Araştırma Makalesi/ Research Article

Determination of Happiness and Spousal Support Level in Married Women's Relationships During Pandemic Period

Pandemi Sürecinde Evli Kadınların İlişkilerindeki Mutluluk ve Eş Destek Düzeyinin Belirlenmesi

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ABSTRACT
Objective: The purpose of this study is to determine the level of happiness and spousal support in the relationships of married women in the pandemic period.
Methods: The sample of the descriptive and relationship-seeking type of research consisted of 1010 married. The data were obtained using the demographic questionnaire, the Relationship Happiness Scale (RHS), and the Spousal Support Scale (SSS).
Results: The average of the Relationship Happiness Scale scores of the women participating in the study is 34.16±6.47, while the average of the Spousal Support Scale is 66.61±13.16. There is a statistically significant positive and high-level linear relationship between the RHS scores and the SSS scores (r=0.741).
Conclusion: As a result of the research, it was determined that women's levels of spousal support and happiness in their relationships were high. It has been determined that the support women receive from their partners increases the happiness in their relationships.
Keywords: Relationship happiness, spousal support, married woman, pandemic period

ÖZ
Amaç: Bu araştırmanın amacı, pandemi sürecindeki evli kadınların ilişkilerinde mutluluk düzeyi ve eş destek düzeylerini belirlemektir.
Yöntem: Tanımlayıcı ve ilişki arayıcı tipteki araştırmanın örneklemini, 1010 evli kadın oluşturmuştur. Veriler, demografik soru formu, İlişkilerde Mutluluk Ölçeği (İMÖ) ve Eş Destek Ölçeği (EDÖ) ile elde edilmiştir.
Bulgular: Çalışmaya katılan kadınların İlişkilerde Mutluluk Ölçeği puan ortalaması 34.16±6.47 ve Eş Destek Ölçeği puan ortalaması 66.61±13.16'dır. İlişkilerde Mutluluk Ölçeği puanları ile Eş Destek Ölçeği puanları arasında istatistiksel olarak anlamlı pozitif yönlü yüksek düzeyde doğrusal ilişki bulunmaktadır (r=0.741).
Sonuç: Araştırma sonucunda kadınların eş desteği ve ilişkilerinde mutluluk düzeylerinin yüksek olduğu belirlendi. Kadınların partnerlerinden aldıkları desteğin ilişkilerindeki mutluluğu arttırdığı saptandı.
Anahtar Kelimeler: İlişkilerde mutluluk, eş desteği, evli kadın, pandemi dönemi

Introduction

Marriage is defined as a system of relationships that two individuals with different needs, desires, and interests establish for purposes such as having and raising children, sharing their lives, and living together. Considering the necessity and reasons for marriage, it is observed that marital life aims to satisfy the biological, social, and psychological needs and motives of the two individuals (Durmuş and Baba, 20114; Williamson et al., 2016).

For people who start living a common life with a bond like marriage, the closest source of social support is their spouses. Many adults perceive their spouses as a main source of social support. Especially in crisis times, the most common and most important source of social support in all societies is the institution of marriage and family. To put it in a different way, spouses become one of the most important sources of support in each other's lives through marriage (Kabasakal and Soylu, 2016).

Many people see the happiness experienced in marriage as an important factor in their lives. Relational happiness or happiness between spouses is the satisfaction or fulfillment that an individual receives from their marriage. Mutual trust and communication between spouses is also expressed as the spouses' self-sacrifice for each other, the distribution of control equally among the spouses and the economic independence of the spouses. Relational happiness is defined as increasing harmony between spouses, decreasing conflict, ensuring reliable communication, and increasing happiness. The high level of happiness perceptions of the spouses and the satisfaction of both marriage and each other bring compliance in marriage (Canbulat and Çankaya, 2014; Çolak and Cin, 2019).

