

**Marital Attitudes as a Mediator on the Relationship between Respect toward Partner and Subjective Happiness**

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**ABSTRACT**

Marital attitudes have central importance on marital relationships. In current study, the possible role of marital attitudes as mediator on the relationship between respect toward partner and subjective happiness is aimed to be examined. Participants were 180 teachers who completed a questionnaire package that included the Marital Attitudes Scale, Respect toward Partner Scale and the Subjective Happiness Scale. Findings demonstrated that subjective happiness is predicted positively by marital attitudes and respect toward partner. Marital attitudes are predicted positively by respect toward partner. Also the relationship between respect toward partner and subjective happiness is partially mediated by marital attitudes. The results and their implications are discussed within the scope of the related literature with recommendations for further research and practice.

**Keywords:** Marital attitudes, respect toward partner, subjective happiness, mediation analysis, marital relationships

**INTRODUCTION**

Marital attitudes can be defined as “the individual meaning and expectations an individual holds toward both marriage in general and their own future marital relationship” (Willoughby, 2010). According to Park, (2013) marital attitudes include individuals’ beliefs and expectations that related to pre-marital term and ongoing marriage. These beliefs and expectations may shift and change across the life span (Willoughby, 2010). Traumatic life events such as stressful childhood, domestic violence, parental conflict and divorce, cultural background, family’s values, socioeconomic status, family structure, and other variables directly affect individuals’ views about their future life course, including their expectations and desires about marriage. For instance, individuals witnessing divorce have more negative attitudes towards marriage and are more opposed to the idea of a long-lasting, healthy marriage (Park & Rosén, 2012; Plotnick, 2007; Riggio & Weiser, 2008). Individuals whose parents were having conflicts, were divorced, and were having post-divorce expressed negative attitudes toward marriage (Xiaohui, 2014). Consequently, individuals internalize marital attitudes based on these phenomena, and marital attitudes and beliefs influence existing and future marital quality (Willoughby, 2010).

Marriage has frequently been of scholarly interest to researchers and its various aspects (e.g, beliefs, values, attitudes, adjustment, and satisfaction) have been examined (Bassett, Braaten, & Rosén, 1999; Willoughby & Hall, 2015). Marital attitudes as an aspect of marriage are one of the core predictors on

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behavioral and emotional patterns in close relationships and also in personal relationships. Specifically, positive or negative strong marriage attitudes are more likely to influence perception and behavior about relationships (Riggio & Weiser, 2008), and related behaviors like decisions to marry (Park & Rosén, 2013). More positive marital attitudes increase the probability of marriage (Willoughby, 2014). Similarly, individuals who have more positive divorce attitudes experience greater conflict and less closeness in relationship and they have negative schemas about experiencing lifelong marriage (Riggio & Fite, 2006). Positive marriage attitudes may influence couples' behaviors in relationships and has a striving effect to avoid deadlock and maintain the quality of the close relationship. On the contrary, negative marriage attitudes may affect beliefs about close relationship faithfulness and maintaining less than satisfying relationships (Etcheverry & Le, 2005; Riggio & Weiser, 2008).

Marital relationship has six aspects that consist of romance, respect, trust, finances, meaning, and physical intimacy. As one of these notions respect in marriage relationship underlines the belief that fidelity and communication are important aspects of a satisfying and successful marriage (Park & Rosén, 2013). Partners who have more positive attitudes toward marriage were more likely to report a greater importance on the value of romance, respect, meaning, financial stability, respect, and physical intimacy to a successful marriage (Christensen, 2014, Park & Rosén, 2013). Studies have revealed that for a healthy and successful marriages it is essential to be committed and trusted (Marks et al., 2008), and egalitarian (Davis, Williams, Emerson, & Hourd-Bryant, 2000). The satisfaction of the partners' material and spiritual needs (e.g., happiness, need for love, and emotional support, actualizing their potentials) is an essential condition for normal functioning and the stability of marriage (Kravchenko, 2014). So that, partners with highly embedded positive attitudes toward marriage may view their current marital relationship as happy and satisfying (Riggio & Weiser, 2008).

