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# A STUDY ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELF-PERCEPTION OF PARENTAL ROLE AND MARITAL ATTITUDE<sup>1</sup>

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#### Abstract:

Individuals' perceptions of parental roles is a significant aspect of their parenting and one's appraisal of parental roles might be related to their global appraisal of marriage. Therefore in this study, it was aimed to examine the relationship between self perception of parental role and marital attitude. The participants of the study are comprised of 220 females and males. In order to gather socio-demographic information, the parents were administered an "Individual Information Form". In order to assess participants' self-perception of parental roles Self-Perception of Parental Role Scale, and in order to assess marital attitudes of the participants Marital Attitude Scale (MAS), were administered. As a result, it was found that there are significantly positive correlations (p<0.05) between the scores of the competence and role balance subdimensions of SPPR and the scores of MAS, whereas there are no significant correlations (p>0.05) between the scores of the role satisfaction and investment subdimensions of SPPR and the scores of MAS. The findings are discussed in terms of the relevant literature.

**Keywords:** parental role, self-perception of parental role, marital attitude

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### 1. Introduction

The demands of parenting are many, and involve adapting to the roles of parenthood. The demands include meeting children's needs such as sheltering, feeding, protecting, showing warmth and affection (Grych, 2002; Clifford-Poston 2004). Parents' perceptions of their roles and competence as parents are critical in their success in meeting these demands. The perceptions about the self as parents may arise directly from the roles parents play within the family. Self-perception of parental role refers to how individuals perceive themselves in their parents roles and covers a number of components which are parents' investment and commitment to children; perception of self-competence in rearing children, the level of satisfaction in their roles and the way a parent balances the distinct roles (e.g. spouse, parent, employee) within the family (Mayseless, 2006; Delvecchio, Riso & Salcuni, 2015). A set of complex factors such as psychological reactions to parenting and qualities of the parents' relationships with the child and with each other may influence the beliefs the parents hold about themselves. Parents' self-perceptions about their roles may, in return, have influences on the acceptance and the success of their roles as parents (Deater-Deckard 2004; Rudy & Grusec, 2006).

Perceptions of competence in parenting are significant predictors of parental involvement (Shumov & Lomax, 2002). Few studies have examined the influence of the marital context on parental invlovement and parental competence. A study of Sevigny and Loutzenhiser (2010) provided proof that parental competence is related to family functioning in both mothers and fathers. Elek, Hudson and Bouffard (2009) found significant relationships among marital happiness and child care self-efficacy. Parents who perceive themselves as competent can be expected to be more positive about their roles and act with their children in warm and sensitive ways. The more competent the parents feel themselves in their roles, the more investment they make in these roles. High investment parents view their children more positively and are more responsive; they also hold a belief that they can meet their children's needs better than other adults (Bornstein et al. 2003). However, most women joined the labour force in society, also started to play the role of a provider, playing multiple roles within family. On the other hand, fathers started to take more responsibility as caregivers (Dökmen, 2016). Hence, playing multiple roles increase the caregiving burden, particularly for mothers, cause difficulties in balancing these roles. Parents who are not happy and satisfied with their marriages and roles within the family may be more rejecting of their children (Chen et al., 2011; Svensson, Bornehag & Janson, 2011).

A wide variety of researches on parenting in relation to various aspects of marriage such as marital satisfaction (O'Brien & Peyton, 2002; Chang et al., 2004; Minotte, Pedersen & Mannon, 2010; Pedro, Ribeiro & Shelton, 2010), marital conflict (Buehler & Gerard, 2002; Kaczynski et al., 2006; McCoy et al., 2013), marital adjustment (O'Leary et al., 2005; Bonds & Gondoli, 2007) provide proof that both marriage and parenting are related constructs. Marriage is a process in which spouses must adhere parental roles and characteristics each is supposed to play within the marital

relationship. Marital investment and satisfaction may rest on whether spouses accept these roles or not (Neff & Karney, 2002). On the other hand, the meanings that individuals attribute to marriage may have influences on this perception of parental roles. The meaning attributed to marriage vary from one person to another, as they are complex cognitive structures that contains beliefs about romantic relationships (Christensen, 2014). The concept of marital belief includes the individual importance attributed to marriage, the age that the person plans to get married and expections about marriage (Willoughby, 2014). Positive marriage attitudes may have a positive influence on marital relationships as such attitudes may help couples solve conflict, maintain stability and quality in marriage (Riggio & Wiser, 2008). Amato and Deboer (2001) found that marital conflict and attitudes towards relationships are related, causing a weak commitment in marriage to end in divorce. In line with this finding, in a longitudinal study, Amato and Rogers (1999) found that in the long run favorable attitudes towards marriage undermine marriage stability and quality.