The WHO considered CoVID-19 as an international public health problem and declared it as a pandemic on January 30, 2020. WHO has declared it as a pandemic after the outbreak and scientists are making great efforts to identify the characterization of the new coronavirus and to develop antiviral therapies and vaccines. Clinical studies and vaccination studies are still ongoing fastly (Özlü and Öztaş, 2020). The coronavirus-19 (COVID-19) pandemic has profoundly altered people's daily lives and one important challenge of this unique stressor is maintaining well-functioning intimate relationships, which are inextricably tied to emotional and physical health. Yet research on romantic relationships shows that external stressors such as economic hardship, demanding jobs, and disasters can threaten the quality and stability of couples' relationships. Research within relationship science investigating how external stressors and existing vulnerabilities shape couple functioning can inform predictions about how the current pandemic will impact couples' relationships and which couples in which contexts may be most at risk for adverse relationship consequences (Pietromonaco and Overall, 2021). As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, more research is needed to understand its impact on couple relationships, including whether the short-term changes in attributions observed here will be maintained and whether changes in relationship satisfaction will arise as couples deal with the pandemic's increasing toll (Williamson, 2020).

The purpose of this study is to determine the factors affecting the level of relationship happiness and spousal support of married women in the pandemic process.

Research Questions

• What is the Level of Happiness and Spousal Support in the Relationships of Married Women During the Pandemic Process?

• What are the factors affecting the Happiness and Spousal Support Level in Married Women's Relationships During the Pandemic Process?

• Is there a relationship between Happiness and Spousal Support Level in Married Women's Relationships During the Pandemic Process?

Methods

Type and location of the research

This descriptive and cross-sectional study was carried out between August and December 2020. The research was carried out as an online survey on social networks.

Universe and sample of the research

The population of the research consists of 30684193 married couples according to TUIK 2019 data. According to the Raosoft sample size calculator, it was determined that the sample should be at least 385 people, according to the 95% confidence interval and 5% margin of error. The sample of the research consisted of 1010 married women who live in different cities in Turkey, and voluntarily participated in the online survey shared on the social website and social network. Married women aged 18 and over, who are literate, and who have a social site or a social network, were included in the study. Women under the age of 18 who are

single and do not use social media were excluded from the sample.

Data collection tools

The data were obtained using the demographic questionnaire, the Relationship Happiness Scale (RHS), and the Spousal Support Scale (SSS).

"Relationship Happiness Scale" (RHS): The Relationship Happiness Questionnaire, which includes the general evaluation of close relationships, is a 6-item scale developed by Fletcher et al. (1990). Scale items measure perceptions about love, happiness, general satisfaction, the stability of the relationship, the severity of the problems, and the level of commitment/obligation to the relationship. The items are scored 29 on a 7-point scale (for example I don't love 1 .... 2 .... 3 .... 4 .... 5 .... 6 ... 7 I love very much). The lowest score that can be obtained from the scale is 6, and the highest score is 42. The higher the score on the scale, the higher the level of happiness in the relationship. The standardization study of the scale was conducted by Tutarel Kışlak (2002) and the overall reliability of the scale was found to be alpha=0.877 (Tutarel Kışlak, 2002). The reliability level of the scale was found to be 0.855 in this study.

Spousal Support Scale: It was developed by Yıldırım (2004) to determine the perceived spousal support level. There are 27 questions in the Spousal Support Scale and answering is a Likert-type scale ranging from 1-3. The lowest score that can be obtained from the scale is 27, and the highest score is 81. Items 10, 20, and 24 contain negativity. High scores indicate that the level of spousal support is perceived as high. The Cronbach alpha coefficient of the Spousal Support Scale was found to be 0.95 (Yıldırım, 2004). The reliability level of the scale was found to be 0.962 in this study.

Evaluation of data

Analysis was completed by transferring the study data to the IBM SPSS Statistics 23 program. Frequency distributions for categorical variables and descriptive statistics for numerical variables (mean±sd) were given. As a result of the Kolmogorow Smirnov normality test, it was seen that all scores provided the assumption of normality and therefore parametric tests were used in comparisons. Whether there was a difference between the two independent groups in terms of mean scores was examined by the Independent Sample t-test. Whether there is a difference between more than two independent groups in terms of mean

scores was examined by One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). To identify differences that occur in more than two groups Scheffe test was used as further analysis. Pearson Correlation Coefficient was used to determine the degree of non-causal relationships between two numerical variables.

