The Relationship Between Mothers’ Psychological Well-Being and Their Attitudes Towards Their Children

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The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of mothers’ psychological well-being on their parental attitudes towards their children. The study was conducted using the general survey model. The study sample consists of 140 (N = 140) mothers aged between 20 and 41 and above whose children attended preschool education institutions affiliated to Konya Provincial Directorate of National Education. In the study, personal information form was used to determine the mothers’ demographic features; Psychological Well-Being Scale was used to measure the mothers’ psychological well-being and Family Life and Child Rearing Attitude Scale (Parental Attitude Research Instrument-PARI) was used to determine their attitudes towards their children. The data obtained from the study were analyzed using the AMOS 16 program according to “Structural Equation Modeling” in order to reveal the predictive relationships between psychological well-being and sub-dimensions of the family life and child-rearing attitude scale. The data obtained as a result of the study were discussed in the light of relevant literature.

Keywords: psychological well-being, attitude, mother, child

Introduction

Psychological well-being is an important construct in psychology. This construct is defined and measured in different ways. For Example, Flouri (2004) uses the term “subjective well-being” to reflect the worth of someone’s life. This concept was defined in its three aspects: life satisfaction, psychological functioning, and psychological distress. Keyes, Shmotkin, and Ryff (2002) made a distinction between subjective well-being and psychological well-being. While subjective well-being is defined as evaluation of life in terms of balance and satisfaction between positive and negative effects of life, psychological well-being represents perceptions related to existential problems of life.

Psychological well-being is concerned with how individuals lead their lives physically, intellectually, psychologically, socially, and spiritually (Balon, Then, Rankin, & Fung, 2008). In addition, psychological well-being is a key component of the quality of the whole of life or life satisfaction (Chida, & Steptoe, 2008; Diamond, Taylor, & Anton-Culver, 2010).

Physiological health may influence psychological well-being. General symptoms of infectious diseases involve general sensations of feeling weak, failure to concentrate, lack of appetite and exhaustion. These symptoms are at the same time symptoms of depression. Therefore, physical health is directly related to psychological distress. Chronic diseases may, if they threaten life, lead to depression, anxiety, and a state of overall distress (Hayes & Ross, 1986).
Moreover, psychological well-being is negatively correlated with physical pain, chronic infections, and treatment of past or present psychological diseases (Hamdan-Mansour & Marmash, 2007).

Ryff (1989, 1995) proposed a multi-dimensional model that divided psychological well-being into six functions. Self-acceptance involves individuals’ favorable evaluations of their past lives and themselves as well as acceptance and confirmation of their good and bad qualities. Positive relations with others involve having high quality relations with others, feeling anxious about others’ well-being, and satisfaction derived from exchange in human relations. Autonomy can be defined as determining one’s own destiny and the ability to think and behave in a certain way in the face of social pressure. Environmental mastery, on the other hand, can be defined as an individual’s ability to manage their own lives and the world around them in an effective way and their skill to create conditions that are conducive to their values and needs. Purpose in life involves an individual’s belief in the purpose fullness and meaningfulness of their past and present lives. Personal growth involves a constant desire on the part of a person to develop and grow as an individual and his or her openness to know and improve the self.

Researchers have so far focused on the effects of parental roles on parents’ psychological well-being and their perceptions of their children. At the same time, researchers need to see the reciprocal effects of these circumstances (roles) on individual behavior. There are at least two key topics that are closely linked to parental circumstances and require more research focus: gender relations and fertility behavior. As far as gender relations are concerned, there is a constant struggle concerning division of household responsibilities and sharing of financial liabilities between divorced parents. During the past twenty years, the rise in women’s entry into working life has meant a decrease in the time they allocate to child care and has caused couples to experience problems regarding parental responsibility. Husbands will resist the topic of sharing of responsibilities because even if they face changing conditions, a change in norms will be relatively slow. Even though some husbands share household responsibilities, it is dubious whether or not gender roles and the time to be devoted to children, in case of both parents working, are shared equally (McLanahan & Adams, 1987).

Many studies on parenthood and psychological well-being use variables such as satisfaction, happiness, and contentment. These studies typically indicate that presence of children at home has a negative effect on parents’ psychological well-being (Reskin & Coverman, 1985; McLanahan & Adams, 1987). A medium level improvement has been observed in especially women’s psychological well-being after their children have grown up and left home (Glenn, 1975; Harkins, 1978). The reason for this could be that women are more likely than men: (a) to take on responsibility in regard to child rearing (Biernat & Wortman, 1991; Ozer, 1995), (b) to adjust their working life according to their concerns for their children (Glass & Estes, 1997), (c) to be more productive and relational and assume responsibility especially in respect of children’s needs (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982).

