



Predictors of Turkish University students' marital attitudes

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Abstract

In Turkey, it has been observed that marital attitudes have changed in recent years. In this study, it is aimed to examine the relationship between university students' marital attitudes and mate selection strategies, gender roles, sex, relationship status and age variables. The sample of the study is made up of 706 (412 females, 294 males) university students. As the data collection instruments, İnönü Marital Attitude Scale, Mate Selection Strategies Inventory and Bem Sex Role Inventory were used in the study. The data analysis was performed using hierarchical regression technique. According to the study findings, virginity and physical attributes mate selection strategies, feminine gender role, age, sex and relationship status variables are significant predictors of university students' marital attitudes. It was found that importance given to physical attributes and virginity were associated with more positive attitudes towards marriage. Having a higher level of feminine characteristics was associated with more positive attitudes towards marriage.

Keywords Marital attitudes · Mate selection strategies · Gender role · Marriage

Even though many Turkish students consider getting married (Bener and Günay 2013), some of them stand aloof from marriage (Can 2015). In the literature, it is seen that some students lean instead towards cohabitation (Bener 2011; Türkarlan and Süleymanov 2010). The number of marriages in Turkey has decreased in recent years, while the average age of first marriage has been gradually increasing (Turkish Statistical Institute 2017). These changes have attracted the attention of politicians, and they have responded by developing a project to encourage young people to marry (Republic of Turkey Official Gazette 2015). Also, these changes have drawn attention to the marital attitudes of university students, who are themselves candidates for marriage.

Marital attitude is defined as the meaning and expectation an individual attaches to both the institution of marriage and their own future marital relationship (Willoughby 2010). In the literature, researchers focus mostly on marital attitudes of young people. Carroll et al. (2007) found that both men and

women generally give importance to marriage. Willoughby et al. (2012) stated that young people consider marriage as an important life goal compared to their parents. Even though young people give importance to marriage, Carroll et al. (2009) found that many do not feel ready for it. As already mentioned, young people's marital attitudes are an area of focus for researchers. Many young adults receive education in Turkish universities. Hence the examination of relationships between university students' marital attitudes and mate selection strategies, gender roles, sex, relationship status and age will all contribute to the literature.

It is known that choosing a partner or a spouse is important for university students (Haskan-Avcı 2014). Researchers have identified many characteristics that Turkish university students find important while selecting a mate (Bener 2011; Bozgeyikli and Toprak 2013; Efe 2013; Köroğlu 2013). In her study, Efe (2013) has identified the most important ten characteristics sought in a mate candidate to be as follows: love, honesty, trustworthiness, fidelity, respect, responsibility, mental health, tolerance, good grooming and compassionate. Bener (2011) determined that piety, physical attractiveness and a good income are among the criteria sought in a mate. Köroğlu (2013) concluded that having similar world views and believing in the same religion are important in choosing a mate. Bozgeyikli and Toprak (2013) found that university students give moderate-level importance to virginity, physical attractiveness and the compatibility of the families concerned.

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Thus we can see that many different characteristics are given importance in mate selection. “Mate selection strategies” can be defined by having individuals list the characteristics they find important when they make their choices. Altuntaş and Atli (2015) determined that mate selection strategies are grouped under the following seven factors: family institution & trust, socio-economic status, religious & political similarity, physical attributes, virginity, child care and love. It can be said that these mate selection strategies play an important role in the formation of marital attitudes and in the unions that follow.

The importance of gender roles in the formation of marital attitudes has been investigated by researchers (Katsurada and Sugihara 2002; Kaufman 2000). It is known that gender roles do influence the decisions of women to marry (Barber and Axinn 1998). Katsurada and Sugihara (2002) found that women in a traditional gender role are more willing to marry, lean towards early marriage, and are less motivated to work after marriage compared to non-traditional women. For men, Kaufman (2000) showed that those with a traditional gender role are more likely to stay single than men who have an egalitarian gender role. Consistent with this result, Katsurada and Sugihara (2002) found that men with nontraditional gender roles lean more towards marriage compared to men with traditional gender roles.

