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A study of parents' child raising styles and marital harmony

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Abstract

This research is conducted to investigate the relation between parents' child raising styles and their marital harmony with children at age 5-6 and attending preschool in Istanbul. The upbringing styles are investigated in three categories; authoritative, authoritarian and permissive. The significant results indicate that there is a positive relation between authoritative upbringing and marital harmony; a negative relation between authoritarian and permissive upbringing and marital harmony. According to these findings we may conclude that as the parent's authoritative style scores increase the marital harmony scores also increases; at the other hand, as the authoritarian and permissive scores on the child raising styles increase their marital harmony scores decreases.

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1. Introduction

In literature **marriage** is described as a normative, personal life event in adulthood (Kurdek, 1999). This system which involves the cohabitation of two people with different habits, demands and needs, is a special relationship that has an effect on personal development and personal realization that is formalized by social norms and law (Ersanlı ve Kalkan, 2008). Spanier describes the **harmony in marriage** as the couple's orientation to daily life and the changes in daily life and their adaptation to these changes in the mean time. Sabatelli describes the harmonious marriage as a unity in which couples are able to communicate, resolving many disagreements concerning the important aspects of marriage to make both sides happy. Nelson-Jones states that people's relationships go through four stages: beginning, improvement, sustainability and ending. In a harmonious marriage the ending stage will only be possible with the death of one partner. Sustainability stage requires high level harmony in the marriage. (Fidanoğlu, 2007). The marital harmony is affected by many factors such as the expectations of partners from each other, their upbringing, maintaining the family finance, friends, sexuality, the relationship with the partner's relatives. A child is also an important dimension in a marriage. According to Belsky (1982), there is a complicated and double sided relation between a child and marriage. According to this double sided relation, a child will affect the marriage and the marriage will be affected by the child (Kocadere, 1995).

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Most studies analyze the marriage and the parent-child relations from the date the baby joins the family and the date when the child starts to walk (Belsky, Youngblade, Rovine, Volling, 1991). There are two different approaches that explain the effects of a child in a marriage. According to the approach that claims positive effects of a child on the marriage is as such; a child's birth certifies the love of a couple and is the source of delight and satisfaction that enriches the marital relationship. According to the second approach that puts forth the negative effects of a child on the marriage states that children are the source of conflict and difficulty in the couple's intimate life and disagreements between a couple are caused by the presence of the child. Some research findings testify this negative approach; showing a negative relationship between the presence of a child and the quality of marriage (Kocadere, 1995). White's research (1986) investigated the reasons that cause negative relations between a child and happiness in marriage. 1535 married participants were surveyed where a negative relation was found between a child and happiness in marriage. The birth of a first child or having young children will decrease the possibility of divorce in the first three years of an unhappy marriage; people who have an unhappy marriage sustain their marriage for a while but the negative relation between a child and happy marriage will continue (White, 1986). The negative impact of children in relation to the harmony in marriage usually is based on the stress caused by their behavioral problems which reflects on the marriage elicited as the disagreement between parents about children's discipline and education, one of the partner's neglect about caring for children and being unable to share equal responsibilities about raising the children (Canel, 2007).

Child rearing practices have an important effect on individual roles in marriage (Heaton, 1990). The approaches about roles of parents in upbringing children became an important factor in recent years due to the changing life styles (Haktanır et. al., 1999). Reviewing literature about factors affecting marital harmony we see limited research about parents' child raising styles and especially parents' cooperative decisions about their children, but on the contrary there is more research about children's problem behaviors.

