

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# When Are You Going to Marry? Intention to Marry through the Lens of Theory of Planned Behavior and Self-Regulatory Focus

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## ABSTRACT

What makes people to take important decisions in their lives, such as marriage? To answer this question, we relied on theory of planned behavior to examine the degree to which peoples' attitudes, subjective-norms, and behavioral control perceptions predict their intentions to marry. Furthermore, we used self-regulatory focus theory to examine whether such attitudes, norms, and perceptions could be partly explained by peoples' focus on pursuing-gains versus securing non-losses. We conducted a cross-sectional, web-based survey with a sample of 699 Turkish young adults (70.7% females;  $M_{age} = 24.89$  years,  $SD = 4.31$ ). The results of the structural equation modeling showed that promotion-focus positively and prevention-focus negatively related to perceived behavioral control, which in turn negatively related to intentions to marry. Intentions also related positively to attitudes but not to subjective-norms, which however related positively to promotion-focus and negatively to prevention-focus. Gender and age differences were also found. The results are discussed in light of the two theories.

Nowadays, young people decide to get married at an older and older age. For instance, the mean age of Europeans who first get married has now exceeded to 30 years of age (Eurostat, 2022). Likewise, the median age at first marriage in United States in 2020 was above 30 years for males and 28 years for females, approximately 6 years higher than that it was in 1980s (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022) and the same increase holds true for many other countries all over the world, including Türkiye. Specifically, in Türkiye, the mean age of the first marriage in 2021 was 28.1 years for males and 25.4 years for females, which was approximately 2 years higher than what it was in 2001 (TUİK, 2022).

Given that being in a partnership, typically through marriage, and having a child result in increased well-being (Kohler et al., 2005; Perelli-Harris et al., 2019), the implications of such a life-long decision for individuals' lives are obvious. Therefore, it is important to understand some of the psychological processes that may relate to people's intention to get married. In this study, we aimed to uncover some of the likely mechanisms that may lie behind intention to marry by relying to the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1985; Bosnjak et al., 2020) and self-regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 2000; 1997). In particular, we examined in a cross-sectional model to what extent people's intentions to get married could be explained by means of the attitudes they hold towards marriage, the extent to which significant others encourage them to get married (i.e., subjective norms), and the degree to which they believe they have control over their own lives (i.e., perceived behavioral control) and whether such attitudes, subjective norms, and perceptions of behavioral control could be explained by

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people's propensity to focus on maximizing gains (promotion-focus) versus securing non-losses (prevention-focus). Further, we examined whether a similar pattern of relations would exist across two genders. Understanding what makes people take a decision to get married may be a useful hint for specialists, when they are asked to intervene to help people overcome their indecision to get married or later on when the couple confronts interrelationship conflicts.

### **Theory of Planned Behavior**

The theory of planned behavior (TPB; Ajzen, 2020) tries to explain the forces that guide human behavior. According to TPB, the proxy of one's behavior is one's intention to act, which refers to people's plans and decisions to exhibit a desired behavior (Ajzen, 2020; Ajzen, 1985). In turn, intentions are thought to be determined by three factors, namely behavioral beliefs, normative beliefs, and control beliefs which are supposed to shape, respectively, people's attitudes, perceived subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 2020). Behavioral beliefs refer to individuals' beliefs about the likely implications (i.e., benefits or consequences) that a behavior might have in future (Ajzen, 2002). For example, a young woman who believes that a marriage sets a lot of obstacles in her wishful future career may shape negative attitudes towards marriage that will deter her from getting married in the close future. Perceived normative beliefs refer to the beliefs that one holds about what significant others expect from him or her and is thought to determine his or her subjective norms (Ajzen, 2020; Madden et al., 1992). For example, a young man who believes that his parents favor a marriage with his fiancée will hold positive subjective norms, something which may strengthen his intention to get married. Lastly, control beliefs reflect person's perceptions about the control they have over a situation (Ajzen, 2020; Hrubes et al., 2001). A young man who believes that he can cope with all the difficulties associated with marriage, will be characterized by high perceived control, and thus by strong intentions to get married.