In the literature, sex appears to be related to marital attitudes (Huang and Lin 2014; Jennings et al. 1992; Kim and Jung 2015; Schwartz 1994; Willoughby and Carroll 2010). While women’s marital attitudes were found to be more positive than men’s in some studies (Jennings et al. 1992; Schwartz 1994; Willoughby and Carroll 2010), in other studies men’s marital attitudes were more positive than women’s (Huang and Lin 2014; Kim and Jung 2015). Blakemore et al. (2005) emphasized that marriage represents an important and normative adult role for both men and women, but getting married holds a special significance for women.

Age is another variable related to marital attitudes (Kim and Jung 2015). Both Marital Paradigm Theory (Willoughby et al. 2015a) and Marital Horizon Theory (Carroll et al. 2007) focus on the timing of marriage. In addition, the ideal age of marriage is a very interesting topic for researchers (e.g. Plotnick 2007; Willoughby 2010; Willoughby et al. 2012). Gassanov et al. (2008) found that age and expectations to marry are related. Willoughby and Carroll (2012) concluded that having a higher age was associated with less belief that cohabitation is beneficial.

In the literature, it is seen that people with romantic relationships have more positive marital attitudes. Willoughby and Carroll (2010) stated that young people who are dating consider marriage as a significant goal. Pinar (2008) found that more than half of the individuals already in romantic relationships consider marriage to their existing partners. In their longitudinal study, Willoughby et al. (2015b) concluded that staying single and breaking up from a partner decrease

marital salience. Ondaş (2007) showed that many young adults believe there should be a dating period before marriage.

Present Study

Even though researchers (Katsurada and Sugihara 2002; Kaufman 2000) found that gender roles played an important role in the formation of marital attitudes, these studies focused on the relationships between men and women in traditional and egalitarian gender roles, and their subsequent marriages and family. Studies (Bener and Günay 2013; İşmen-Gazioglu 2006) conducted in Turkey have examined traditional and egalitarian roles regarding marriage and family life in male and female university students. Studies (Hatipoğlu-Sümer 2013; Kızılaslan and Diktaş 2011) determined that some male university students had feminine characteristics whereas some female university students had masculine gender roles. From this point of view, we believe that it is important to examine the relationship between masculine and feminine gender roles in general, as well as marital attitudes, without differentiating between men and women.

Even though many studies (Bacanlı 2001; Bozgeyikli and Toprak 2013; Efe 2013; Keklik 2011; Yıldırım 2007) have been conducted on mate selection in Turkey, these studies have focused on the characteristics that are given importance in mate selection. In the literature, it has been said that these characteristics are not static. Buss et al. (2001) concluded that they change over time. Buss et al. (2001) emphasize that the importance given to chastity has decreased and the importance given to mutual attraction and love has increased over the course of time. Changes in these criteria may affect later union-forming behavior. Willoughby and Carroll (2010) found that university students with sexual experience were more likely to agree to the idea of cohabitation regardless of any marital plans. In this context, it is significant to examine the relationship between university students’ marital attitudes and their mate selection strategies in terms of marriage and family formation.

In previous studies, while marital attitudes were examined in terms of sex, relationship status and age variables, examining the relationships between marital attitudes and the aforementioned variables constitutes a significant contribution to the literature. Many university students make plans for their future. Since one of the most important of these plans is marriage, our study is significant. We seek the answer to the following question:

Research Question: When demographic variables are controlled, do mate selection strategies and gender roles significantly predict university students’ marital attitudes?

Method

Study Model

Examining the relationship between university students' marital attitudes and mate selection strategies, gender roles, sex, relationship status and age variables, this study was designed according to a correlational model. According to Gay et al. (2011), a correlational model is a data collection process to determine whether there are relationships between two or more measurable variables and to determine the level of the relationship. The predictor variables of this study are mate selection strategies, gender roles, sex, relationship status and age. The criterion variable of the study is marital attitudes.