Ethical Considerations

Permission to use the scale was obtained from the people who made the validity and reliability of the scales in Turkish. The written approval and permissions necessary for conducting the research and collecting the data were obtained from the Scientific Research and Publications Ethics Committee (on 22/07/2020 No: 56665618-204.01.07) of a university and the hospital where the research took place. 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.

Results

When Table 1 is examined, it is seen that 43.1% of the women participating in the study are in the 30-39 age group. Also, the average age of the subjects is 36.43 years, 75.8% of them are university and above graduates. 54.4% of women have one child, 71.1% of them have an income equivalent to expenses, and 40.8% of them have a marriage period of 11 years or more. 18.1% of the women were married by an arranged marriage, 91.4% of them were not related to their spouses and the spouses of 50.8% continued to work during the pandemic period.

When Table 2 is examined, the average of the Relationship Happiness Scale scores of the women participating in the study is 34.16, while the average of the Spousal Support Scale is 66.61. It is seen that the reliability level of the Six-item Relationship Happiness Scale is 0.855 and the reliability level of the Spousal Support Scale, which consists of 27 items, is 0.962 and higher.

When Table 3 is examined, there is a statistically significant positive and high-level linear relationship between the Relationship Happiness Scale scores and the Spousal Support Scale scores (r=0.741).

Table 1. Distributions by Demographic Features (n=1010)

Parameters	n	%
Age (Mean=36.43±8.639)		
20-29 years old	235	23.3
30-39 years old	435	43.1
40 years and over	340	33.7
Educational Level		
Primary school	82	8.1
Middle School	38	3.8
High School	124	12.3
University and above	766	75.8
Presence of Child		
1 child	549	54.4
2 children	348	34.5
3 and more children	113	11.2
Income status		
Income equal to expenses	718	71.1
Income higher than the expenses	292	28.9
Duration of Marriage		
1-5 years	351	34.8
6-10 years	247	24.5
11 years and over	412	40.8
Type of marriage		
Dating	827	81.9
Arranged marriage	183	18.1
Blood kinship with Spouse		
Yes	87	8.6
No	923	91.4
Working Status of the Spouse in the Pandemic Period		
Continued to work as before the pandemic	513	50.8
Continued to Work from Home/Did not go to work	371	36.7
Quit the job/Did not work	126	12.5

When Table 4 is examined, while there is a statistically significant difference in the level of relationship happiness according to age, duration of marriage and type of marriage ($p < 0.05$); there is no statistically significant difference according to educational level, presence of children, income status, and relationship with spouse during the pandemic period. Accordingly, the relationship happiness level of women in the 20-29 age group is significantly higher than women in the 30-39 and 40 and over age groups. Relationship happiness level of women with a marriage of 1-5 years is significantly higher than that of women with a marriage of 6-10 and 11 years or more. The level of relationship happiness is significantly higher for those who marry by dating than those who marry arranged. The level of happiness in the relationships of women whose spouse quit his job/not worked during the pandemic period is significantly less than women who continue to work and work from home/not go to work as before the pandemic period. As a result of the statistical analyses applied, the level of spousal support shows statistically significant differences according to age, educational level, presence of children, income status, duration of marriage, and marriage type ($p<0.05$), while the status of blood kinship with the spouse, spouse's working status during the pandemic period does not show a statistically significant difference ($p>0.05$). Accordingly, the spousal support level of women in the 20-29 age group is significantly higher than women in the 30-39 and 40 and over age groups. The spousal support level of women with a university or higher education level is significantly higher than women with a high school level. The spousal support level of women with 1 child is significantly higher than women with 2 children and 3 or more children. The spousal support level of women whose income is more than expenses is significantly higher than women whose income is equivalent to expenses. The spousal support level of women with a marriage of 1-5 years is significantly higher than that of women with a marriage of 6-10 and 11 years or more. The level of spousal support of women who married by dating their spouses is significantly higher than those who married arranged