The theory of planned behavior has been found to predict and explain a wide range of health-related behaviors such as substance use (Jalilian et al., 2020; Morell-Gomis et al., 2019; Morrison et al., 1998; Zhao et al., 2019), healthy eating (Grønhøj et al., 2012; Lim et al., 2020; Sogari et al., 2023), and weight loss (Schifter & Ajzen, 1985; Wykes et al., 2022). Moreover, it has been used to predict different kinds of behaviors and intentions such as seeking social support (Albarracin et al., 1997; Zhao et al., 2021), online shopping (George, 2004; Wang et al., 2022), and public transportation usage (Heath & Gifford, 2002; Warner et al., 2021). Moreover, these significant relations were stated in relatively recent reviews (Lareyre et al., 2021; Moore et al., 2022) and meta-analyses (e.g., Albarracin et al., 2001; Armitage & Conner, 2001; Hagger et al., 2022; Hirschey et al., 2020), as well as correlational (Jalilian et al., 2020; Simamora & Djmaludin, 2020) and longitudinal studies (Lee et al., 2020; Vankov et al., 2021). In addition, several intervention studies have shown that changing attitudes, subjective norms, and perceptions of behavioral control leads to subsequent change in intended behaviors (e.g., Hardeman et al., 2002; Zhao et al., 2019), including those ones that can have long-lasting implications such as condom use (Albarracin et al., 2001) or healthy eating (Grønhøj et al., 2012).

Given its usefulness in predicting people's intentions to act, a pertinent question is whether the theory of planned behavior could apply to the issue of intentions to marry. Examining individuals' marriage intention could help us understand the antecedents of such intentions and could provide worthwhile information for future intervention programs. Even though research on marriage intention is scarce, in one exception, Shahrabadi et al. (2017) tested the role of theory of planned behavior as a possible predictor of 192 Iranian university students' intention to marry. The results showed that all three constructs of the theory significantly predicted the marriage intention of the university students. Moreover, some previous research also provided indirect evidence for the applicability of theory of planned behavior in the marriage domain. Specifically, some research has shown that people who have higher subjective well-being (Yoo & Lee, 2019), plans, positive expectations, and favorable attitudes toward marriage hold higher intentions to marry and eventually they are more likely to marry (Cherlin, 2009).

Given these findings, we assume, in line with the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1985; Bosnjak et al., 2020), that positive attitudes towards marriage, and supportive subjective norms and higher perceptions of behavioral control may explain greater intentions to marry. However, why some people may hold more positive attitudes or subjective norms towards marriage than others? Or why they may believe that they have higher

behavioral control over a future marriage than some others? To address this research question, we relied on self-regulatory focus (Higgins, 2000; 1997) and examined whether variation in people's attitudes, subjective norms, and perceptions of their behavioral control could be explained by their willingness to act (and thus maximizing gains) or their focus on avoiding committing mistakes. This issue is elaborated in the next section.

### **Self-Regulatory Focus Theory**

According to the self-regulatory focus theory, individuals are inherently motivated to satisfy two fundamental needs, that of nurturance (i.e., growth) and that of security (i.e., protection) (Scholer et al., 2019). They use different strategies to accomplish these needs and that they experience different emotions when they do (or do not do) so (Higgins, 1997). The theory suggests a distinction in regulatory focus between nurturance-related regulation and security-related regulation. While nurturance-related regulation is characterized by a promotion-focus, security-related regulation is associated with a prevention-focus (Higgins, 2000; 1997). When individuals are promotion-focused, they act according to their growth, maximization, and development needs to attain their ideal selves. These individuals are more sensitive to the presence or absence of positive outcomes, and they mainly endorse an approach strategy to maximize gains. On the other hand, when individuals are prevention-focused, they act according to their security and safety needs to accomplish their ought selves (Brockner & Higgins, 2001). These individuals are more sensitive to the presence or absence of negative outcomes, and they mainly follow an avoidance strategy to secure non losses (Crowe & Higgins, 1997).

Despite this sharp distinction, research has pointed out that all people espouse both regulatory focus systems at some degree (Winterheld & Simpson, 2011) with some individuals however favoring more the promotion and others favoring more the prevention-focus (Manian et al., 2006). To illustrate, consider two people being in a romantic relationship. While a promotion-focused person might view this romantic relationship as an opportunity to further expand and solidify it (through marriage), a prevention-focused individual might take the very same relationship as a possible pitfall that he or she should cautiously proceed. While promotion-focused individuals will tend to exhibit a risky bias, their prevention-focused counterparts will tend to show more conservative bias (Higgins, 1997). Therefore, understanding the role of individual differences (e.g., being promotion- vs. prevention-focus) could explain respective differences in people's attitudes, subjective norms, and behavioral control perceptions, and eventually their intentions to a life-commitment goals.