Participants

The study group was made up of 706 (412 females, 294 males) single students studying at İnönü University. The quota sampling method was used in order to determine the study sample. According to Gay et al. (2011), the basis of a quota sampling method is selecting a sample by using quotas based on the various characteristics of individuals or groups. In this study, sex and grade level variables are used as quotas to determine the sample. 218 (31%) of the participating students were freshmen, 195 (27.5%) sophomores, 153 (21.5%) juniors and 140 (20%) seniors. The students' ages were between 18 and 30 ($M = 20.92$, $SD = 1.72$). 240 of the students who participated in the study had an ongoing romantic relationship. Many of the participants reported that their families' income level was low.

Procedure

Before collecting the study data, the necessary permission from İnönü University's ethics committee was obtained. The data were then collected in November 2014. The faculty administrators had been contacted and time slots appropriate for both faculty and researchers had been arranged to collect the data. This was carried out inside classrooms with the participation of the researchers. Students were given information about the study and participated voluntarily. The researchers gave contact details to participants who wished to get information about the study results. Then the participants each filled in the 119 items on the form, taking between 30 and 35 min to complete their responses.

Measures

İnönü Marital Attitude Scale (IMAS) This scale was developed by Bayoğlu and Atli (2014) in order to measure the marital attitudes of single individuals. It consists of one factor and 21 items. Confirmatory factor analysis was used to test the model obtained through explanatory factor analysis. As a result of

the confirmatory factor analysis, $\chi^2/df = 2.9$, $GFI = .91$, $CFI = .93$, and $RMSEA = .06$ coefficients were achieved. These coefficients indicate that the model fit is adequate. The IMAS is a five-point Likert scale measurement tool graded from "1= Strongly disagree" to "5= Strongly agree" (sample item: *I think marriage enhances the love between couples*). Having a high score on the scale is considered to be an indication of individuals having more positive marital attitudes. The IMAS's internal consistency reliability coefficient was found to be .90.

Mate Selection Strategies Inventory (MSSI) Developed by Altuntaş and Atli (2015), the "Mate Selection Strategies Inventory" (MSSI) is a measurement tool composed of 28 items and seven sub-dimensions. The purpose behind the development of the inventory was to determine university students' mate selection strategies. The MSSI is graded from "1 = Strongly disagree" to "9= Strongly agree". The sub-dimensions of the inventory are as follows: family institution & trust (including eight items, sample item: *It matters to me that the person I will marry is honest*), socio-economic status (including four items, sample item: *It matters to me that the person I will marry has a good income*), religious & political similarity (including four items, sample item: *It matters to me that the person I will marry is of the same ethnic roots as me*), physical attributes (including three items, sample item: *It matters to me that the person I will marry is sexually attractive*), virginity (includes three items, sample item: *It matters to me that the person I will marry has never had sexual intercourse before*), child care (including three items, sample item: *It matters to me that the person I will marry loves children*) and love (including three items, sample item: *It matters to me that the person I will marry believes in love*). The MSSI's internal consistency reliability coefficients were found to be between .58 and .89 for the sub-dimensions.

Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) The Bem Sex Role Inventory was developed by Bem (1974). The inventory's adaptation to Turkish culture was carried out by Kavuncu (1987). The BSRI is made up of 60 adjectives including 20 feminine characteristics (sample items: *dignified, serious*), 20 masculine characteristics (sample items: *attractive, strong*) and 20 neutral characteristics (sample item: *hospitable*). The BSRI is graded from "1= Almost never true" to "7= Almost always true". For the femininity and masculinity dimensions, two separate scores were obtained from the inventory. The inventory's reliability assessments were conducted by Kavuncu (1987) using the test retest reliability method, and a coefficient of .75 for the femininity dimension and .89 for the masculinity dimension were obtained. The BSRI's validity and reliability assessments were repeated by Dökmen (1991), and it was determined that the BSRI's split-half reliability coefficient for femininity was .77 and for masculinity .71.

