

## THE EFFECT OF NUMBER OF CHILDREN ON MARITAL SATISFACTION AND SPOUSE SUPPORT

ÇOCUK SAYISININ EVLİLİK DOYUMUNA VE EŞ DESTEĞİNE ETKİSİ

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether spousal support, highly correlated with marital satisfaction, is affected by the number of kids and other factors as they are the most important issues in a marriage. Findings are expected to benefit spouses for family planning regarding the number of children. In today's society, marital satisfaction and spousal support are accepted the most important issues. Marital satisfaction is basically defined as the satisfaction that the couples get from marriage on a personal and environmental basis. Spousal support is accepted as the support they provide to each other. Recent studies showed that a positive correlation exists between spousal support and marital satisfaction. However, there are a few types of research on issues regarding their foundations. The study group consisted of 201 married in Kayseri province in Turkey. The Marriage Satisfaction Scale (MSS), the Spouse Support Scale (SSS) and a Demographic Form were utilized for data collection. Data analysis was conducted with statistical analysis including average scores, standard deviations, and Pearson correlation. The findings showed that a negative medium correlation existed for the participants with no kids and with four children compared to marital satisfaction and marital support levels. In addition, the higher the number of children, the higher the negative correlation between marital satisfaction and support was found. In conclusion, the number of children and other factors significantly affects spousal support and marital satisfaction.

**Keywords:** *Marital satisfaction; spousal support; the number of children.*

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## Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı, evlilikteki evlilik doyumu ile ilişkili eş desteğinin, ailedeki en önemli faktörlerden birisi olarak bilinen çocuk sayısından ve diğer faktörlerden etkilenip etkilenmediğinin incelenmesidir. Sonuçların çocuk sayısına ilişkin aile planlamasında eşlere faydalı olması beklenmektedir. Günümüz toplumlarında evlilik doyum ve eş desteği aileler için en önemli konular olarak kabul edilmektedir. Evlilik doyumu temel olarak, çiftlerin evlilikten kişisel ve çevresel olarak aldıkları memnuniyet olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Eş desteği ise birbirlerine sağladıkları destek olarak kabul edilmektedir. Son yıllarda yapılan araştırmalar, eş desteği ile evlilik doyumu arasında pozitif bir ilişki olduğunu göstermiştir. Ancak, yapılarıyla ilgili konularda yeterli araştırma yapılmadığı görülmektedir. Araştırmanın çalışma grubunu Kayseri ilinde ikamet eden 201 evli kişi oluşturmuştur. Veri toplama işleminde Evlilik Memnuniyeti Ölçeği (EMÖ), Eş Destek Ölçeği (EDÖ) ve Demografik Form kullanılmıştır. Veri analizi, ortalama puanları, standart sapmaları ve Pearson korelasyonunu içeren istatistiksel bir analiz ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Çocuğu olmayan ve dört çocuklu çiftlerin evlilik doyum ve eş destek seviyeleri karşılaştırıldığında negatif bir ilişki elde edilmiştir. Ayrıca, çocuk sayısı arttıkça, evlilik doyumu ile destek arasındaki negatif korelasyon olduğu görülmüştür. Sonuç olarak, çocuk ve diğer faktörlerin miktarı eş desteği ve evlilik doyumunu önemli ölçüde etkilediği elde edilmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Evlilik doyumu; eş desteği; çocuk sayısı.*

## INTRODUCTION

Family and marriage have been a foremost and complex structure in the history of mankind. Marriage is accepted as a basic factor in the lives of individuals, who have been existing for a long time in all societies, albeit in different ways. In marriage, two individuals living together, share their lives, raise children, make promises and sacrifices (Ozguven, 2000). Nonetheless, it is the most fundamental human relationship that provides emerging a family and next generation (Larson and Holman, 1994), and is commonly described as an important institution in various societies and cultures (Brubaker and Kimberly, 1993).

Spousal support is defined as the support of married couples when needed and as needed (Dehle and others, 2001). Marital satisfaction arises in personal situations such as love, sexual satisfaction, desired communication types, and 'no matter what' behaviors by the spouses. It is the psychological satisfaction gotten from environmental conditions including equality, earnings, work and sharing problems in decisions (Sokolski ve Hendrick, 1999).

There are studies conducted on the variables predicting marital satisfaction. They include marriage stability, commitment, strong spiritual values, respect, sexual loyalty, willingness to be a good spouse, religious faith and devotion, forgiveness (Grandon, Myers ve Hattie, 2004).

Recent studies suggested that perceived support of the spouses enhance the quality of marriage (Dehle et al., 2001; Beach ve Gupta, 2006; Kabasakal and Soylu, 2016). Correspondingly, marital satisfaction mainly depends on perceived spouse support, sexual life satisfaction, and education levels (Cag and Yildirim, 2013).