Table 2. Descriptive statistics, reliability on relationship happiness scale and spousal support scale

	Mean	SD	Min- Max	Number of Item
Relationship Happiness Scale	34.16	6.47	12-42	6
Spousal Support Scale	66.61	13.16	28-81	27

Table 3. Investigation of the relationship between the relationship happiness scale and the spousal support scale

		Spousal Support Scale
Relationship Happiness Scale	r	**0.741****
	p	0.000

r: Pearson Correlation Coefficient** p<0.01

Table 4. Investigation of the differences in the relationship happiness scale and spousal support scale according to demographic features

	Relationship Happiness Mean	SD	Statistical Analysis	Spousal Support Mean	SD	Statistical Analysis
Age*						
20-29 years old [a]	35.88	5.174	F=11.919	69.86	11.631	F=10.544
30-39 years old [b]	33.93	6.324	p=**0.000**	66.24	13.562	p=**0.000**
40 years and over [c]	33.28	7.237		64.85	13.280	
Educational Level**						
Primary School [a]	34.59	5.531	F=0.551	64.96	11.383	F=3.580
Middle School [b]	34.32	7.308	p=0.647	62.97	15.300	p=**0.014**
High School [c]	33.52	7.705		64.24	13.815	
University and above [d]	34.22	6.317		67.36	13.054	
Presence of Child*						
1 child [a]	34.60	6.200	F=2.729	68.15	12.811	F=10,544
2 children [b]	33.61	7.038	p=0.066	65.19	13.681	p=**0.000**
3 or more children [c]	33.75	5.879		63.51	12.274	
Income status						
Income Equal to Expenses	33.95	6.472	t=-1.633	65.69	13.375	t=-3.648
Income higher than the expenses	34.68	6.477	p=0.103	68.89	12.360	p=**0.000**
Duration of Marriage*						
1-5 Years [a]	35.11	5.969	F=5.796	68.93	12.831	F=8.935
6-10 Years [b]	33.60	6.107	p=**0.003**	66.00	13.185	p=**0.000**
11 years and over [c]	33.70	7.015		65.00	13.182	
Type of marriage						
Dating	34.46	6.326	t=3.165	64.90	10.779	t=4.818
Arranged marriage	32.79	6.984	p=**0.002**	60.54	12.440	p=**0.000**
Blood Kinship with Spouse						
Yes	34.55	6.333	t=0.585	65.47	12.410	t=-0.848
No	34.13	6.494	p=0.559	66.72	13.234	p=0.397
Working Status of the Spouse in the Pandemic Period***						
Continued to work as before the pandemic [a]	34.38	6.393	F=3.387	66.23	12.981	F=2.759
Continued to Work from Home/Did not go to work [b]	34.35	6.457	p=**0.034**	67.75	13.671	p=0.064
Quit the job/Did not work [c]	32.76	6.760		64.84	12.156	

t: Independent Sample t Test   F: One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)
*Difference between a-b, a-c (p<0.05). (The difference was evaluated with Scheffe.)
** Difference between c-d (p<0.05). (The difference was evaluated with Scheffe.)
***Difference between c-a, c-b (p<0.05). (The difference was evaluated with Scheffe.)

Discussion

In marital relationships, an individual's spouse is one of the most important sources of social support in life. A healthy family structure is formed by a love-based relationship between the spouses and the supportive acts of the spouses towards each other. Spouses who act supportively to each other can protect their mental and physical health and cope more easily with situations such as unemployment, poverty, and marital conflicts (Yıldırım, 2004; Brown et al., 2021).

The average of the Relationship Happiness Scale scores of the women participating in the study was found to be 34.16±6.47 and the average of the Spousal Support Scale was found to be 66.61±13.16. The results of studies conducted with different sample groups in the literature are similar to the study findings. In the study of Kışlak (2002), RHS score average of the married women was found to be 35, Çolak and Cin (2019) found 34.47±4.75; in the study of Çelebi and Polat (2019) on women who are married for at least 1 year was found to be 30.47±6.09, in the study of Uzunçakmak and Yılmaz (2021) conducted with married Turkish women living in Anatolia, RHS score average was found to be 32.086±4.94.