Personal Information Form A demographic information form was developed in order to obtain information about the students participating in the study. There are questions on the form about the students' sex, age, relationship status, socio-economic status and grade level.

Data Analysis Plan

Hierarchical regression technique was used in order to answer the study question. The data were analysed using SPSS 23, and the hierarchical regression technique was employed in three steps. In the predictors model sex, relationship status, and age were analyzed in the first step, femininity and masculinity in the second step, and family institution and trust, economic status, religious and political similarity, physical attributes, virginity, child care, and love in the third step. To include sex (female = 0, male = 1) and relationship status (I do not have a romantic relationship = 0, I have a romantic relationship = 1) variable in the regression analysis, a dummy variable was used. The significant level was accepted as .01 in the study. Regression analysis assumptions, normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity of residuals, outliers, independence of residuals, multicollinearity and singularity (Tabachnick and Fidell 2012) were checked, and it was found that the data set met the assumptions.

Findings

Mean, standard deviation and correlation values regarding the variables are given in Table 1. The relationships between the marital attitudes and predictor variables vary between .11 and .27. It is also seen that there are small and medium-level

relationships between the predictor variables themselves. The results regarding the prediction of university students' marital attitudes are given in Table 2. The findings show that all three models are significant (First model $F(3,702) = 9.70, p < .01$, second model $F(5,700) = 15.75, p < .01$, third model $F(12,693) = 14.07, p < .01$).

In the first model, the demographic variables explained the 4% of the variance of marital attitudes. In the second model, gender roles with the demographic variables explained the 10% of variance of marital attitudes. In the third model, demographic variables, gender roles and mate selection strategies explained the 18% of the marital attitudes. When the final model is examined, it is seen that virginity and physical attributes mate selection strategies, feminine gender role, sex, age and relationship status are important predictors of marital attitudes. On the other hand, religious & political similarity, family institution & trust, economic status, love, and child care mate selection strategies, as well as masculine gender role, are not significant predictors of marital attitudes.

There is a significantly positive relationship between femininity ($B = .22, t = 4.78, p < .01$), virginity ($B = .39, t = 3.81, p < .01$) and physical attributes ($B = .33, t = 3.33, p < .01$) variables and marital attitudes. However, there is a significantly negative relationship between age ($B = -.90, t = -2.89, p < .01$) and marital attitudes. There is a significant relationship between sex and relationship status variables and marital attitudes. Males and the ones in a romantic relationship have more positive marital attitudes. When standardized regression coefficients are examined, it is seen that feminine gender role ($\beta = .20$) and virginity ($\beta = .15$) mate selection strategy are the most important predictors of marital attitudes.

The semipartial correlations (sr^2) coefficients were calculated in order to examine the unique contributions in the

Table 1 Bivariate correlations, means, and standard deviations for study variables

	<i>M (SD)</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1.Marital Attitude	79.52 (15.41)	.90 ^α												
2.Sex	–	.12**	–											
3.Relationship Status	–	.11**	–.02	–										
4.Age	20.92 (1.72)	–.09	.13**	.08	–									
5.Masculinity	100.58 (15.16)	.10	.24**	.03	.13**	.89 ^b								
6.Femininity	110 (13.88)	.22**	–.20**	.01	–.02	.34**	.75 ^b							
7.Family Institution & Trust	69.17 (6.25)	.22**	–.13**	–.04	–.05	.19**	.38**	.84 ^α						
8.Economic Status	22.42 (9.47)	–.02	–.42**	–.07	–.05	.00	.19**	.14**	.89 ^α					
9. Religious & Political Similarity	22.31 (9.52)	.08	–.17**	.01	–.01	.06	.15**	.16**	.38**	.82 ^α				
10.Physical Attributes	17.91 (6.35)	.18**	.14**	.01	.05	.22**	–.04	.09	.26**	.13**	.70 ^α			
11.Virginity	23.14 (5.8)	.27**	.07	–.03	–.01	.15**	.19**	.35**	.11**	.27**	.20**	.73 ^α		
12.Child Care	21.97 (4.95)	.22**	.05	–.08	–.01	.16**	.21**	.41**	.19**	.25**	.22**	.34**	.69 ^α	
13.Love	23.57 (4.35)	.24**	–.20**	.10**	–.10**	.11**	.32**	.41**	.22**	.16**	.30**	.24**	.28**	.58 ^α