In addition, related researches between spouse support and social support revealed relationship between support exchange of spouses and marital satisfaction (Cutrona and Suhr, 1994), marital and individual life planning provided by spouses or perceived social support competence (Dehle, Larsen and Landers, 2001), the role of spousal support in physical health, and spouses' levels of support (Neff and Karney, 2005). Current researchers in Turkey generally studied identifying factors that affect marital satisfaction (Çınar, 2008; Guven, 2005) and targeted at estimating marital satisfaction level of the couples (Celik, 2006). For example, in a recent study, Kabasakal and Soylu (2016) recently investigated 524 married couples' marital satisfaction in terms of gender and spousal support. They showed that no statistically significant differences existed between marital satisfaction and gender-related spousal support. That means men and women indicated similar tendencies on both. However, a medium positive relationship between marital satisfaction and spousal support in general circumstances was identified. In conclusion, marriage satisfaction depends on multiple dimensions of psychological, biological, and social issues, which makes it a multifactorial relation issue.

Other studies also discovered a positive correlation between marital satisfaction and social support according to other features, including psychological cases (Beach et al., 1986; Hoseini et al., 2015; Polenick et al., 2017), hemodialysis patients (Jiang et al., 2015), and newlywed couples (Gadassi et al., 2016). Yet, there was no specific study that focused only on marital satisfaction, spousal support, and the number of children. Hence, the current study is expected to fill this gap in the field and help couples in family planning to a great extent.

The purpose of this study was to investigate any relationship existed between the number of kids and marital satisfaction in relation to spousal support. Following research questions were aimed to be explored:

1. Is there a significant relationship between spousal support and marital satisfaction according to the number of children in the spousal support scale and marital satisfaction scale, respectively? If yes, How?
2. How are marriage satisfaction and spousal support related?
3. How is the correlation between marital satisfaction and spousal support based on the number of children related?

### **Methodology**

The participants contained married women and men living in Kayseri who met the criteria, which excluded previous miscarriage and multiple births. The sample randomly selected from the population was composed of 201 people who voluntarily agreed to participate. Of them, 118 (58.7%) were women and 83 (41.3%) were men. The survey research methodology was utilized. Missing and wrongly filled items were discarded for the sake of validity and reliability of the research findings. Data collection tools, marital satisfaction scale, and spouse support scale were created as Google data collection forms and sent to 250 married people. 213 of them responded to the questionnaires, but after removing missing and incorrect forms, 201 individuals were selected as the final participants. The families with miscarriage or multivariate births were excluded for study purposes. Data collection process took place in the fall semester of the 2018-19 academic year.

Three data collection tools were used in the study: Demographic form, marriage satisfaction scale (MSS), spouse support scale (SSS). A demographic form was prepared by the researchers to collect related personal information of the participants such as gender, age, marriage year, number of children, the gender of children, marriage styles, and income levels.

The MSS was initially developed by Tezer (1986) to evaluate marital satisfaction in the marriage. It consists of ten five-point Likert-type items. The responses in the questionnaire are categorized between 'strongly disagree' (1) to 'strongly agree' (5) choices. The total score that can be obtained from the scale varies between 10 and 50 points. Higher scores display greater marital satisfaction. Test-retest reliability of the MSS was designed by applying to the same individuals twice in three-month intervals. Its reliability was calculated as .85 with the Pearson product moment correlation coefficient. The internal validity consistency was found 0.91 for

the first group (N=50) and .89 for the second group (N=208), by using Cronbach's alpha formula. The construct validity was tested based on a comparison of the scores between them.

In addition, the SSS was initially designed by Yildirim (2004) and contains 27 three-point Likert-type items. It targets the measurement of perceived support of the spouses in a marriage. The total possible score ranges between 27 and 81. Higher scores show superior spousal support. It was found to possess four features with an eigenvalue greater than one. Such factors could explain the variance of the responses in terms of the correctness between 46% and %84. Its validity and reliability (Cronbach alpha) were tested with 248 individuals and were calculated 0.95 and 0.89, respectively. The Construct validity was also examined by factor analysis and Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin (KMO) coefficient and found 0.95.

Data were analyzed with the use of SPSS v.20 program. Mean, standard deviation, range and Pearson correlation were performed for inferential statistical analysis. The average age of the participants was calculated 39.48 with a standard deviation of .77 and with the range of 22-79.

The participants' gender, levels of education, married type, and the number of kids were summarized in table 1. As illustrated in the table, 118 (58.7%) of the participants were male and 83 (41.3%) were female. The majority holds an undergraduate (49.3%) and post-graduate (25.4%) degree. They mostly (42.6%) got married following a flirting period and otherwise, 115 (57.3) had arranged marriage. Approximately half of them (%49) had 20+ years of marriage. Also, the majority of them (44.3%) stated that they got married between the ages of 20-25.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the participants

Characteristic	N	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	118	58.7
Female	83	41.3
<b>Education Level</b>		
Pre-College	71	35.3
Undergraduate	99	49.3
Graduate	31	15.4
<b>Married Type</b>		
Agreement	86	42.6
Arranged (willingly)	115	57.4
<b>Number of Kids</b>		
0	35	17.4
1	53	26.3

2	59	29.4
3	37	18.4
4	17	8.5
<b>Length of Marriage</b>		
0-18	21	51
20 y.+	20	49
<b>Married Age</b>		
15-20	13	13
21-25	89	44
26-30	63	31
30+	24	12

## Results

We investigated the potential impacts of the number of kids in a family on marital satisfaction and spousal support. The results indicated some correlations between parental satisfaction and spousal support based on the number of children in the families.