Similar to the study findings, in the study conducted by Yedirir and Hamarta's (2015) spousal support scale average of married women was 63.73; in Vural Batık's (2019) study, the mean spousal support scale score of women was 71.56±10.60 and in the study conducted by Taş and Batık (2019) on women of Turkish origin living in Belgium, the mean SSS score was found to be 65.55±12.25.

There is a statistically significant positive and high-level linear relationship between the Relationship Happiness Scale scores and the Spousal Support Scale scores of the women included in the study (r=0.741). This result may show that the support women receive from their partners increases the happiness in their relationships. The COVID-19 epidemic, which negatively affected all individuals physically, socially, psychologically, and economically, caused especially working couples to spend more time together at their homes, through the curfew measure applied. Couples who had to spend more time together had the opportunity to get to know and understand each other better (Williamson, 2020; Pietromonaco and Overall, 2021). In addition, the fact that this disease, which can be fatal, affects both genders and their children, which are the most important common points of the couples, can be

interpreted as enabling the couples to increase their support for each other. There are many studies in the literature that are similar to the study findings. It is claimed that individuals who provide social support to each other during crisis periods and stressful times of life get satisfaction from their marriage (Neff and Karney, 2017; Brown et al., 2021). In the study of Arıdağ et al. (2019), it was found that spousal support of married individuals significantly predicted marital satisfaction. Kabasakal and Soylu (2016) found a moderate relationship between spousal support and marital satisfaction in their study, and stated that as the social support received from the spouse increased, marital satisfaction also increased. In the studies of Çağ and Yıldırım (2013), Yedirir and Hamarta (2015), it was determined that spousal support in marriage increased marital satisfaction. In the study of Canbulat and Çankaya (2015), it was found that the support of spouses in marriage relationships can increase their subjective well-being as they can meet their love needs as well as many psychological needs. Therefore, the individual who feels that he/she is supported by his/her partner experiences higher marital satisfaction (Lebel et al., 2020).

While the happiness level of women, those in the 20-29 age group, those who have been married for 1-5 years, and those who married by dating were higher; women whose spouses quit the job/do not work during the pandemic period have a lower level of relationship happiness (Table 4). Being young, short duration of marriage and dating may indicate that women who get married by dating better tolerate the negativities that can be experienced in marriage. Besides, it is thought that the reason for the low level of happiness of women who quit their jobs during the pandemic period may be due to economic concerns. In the study of Yıldız and Baytemir (2016), it was determined that individuals who got married by companionate/dating got more satisfaction from their marriages compared to individuals who married by arrangement. An analysis of marriages in Turkish society indicates that, in general, couples get married in two ways: love marriages in which individuals choose their partners on their own and arranged marriages in which other members of the family choose partners (Yılmazçoban, 2016). It is stated that because women who have an arranged marriage have not been given enough time to talk about their expectations from marriage and to know their prospective husbands by the elders in the family, they and their spouses cannot find what they are

looking for in marriage, which affects relationship happiness (Kublay and Oktan, 2015). As an expected result, in this study, it was observed that the participants who had love marriages were better in terms of happiness, consensus, cohesion and affectional expression. In the study of Uzunçakmak and Yılmaz (2021), of the participants, those who were 18–30 years old, had 1–10 years duration of marriage, and had love marriages had higher mean scores from the RHS, and these differences were statistically significant (p<0.05). In the study of Çelebi and Polat (2019), different from the study findings, no significant difference was found in the happiness level of married women in their age, duration of marriage, and marriage types; and in the study of Çağ and Yıldırım (2013), it was reported that there was no significant relationship between the duration of marriage and marital satisfaction.