Being promotion-focused has been found to be related to some outcomes such as cheerfulness (Idson et al., 2000) and more theoretical and comprehensive information processing (Förster & Higgins, 2005). On the other hand, being prevention-focused has been found to be related to certain outcomes such as more quiescence (Idson et al., 2000) and more actual, limited, and restricted information processing (Förster & Higgins, 2005). In addition, while promotion-focused individuals who perceive high support from their romantic partners report high relationship and personal well-being (Molden et al., 2009), prevention-focused individuals tend to evaluate their potential romantic partners less positively, as they are characterized by rejection sensitivity (Ayduk et al., 2003). Given these distinct patterns of relations, one may easily assume that promotion-focused people, as compared to prevention-focused ones, may be riskier and thus hold more positive attitudes towards marriage. They might form more positive subjective norms and might feel that have higher behavioral control over a will-be marriage. However, there is no evidence regarding these assumptions as no previous research has ever examined promotion-focus and prevention-focus along with the theory of planned behavior within the marriage literature. Therefore, we aimed to examine how peoples' promotion-focus and prevention-focus could explain their marriage intention by means of the three elements defining such intentions according to the theory of planned behavior; that is, attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control.

### **The Present Study**

We aimed to build on previous research in some important ways. Firstly, this study was among the first one that measures the marriage intention through the lens of the theory of planned behavior and the self-regulatory focus theory. Therefore, the present study will try to shed light on the marriage intention literature by examining the possible antecedents of it by relying on two theories. Secondly, this study was conducted in a non-Western context where marriage is considered a milestone in people's life (e.g., Yilmaz, 2016) and as men and women get married at a relatively younger age than their Western counterparts even though their age of

the first marriage gets increased throughout the years (Blakemore et al., 2005). Moreover, we used structural equation modeling to examine our hypotheses that allowed us to test our model by considering other possible direct relations (i.e., from promotion- or prevention-focus to intentions).

We aimed to examine to what extent marriage intention would be predicted by greater levels of promotion-focus and lower levels of prevention-focus by means of positive attitudes, favorable subjective norms, and higher behavioral control perceptions. Based on TPB, we hypothesized that higher behavioral control perceptions, favorable subjective norms, and positive attitudes would positively relate to marriage intention. Further, in the light of the self-regulatory focus theory, we hypothesized that promotion-focus would positively, and prevention-focus would negatively relate to attitudes, subjective norms, and behavioral control perceptions. Moreover, given that previous research shows that women have higher drive to marry compared to men especially in conservative or traditional cultures, such as that of Türkiye (Blakemore et al., 2005), we examined whether these associations would remain similar across males and females. We made no particular hypothesis regarding gender differences, given the lack of previous findings regarding this issue. In addition, because marriage intention increases with age (Thornton & Freedman, 1982), we considered participants' age by hypothesizing that age would positively predict attitudes, subjective norms, behavioral control perceptions, and eventually marriage intentions.

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

The sample consisted of 699 Turkish young adults. The mean age of participants was 24.89 years ( $SD = 4.31$ ) and majority of them was female (70.7%). To assess attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and marriage intention, we adapted the necessary items according to the conceptual and methodological considerations being offered by Ajzen (2006). The items were translated into Turkish and then back translated by two independent groups of psychology professors according to the procedures described by Hambleton and De Jong (2003) and for the content validity of the measures, the translations were evaluated and negotiated by these experts and the final Turkish versions of the measures were created. After obtaining an approval to conduct the study from the ethics committee of the Hacettepe University (Approval number: 35853172/431-72), we invited young and single adults to fill out our online survey through social media. The participants were informed initially about the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and they were assured about their anonymity and the confidentiality of their responses. After indicating their consent to participate, their age and gender, participants filled out the study measures.

### Measures

**Attitudes Towards Marriage.** Attitudes were assessed through seven five-point semantic differential items adapted from the scale of Ajzen (2006). Specifically, after reading the stem item 'For me, the marriage is', participants rated to what extent marriage is not normal-normal, bad-good, unenjoyable-enjoyable, foolish-wise, unpleasant-pleasant, harmful-beneficial, and worthless-valuable. The Cronbach's alpha of the seven-item scale was found as .93 in the current study. The results of the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) showed that one-factor solution yielded a good fit for attitudes:  $S-B\chi^2(14, N = 699) = 50.16, p < .001, CFI = .983, SRMR = .022, RMSEA = .061$  (90%-CI: .047, .075).

**Subjective Norms.** Subjective norms concerning marriage were assessed by means of the adapted items from the scale of Ajzen (2006). Using a five-point Likert type scale (1= 'totally disagree'; 5= 'totally agree') over four items (e.g., 'The people in my life whose opinions I value approves marriage'). The Cronbach's alpha of the four-item scale was found as .82 in the current study. The results of the CFA showed that one-factor solution yielded a good fit for subjective norms:  $S-B\chi^2(2, N = 699) = 26.23, p < .001, CFI = .974, SRMR = .035, RMSEA = .132$  (90%-CI: .094, .174).