Our null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) was that no statistically significant difference existed between the scores of marital satisfaction and spousal support based on the number of children. On the other hand, the alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ), according to the number of children, was that a significant difference between the scores of the marital satisfaction and the spousal support ( $p < .001$ ). Pearson correlation was applied to test the hypothesis.

**Table 2.** Comparison of the marriage satisfaction scale and the spouse support scale responses according to the number of children

Number of Children			MSS	SSS
0	MSS	Pearson Corr. Sig. (2-tailed)	1	-.479** .004
	SSS	Pearson Corr. Sig. (2-tailed)	-.479** .004	1
1	MSS	Pearson Corr. Sig. (2-tailed)	1	-.737** .000
	SSS	Pearson Corr. Sig. (2-tailed)	-.737** .000	1
2	MSS	Pearson Corr. Sig. (2-tailed)	1	-.665** .000
	SSS	Pearson Corr. Sig. (2-tailed)	-.665** .000	1
3	MSS	Pearson Corr. Sig. (2-tailed)	1	-.620** .000
	SSS	Pearson Corr. Sig. (2-tailed)	-.620** .000	1
4	MSS	Pearson Corr. Sig. (2-tailed)		-.870** .000
	SSS	Pearson Corr. Sig. (2-tailed)	-.870** .000	1

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 demonstrates relationships regarding the information provided from the study. It showed that  $H_1$  hypothesis was found valid because significance level of the test was lower than the alpha value and that revealed that a statistically significant difference existed between marriage satisfaction and spousal support quantities according to the number of children.

In addition, Pearson correlation analysis was performed for the surveys conducted with the participants in terms of the number of children to explore whether there was a correlation between marriage satisfaction and spousal support. If correlation value is negative ( $r < 0$ ), an inverse (negative) relation exists between them. If positive ( $r > 0$ ), then a direct (positive) relationship existed between them. The findings of correlations are shown below.

**Table 3.** Correlation coefficients (r) between marriage satisfaction scores vs. spousal support

Number of Children (N)	MSS vs. SSS
No child (35)	-.479
One child (53)	-.737
Two children (59)	-.665
Three children (37)	-.620
Four children (17)	-.870
Average (201)	-.674

Table 3 showed a negative correlation between marital satisfaction and spousal support scores of the participants with 1-4 children. Therefore,  $H_1$  hypothesis was valid. According to common correlation coefficient definitions, the following intervals could be defined for the degree of correlation:

- $0 > r > -0.3$ , no correlation.
- $0.3 > r > -0.5$ , weak.
- $0.5 > r > -0.8$ , moderate.
- $0.8 > r > -1.0$ , strong.

Regarding the correlation between marital satisfaction and spousal support according to the number of children, our data findings indicated that the correlation coefficient increase as the number of children increases except for the families with four kids. Generally, the following results were emphasized:

- A weak negative correlation for non-child participants.
- A moderate negative correlation for single child participants.
- A high negative correlation for participants with two kids.
- A high negative correlation for participants with two or three kids.

## **DISCUSSION**

In light of the results, there existed a statistically significant relationship between marital satisfaction and spousal support in terms of the number of children. Our hypothesis was approved and is valid. In other words, as the number of children increases, spousal support and marriage satisfaction decreases. Such a result was slightly different from previous research findings and but also similar to their findings as well (Cag and Yildirim, 2003). They found that the number of children was not significantly predictive of marital satisfaction and a relationship existed between marital satisfaction and marital satisfaction. However, they were interested in the relationship between sociodemographic issues (age, education levels, number of children, etc.) and marital satisfaction. Therefore, our results somewhat are aligned with a recent similar study.

Besides the above studies, additional research findings disclosed more consistent results with our findings of spousal support, marital satisfaction and child effect (Wan et al., 1996; Mickelson et al., 2006). These findings were somewhat realistic because of the more children, the less time the couples are able to spend alone time and support for each other. Couples are expected to spend alone times for happy marriage and spousal support.

The current study ignored cultural effects, however, may be useful to conduct similar research considering it since it may involve individuals with different cultures residing in the same city. Gender and ages of the children, occupations, and income of the families should be included for a wider perspective and elaborating richer outcomes. The outcomes of the study could also be considered and used for an effective guide in the family planning of the couples, an ideal number of children may be decided for optimum marital satisfaction and spousal support.



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