### **Respect in close relationships**

As a pro-social behavior (e.g., emotional support, demonstrating trustworthiness and loyalty) showing respect is illustrated as being supportive, trustworthy, reliable, caring, and treating each other with equality and humility (Gowen, Catania, Dolcini, & Harper, 2014; Hendrick & Hendrick, 2006). Respect in marital relationship underlines dignity, equality, autonomy, protection of self and reciprocity. Respect as an earned virtue is agreement upon meeting a set of mutual expectations that results from the esteem one person has for another (Goodman, 2009), additionally the importance of bidirectional respect in relationships was highlighted (Deutsch & Jones, 2008). In addition, respectful relationships contribute to personal growth, and sense of self-confidence; promote healthy self-expression; enable to feel recognized, and also help people to feel safe, and it can be a great way for happiness (Healey, 2012).

Respect has not been examined directly in marital studies but there are findings about other variables (e.g., trust, empathy, commitment, and egalitarian attitude) which have closeness to respect. For instance, there was a significant positive association among meaning (examines one's sense of personal fulfillment or the necessity of shared values between partners), trust (emotional support, commitment) and respect in marital relationship (Park & Rosén, 2013). Respect and trust are the core component of a satisfying marital relationship and they develop together. The respectful couples involve a benign and responsible, protecting and truly loving attitude and behavior towards their partners (Jordal, Wijewardena, Öhman, Essén & Olsson, 2015). In addition, Kennedy-Lightsey et al., (2015) suggested that there was strong association between general discomfort with intimacy and lack of trust, and also a

negative link was stated between relationship satisfaction which is an essential part of happiness and avoiding intimacy. Perry (2013) showed that lower levels of fear of intimacy significantly predicted more favorable views toward their marriage. Respectful close relationships may be characterized by supportive, effective and intimate communication. In this manner, partners' respectful attitudes and behaviors may become more important for subjective happiness.

Likewise respect, psychological commitment to the relationship is also as an important predictor of cognitions and behaviors associated with maintenance and persistence of a marital relationship. Commitment includes a wide range of individual and relational processes such as a long-term orientation toward the relationship, respectful attitudes and a psychological attachment to the partner, feelings of loyalty and devotion between partners (Etcheverry & Le, 2005) and egalitarian attitudes to each other. Results show that couples with more with egalitarian attitudes have egalitarian marriage relationship and lower level of family conflicts, and those who have congruent attitudes towards marital roles have higher social support from the family and higher quality of family functioning than couples who are not congruent in their attitudes towards marital roles (Kokorić, Gregov, & Šimunić, 2014). Married couples who have similar attitudes toward marriage and common interests are more likely to be happy across marital life (Kravchenko, 2014). Spouses who feel more accepted and understood by their partners are more likely to tend to express greater happiness in their marital relationship (Kennedy-Lightsey, Martin, LaBelle, & Weber, 2015).

### **Subjective happiness**

Subjective happiness is considered as a key point for mental health and coping skills (Pompili et al., 2015), a broad and comprehensive indicator of subjective wellbeing (Lauriola & Lani, 2015), which is envisioned as a balance of positive-negative affect and overall life satisfaction (Diener, 2000). Wellbeing predominantly defined through happiness (Scott, 2015). Accordingly, it can be stated that subjective happiness might be regarded as an indicator of a more positive evaluation of life and a higher quality of life (Kawashima et al., 2015). Recent research in positive psychology emphasizes the pursuit of happiness and possible ways to foster psychological well-being and personal strengths (Kawashima et al., 2015). Research findings underline some of variables that related to happiness. Previous findings have indicated that subjective happiness is positively related with openness to experience, extraversion (Lauriola & Lani, 2015), self-perceptions of well-being (Diener, 2000; Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandi, 1998), positive self-evaluation in young (Cheng & Furnham, 2004), mental health (Liem, Lustig, & Dillon, 2010), life satisfaction (Garcia & Siddiqui, 2009), satisfying relationships, positive emotions (Diener & Seligman, 2002), and self-enhancing bias (Lee & Im, 2007). Also, subjective happiness has been found to relate negatively to the hopelessness, suicide risk, depressive symptoms, cognitive vulnerabilities (Chaplin, 2006;Pompili et al., 2015), and neuroticism (Lauriola & Lani, 2015).