^α = Cronbach's alpha coefficient, ^b = Test retest reliability

** $p < .01$

Table 2 Results regarding prediction of marital attitudes

Predictor variables	Model I			Model II			Model III			<i>sr</i> ²
	<i>B</i>	SE <i>B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	SE <i>B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	SE <i>B</i>	β	
Sex	4.15	1.17	.13**	6.03	1.22	.19**	4.55	1.33	.15**	.01
Relationship status	3.99	1.21	.12**	3.99	1.17	.12**	3.89	1.13	.12**	.01
Age	-1.06	.33	-.12**	-1.04	.33	-.12**	-.90	.31	-.10**	.01
Masculinity	–	–	–	-.03	.04	-.03	-.09	.04	-.09	
Femininity	–	–	–	.29	.05	.26**	.22	.05	.20**	.03
Family institution & trust	–	–	–	–	–	–	.14	.10	.06	
Economic status	–	–	–	–	–	–	-.15	.07	-.09	
Religious & political similarity	–	–	–	–	–	–	.01	.06	.01	
Physical attributes	–	–	–	–	–	–	.33	.10	.13**	.01
Virginity	–	–	–	–	–	–	.39	.10	.15**	.02
Child care	–	–	–	–	–	–	.26	.13	.09	
Love	–	–	–	–	–	–	.33	.15	.09	
<i>R</i> ²	.04			.10			.19			
<i>Adjusted R</i> ²	.04			.10			.18			

***p* < .01

explanation of each variable’s marital attitude variance. When the coefficients of squared semipartial correlations in Model III are examined, it is seen that the most important variable is the femininity gender role.

Discussion

The purpose of this study is to examine the predictors of Turkish university students’ marital attitudes. Our results show that virginity and physical attributes mate selection strategies, feminine gender role, sex, age and relationship status variables are significant predictors of university students’ marital attitudes.

Importance given to virginity is associated with more positive attitudes towards marriage. It is known that virginity is an important criterion in mate selection (Bacanlı 2001; Bozgeyikli and Toprak 2013; Ondaş 2007). Even though the importance given to virginity changes from society to society, it is found that virginity carries importance in Turkey (Ondaş 2007). Sexual intercourse is considered one of the meanings of marriage in Bacanlı’s (2001) study. In addition, many university students stated that having intercourse is easier in a marriage (Ondaş 2007). Individuals may have a positive attitude towards marriage in order to have intercourse easily. Bener and Günay (2013) stated that female university students believed that men should not have premarital sex and male students believed that women should not have premarital sex. The fact that premarital sex is not accepted in Turkey may increase the importance given to virginity. For this reason, it can be said that young people may attach importance to virginity for a healthy

and socially acceptable sex life and therefore have positive attitudes towards marriage.

Importance given to physical attributes is associated with more positive attitudes towards marriage. In mate selection literature, physical attributes (Bacanlı 2001; Bozgeyikli and Toprak 2013; Buss et al. 2001) constitute an important factor. Buss et al. (2001) stated that importance given to physical attributes has been gradually increasing over time. Peretti and Abplanalp (2004) pointed out that physical attractiveness is an important determinant of whether individuals want to establish contact with each other or not. From this point of view, university students who attach importance to physical attributes may want to establish a relationship with the opposite sex through marriage and therefore may give importance to marriage. Willoughby (2012) expressed the view that young adults who believe that sexual activity is important for marital readiness may give more importance to physical attractiveness in mate selection. When many of the university students in Turkey are in the period of emerging adulthood, it can be said that the ones who want to have sexual intercourse probably attach importance to physical characteristics. In a study on Turkish university students, Golbasi and Kelleci (2011) found out that almost two thirds of students did not have sex. From this point of view, university students who want to have sex may give importance to physical attributes and thus have positive marital attitudes.

