

## Examining the Relationships Between Social Support Resources and Attitudes Towards Women's Career Among Children\*

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**Abstract.** It has been stated for many years that the career development process should be approached in a developmental context. In this respect, it was predicted that early life experiences can affect both subjective career development and attitudes towards the careers of others. In the present study, the association between primary school students' attitudes towards women's career choice and having a career and social support resources was examined. The research group consisted of 194 primary school fourth grade students. The research group had a homogeneous distribution in terms of gender (97 males, 97 females). The mean age of the research group was 9.89 (SD = .54). The Attitude Towards Gender-Based Career Choices Scale and Social Support Appraisals Scale for Children and Adolescents were used as measures. According to the findings of the correlation analysis, attitudes towards women's career choice were negatively associated with perceived social support from family and teachers. There was a positive and significant relationship between the attitudes of women towards having a career and the perceived social support from their friends. Structural equation modelling showed that gender and perceived social support from friends significantly predict attitudes towards women's having a career. It was determined that the attitudes towards women's career choice were only associated with perceived social support from the teacher. The research presented empirical findings that will enable the development of attitudes towards career choice and having a career in early life to be approached in the context of both gender and social support.

**Keywords:** Attitudes Towards Women's Career, Social Support, Children.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Social cognitive career theory (SCCT) stated that the individual does not take a passive role in the career decision process, but there would be also obstacles where the individual may not control. SCCT was explained by a two-stage theoretical analysis. The first stage included cognitive variables, and the second stage was classified by the out-of-control variables (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994). Cognitive variables were competence expectation, outcome expectation, and personal goals. The out of control variables were race and gender. It was known that variables such as gender and race, which were considered as out-of-control variables in line with the SCCT, were existential structures. To achieve this objective, studies were carried out to develop cognitive variables based on out-of-control variables. Hackett and Betz (1981) first used Bandura's (1977) theory of competence expectation in career counseling. They aimed to examine the concept of competence in women's career development. In addition, it was stated that the factors preventing women from acquiring knowledge as a barrier to the development of competence expectation were women's perceptions of traditional gender roles. The experiences among women were generally limited to the home environment; when they examined themselves in areas such as baby care, cooking and cleaning; men encountered more stimuli in the social environment, on more technical issues, on business and money-related issues (Bolat & Odacı, 2017). Hackett and Betz (1981) reported that men gain more experience outside the home compared to women, whereas women have traditional experiences at home. It was thought that the difficulties experienced by women in their career planning processes may be effective in certain social acceptances as well as biologically based differences. There were communities with sharp lines between male and female characteristics in a sociocultural structure that considers marriage and having children as the basic life task for women (Aneshensel & Rosen, 1980). The fact that stimuli vary by gender indicated that women have difficulty in clearly distinguishing their abilities and capacities in their career development process (Bergeron & Romano, 1994; Hackett & Betz, 1981).

The emphasis on the social environment in career development was quite high. Emphasizing the need for individuals to evaluate in all living environments, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System Theory (EST) (1979) emphasized that the development of the child and the environment are in mutual interaction, and this interaction continues throughout life. In EST, the development of the individual consisted of a complex system in environmental layers. These layers were; microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem (Eliasa, 2012; Marzloff, et al., 2010; Özenç & Doğan, 2014). The closest environment that affects the development of the individual is the microsystem. The interaction area with which the individual is in direct communication constitutes the microsystem. This system, which has the greatest impact on the individual, basically includes parents, siblings, close relatives, school, teachers and peer groups (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Support perceptions of individuals in their immediate environment can be expressed with the concept of social support. It referred to the quality of help and support in the relations of individuals with other people in their

