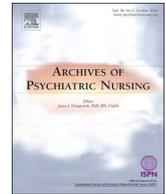




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## Predictors of Marital Adjustment among Child Brides

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## ABSTRACT

The researchers aim was to examine the predictors of marital adjustment among child brides in Turkey. The sample included 246 women who were between 18 and 49 years of age, got married while under the age of 18, not divorced, who spoke Turkish or Kurdish, by using convenience sampling method. We used a marital adjustment scale and a survey form to collect data. Our findings indicated that marital adjustment was low among child brides. The factors affecting women's marital adjustment were duration and types of the marriage, number of pregnancies and physical violence. The incidence of physical violence was inversely correlated with the scores of marital adjustment of women, while the women's age, education, income level, number of living children, age, and the education level of their partner was not correlated. The results of this study would be useful for nurses, midwives, social workers, and counselors who assist women who are facing domestic violence.

## Introduction

Marital adjustment is a significant aspect of family life, which shapes couple's satisfaction and well-being (Allendorf & Ghimire, 2013; Basharpour & Sheykholeslami, 2015). According to Locke and Williamson, marital adjustment is a multidimensional concept and forms by the harmony with men and women in terms of friendship, agreement on core values, emotional proximity, accommodation, and happiness (Locke & Williamson, 1958). Marital adjustment has been found to be strongly associated with physical and psychological well-being of individuals (Basharpour & Sheykholeslami, 2015; Hollist, Miller, Falceto, & Fernandes, 2007; Robles, Slatcher, Trombello, & McGinn, 2014). In addition to diseases such as depression, heart diseases, and cancer, self-esteem, dissatisfaction and domestic violence are among the most common problems in an inharmonious marriage (Umberson, Williams, Powers, Liu, & Needham, 2006; Williams, 2003). A number of affecting factors have been emphasized in studies on the marital adjustment such as age, gender, duration of marriage, employment status, marriage form, unrealistic expectations, level of education, number of children, absence of age difference between couples, acquaintance before marriage, social support, physical environment, positive emotions, religiosity, and the possibility of acquiring new skills and information, and lack of preparation for marriage and child marriages (Batool & Khalid, 2012; Jamabo & Ordu, 2012; Rahmani, Alahgholi, Merghati, et al., 2009; Tutarel Kışlak & Göztepe, 2012; Zhang, Ho, & Yip, 2012).

Child marriage is defined as a formal marriage or informal union before age 18 (UNICEF, 2001). Although found in most countries of the

world, child marriages are much more widespread and common in underdeveloped or developing countries (UNFBA, 2012). A report indicated that nearly one in every four adolescent girls aged 15–19 in the developing countries is currently married or in a union (UNFBA, 2012). Worldwide, 8% of women between the ages of 20 and 24 were married before age 15 and one in every four women was married before age 18. In less developed countries, this rate ranged between 15 and 42% (UNICEF, 2016). Countries in the eastern and western parts of Africa and South Asia rank among the highest in the world (UNICEF, 2016) and Turkey is the highest in Europe with regards to the rates of child brides (UNICEF, 2016). In Turkey, 22% of women between the ages of 25 and 49 were married by the time they turned 18 and 4% got married before their 15th birthday (TDHS, 2013).

Child marriages are an important human rights issue that hampers every aspect of a girl's development. Düzen and Atalay (2014) reported that the risk of death for women between 10 and 14 years old during pregnancy is five times higher than for women between 20 and 24 years old. Respectively, infants born to mothers in the first age bracket were five times more probable to die than those born to mothers in the second age bracket. According to the International Women's Research Center (ICRW), child brides were likely to be exposed to double the amount of physical violence and three times the amount of sexual violence in comparison to older age groups (ICRW, 2007). In addition, depression and suicide rates were found to be higher in child marriages (Gage, 2013). In addition to the negative impact on the mother's and infant's health due to frequent and early pregnancies (Hampton, 2010), complications in pregnancy and childbirth such as obstetrics fistula,

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prolonged childbirth, obstructed labor, low birth weight infants and unaware of their rights to access contraception (Raj, Saggurti, Balaiah, & Silverman, 2009), early marriages were also associated with social and economic development (Raj et al., 2009), women's basic education, work life access, feminization of poverty, violence, abuse and victimization, nutritional status, life satisfaction and problems related to marital adjustment (Erulkar, 2013; Goli, Rammohan, & Singh, 2015; Nour, 2006; Stanley, Ragan, Rhoades, & Markman, 2012; Tezcan & Coşkun, 2004; UNICEF, 2016). A review study indicated that age at marriage has a strong effect on the country's fertility rate by increasing the crude birth rate that has a positive impact on population growth (Marphatia, Ambale, & Reid, 2017). A recent study from Sub-Saharan Africa indicated that improving gender equitable norms and opportunities for girls are likely to improve social status of women in the community (Petroni, Steinhaus, Fenn, Stobenau, & Gregowski, 2017). Age at marriage has a strong effect on women's empowerment and agency within households and their status in the broader community (Marphatia et al., 2017). In patriarchal societies, society chooses different ways to control women's behavior and sexuality. In order to control women's sexuality, girls are forced to marry at an early age. Early married girls give birth to many children, cannot work in a job that brings money due to child care, cannot make their own decisions (Kaynak Malatyalı, 2014; Petroni et al., 2017). Men decide about education of the children and expenditures, health care needs. Such cultural practices cause gender inequality and a decrease in the social status of women (Bates, Maselko, & Schuler, 2007; Marphatia et al., 2017; Nour, 2006; Petroni et al., 2017).