The literature discussed above has explored the associations between concepts such as parenting, marriage quality and marital satisfaction. However, it is thought that individuals' perceptions of parental roles are significant aspects of their parenting and one's appraisal of parental roles might be related to their global appraisal of marriage. An examination of marital attitudes can help not only to assess future marital context but also help to assess future parenting practices. Within this context in this study, it was aimed to examine the relationship between self-perception of parental role and marital attitude.

# 2. Methodology

# 2.1 Participants

The participants of this study were 220 females and males. Convenience sampling method was employed to determine the participants from the general population of Turkey. The inclusion criteria were being at least 18 years old and being married. The participants were recruited by email or through social media and face-to-face contact.

Of the participants, 69.1% (n=152) of them were females and 30.9% (n=68) of them were males. 23.6% (n=52) of them were between 18 and 29 years old, 65.5% (n=144) of them were between 30 and 49 years old and 10.9% (n=24) of them were 50 years old and above. In regard to the education level of the participants, 15.5% (n=34) of them were primary school graduates, 6.4% (n=14) were secondary school graduates, 28.3% (n=62) were high school graduates and 47.5% (n=104) of them were university graduates. 2.3% (n=5) of the participants were not graduates of any school.

### 2.2 Instruments

#### A. Individual Information Form

In the study, an "Individual Information Form" was developed by the authors in order to gather socio-demographic information about the participants' age, gender and education levels.

## B. Self-Perception of Parental Role Scale (SPPRS)

SPPRS is developed by MacPhee, Benson and Bullock (1986) in order to assess parental self-perception. It is a 22-item scale involving four dimensions which are competence, role satisfaction, investment and role balance. The item has two statements which are related to contrasting parental attitudes or feelings. The subject decides among the two statements which describe her better and checks ""really true for me" or "sort of true for me". The items are scored as 1, 2, 3 and 5. There is not a total score for the entire scale, as the score for each subscale is computed separately. The possible minimum score is 6 and the possible maximum scores is 30 for the Competence sub-dimension. For the sub-dimensions of Role Satisfaction, Investment and Role Balance. The possible minimum score is 4 and the possible maximum scores is 20. The high scores indicates positive self-perception for the relevant sub-dimension of the parental role. The internal consistency reliability of the original scale were .78 for competence, .80 for role satisfaction, .72 for investment and .76 for role balance (MacPhee, Benson and Bullock, 1986). The scale is adopted in Turkish by Güler and Yetim (2008). In the study, the Cronbach alpha coefficients of the scale were found to vary between .61 and .68.

## C. Marital Attitudes Scale (MAS)

MAS was developed by Braaten and Rosén (1998) to assess individuals' subjective beliefs about marriage. The scale consists of 23, 4-point Likert-type items. In terms of the scoring, the responses are scored as "strongly agree" (0), "agree" (1), "disagree" (2) and "strongly disagree" (3). The score of the 9<sup>th</sup> and <sup>23rd</sup> items are reversed before summation of all item scores to compute a total score. The possible highest score is 92 whereas the possible minimum score is 23. Higher score indicate more positive attitudes about marriage. Higher scores indicate more positive attitudes toward marriage. A test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.85 was found for the original version of MAS in a sample of introductory psychology students at Colorado State University (Braaten & Rosén, 1998; Basset, Braaten & Rosén, 1999). The scale is adopted in Turkish by Öz, Uz Baş and Aysan (2016). In the study the Cronbach alpha coefficients of the scale were found as .85.

## 2.3 Data Collection and Data Analysis

In regards with the data collection, the ethical concerns have been adjusted and anonymity was assured. The participants were explained the aim and the content of the study. They were also explained that they are free to accept or decline participating in the study. Prior to the onset of the analysis, a normality test was conducted to examine whether the data collected is parametric or not. The findings showed that the data is non-parametric. Hence, Spearman correlation test was employed in the analysis. The scores obtained were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

## 3. Results

The Table 1 shows the arithmetic mean and the standard deviations of the scores of the scores of Self Perception of Parental Role Scale (SPPRS) and the Marital Attitude Scale (MAS).

**Table 1:** The Arithmetic Mean and the Standard Deviations of the Scores of Self SPPRS and The MAS

Scores		n	Minimum	Maximum	X	sd
MAS		220	42	78	59.33	6.37
SPPRS	Competence	220	6	25	15.88	4.66
	Role Satisfaction	220	4	20	11.96	3.77
	Investment	220	4	20	10.43	3.74
	Role Balance	220	4	20	10.71	04.76

According to the Table 1, participants' scores of MAS vary between 42 and 78. The mean MAS score is 59.33±6.37. In regards with SPPRS, the scores of Competence subscale vary between 6 and 25; and the mean score of the subscale is 15.88±4.66. All the other subscale scores vary between 4 and 20. The mean score of the Role Satisfaction subscale is 11.96±3.77, Investment mean score is 10.43±3.74 and Role Balance mean score is 10.71±4.06.