**Perceived Behavioral Control.** Perceived behavioral control was measured by three items adapted from the scale of Ajzen (2006); two items (e.g., 'It is mostly up to me whether or not to marry' and 'I am sure that whenever I decide I can marry') using a five-point Likert type scale (1= 'totally disagree'; 5= 'totally agree') and one item (e.g., 'How much control do you think you have over marriage') using five-point semantic

differential scale (1 = 'extremely low'; 5 = 'extremely high'). The Cronbach's alpha of the three-item scale was found as .83 in the current study. The results of the CFA showed that one-factor solution yielded a perfect fit for perceived behavioral control:  $S-B\chi^2(3, N = 699) = 550.9, p < .001, CFI = 1.000, SRMR = .000, RMSEA = .000$  (90%-CI: .000, .000).

**Intentions.** Participants' intentions about getting married were measured by two items that were adapted from the scale of Ajzen (2006) (e.g., 'I plan to marry within next 5 years'; 'I am thinking to marry within next 5 years') with endpoints labeled as definitely no and definitely yes. The Cronbach's alpha of the two-item scale was found as .76 in the current study. The results of the CFA showed that one-factor solution yielded a perfect fit for marriage intention:  $S-B\chi^2(1, N = 699) = 433.0, p < .001, CFI = 1.000, SRMR = .000, RMSEA = .000$  (90%-CI: .000, .000).

**Self-Regulatory Focus.** Twelve six-point Likert type items (1 = 'totally disagree'; 6 = 'totally agree') that were taken from the Locomotion and Assessment Scales (Kruglanski et al., 2000) were used to measure participants' promotion- and prevention-focus. The Cronbach's alpha of the five-item locomotion scale that is purported to assess promotion-focus (e.g., 'I don't mind doing things even if they involve extra effort') was found as .58 in the current study. In addition, the Cronbach's alpha of the seven-item assessment scale that is assumed to assess prevention-focus (e.g., 'I spend a great deal of time taking inventory of my positive and negative characteristics') was found as .71. The results of the CFA showed that a one-factor solution yielded good fit for both scales:  $S-B\chi^2(5, N = 699) = 8.44, p = .133, CFI = .984, SRMR = .024, RMSEA = .034$  (90%-CI: .000, .072) for promotion-focus and  $S-B\chi^2(14, N = 699) = 47.32, p < .001, CFI = .942, SRMR = .039, RMSEA = .058$  (90%-CI: .042, .075) for prevention-focus.

## Data Analyses

First, we performed the CFAs to verify the factor structure and item loadings of the scales translated and used in this study. Then, the descriptive statistics were computed and the Pearson's correlation coefficients among study variables were examined. As a preliminary analysis, we conducted a multivariate analysis of variance in order to examine gender differences. Next, we tested our main hypotheses across three models, one involving all the participants, one including only females, and a third one with males only. Moreover, we also examined whether the significant paths were invariant across gender. We tested our models through structural equation modeling (SEM) with six latent variables (i.e., promotion-focus, prevention-focus, attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and marriage intention). The latent variable of promotion-focus was defined by five items and prevention-focus was defined by seven items. Moreover, the latent variable of attitudes was defined by seven items, subjective norms by four items, perceived behavioral control by three items, and lastly marriage intention by two items. The goodness of fit of all three models was determined by CFI (close to .95), SRMR (lower than .05), and RMSEA (lower than .08) (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The analysis was performed using the lavaan software package for R (Rosseel, 2012).

## Results

The results of the CFAs including fit indices of the scales and the standardized factor loadings of the scale items were presented in Table 1 and Table 2. As seen in Table 1, one-factor solutions yielded an adequate fit for all scales. Moreover, as seen in Table 2, with three exceptions in promotion-focus scale and two exceptions in prevention-focus scale, all the factor loadings of the scales exceeded the .50 threshold (Hair et al., 2009). Table 3 shows the means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations of the measured variables of the study. As can be noticed, marriage intention was correlated positively with attitudes ( $r = .52, p < .01$ ) and subjective norms ( $r = .24, p < .01$ ) and negatively with perceived behavioral control ( $r = -.09, p < .05$ ). Moreover, subjective norms were correlated positively with attitudes ( $r = .29, p < .01$ ) and promotion-focus ( $r = .09, p < .05$ ). Perceived behavioral control was correlated negatively with prevention-focus ( $r = -.11, p < .01$ ) which was correlated positively with promotion-focus ( $r = .25, p < .01$ ). Furthermore, age was correlated positively with subjective norms ( $r = .08, p < .05$ ) and marriage intention ( $r = .15, p < .01$ ), and negatively with prevention-focus ( $r = -.15, p < .01$ ). Lastly, gender was correlated positively with attitudes ( $r = .08, p < .05$ ) and negatively with perceived behavioral control ( $r = -.10, p < .05$ ).