## Turkey

When the issue of child brides in Turkey is examined, it is seen that there are various reasons for the continuation of child marriage, including poverty, having a poor education, exposure to violence, traditional practices, the protection of honor and gender view of the family (Düzen & Atalay, 2014; Kaynak Malatyalı, 2014; Tezcan & Coşkun, 2004; UNICEF, 2005). Children, especially girls, are seen as an economic burden on some families due to poverty. In addition, families get money under the dowry system which is a sum of money; men pay to the brides' family in order to marry their daughters, when they marry their girls (Tezcan & Coşkun, 2004). Therefore, families force their daughters into marriage at a young age. In these cases, the choice of partner is often made by the head of the family or the parents, marriage is seen as an economic adjustment rather than a personal choice. Moreover, Turkish girls are under the obligation to protect their virginity. Early marriage is perceived as a way to protect the reputation of the family by preventing sexual relations outside of marriage (Boran, Gökçay, Devicioğlu, & T., 2013; Kaynak Malatyalı, 2014). Traditional practices among different kinds of marriage such as dowry, berdel (changing the girls between families) and cradle, which still exists in some parts of Turkish society also cause girls to be married at an early age.

Improving the quality of marital life is extremely important in terms of the physical and psychological health of married individuals. However, there is little information on the marital adjustment of child brides. This is almost a new topic which is not extensively studied in Turkey. Therefore, the researchers aimed to examine the predictors of marital adjustment among child brides in Turkey. The main objectives of the study were to determine the marital adjustment of the child brides and to examine the factors like age, partners' age, educational status, income level, number of living children, age at marriage, marriage types, and presence of physical violence on marital adjustment of child brides.

## Methods

### Samples

This descriptive study included 246 women (using convenience sampling) who were admitted to the Obstetrics and Gynecology Clinic of the Bitlis Government Hospital, were between 18 and 49 years of age, got married while under the age of 18, not divorced, who spoke Turkish or Kurdish and agreed to participate in the study. Out of 288 women, 21 women refused to participate in the study due to fear of facing a legal investigation, and not getting a permission from their husbands, 12 women did not want to state their opinions about their marriage, and 9 women stated lack of time. According to Erulkar, in order to have the greatest impact in reducing the prevalence of child marriage, programs to address child marriage should focus on regions where a large proportion of girls are married before the age of 15 (Erulkar, 2013). Bitlis is located in the eastern part of Turkey and had one of the highest child marriage rates in 2014 (TSI, 2014).

### Data collection

Researchers developed a survey form in the direction of literature (Boran et al., 2013; Tutarel Kışlak, 1999; Yağın, 2014). They used the survey form and the marital adjustment scale (MAS) to collect data. The first part of the validated survey form included the socio - demographic information of the participants, the second part included the questions related to pregnancy and childbirth and the third part included questions about marriage life. We carried out a pilot study involving 40 women who were not included in the main study. Based on the pilot study results, the survey form was found to be appropriate in terms of usability. Data collection was done between 1 July and 31 October 2014. The implementation of the data collection tools took about 25 min for each participant. The tools were completed by the women. For illiterate participants, the researcher instructed the survey questions. The researcher knows the language spoken in the area, Kurdish, and created a reassuring environment for women in the sample.

### Marital adjustment scale

The MAS is a 15-item scale developed by Locke and Wallace (1959). Although it was developed in 1959, it still continues to be a widely used tool for evaluating marital relationships. The validity and reliability of the Turkish version was tested by Tutarel Kışlak (1999). The MAS placed couples and individuals into satisfied and dissatisfied groups according to their scores and measured their marital happiness. The MAS consists of one question related to general compliance, a single item scored as 0 (very unhappy) to 35 (perfectly happy); eight questions about the possible areas of agreement, six of the eight questions scored on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (Always disagree) to 5 (Always agree), a single item scored on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (Always disagree) to 8 (Always agree) another single item scored ranging from 0 (Always disagree) to 15 (Always agree) on the same scale; and six questions to measure conflict resolution, commitment, and communication. The maximum point for the scale is 60, and the minimum score is 0. The highest score indicates that women are happy in their marriages, while the lowest score indicates unhappiness. The cut-off point was determined to be 43.5 to distinguish individuals with compatible and incompatible marriage by Tutarel Kışlak. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.84 (Tutarel Kışlak, 1999). Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient was found to be 0.90 and the reliability coefficient was 0.76 in the present study.

### Ethical dimension of research

The researchers received written permission from the Bitlis Hospital to conduct the study. The Gaziantep University, Faculty of Medicine

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