Mothers in families are in a position to be the persons that look after primary needs of children such as care and education by virtue of social roles. The responsibility regarding raising of children is laid predominantly on mothers. When combined with other requirements of life, this responsibility may give rise to some impacts on mothers’ psychological states. Differences can be observed in mothers’ behaviors towards their children depending on their psychological well-being. Therefore, mothers’ psychological well-being and their attitudes towards their children were handled and analyzed according to sub-dimensions.

**Method**

**Research Model**

This study was conducted using the relational survey model from among the general survey models. The
relational survey model is a research model that aims to determine the presence and degree of covariations between two or more variables (Karasar, 2005).

Sample
The sample of this study consists of 140 mothers aged 20-41 and above (N = 140) whose children attend preschool education institutions affiliated to Konya Provincial Directorate of National Education. Personal information about the mothers is given in Table 1.

Table 1
Results of Frequency Analyses for Demographic Variables Belonging to Mothers

| Variables     | f | %  |
|---------------|---|----|
| **Age**       |   |    |
| 20-24         | 12| 8.6|
| 25-30         | 52| 37.1|
| 31-35         | 33| 23.6|
| 36-40         | 23| 16.4|
| 41 and above  | 20| 14.3|
| **Level of education** | |    |
| Literate      | 5 | 3.6|
| Elementary    | 34| 24.3|
| Junior school | 20| 14.3|
| High school   | 33| 23.6|
| Associate degree | 12 | 8.6|
| Bachelor’s degree | 32 | 22.9|
| Master’s degree | 3  | 2.1|
| Doctorate degree | 1  | .7|
| **Level of income** | |    |
| 500-1,000 TL  | 72| 51.4|
| 1,000-1,500 TL| 47| 33.6|
| 1,500- and higher | 21 | 15.0|
| **Total**     | 140| |

When the distribution of the mothers who participated in the study by their age is considered, it is seen that there were 12 mothers aged 20-24 (8.6%), 52 mothers aged 25-30 (37.1%), 33 mothers aged 31-35 (23.6%), 23 mothers aged 36-40 (16.4%), and 20 mothers aged 41 and above (14.3%). When their distribution by their education level is considered, it is seen that 5 mothers were literate (3.6%), 34 mothers were elementary school graduates (24.3%), 20 mothers were junior school graduates (14.3%), 33 mothers were high school graduates (23.6%), 12 mothers had associate degree (8.6%), 32 mothers had bachelor’s degree (22.9%), 3 mothers had master’s degree (2.1%), and 1 mother had doctorate degree (0.7%). When the mothers’ distribution by the level of their income is considered, it is seen that there were 72 mothers with incomes between 500 and 1,000 TL (51.4%), 47 mothers between 1,000 and 1,500 TL (33.6%), and 21 mothers 1,500 TL above (15%).

Data Collection Tools
Personal information form, psychological well-being scale, and parental attitude research instrument (family life and child rearing attitude scale) were used as data collection instruments in the study.

Psychological Well-Being Scale
The Psychological Well-being Scale is a data collection tool developed by Ryff (1989). Ryff developed the psychological well-being scale as a measuring scale on the basis of his own psychological well-being model as an 84-item that comprises 6 subscales each containing 14 items.
The scale was adapted to Turkish by Cenkseven (2004) and Akın and Abacı (2008). In Cenkseven’s study (2004), the Cronbach alpha coefficient of the study varies between 0.74 and 0.77. In their study, Akın and Abacı (2008), too, determined the Cronbach alpha coefficient of the scale to be 0.94 for autonomy subscale, 0.97 for environmental mastery, 0.97 for personal growth, 0.96 for positive relations with others, 0.96 for purpose in life, and 0.95 for self-acceptance. The test-retest reliability coefficients of the scale conducted with an interval of four weeks vary between 0.78 and 0.97. The item total correlations of the study were between 0.32 and 0.90 (Cenkseven, 2004; Akın & Abacı, 2008).

Family Life and Child Rearing Attitude Scale (PARI)

This scale was developed by E. S. Schaefer and R. Q. Bell in the USA in 1958. The test was adapted to Turkish in 1978 by Güney Le Compte, Ayhan Le Compte, Serap Özer and Şenay Küçük. Reorganized in accordance with conditions of Turkey, the test contains 60 items and 5 sub-tests. These sub-tests and their items are as follows: overprotective motherhood 16 items, democratic attitude and equalitarianism 9 items, rejection of the homemaking role 13 items, marital conflict 6 items, and strictness with the child 16 items (Öner, 1997).