**Table 1.** Fit indices of the Confirmatory Factor Analyses of the Scales of the Study

Variables	<i>N</i>	<i>S-Bχ<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	CFI	SRMR	RMSEA (90%-CI)
1. Attitudes towards marriage	699	50.16	14	< .001	.983	.022	.061 (.047 - .075)
2. Subjective norms	699	26.23	2	< .001	.974	.035	.132 (.094 - .174)
3. Perceived behavioral control	699	550.9	3	< .001	1.000	.000	.000 (.000 - .000)
4. Marriage intention	699	433.0	1	< .001	1.000	.000	.000 (.000 - .000)
5. Promotion-focus	699	8.44	5	= .133	.984	.024	.034 (.000 - .072)
6. Prevention-focus	699	47.32	14	< .001	.942	.039	.058 (.042 - .075)

**Table 2.** Standardized Item Loadings from CFA of the scales of the study.

Items for each scale	Item loadings
Attitudes towards marriage	
1. Item1	.79
2. Item2	.87
3. Item3	.77
4. Item4	.75
5. Item5	.89
6. Item6	.81
7. Item7	.78
Subjective norms	
1. Item1	.75
2. Item2	.85
3. Item3	.83
4. Item4	.54
Perceived behavioral control	
1. Item1	.79
2. Item2	.84
3. Item3	.72
Marriage intention	
1. Item1	.83
2. Item2	.73
Promotion-focus	
1. Item1	.48
2. Item2	.37
3. Item3	.50
4. Item4	.50
5. Item5	.48
Prevention-focus	
1. Item1	.35
2. Item2	.55
3. Item3	.66
4. Item4	.50
5. Item5	.56
6. Item6	.52
7. Item7	.43

Preliminary analyses showed statistically significant differences between males and females in the linear combination of the studied variables, Wilk's  $\Lambda = .965$ ,  $F(6, 692) = 4.14$ ,  $p = .001$ , multivariate,  $\eta_p^2 = .035$ . The follow-up ANOVAs indicated that males ( $M = 3.88$ ,  $SD = 0.96$ ) differed from females ( $M = 3.71$ ,  $SD = 0.90$ ) in attitudes,  $F(1, 697) = 5.00$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .007$ , and females ( $M = 3.85$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ ) differed from males ( $M = 3.65$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ ) in perceived behavioral control,  $F(1, 697) = 6.49$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .009$ . Even though the effect sizes are small, these results provided further evidence about the necessity to test our hypotheses across the two genders.

**Table 3.** Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations of the Measured Variables of the Study ( $N = 699$ )

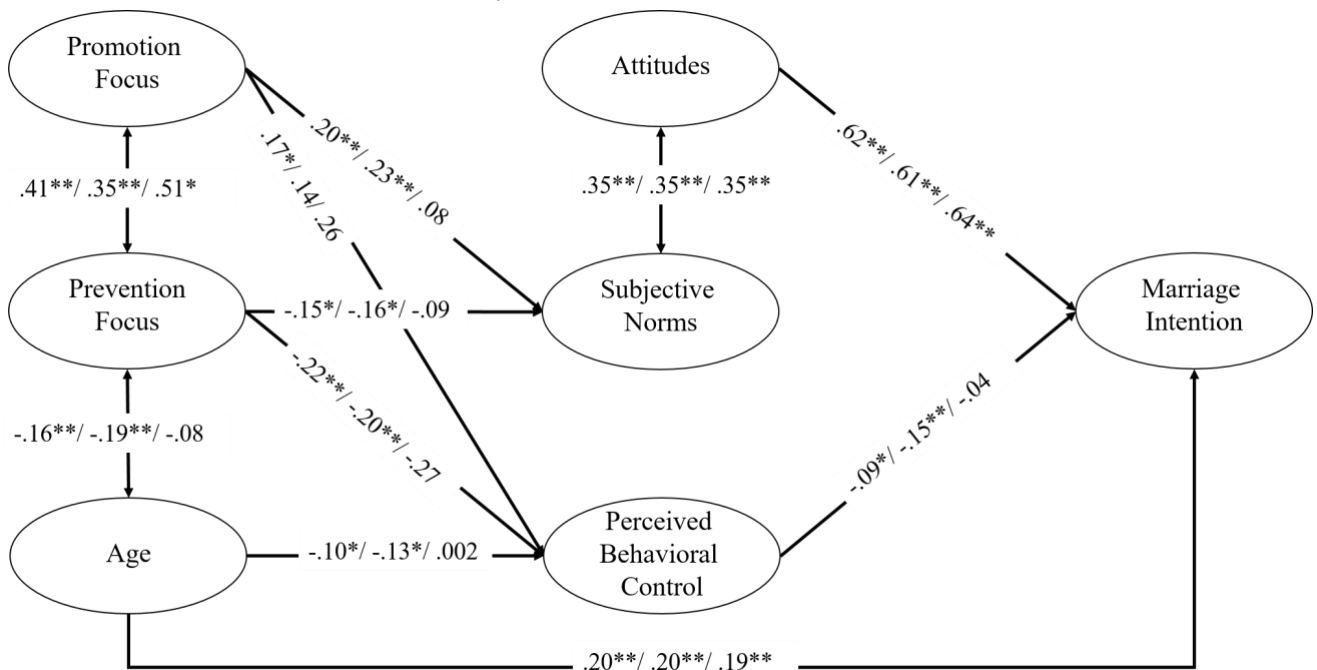
Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Age	-							
2. Gender	-.01	-						
3. Attitudes towards marriage	-.07	.08*	-					
4. Subjective norms	.08*	.03	.29**	-				
5. Perceived behavioral control	-.05	-.10*	-.01	.06	-			
6. Marriage intention	.15**	-.06	.52**	.24**	-.09*	-		
7. Promotion-focus	.03	-.02	.04	.09*	.06	.02	-	
8. Prevention-focus	-.15**	.02	-.03	-.02	-.11**	.01	.25**	-
<i>M</i>	24.89	-	3.76	4.15	3.79	0.65	4.21	3.63
<i>SD</i>	4.31	-	0.92	0.79	0.99	0.42	0.79	0.85