Accordingly, the level of spousal support of women in the 20-29 age group, at university, and above education, having a child, having a higher income than the expenses, married for 1-5 years, and married by dating with their spouse is more significant (Table 4). It was thought that women in the young age group who have children receive more support from their spouses in this pandemic period, women who do not work have no other responsibilities outside the home and their primary duties stem from the gendered perspective of fulfilling home and family work. Age is a risk factor for the progression of COVID-19, the degree to which older couples effectively weather the current crisis likely depends more on whether they communicate effectively and provide each other with responsive support (Pietromonaco et al., 2021). Newly married women receive more support from their husbands and if she is satisfied with the support, she would have fewer negative thoughts and be less reactive to conflicts and problems in the marriage (Roddy and Doss, 2020). Parents, compared to nonparents, report feeling much more stressed as a result of the current crisis. While under quarantine, many parents face simultaneous demands to fulfill work-related responsibilities, ensure that their children complete schoolwork and have other activities available, and manage their household tasks. Dividing household and childcare responsibilities may place added stress on couples during the crisis, given that unfairness in dividing responsibilities is associated with greater conflict even under ordinary circumstances (Newkirk et al., 2017). Furthermore, parents with preexisting risks (e.g., young, low-income, having children before

marriage) may be even more vulnerable to relationship difficulties (Lavner et al., 2020). Couples experiencing socioeconomic challenges prior to the COVID-19 pandemic already were at risk for poorer marital outcomes. Established and newlywed couples experiencing greater financial strain evidence lower and more unstable satisfaction (Jackson et al., 2017). As Neff and Karney (2017) point out, couples facing economic hardship must deal with all of the stressors associated with their situation, opening more possibilities for conflict and constraining opportunities for activities that may promote growth and intimacy in the relationship. In the context of the current pandemic, this additional stress may further exhaust couples' resources and impair their ability to interact with their partners in meaningful and constructive ways, potentially eroding relationship quality. In the literature, there are results that are similar to the study findings regarding the factors affecting spousal support in Turkish society.

In the study of Batık (2019), a significant difference was found between the duration of marriage and the number of children and spousal support, and it was determined that as the duration of marriage and the number of children increased, spousal support decreased. In the study in which Akbay and Duran (2018) examined the effect of spousal support on the quality of life of women, a statistically significant difference was found between the age group, education level, number of children and duration of marriage and the SSS score average. In the study conducted by Taş and Batık (2019) on women of Turkish origin living in Belgium, a significant difference was found between spousal support level and education level, income level and working status. Although there is no change in the expectations of individuals who get married by knowing each other well enough, the expectations about marriage change slightly in marriages made without knowing each other sufficiently (Aluş and Selçukkaya, 2015). In the study of Karayağız et al. (2019), it was observed that as the number of children increased, there is a negative correlation between marital satisfaction and support.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As a results of this research, women have high levels of happiness and spousal support and there is a statistically significant positive and high-level linear relationship between the Relationship Happiness Scale scores and the Spousal Support

Scale scores. While the happiness level of women, those in the 20-29 age group, those who have been married for 1-5 years, and those who married by dating were higher; women whose spouses quit the job/do not work during the pandemic period have a lower level of relationship happiness. Accordingly, the level of spousal support of women in the 20-29 age group, at university, and above education, having a child, having a higher income than the expenses, married for 1-5 years, and married by dating with their spouse is more significant.

For couples to get to know each other and decide to get married, midwives and nurses, who are responsible for providing service to society, should take a greater role in raising awareness of individuals. Necessary trainings on this subject should be organized by these health personnel and their effectiveness should be evaluated. Since the level of education increases the level of happiness and support in relationships, efforts should be made to increase the number of university graduates in the society.

Limitations of the Study

The study is based on the reports of the participants. The results of the study cannot be generalized to the whole population.

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What did the study add to the literature?
- The results show that women have high levels of happiness and spousal support.
- There is a statistically significant positive and high-level linear relationship between the Relationship Happiness Scale scores and the Spousal Support Scale scores of the women included in the study.
- In this pandemic process, which is a crisis situation that challenges everyone on a social, family and individual basis, it is recommended to plan comprehensive studies that will reveal other existing problems and to produce solutions in line with the results in order to improve the intrafamilial interaction process.

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