Analysis of the Data

The data obtained from the study were analyzed according to “Structural Equation Modeling” using AMOS 16 program in order to reveal the predictive relationships between psychological well-being and family life and the subdimensions of the child-rearing attitude scale. Structural Equation Modeling is a statistical approach that presents causal and reciprocal relations between observed and latent variables to test a theoretical model (Shumacker & Lomax, 2004).

Findings

In the model that was obtained (χ² = 75.047, df = 37, p < 0.001), there were six exogenous (positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life, self-acceptance), five endogenous (overprotective mother, democratic attitude and equalitarianism, rejection of the homemaking role, strictness with the child, and marital conflict) data. Chi-square/degree of freedom (χ²/df), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI), and Normed Fit Index (NFI), indicated that the model was fit at an acceptable level (Table 1).

When the fit values given in Table 1 are examined, it is seen that χ²/df = 2.03, RMSEA = 0.08, SRMR = 0.08, IFI = 0.95, NFI = 0.90, CFI = 0.95, GFI = 0.91, and TLI = 0.90. It is understood that in general the model has the required fit values (Bollen, 1989; Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Byrne, 2010; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2011; Tanaka & Huba, 1985). The tested model is shown in Figure 1.

In this model, four paths were found to be significant whereas 1 model was found to be insignificant. The path leading from the psychological well-being variable to the democratic attitude and equalitarianism variable is not significant (p = 0.554 > 0.01).
Table 1

| Measurement | Good fit | Acceptable fit | Fit index values of the model |
|-------------|----------|----------------|-------------------------------|
| $\chi^2$/df | ≤ 3      | ≤ 4-5          | 2.03                          |
| RMSEA       | ≤ 0.05   | 0.06-0.08      | 0.08                          |
| SRMR        | ≤ 0.05   | 0.06-0.08      | 0.08                          |
| NFI         | ≥ 0.95   | 0.94-0.90      | 0.08                          |
| IFI         | ≥ 0.95   | 0.94-0.90      | 0.95                          |
| CFI         | ≥ 0.97   | ≥ 0.95         | 0.95                          |
| GFI         | ≥ 0.90   | 0.89-0.85      | 0.91                          |
| TLI         | ≥ 0.95   | 0.94-0.90      | 0.92                          |

Figure 1. Path analysis of the model.

Table 2

| Predictive variable | Dependent variables                              | Direct impact | Standard error | Critical value | p    |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|------|
| Psychological well-being | Overprotective mother                           | -0.24         | 0.08           | -2.68          | ***  |
| Psychological well-being | Democratic attitude and equalitarianism          | -0.42         | 0.07           | -4.86          | ***  |
| Psychological well-being | Rejection of the homemaking role                | -0.32         | 0.09           | -3.65          | ***  |
| Psychological well-being | Strictness with the child                       | -0.23         | 0.05           | -2.66          | ***  |
| Psychological well-being | Marital conflict                                |               |                |                |      |

When the model in Figure 1 and the data in Table 2 are examined, it is seen that the psychological well-being variable affects the overprotective mother variable ($t = -2.68, p < 0.01$). The correlation coefficient value for this factor was found to be $\beta = -0.24$. When the predictive correlations between psychological well-being and overprotective mother are examined, it is observed that there is a negative and linear correlation between the two.

It is seen in the tested model that psychological well-being variable affects the rejection of the homemaking role variable ($t = -4.86, p < 0.01$). The correlation coefficient value for this factor was found to be $\beta = -0.24$. When the predictive correlations between psychological well-being and rejection of the homemaking role are examined, it is observed that there is a negative and linear relationship between the two.

It is seen in the tested model that the psychological well-being variable affects the marital conflict variable ($t = -2.66, p < 0.01$). The correlation coefficient value for this factor was found to be $\beta = -0.32$. When the predictive
correlations between psychological well-being and marital conflict are examined, it is observed that there is a negative and linear relationship between the two.

It is seen in the tested model that the psychological well-being variable affects the strictness with the child variable \((t = -3.65, p < 0.01)\). The correlation coefficient value for this factor was found to be \(\beta = -0.32\). When the predictive correlations between psychological well-being and strictness are examined, it is observed that there is a negative and linear relationship between the two.

Discussion

The findings obtained from the study conducted were discussed below in the light of relevant literature.

When the model in Figure 1 and the data in Table 2 are examined, it is seen that the psychological well-being variable affects the overprotective mother variable \((t = -2.68, p < 0.01)\). The correlation coefficient value for this factor was found to be \(\beta = -0.24\). When the predictive correlations between psychological well-being and overprotective mother are examined, it is observed that there is a negative and linear correlation between the two.