Child raising refers to the interactions involving parental practices and expression of attitudes, values and beliefs between parents and their children. There are important factors underlying a wide variety of parental behaviors. Sears, Maccoby and Levin emphasized eight factors used by mothers: *permissiveness, restriction, warmth, aggressiveness, punitiveness, perception of husband, orientation towards child's physical well being and pattern of control and discipline* (Sever, 1985)

A parent, acquires a parenting role from his/her own experiences in childhood and from their own parents' behaviors. These behaviors are generally internalized but have not reached consciousness therefore emerge involuntarily and spontaneously (Sevinç, 2005(a)). The quality of parent-child relationship is determined and formalized by parents (Yavuzer, 2003). These attitudes show differences in families and societies but are mostly similar on account of the effects on children (Haktanır et. al., 1999). Thereby parents set up a model for their children and give expression to their behaviors by their own attitudes when bringing up children (Kaya Sezer, 2007).

Various studies indicate that child-rearing practices are shaped by cultural values that vary between human populations which become effective in the personal preferences and inner regulations of individuals who seek to sustain them in the next generation. Le Vine's model of **parental strategies** is based on the concept of parental investment strategies for allocating time, attention, and domestic resources to the raising of children during early and later years (Sevinç, 2005(b)) Therefore in preschool years parent's overall conception and conscious attitude about bringing up children is important. The merits of parent's consistency in upbringing children affects children both psychologically and behaviorally (Vaughn, Block&Block, 1988).

Baumrind's "Family Attitudes" theory in 1967 suggests three styles of upbringing children namely authoritative, authoritarian and permissive (Lamb & Baumrind, 1978).

Authoritative child rearing style: Authoritative parents have consistent approach towards their children. They exercise certain rules which are accepted by all the family members. Children are aware of what is right and wrong behavior. Parents' consistent behavior helps to develop the child's confidence. The child's efforts toward independent decision making are encouraged and respected. Parents frequently ask children their opinions about any decisions regarding family affairs. They exercise discipline in the context of warm, emotionally supportive home environment. Children who grow up in authoritative families, elicit positive energy, creativity and their self-confidence level is high (Sevinç & Evirgen, 2003).

Authoritarian child rearing style: Authoritarian parenting is a way of upbringing of children in a milieu in which the child's emotional, social and support needs are unfulfilled. There is a lack of two-way communication

with the child. Parents use control through absolute set of rules rarely providing justifications when interacting with the child. The parent continuously criticizes the child in order to exercise his/her authority (Coplan, Hastings, Lagacé-Séguin, Moulton, 2002). It is very likely that children who grow up subject to this parenting attitude, end up to be extremely rebellious or submissive exhibiting extreme anxiety and anger manifestations (Sevinç, 2005(a)).

Permissive child rearing style: This is a style that parents scramble together convenience and care free attitude. Children have unconditional freedom to choose whatever they do (Yörükoğlu, 2008). Parents have no control over their children and sometimes act too tolerant resulting in neglect. Under these circumstances children are the one who have authority in the family and other family members unconditionally obey them. In this family type children show less respect to their parents. These children, in course of time become a person who tries to find ways to dominate other people outside their family (Yavuzer, 1999).

When all these approaches are taken into consideration we can hypothesize that marital harmony will also be affected in relation to parents' child rearing style especially when the child is at a period of preschool age. Parents who cooperate together in child rearing practices and support each other they can have more time for themselves, they will be satisfied and happy not only in their married life but also in their social life. This situation will reflect onto the child and the positive energy arising from the child will reverberate to parents. As a result, happy people will have less difficulty as well as being less troubled in social interaction and social harmony (Önder, 2007).

2. Method

1.1. The research problem

This research was carried out with parents who have 5-6 year old children to investigate the relationship between their child rearing styles and harmony in marriage.

1.2. The sample

The sample consisted of parents who have children attending kindergarten at both private/state primary schools in the city of Istanbul. The sample was chosen randomly from schools in the city of Istanbul and their social-economic status was taken in consideration. Accordingly population was drawn from six towns in Asian side (Kadıköy, Üsküdar, Ümraniye, Ataşehir, Çekmeköy, Sultanbeyli) and six towns in European side (Beşiktaş, Sarıyer, Bahçelievler, Güngören, Sultangazi, Gaziosmanpaşa) in total 12 towns were specified. The survey was conducted at 25 schools with 1000 parents to counteract for the possibility of data loss of unreturned questionnaires.