Having a higher level of feminine characteristics is associated with more positive attitudes towards marriage. İşmen-Gazioglu (2008) determined that students with feminine gender roles gave more importance to “desire for home and children” than other students (p.610). In their study, Katsurada

and Sugihara (2002) found that women with a traditional gender role are more likely to marry, find marrying at an early age favorable, and are less motivated to work after marriage. Kaufman (2005) expressed that women with egalitarian gender role definitely expect to marry less likely than traditional women. In his study, Kaufman (2000) reached the conclusion that women in an egalitarian gender role are also more likely to divorce than women in a traditional gender role. Jennings et al. (1992) pointed out that even though recent social changes have changed gender roles in many ways, women continue to value marriage more than men do and have higher expectations from marriage. When these findings are evaluated together, it is possible that those with a feminine role have more positive marital attitudes.

According to the results of our study, it is seen that men have more positive marital attitudes compared to women. Even though there are other studies (Huang and Lin 2014; Kim and Jung 2015) supporting this finding in the literature, there have also been studies (Jennings et al. 1992; Schwartz 1994) that found the opposite. Christensen (2014) concluded that men have more negative marital attitudes compared to women. Koroğlu (2013) also argued that women are more cautious about marriage and more scared of getting married than men are. Ondaş (2007) expressed the view that Turkish male university students believe, “marriage is a tradition, so one must get married”, to a greater extent than Turkish female university students. Male students holding a traditional view on marriage may consequently have more positive attitudes towards it. However, the fact that many women having higher education think it will be difficult to handle both marriage and a career at the same time may lead them to form negative marital attitudes. In addition to these, men with high levels of femininity characteristics may have a significant role in males having more positive marital attitudes compared to females.

Another result of our study is that the students with romantic relationships have more positive marital attitudes. In their study on university students, Willoughby and Carroll (2010) found that young adults who are dating consider marriage as an important goal. Pinar (2008) found that more than half of the individuals with current romantic relationships would consider marriage to their partners in the future. In their longitudinal study, Willoughby et al. (2015b) concluded that staying single and breaking up from a partner decrease marital salience. In this light, romantic relationships for university students can be considered as preparation for marriage. Thus it can be said that the ones with romantic relationships have more positive marital attitudes.

Having a higher age is associated with less positive attitudes towards marriage. Mahay and Lewin (2007) stated that older single individuals are less likely to want to marry than young single individuals. As age increases, university students may give importance to different criteria in mate selection and can be choosier. As their age increases, university students’

marital expectations may become more unrealistic. The likelihood of these expectations not being met may encroach on their marital attitudes.

Limitations and Future Directions

While generalizing the results of this study, its limitations should be given attention. The sample was made up of university students at İnönü University. Choosing the sample group of the study from only one university can be considered a limitation. When students at İnönü University are assessed in socio-economic terms, we find that they grew up in low-income families and are more conservative than students at some other universities. Because of this, our study may not be representative of all university students. Secondly, the sample group was selected using a nonrandom sampling method, which is also a limitation. In future studies, the relationships between university students’ marital attitudes, mate selection strategies and gender roles may be reexamined by using the probability sampling method from different universities.

Another limitation is that our study is a cross-sectional research one. Hippen (2016) stated that attitudes towards marriage and long-term relationships are not static. Thus we believe that examining whether marital attitudes change over time is important. Longitudinal studies are therefore needed to determine this, and such studies may be conducted in the future.

Conclusion

Despite the limitations of this study, it can be said that it has contributed significantly to the field. The most important result of this research is that virginity and physical attributes mate selection strategies and feminine gender role play an important role in the formation of marital attitudes. These results are important for the understanding of university students’ union formation behaviors.

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Compliance with ethical standards

Ethical Approval All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Conflict of Interest Author GK declares that he has no conflict of interest.

Author AA declares that he has no conflict of interest.

Informed consent Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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