It is seen in the tested model that psychological well-being variable affects the rejection of the homemaking role variable \((t = -4.86, p < 0.01)\). The correlation coefficient value for this factor was found to be \(\beta = -0.24\). When the predictive correlations between psychological well-being and rejection of the homemaking role are examined, it is observed that there is a negative and linear relationship between the two.

It is seen in the tested model that the psychological well-being variable affects the marital conflict variable \((t = -2.66, p < 0.01)\). The correlation coefficient value for this factor was found to be \(\beta = -0.32\). When the predictive correlations between psychological well-being and marital conflict are examined, it is observed that there is a negative and linear relationship between the two.

It is seen in the tested model that the psychological well-being variable affects the strictness variable \((t = -3.65, p < 0.01)\). The correlation coefficient value for this factor was found to be \(\beta = -0.32\). When the predictive correlations between psychological well-being and strictness are examined, it is observed that there is a negative and linear relationship between the two.

Mothers’ having a high level of adoptiveness, for example their generous tolerance, self-confidence, and self-love exerts an influence on their developing a favorable attitude towards their children (Gordon, 1999, p. 17). Parents who are not receptive to views other than theirs, on the other hand, fail to establish a healthy communication with their children; therefore, parents need to adopt an attitude that is self-confident, respectful, sensitive to mutual problems, cooperative and empathizing with, and receptive to their children’s emotions and ideas in order to establish a healthy communication (Tezel Şahin & Cevher, 2006).

According to Baymur (1993), Gordon (2001), and Çağdaş (2012), acceptance/admission/approval/recognition is an indication of value attached to a person. A person who realizes that he/she is cordially accepted by another person as he/she feels free and begins to think about how he/she may change. They may learn to solve their problems, their psychological health may improve, they may plan how he/she may be different and how they can do more than they could, become more productive and creative; in short, they display a positive development. Special skills are needed for acceptance. Many people regard acceptance as a passive phenomenon. According to them, this way of thinking is an inner behavior or emotion. Acceptance needs to be conveyed and proven in an effective manner in order to demonstrate that it is an inner phenomenon but it also affects others. Parents, in particular, must see their children as distinct individuals. They must accept their children as they are, considering that they are free in their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors.
Parenthood impacts psychological well-being of men and women differently. In general, presence of children at home exerts a negative influence on marital satisfaction of both men and women (Pittman & Lloyd, 1988). It is highly likely that women have higher levels of psychological distress with regard to their children because women have primary responsibility with their role as mother in the care of children compared with the role of father and therefore it is more likely that parenthood will have an influence on their psychological well-being (Glenn & McLanahan, 1982).

As a result of a study they conducted, Özyürek and Şahin (2005) suggested to individuals who have come together in conjugal union, to couples whose marriage suffers from problems, and to prospective mothers and fathers that they should attend, before they have children, parenting courses so that they could receive the right information at the right time.

Seçer, Çeliköz, and Yaşa (2008) stated in a study they conducted that mothers’ parental attitudes, which comprise the variables of their perception of efficiency, interest, and satisfaction with regard to parenthood, could affect not only mothers’ psychological well-being but also indirectly their children by leading to their abuse and neglect.

It can be said on the basis of aforementioned arguments that mothers’ feeling that they have sole responsibility of their children by also taking on responsibility of their spouses may have led them to reject the homemaking role.

According to Gordon (1999), some parents do not exhibit acceptance towards everybody. Parents of this kind have precise and invariable ideas about how their children as well as others should behave, and what behaviors of theirs are right and what are wrong. These mothers will not approve whatever their children might do. For example, you may think of a mother constantly warning her children walking calmly beside her in a supermarket with such remarks as “come near me”, “take your hands off the trolley”, “move aside, you are getting in the way”, and “do not touch the food” (Gordon, 1999).

Adults preserve their characteristics in healthy families. They are affectionate, sympathetic, hearty, and responsible. They like their bodies, they live in the present time, and experience their general feelings, are creative, productive, and realistic. They are content with themselves because of their achievements and take on responsibility for everything in their lives. Therefore, psychologically healthy members of a family can solve their own problems without causing problems for other family members (Nazlı, 2011).

The study Umberson (1989) conducted focuses on two relationships: quality of parent-child relationship and the level of demand created by children on their parents. The strongest predictor of relationship is the parent’s age and whether he/she is divorced or not. While the parent’s age is positively correlated with quality, divorce is negatively correlated with it. The strongest predictor of relational demand is the parent’s age and gender. The degree of demand is higher for mothers than fathers and there is a reverse correlation between demand and age. Therefore, quality of relationship and parents’ demands are strongly correlated with parents’ psychological well-being.

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