Happiness in marital relationship was examined in terms of marital quality which consists of respect, marital commitment, social support, marital interaction, forgiveness. Higher levels of happiness in marital relationship was positively correlated with a decline in depressive symptoms and psychological wellbeing (Kamp Dush, Taylor, & Kroeger, 2008). In addition, higher levels of marital quality were associated with greater well-being (Proulx, Helms, & Buehler, 2007), and Whitton, Stanley, Markman and Johnson's study (2013) showed a strong association between low marital quality (happiness) and divorce proneness. Because, couples who were happy with and committed to their marriages and also

who were in the mutually supportive attitudes reported greater intimacy and maintenance and less conflict and ambivalence. The mutually supportive and engaged couples had higher level of happiness and the most positive problem-solving as well as the lowest levels of negative problem-solving. This may be due to the fact that supportive attitudes allow the couples to empathize with and feel appreciated by their spouses. Spouses who have higher level of happiness also show faithfulness to each other (Elmslie & Tebaldi, 2014). Consequently, happier couples utilize positive conflict responses that facilitate resolution (Rauer & Volling, 2013).

### **The Present Study**

Marriage has always been an important custom and a major life event almost in all cultures. So that, marital quality in which includes being satisfied, fulfilled, approved, respected and happy in marital relationship has become more important for personal and social wellness. In this point of view, marital attitudes play a key role on couples' marital behaviors. Previous research has shown that individuals who have positive marital beliefs are more likely to end up in positive relationship outcomes (Carroll et al., 2007; Dollahite, Hawkins, & Parr, 2012; Gubernskaya, 2010; Kaufman & Goldscheider, 2007). For gaining positive marital outcomes respect toward partner is inherent and most common factor especially. Based on research findings, it can be suggested that respect with its multidimensionality in marital relationships has substantial linkages with some positive and negative psychological variables. It was found that higher levels of respect were positively linked with liking (Frei & Shaver, 2002), self-esteem (Ellemers, Doosje, & Spears, 2004), relationship satisfaction (Frei & Shaver, 2002); and negatively linked with lower levels of negative social behavior (Clemans, Graber, & Bettencourt, 2012), disrespectful behaviors and dating violence (Martin, Houston, Mmari, & Decker, 2012); bullying (Langdon & Preble, 2003).

Respect toward partner may serve as a facilitator for positive relationship outcomes; since positive marital attitudes affect partners' relationship behaviors (e.g., effective problem solving). Respect toward partner may nurture subjective happiness in marital relationship. Subjective happiness is a positive outcome in marital relationship and emerges as a virtuous circle in marital quality. Marital quality as a focal indicator of happiness has an interactive relation with marital satisfaction which is associated positively with partners' life satisfaction, happiness and self-esteem, (Proulx, Helms, & Buehler, 2007). Individuals in happy relationships reported a higher level of subjective well-being than did individuals in unhappy relationships, and found a little evidence for assumption that people with a high level of well-being select themselves into more committed relationships (Kamp Dush & Amato, 2005). In addition Kamp Dush, Taylor and Kroeger (2008) suggested that respondents with the greater levels of life happiness were more likely to be in the highest marital happiness trajectory over time. In conclusion, it may be suggested that both respect and subjective happiness comes together in the center of well-being which affect marital functioning seriously, marital attitudes has a dominant role in marital well-being.

To date, no study has explored how the combination of marital attitudes and respect toward partner may provide a plain understanding of the link between marital attitudes and partner behaviors. Taking into consideration its extensive influences and concomitants, it may be proposed that higher levels of respect, which plays an important role in adaptive marital functioning may be linked to higher level of marital attitudes and subjective happiness. Considering studies demonstrating the relationships of

marital attitudes, respect, and subjective happiness with well-being indicators that presented above the following hypotheses have been suggested:

*Hypothesis 1:* Respect toward partner is positively associated with marital attitudes.

*Hypothesis 2:* Respect toward partner is positively associated with subjective happiness.