Note. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . Gender was coded as 0 for females, 1 for males.

**Main Analyses**

We first examined the fit of the measurement model that included six latent variables (i.e., promotion-focus, prevention-focus, attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and marriage intention as defined through their respective indicators). The measurement model yielded a good fit for the full sample ( $S-B\chi^2 [336; N = 699] = 606.37, p < .001, CFI = .957, SRMR = .043, RMSEA = .034 [90\%-CI: .030 - .038]$ ), as well as the model that concerned females ( $S-B\chi^2 [336; N = 494] = 516.99, p < .001, CFI = .961, SRMR = .046, RMSEA = .033 [90\%-CI: .028 - .038]$ ), and males ( $S-B\chi^2 [336; N = 205] = 379.58, p = .051, CFI = .975, SRMR = .060, RMSEA = .025 [90\%-CI: .006 - .036]$ ). The same was true for the structural model in which age being included as a covariate. In particular, the model, shown in Figure 1, yielded good fit indices for the full sample ( $S-B\chi^2 [358; N = 699] = 642.57, p < .001, CFI = .956, SRMR = .042, RMSEA = .034 [90\%-CI: .030 - .038]$ ), as well as for females ( $S-B\chi^2 [358; N = 494] = 546.14, p < .001, CFI = .960, SRMR = .046, RMSEA = .033 [90\%-CI: .027 - .038]$ ), and males ( $S-B\chi^2 [358; N = 205] = 406.27, p < .001, CFI = .972, SRMR = .059, RMSEA = .026 [90\%-CI: .009 - .037]$ ).

**Figure 1.** The structural model of the study.



Note. First coefficient stands for all participants, second for females, and third for males. Only significant paths (at least one coefficient) were shown for the sake of clarity.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Specifically, the model involving all participants (see first set of coefficients in Figure 1) showed that marriage intention was predicted positively by attitudes ( $B = .27$ ,  $SE = .02$ ,  $z = 12.39$ ,  $\beta = .62$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and age ( $B = .02$ ,  $SE = .01$ ,  $z = 3.64$ ,  $\beta = .20$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and negatively by perceived behavioral control ( $B = -.04$ ,  $SE = .02$ ,  $z = -2.15$ ,  $\beta = -.09$ ,  $p = .031$ ), which was predicted positively by promotion-focus ( $B = .22$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $z = 2.48$ ,  $\beta = .17$ ,  $p = .013$ ) and negatively by prevention-focus ( $B = -.37$ ,  $SE = .11$ ,  $z = -3.41$ ,  $\beta = -.22$ ,  $p = .001$ ) and age ( $B = -.02$ ,  $SE = .01$ ,  $z = -2.30$ ,  $\beta = -.10$ ,  $p = .022$ ). In addition, although subjective norms failed to predict marriage intention, it is noteworthy that they were predicted positively by promotion-focus ( $B = .19$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $z = 2.65$ ,  $\beta = .20$ ,  $p = .008$ ) and negatively by prevention-focus ( $B = -.19$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $z = -2.32$ ,  $\beta = -.15$ ,  $p = .021$ ).