1.3. Instruments

The research data was collected by questionnaires directed to the Mother and Father separately consisting of 11 questions to collect personal information; another questionnaire concerning 'Parenting styles and Dimensions' consisting of 27 items and 'Marital Adjustment Test' with 15 questions.

Parents Personal Information Questionnaire{PPIQ}: This questionnaire was developed by the researchers and aimed to find answers about parents' demographic profile and familial life.

Parenting Styles&Dimensions Questionnaire {PSDQ}: This questionnaire was developed by Robinson, Mandlco, Olsen & Hart (1995); translated into Turkish by Önder and Gülay (2009). Original questionnaire aimed to survey authoritative, authoritarian and permissive parenting styles of parents who have children aged 4-12. Original questionnaire included 62 items. With the revisions made(2001) the questionnaire was reduced to 32 items. The answers to the items were given as 'never', 'sometimes', 'half&half', 'very often' and 'always' are the evaluations used in the questionnaire. The Turkish adaptation of this questionnaire resulted in 27 items including three subheads which are authoritative style with 13 items, authoritarian style with 10 items and permissive style with 4 items as being indicative (Önder & Gülay, 2009).

Marital Adjustment Test{MAT}: Aimed to test married couples complacency levels developed by Locke& Wallece (1959), validity and reliability studies for Turkish population done by Tutarel-Kışlak includes 15 questions on general marital complacency besides other issues such as family finance, expressing emotions, friends, sexuality, social norms, philosophy of life, agreements and disagreements, marital harmony and attribute, relationship style

{free time, social activities, problem solving, trust}. Scores obtained from the questionnaire vary between 1-58, high score rates for marital harmony, low score rates for lack of harmony in the marriage (Kılıçaslan, 2007). According to this 43.5 is abscission point; 43 and below indicates inharmony, over 43 indicates harmony.

1.4. Procedure

Mother’s Personal Information and Father’s Personal Information Questionnaires and the Parenting Styles&Dimensions Questionnaire together with the Marital Adjustment Test were individually given to parents who had 5-6 years old children. These were sent to the parents by the kindergarten teachers asking to be filled out. Assessments were made by the researchers. The questionnaires with some blank answers and the ones answered by only one parent were excluded from the data analysis. The analysis was done on 664 questionnaires returned from the parents.

1.5. Analysis of Data

The analysis of data is carried out by the SPSS 16.00 package programme. To analyse the relationship between Parenting Styles&Dimensions and Marital Adjustment Test, Pearson Product Moments Correlation analysis is used. To analyze whether a differentiation of subhead scores in PSAQ and MAT between mother and father exists Independent-Samples T Test is used.

3. Results

When the scores from PSAQ and MAT are compared and correlation and variation analysis is done, the differences in data between mothers and fathers have indicated the following results:

Table 1. Pearson Product Moments Correlation Analysis Results for Relationship Between Parents, PSDQ Subhead Scores and MAT Scores

Points	N	Mother		N	Father	
		r	p		r	p
Authoritative/MAT	664	.261	.000	664	.395	.000
Authoritarian/MAT	664	-.116	.003	664	-.183	.000
Permissive/ MAT	664	-.158	.000	664	-.142	.000

As seen in Table 1 there is a positive relationship between parents’ authoritative child rearing style and their marital harmony, a negative relationship between authoritarian and permissive child rearing style and their marital harmony. According to this as the authoritative child rearing scores increase the marital harmony scores increase ($p<.01$); as the authoritarian (*mothers* $p<.05$; *fathers* $p<.01$) and permissive rearing style scores increase the marital harmony scores decrease ($p<.01$).