*Hypothesis 3:* Marital attitudes are positively associated with subjective happiness.

*Hypothesis 4:* Marital attitudes mediate the link between respect toward partner and subjective happiness.

## **METHOD**

### **Participants of the study**

Participants were 180 teachers who completed a questionnaire package that included the Marital Attitudes Scale, Respect toward Partner Scale and the Subjective Happiness Scale. Firstly participants were informed of the purpose and of the voluntary nature of study and were ensured anonymity for all responses given. The measures were counterbalanced in administration.

### **Measures**

**Respect toward Partner Scale (RTPS).** Respect was measured using the Respect toward Partner Scale (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2006). Turkish adaptation of this scale was done by Akin, Uğur and Ozcelik (2015). The Respect toward Partner Scale is a 6-items self-report instrument and each item was rated on a 5-point scale. There were no reverse coded items and all answers given are summed to indicate the level of respect toward partner. Higher scores indicate higher level of respect in close relationships. Results of confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the uni-dimensional model fitted Turkish population ( $\chi^2/df=1.92$ , RMSEA= .091, NFI= .93, NNFI= .93, CFI= .96, IFI= .96, RFI= .87, GFI= .96, AGFI= .88 SRMR= .043) and the internal consistency reliability coefficient was .83.

**Subjective Happiness Scale.** Subjective happiness was measured using the Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). Turkish adaptation of this scale was done by Akin and Satici (2011). The Subjective Happiness Scale is a 4-item self-report instrument and each item was rated on a 7-point scale. This scale is a summative scale, with item 4 being reversed scored. All answers given will be totaled to indicate the level of subjective happiness, with a high number indicating a greater incidence of subjective happiness. Results of confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the uni-dimensional model was well fit to Turkish population ( $\chi^2/df= 0.71$ ,  $p= 0.49193$ , RMSEA= .000, NFI= .99, CFI= 1.00, IFI= 1.00, RFI= .98, GFI= 1.00, AGFI= .99, and SRMR= .015). The internal consistency reliability coefficient was .86 and the three-week test-retest reliability coefficient was .73 for Turkish sample.

**Marital Attitudes Scale.** Attitudes towards marriage were measured using the Turkish version of the Marital Attitudes Scale (Akin et al., 2014). The Marital Attitudes Scale is a 10-item self-report instrument and each item was rated on a 7-point scale. This scale has three subscales (positive attitudes, negative attitudes, fear/doubt). Results of confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the uni-dimensional model fitted the data well in a Turkish sample ( $\chi^2= 48.40$ ,  $df= 30$ , RMSEA= .048, CFI= .97, IFI= .97, RFI= .91, GFI= .97, AGFI= .94, SRMR= .046). The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency reliability coefficients were .81, .51, .77 for subscales, for the Turkish sample.

### **Procedure**

Firstly participants were informed of the purpose and of the voluntary nature of study and were ensured anonymity for all responses given. The measures were counterbalanced in administration. To determine the relationships among marital attitudes, respect toward partner, and subjective happiness; the Pearson correlation coefficient and regression analyses were used. In order to test whether respect toward partner mediated the link between marital attitudes and subjective happiness with regression analyses, Baron and Kenny's (1986) recommendations were followed. These analyses were carried out via SPSS 13.0.

**RESULTS**

Table 1.

Descriptive statistics and inter-correlations of the variables

Variables	1	2	3
1. Subjective happiness	1.		
2. Marital attitudes	.37**	1.	
3. Respect toward partner	.27**	.38**	1
Mean	20,10	45,88	26,12
Standard deviation	3,84	10,46	3,77
Cronbach's $\alpha$	.67	.85	.87

\*\*p<.01

Descriptive Data and Inter-correlations

Table 1 shows the means, descriptive statistics, inter-correlations, and internal consistency coefficients of the variables used.

When Table 1 is examined, it is seen that there are significant correlations between marital attitudes, respect toward partner, and subjective happiness. Marital attitudes related positively to respect toward partner ( $r= .38$ ) and subjective happiness ( $r= .37$ ). On the other hand, respect toward partner was found to be positively ( $r= .27$ ) related to subjective happiness.