The female-model (see Figure 1, second set of coefficients) showed very similar paths, except the now nonsignificant path linking promotion-focus with perceived behavioral control ( $B = .15$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $z = 1.87$ ,  $\beta = .14$ ,  $p = .061$ ). As for the male-model, it differed from the female model in various ways as it were only the paths linking marriage intention with attitudes ( $B = .29$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $z = 7.36$ ,  $\beta = .64$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and age ( $B = .02$ ,  $SE = .01$ ,  $z = 3.52$ ,  $\beta = .19$ ,  $p < .001$ ) that were statistically significant. Nevertheless, the findings concerning males should be interpreted with caution given the loss of statistical power due to the relatively small male subsample ( $n = 205$ ). Given that the significant paths differed across gender, we conducted a test of gender invariance. Therefore, we tested two models: one baseline model (without any equality constraints across male and female groups) and one constrained model (imposing equality constraints to the regression paths across gender). Then, we compared the model fit of the constrained model with the fit of the baseline model using a chi-square difference test. The results showed that the difference between baseline and constrained models was not significant ( $\Delta\chi^2 [15] = 17.42$ ,  $p = .295$ ) which means that none of the hypothesized paths vary as a function of gender. Therefore, although some paths (namely, the path linking prevention- and promotion-focus with subjective norms and the path linking prevention-focus and age with perceived behavioral control) were statistically significant among females but not among males, they did not significantly differ (in terms of statistics) from each other.

## Discussion

In the present study, we examined to what extent promotion- and prevention-focus could account for interpersonal differences in pro-marriage attitudes, subjective norms, and behavioral control perceptions which in turn could explain marriage intention. We tested this sequence of relations in a non-Western culture and whether it would remain invariant across males and females. The main findings were discussed around two main topics: First, the relation of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control to marriage intention and then to promotion-focus and prevention-focus.

Consistent with our first hypothesis and the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 2020), positive attitudes towards marriage positively predicted marriage intention in the full sample as well as in the model that included either males or females. This finding implies that when people have positive attitudes towards marriage, they may have more intention to get married, regardless of their gender. Moreover, consistent with the previous research, the more positive attitudes people hold, the stronger their intentions are about marriage (e.g., Armitage & Christian, 2003; Raymo et al., 2021). Although some studies suggest that these attitudes are gender dependent (Higgins et al., 2002), in our study we found a significant positive relation between attitudes and intentions for both genders, most likely because we specifically asked our participants their attitudes about marriage. A previous meta-analytic study showed that specific, rather than general attitudes, can accurately predict the respective intentions and eventually the respective behaviors (Kraus, 1995). Therefore, specifically asking participants' attitudes regarding marriage may explain why in our study the relation between marriage attitudes and marriage intention was positive, moderately strong, and quite consistent across the two genders.

On the other hand, contrary to our hypothesis and the relevant literature (Ajzen, 2020), we found that perceived behavioral control over marriage behavior negatively related to marriage intention both in all participants and female models. Although previous research suggests that as perceived behavioral control gets stronger, intention towards a specific behavior becomes stronger (Ajzen, 1985; 2002), it makes sense to think that this principle may not fully apply for behaviors such as marriage that imply lifelong commitment. As research



shows, people's internal perceptions of control are highly related to their interpretation of their own resources to initiate a specific behavior so this may somehow lead the behavior to be procrastinated (Bringle & Byers, 1997). As in our study, when individuals believe to have control over marriage behavior that is whenever they want, they can get married, they may be more likely to procrastinate the marriage behavior.

Another reason for finding negative relation between perceived behavioral control and marriage intention may be because of the fact that previous research were mostly held with transforming an undesired behavior or situation to a desired one such as heavy drinking (Stevens et al., 2022), weight loss (Chung & Fong, 2015; Schifter & Ajzen, 1985), dishonesty (Beck & Ajzen, 1991; Chudzicka-Czupala et al., 2016), unethical behaviors (Carpenter & Reimers, 2005; Chang, 1998), violations of traffic regulations (Diaz, 2002), and cyberbullying (Auemaneekul et al., 2019; Pabian & Vandebosch, 2014). Unlike these studies, in the current study being single young adult could barely be understood as being in an undesired end-state and getting married may not necessarily imply getting into a positive end-state. Given that there is not much research on such type of intentions (Katz & Hill, 1958), these arguments remain as speculations. Therefore, further research is needed to make a more precise conclusion.