Table 2. The Results of Independent-Samples T Test for the Difference Between PSDQ and MAT Scores

Groups	N	Authoritative			Authoritarian			Permissive			MAT		
		\bar{x}	t	p	\bar{x}	t	p	\bar{x}	t	p	\bar{x}	t	p
Mother	664	58.64	5.27	.000	18.53	3.08	.002	9.64	-3.0	.765	45.65	-2.28	.023
Father	664	56.77			17.63			9.69			46.57		

As seen in Table 2, mothers’ authoritative ($t=5.27$; $p<.01$) and authoritarian style scores are higher than fathers’ scores ($t=3.08$; $p<.05$). Accordingly mothers are more authoritative and more authoritarian than the fathers. Whereas the results indicate that mothers’ and fathers’ permissive style scores are similar ($t=-.30$; $p>.05$). When the marital harmony scores are considered the results show that fathers’ scores are higher than the mothers’ ($t=-2.28$; $p<.05$).

4. Discussion

Literature on the relationship between parents' child rearing styles and marital harmony is limited. In general research studies have focused on marital maladjustment and problems encountered in childhood relations. The research about marital dissatisfaction emphasizes child anxiety, aggression, and observed behavioural problems related to insecure family-child relationships. Aggressive and hostile interactions in an inharmonious marriage, could affect especially the child rearing practices and child's behaviors (Gable, Belsky, Crnic, 1992). On the other hand, parallel to Block, Block and Marrison (1981) findings, parents' disagreements about child rearing approaches and child rearing values in preschool period increases the probability of divorce within ten years. At the same time parents' disagreements about child rearing could also point at other problem areas in marriage {communication, problem solving, sexual harmony, etc, (Belsky, 1990). Present research findings indicate that even though mothers' authoritative and authoritarian style subhead scores are higher than the fathers' the permissive style scores are similar. A study by Sümer and Güngör (1999) compared the 'perceived acceptance/ support' and control/ monitoring levels. The results showed that students perceived their mother more accepting and at the same time more controlling than their fathers (Yılmaz, 1999). Looking at our findings mothers' high scores in both authoritative and authoritarian style show that mothers do not have a consistent child rearing style. We might interpret these results as a fact that majority of mothers who are housewives spend more time with their children and are in charge of main responsibilities for their children. On the other hand, fathers are more socially oriented when spending time with their children and thus try to have an entertaining permissive interaction. From this point of view; parents should judge themselves critically about upbringing children and they should take child rearing practices seriously and cooperate together with their spouse about their child rearing styles.

The question 'how the child rearing styles will affect the harmony of marriage?' is also important. In this regard the results for 'differences in marital harmony' are worth to be seriously considered. Our research findings show that fathers' marital harmony is higher than the mothers'. Şener and Terzioğlu's (2008) research on 413 couples also gives support to our research results. Marital harmony average scores according to gender indicate that men find the quality of marriage better than women (Terzioğlu, 2008). Cowan et al's study support these findings with an interpretation that women feel the negative effects of raising a child more than men (Kocadere, 1995). When the relationship between child rearing styles and marital harmony is considered from this point of view the existence of a child, being cooperative on the child rearing style, sharing the responsibility for child caring is determinative factor for the elicited difference between parents' marital harmony.

5. Conclusion and Suggestions

Results of our research carried out with parents' having 5-6 years old children attending kindergarten show that there is a positive relationship between their authoritative child rearing style and marital harmony, a negative relationship between their authoritarian and permissive child rearing styles. Besides, mothers authoritative and authoritarian child rearing style subhead scores are higher than the fathers' and their permissive style scores are similar. Fathers' marital harmony was found to be higher than the mothers'. According to the results we may conclude that parents cooperation in the child rearing style could affect their marital harmony positively.

We suggest that;

- Further research should include the children together with the parents
- The research on marital harmony should not only intend to study the effects of marital harmony in relation to the child but also should investigate the effects of marital harmony on child rearing practices,
- Parenting training should be given to mothers and father at the same time to work in cooperation
- Programs for improving marital relationships should also include sessions on child rearing styles.

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