***Testing the Mediating Role of Respect toward Partner in the Relationship between Marital Attitudes and Subjective Happiness***

Following the steps of the mediation procedure, firstly it was verified that marital attitudes and respect toward partner were positively related ( $\beta= .38, t= 5.457, p<.001, 95\%CI = .32, .95, R^2=.14$ ). Then it was verified that respect toward partner and subjective happiness revealed a positive relationship ( $\beta= .27, t= 3.775, p<.001, 95\% CI = .13, .45, R^2=.07$ ). To test the third and last steps of mediation procedure, regression analysis was conducted. The results of the regression analysis demonstrated that marital attitudes were positively associated with subjective happiness ( $\beta= .37, t= 5.345, p<.001, 95\% CI = .08, .19, R^2=.14$ ). However, when marital attitudes and respect toward partner were taken together in the regression analysis, the magnitude of the relationship between marital attitudes and subjective happiness ( $\beta= .31, t=$

4.212,  $p < .001$ , 95%CI = .05, .18,  $R^2 = .16$ ) decreased, yet the relationship between marital attitudes and subjective happiness was significant. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), this result indicated a partial mediation. Therefore, it can be said that respect toward partner partially explains the relationship between marital attitudes and subjective happiness, Sobel  $z = 3.58$ ;  $p < .001$  (Sobel, 1982). The results are presented in Figure 1.

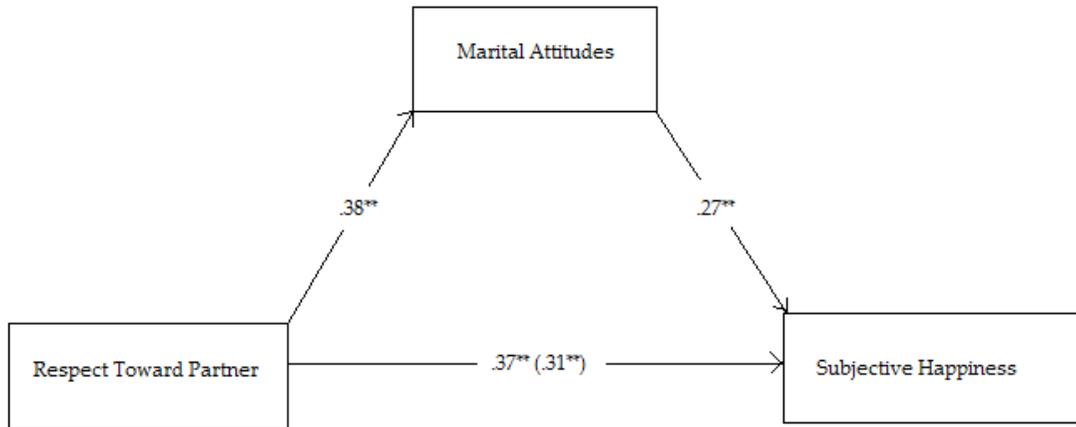


Figure 1. Standardized regression coefficients for the relationship between respect toward partner and subjective happiness as mediated by marital attitudes. The standardized regression coefficient between Respect toward partner and subjective happiness, controlling for marital attitudes, is in parentheses.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study was to investigate marital attitudes as a mediator on the relationship between respect toward partner and subjective happiness. As predicted, findings revealed that the relationship between respect toward partner and subjective happiness was partially mediated by the level of marital attitudes. Firstly, respect toward partner was related positively to marital attitudes.

As mentioned in the previous studies it was revealed that marital attitudes have remarkable impacts upon quality of marital life and they may provide keys for predicting actual partners' behaviors in marital relationship (Huang & Lin, 2014). Marital attitudes consist of personal meanings and expectations an individual holds toward both marriage (Willoughby, 2010) so that couples who have positive attitudes toward their marriage may most likely behave in a respectful manner to each other. Secondly, marital attitudes were found to be positively associated with subjective happiness. Positive attitudes may have a triggering effect on increases of respectful behavior toward partner, and according to Kelly, Zuroff, Leybman and Gilpert (2012) couples who were to be respected and cared about feel themselves happy and also the increased sense of subjective happiness is characterized by feelings of warmth, connectedness, and contentment. Moreover, when people get respect from their partner quite likely may feel positively and as mentioned before a respectful close relationship can be a great way for happiness and being energized (Healey, 2012), and energized people has more potential to manage their problems more effectively and have more optimistic thoughts about their power to change their life (Juhl & Routledge, 2015; Rothstein & Uslander, 2005).

