated by Relationship Status

Discussion

The results of the present study are significant in revealing variables related to Turkish emerging adults' marital attitudes. A positive relationship was found between their marital attitudes and well-being levels, as well as between their attitudes and their perceived quality of family communication. In addition, it was revealed that demographic control variables were associated with marital attitudes.

As expected, a higher quality of family communication was associated with more positive marital attitudes in the emerging adults. While researchers in the past have generally investigated the relationship between family factors and marital attitudes, this has been discussed in the context of family structure, interparental conflict and the existence of siblings. It has been found that family structure is an important factor in determining marital attitudes. Willoughby et al. (2019) also reported that having divorced parents was associated with less belief in marital salience, marital centrality and marital permanence compared to still married parents. Previous studies conducted with emerging adults (Huang & Lin, 2014; Shimkowski et al., 2018) have also found that those who have intact families have more positive marital attitudes than those with divorced parents. In addition, Miles and Servaty-Seib (2010) revealed that emerging adults with divorced parents have more positive attitudes towards divorce when difficulties in marriage occur.

Interparental conflict draws attention as another important factor. Jennings et al. (1992) reported that emerging adults with parental conflicts have more negative marital attitudes than those whose parents are conflict free. In their study with Turkish emerging adults, Sağkal and Özdemir (2019) found that interparental conflict is a negatively predictor of general marital attitudes. Larson and Thayne (1999) stated that young adults whose parents are alcoholics feel less prepared for marriage than young adults whose parents are non-alcoholics. Willoughby et al. (2015a), on the other hand, determined that the parental warmth in emerging adults is positively associated with importance given to marriage, and that it is negatively associated with the perception that being single has more advantages than being married. Jensen et al. (2015) concluded that the quality of emerging adults' families of origin was associated with some of the dimensions of marital paradigms.

In recent studies (Arslan, 2019; Cassinat & Jensen, 2020; Hall & Willoughby, 2018), the effect of having a sibling, single or married, on emerging adult's marital attitudes was investigated. Findings related to family structure, family conflicts and sibling presence reported by the researchers contributed to the understanding of the importance of family factor in terms of marital attitude. The reason why quality of family communication has a positive relationship with marital attitudes can be explained by the results of the studies summarized above. It is clear that the effects of the family are important in the formation and shaping of emerging adults' marital attitudes. In particular, getting positive messages or making positive observations about marriage in the family where the individual becomes socialized, can lead to more positive marital attitudes.

In this study, one of our important findings was that a higher level of well-being was associated with more positive marital attitudes. Similarly, Yoo and Lee (2019) reported that emerging adults' high levels of well-being strengthened their marital intentions and that emerging adults with high subjective well-being levels were more likely to plan to marry at a younger age. Arocho's (2021) study revealed that greater well-being improves the marriage expectation. When these findings are considered together, it can be said that well-being is important in terms of marital attitudes and beliefs. A high level of well-being in emerging adults may allow them to look more optimistically into the future, and encourage them to make marriage plans. Thus, they have more positive marital attitudes.

An important finding of this research is that well-being levels contributed more than quality of family communication to explaining the variability of emerging adults' marital attitudes. In their study addressing the distal factor as family of origin quality and the proximal factor as past relationship influence, Jensen et al. (2015) determined that past relationship influence had a stronger effect on marital beliefs. When evaluated from this perspective, it can be expected that the well-being level will contribute more to the model. In addition, considering that many emerging adults attending university are far away from their families, it can be stated that the well-being level contributes more than quality of family communication.

This study determined that the relationship status moderates the relationship between quality of family communication and marital attitudes. The study also revealed that there is a strong positive relationship between quality of family communication and marital attitudes in those who do not have a romantic relationship. According to previous studies (Karabacak & Çiftçi, 2016; Keldal & Atli, 2020) those who have a romantic relationship have more positive marital attitudes. Considered in this regard, due to the lack of possible partner support, the role of the family may arise in developing positive marital attitudes for those who do not have a romantic relationship.

Several limitations should be taken into account when interpreting the results of this study. First, it was conducted with data collected from participants attending Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University, which is located in a city in central Anatolia. In addition, selection involved a nonrandom sampling method. Among the participants, females were overly represented. Because of these limitations, our results should not be generalized to cover all emerging adults. In future research, data obtained from emerging adults who are attending other universities, and also from emerging adults who are not going to university, should be used to see whether the results of this study can be replicated.

Another important limitation of this study is that the data was cross-sectional. That is, casual relationships between marital attitudes, and well-being and quality of family communication involving the changes of these relationships over time could not be examined. By conducting longitudinal studies, researchers could examine changes over time in the relationship between emerging adults' marital attitudes, and well-being and quality of family communication.

Although it has limitations, this study makes a significant contribution to the literature. It identifies important relationships between emerging adults' well-being levels and quality of family communication, and their marital attitudes. Our findings expand the literature on premarital factors by revealing positive relationships between quality of family communication and well-being, and marital attitudes in Turkish culture. Furthermore, considering that well-being has been a hitherto neglected topic among premarital factors, it can be stated that the study is valuable from this aspect.

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