The Table 2 shows the Spearman correlation coefficients between the scores of MAS and SPPRS.

Table 2: The Spearman Correlation Coefficients between the Scores of MAS and SPPRS

	SPPRS	n	r	р
	Competence	220	0,137	0,042*
MAS	Role Satisfaction	220	0.093	0.169
	Investment	220	0.035	0.601
	Role Balance	220	0.210	0.002*

<sup>\*</sup>p<0.05

Examination of Table 2 reveals that the scores of Competence (r=0.137, p<0.05) and Role Balance (r= 0.210, p<0.05) sub-dimensions of SPPRS are significantly and positively correlated with the scores of MAS. However, no significant correlations are found between the scores of Role Satisfaction (r=0.093, p>0.05) and Investment (r=0.035, p>0.05) sub-dimensions and the scores of MAS.

#### 4. Discussion

This study aimed to examine the relationship between self-perception of parental role and marital attitude. For this purpose, the correlations between the scores of Self Perception of Parental Role Scale and Marital Attitude Scale were examined. As a result, it was found that there are significantly positive correlations between the scores of the

competence and role balance sub-dimensions of SPPR and the scores of MAS; whereas there are no significant correlations between the scores of the role satisfaction and investment sub-dimensions of SPPR and the scores of MAS.

It is thought that the parents' positive attitudes towards marriage may be increasing when the parents perceive themselves as competent in parental roles and are able to balance these roles within the family. Riggio and Wiser (2008) found that marriage attitudes are predictive of personal beliefs about the likelihood of experiencing an unhappy or a happy marriage. In their study, they found that negative marriage attitudes are related to less satisfaction, less commitment and greater conflict in marriage. Stronger attitudes about marriage may lead to positive interpretations about personal relationships, thus affecting relationship outcomes such as marital satisfaction and quality (Etcheverry & Le, 2005). It can be argued that an unhappy marriage may lead parents to withdraw themselves from their parental roles as conflict or dissatisfaction may distract them from their responsibilities and avoid them to be fully involved with their children. A number of studies showed that marital adjustment influence parental warmth (Bonds Braaten, E., & Rosén Gondoli, 2007), whereas marital conflict leads rejection of child-parent relationships (Kitzmann, 2000; Frosch, Mangelsdorf & McHale, 2000; Shelton & Harold, 2008). The negativity of the marriage may lead to a lower quality in parent-child relationships and may steal emotional energy from the parent-child relationship (Wilson & Gottman, 2002; Benzies, Harrison, & Magill-Evans, 2004).

Positive beliefs provide parents with a means for adhering priorities for parenthood, elaborating their own success in parenting and preserving competence. A belief of self-efficacy may serve a motivational source of positive parenting and management behaviors, influencing the child's overall development (Grych, 2002). Parents who are able to establish positive relationships and adjustment with the spouse, might be experiencing stronger efficacy in their roles within the family. They show a more positive perception of parenting and are more able to balance roles, in particular regarding overall positive perception of the family. Therefore, parental competence can be argued to be related to role balance. The roles of both motherhood and fatherhood are traditionally constructed. But a problem may occur when the spouses do not desire or are unable to meet the demands of these roles. For example, women may give up their professional occupations for the sake of a domestic role of the care giver. On the other hand, the fathers as the breadwinners, may need to shoulder heavier burdens to meet the needs of the entire household. Therefore, both women and men may experience stress and incompetence in their roles within the family (Elloy & Smith, 2003; Twenge & Campell, 2003).

As mentioned above, there has been a wide variety of researches linking parenthood to various aspects of marriage. However, conceptualizing parenthood perceptions from the perspective of attitudes towards marriage, this study may provide a useful approach about the future roles of individuals in parenting. While previous researches has traditionally viewed concepts such as conflict, divorce, dissatisfaction as directly influencing parenthood, the approach of the present study may provide a clear

case for elaborating the context in which family problems may occur in the future. Accurate assessments of marital attitudes may also serve to assist professionals in identifying the possible future strains and deficiencies within the family. In line with these arguments, some suggestions for future studies should be mentioned as well; that is, relating marital attitudes directly to self-perception of parenthood should also consider confounding variables such as socio-demographic factors. Particularly gender should be controlled in the assessment of role balance in the future studies, as women and men face experience very distinctive societal roles in many societies.

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