Thirdly, marital attitudes predicted subjective happiness in a positive way, as anticipated. This may be due to the fact that subjective happiness is considered as a component of subjective wellbeing and is related to mental health (Scott, 2015; Liem et al., 2010), life satisfaction (Garcia & Siddiqui, 2009), positive emotions (Diener & Seligman, 2002), and self-enhancing bias (Lee & Im, 2007). In accordance with the findings, it can be suggested that positive effect of marital attitudes on subjective happiness seems very conceivable and partners had more positive attitudes may experience subjective happiness. In this respect, relationships between subjective happiness, respect towards partner and positive marital attitudes can be envisioned within the common ground of wellbeing.

In addition, findings of the current study have shown that marital attitudes partially mediated the relationship between respect toward partner and subjective happiness. This result extends what is known about marital attitudes and its relation with respect, what identify attitudes, how attitudes practice are functional research questions to take into consideration. Understanding the role of marital attitudes could facilitate the development of interventions to enhance communication between couples about safety attitudes and may decrease partner violence (Gowen et al., 2014). There may be a strongly negative association among positive attitudes, subjective happiness and undeserved behaviors in partnerships. In a disrespectful relationship, partners feel that he/she is unsafe, depressive and unhappy (Healey, 2012). Clearly concepts of marital attitudes, respect toward partner and subjective happiness have similar aspects and both of them are related with well-being. Also, respect is one of the aspects of marriage. As mentioned before, marital attitudes may play a trigger role to gain and enhance respect because all requirements of positive marital attitudes such as being supportive, trustworthy, reliable, caring, and treating each other with equality and humility (Gowen et al., 2014) commitment, intimacy, passion, love and honesty (Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000) have very close contact with the components of respect.

Although it has been deduced that respect linked to emotional, physical wellbeing and psychological health, no research has addressed factors that might mediate these relationships. In other words, literature is limited about in which direction pro-social variables relate with marital attitudes. The results of the present study are particularly remarkable because it suggested that marital attitudes in which include pro-social behaviors (Gowen et al., 2014) associated with subjective happiness through respect toward partner.

### **Limitations**

Limitations of the current study should be acknowledged when evaluating the findings. The data reported in study for marital attitudes, respect toward partner, and subjective happiness are limited to self-reported data and did not used any qualitative measure of these variables. Also as correlational statistics were utilized, no definitive statements can be made about causality. All in all, this study shows that partners who have higher level of positive attitudes toward marriage are more likely to be high in respect and subjective happiness. Hence, the current findings contribute the understanding of the relationships among marital attitudes, respect toward partner, and subjective happiness. As the knowledge base grows, the relations of attitudes toward marriage as well as the possibilities to enhance positive attitudes will be better understood. Also, to integrate knowledge about marital attitudes, respect toward partner, and subjective happiness into a preventative circle which is including issues of pre-marriage term would be worthwhile endeavors. Therefore it may be functional to examine relations between marital attitudes and known core skills, such as effective problem solving, psychological well-being, decision-making, self-regulation, and self-efficacy. Additionally, better understanding of the issue

of attitudes toward marriage may aid to reduce partner and domestic violence; to increase well-being, self-esteem, and happiness.

Finally, further studies using a longitudinal design would provide better understanding of directionality in the relation among attitudes toward marriage, respect toward partner, and subjective happiness. Further examination is also essential to comprehend the dynamics of marital attitudes such as irrational beliefs and cognitive distortions in different relationship types and future studies may shed light on other structures such as marital quality, marital adjustment, social self-efficacy, and the effect of the culture. It is clear that more research needs to be done to understand how social, emotional and psychological variables are interrelated to couples' attitudes toward marriage.

#### **Disclosure statement**

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest or financial support with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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