Although we hypothesized a positive association between subjective norms and marriage intention, we could not find a significant relation between these two constructs. This is in line with some previous research which has failed to support the link between subjective norm and intention (e.g., Johnston & White, 2003). In a meta-analysis, Armitage and Conner (2001) stated that the subjective norm construct has less predictive power than the attitudes for most of the measured behaviors. Indeed, the link between subjective norms and intention has been argued as the weakest link compared to the link between attitudes, perceived behavioral control, and intention (e.g., White et al., 1994). In this regard, subjective norm may not adequately capture the effect on intentions unless other factors such as cultural background, special population characteristics, or types of certain behavior are also considered (Johnston & White, 2003). Therefore, future research should also consider all these factors that may render the consistent the relation between subjective norms and behavioral intentions over and above positive attitudes and perceived behavioral control.

Moreover, consistent with our second hypothesis, we found a positive significant relation of promotion-focus to both subjective norms and to perceived behavioral control. Research shows that promotion-focus has been characterized by growth, development, accomplishment, ensuring gains, and making progress through a desired end (Förster et al., 2001). As such, it makes sense that the more people are promotion-focused, the more they perceive the marriage as a goal to be accomplished thereby adjusting subjective norms positively and perceiving themselves as having control over their own actions. In contrast, and consistent with our hypothesis, we found a negative relation of prevention-focus with subjective norms and perceived behavioral control. Previous research has shown that prevention-focus has been characterized by security, ensuring non-losses, and avoiding behaviors that mismatch with someone's goals or standards (Brockner & Higgins, 2001). Therefore, for prevention-focused people, marriage is seen as a life commitment goal that one should commit no mistake. As such it makes sense that prevention-focused people are more likely to interpret subjective norms less favorably and to perceive themselves as having low behavioral control over the situation.

Contrary to our expectations, we found that some significant paths linking the tested variables in female model were not significant for male model, except the link from marriage intention to attitudes and to age. This may be because of the low power of male sample compared to the female one, given that our test of gender invariance showed nonsignificant path differences between males and females. In any case, future research should consider equating the number of participants for each group to clearly discuss the significance and difference of the paths among two groups. Also, our research showed a positive relation between age and marriage intentions. This finding is consistent with the literature which has shown that people who get older, are more likely to form positive intentions towards marriage (Mahay & Lewin, 2007), something which seems particularly true for Turkish culture where early marriages were more prioritized even if the age of first and after divorce marriages is getting higher and higher over time for both men and women (AVESPB, 2015). However, age negatively predicted perceived behavioral control (but not among males). This may be because of the fact that while the number of possible mates is getting decreased throughout the time for females this may lead them to feel that they have less control over the marriage issue. This finding is consistent with the Turkish cultural value of judgement. The expected age of the marriage is always lower for females than males

(TUIK, 2016). Therefore, with age, even though females' intention to marry may be getting increased, their perception over marriage behavior may be getting decreased.

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

Although the current study is among the first ones which examine the role of both the theory of planned behavior and the self-regulatory focus theory at the same time to explain people's marriage intention, it has some limitations. First, because of the cross-sectional nature of the study, the significant paths just show relations and therefore no causal inferences can be made. Therefore, future research should use a longitudinal design to talk about the causal effects. Moreover, because of the unequal sample sizes among genders and the low power for the male sample, it remains unknown whether some the nonsignificant paths in the male model are due to lack of relation in the population or due to loss of statistical power. Therefore, future research needs to balance the number of male and female participants and further examine the path invariance. In addition, the Cronbach's alpha for promotion-focus scale was marginally acceptable that may be the source of nonsignificant results. Additionally, some further background information such as working status and living conditions (living apart from the family or living together) could be taken into account as well to give more information about the direction of the paths and may test for the moderating roles of these background variables. Therefore, future research may benefit from considering taking more demographic information. Lastly, given that age was a significant factor in determining the intentions to marriage, future studies may consider sampling various age groups and compare adult developmental periods in predicting marriage intentions as well as attitudes, subjective norms, and the perceived behavioral control of the participants.

### **Conclusion**

Guided by the theory of planned behavior and the self-regulatory focus theory, the present tested the intervening roles of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control in relation between promotion- and prevention-focus and marriage intention. The results yielded that promotion-focus positively and prevention-focus negatively related to perceived behavioral control, which in turn negatively related to intentions to marry. Intentions also related positively to attitudes but not to subjective-norms, which however related positively to promotion-focus and negatively to prevention-focus. Moreover, this sequence of relations was tested in a non-Western culture by considering gender and age differences. The findings highlighted several potential factors that should be considered when planning to intervene in marriage-related intentions and anxieties. Understanding individuals' attitudes towards marriage, marriage-related norms, and the degree of control they have over marriage, as well as whether they are promotion- or prevention-focused, would provide valuable insights for therapists, counselors, or intervention researchers in planning suitable approaches tailored to the needs of each individual.

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