social environment (Schwarzer, Knoll & Rieckmann, 2004). Social support resources of individuals can be classified as family, friends and important people (Bieda et al., 2018). One of the models used to explain social support was developed by Cohen and Wills (1985). The evaluation, which stands out in emphasizing the importance of social support in the model, has been reported to increase the strength of struggle in the face of adversities, whether or not stress occurs (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Individuals with a high level of social support can adapt to stress more easily, they can overcome psychological problems in a shorter time (Lara et al., 1998). Inadequate social support was an important predictor of substance use, delinquent behaviors, anxiety and negative affect (Brown, 2009; Holt & Espelage 2005; Varni & Katz 1997). Social support provided a potential benefit for almost every child and adolescent by supporting the general psychological state and reducing psychologically based problems (Cheung & Sun 2000, Demaray & Malecki 2003). In the study investigating the mediating role of social support on resilience and mental well-being in children, it was concluded that resilience partially mediates the effect of social support on mental well-being (Fan & Lu, 2020). Children's awareness of the social support from their social environment has been associated with many different concepts. In a recent study investigating social support in the career field, it was aimed to determine the effect of social support on the career development of secondary school students. It was reported that there was a positive relationship between perceived social support and career development (Gor, Othuon & Migunde, 2020). The aim of the present study was to determine the relationship between social support resources and attitudes towards women's career choice and having a career among a school-based sample of children.

## 2. METHOD

The current cross-sectional study was conducted with correlational design based on quantitative research approach. Correlational researches can enable to comprehend human behaviors and thoughts. Therefore, the associations between behavior patterns and variables, which were defined behaviors, could be determined (Cohen, Manion ve Morrison, 2007).

### Research Group

The research group was composed of 194 primary school 4th grade students from public schools. The research group included 97 female (50%) and 97 male (50%). The mean age of the research group was 9.89 years ( $SD = .54$ ). The research was started after the issuance of the ethical approval from a state university (Date: 01.09.2021/Desicion Number: 68700-19.08). Measures, which were prepared in line with research aims, were shared via social networks. In this direction, the communication resources of the families were used and children of the families who found it appropriate were provided to fill it out. The ethics committee approval for this study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Human and Social Sciences Ethics Committee of Tokat Gazi Osmanpaşa University, dated 16/09/2021 and numbered 01-14.

## Measures

### *Attitude Towards Gender-Based Career Choices Scale*

This measure was developed by Gündüz, Tahran and Kılıç (2015). It consisted of nine items and had a two-factor structure. The first sub-dimension supplied information about the negative attitude towards women's career choice. The second sub-dimension gave information about the negative attitude towards women having a career. The Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of the factors was calculated as .71 for the first factor and .69 for the second factor.

### *Social Support Appraisals Scale*

The adaptation study of the measure developed by Dubow and Ullman (1989) to evaluate the perceptions of children regarding the social support they receive from their families, friends (close friends and peers) and teachers was conducted by Gökler (2007). The measure, which has 3 sub-dimensions, consisted of 41 items. The Cronbach alpha coefficient of the measure was found to be .93. The internal consistency coefficients obtained for the sub-dimensions of the scale were calculated as .89, .86 and .88 for the sub-dimensions of support from friends, support from family and support from teachers, respectively.

## Data Analysis

In line with research aims, data were analyzed by means of SPSS 24.0 and AMOS 24.0. To evaluate the associations among variables, Pearson product of moments correlation coefficient technique was used. Structural pathways were explored via structural equation modelling. All statistical procedures were performed with bootstrap samples (N = 10000).

## 3. FINDINGS

### The Associations Among Variables

To assess the associations between attitudes toward gender-based career choices and social support sources among children, zero-order correlations were examined (Table 1). According to the correlation analysis, adverse attitude towards women's career choice was negatively associated with social support from family ( $r = -.16, p < .05$ ; %95 CI [-.31, -.01]) and teacher ( $r = -.20, p < .01$ ; %95 CI [-.34, -.06]). Additionally, there was a positive significant association between adverse attitude towards women having a career and social support from friends ( $r = .19, p < .01$ ; %95 CI [.05, .34]).

Table 1

*Correlations among variables*

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
(1)WCC	12.19	2.36	1				
(2)WHC	4.92	1.79	-.18**	1			
(3)Fam	19.30	7.77	-.16*	.13	1		
(4)T	19.10	7.68	-.20**	.13	.32**	1	
(5)Frn	37.17	10.90	-.11	.19**	.40**	.50**	1

*Note.* \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; WCC = Attitude towards women's career choice; WHC = Attitude towards women having a career, Fam = Social Support From Family; T = Social Support From Teacher; Frn = Social Support From Friends. Confidence intervals generated by means of bias corrected and bootstrapping (N = 10000). High means in the dimensions of adverse attitude towards women's career choice and adverse attitude towards women having a career refers to high adverse attitudes toward gender-based career choices.

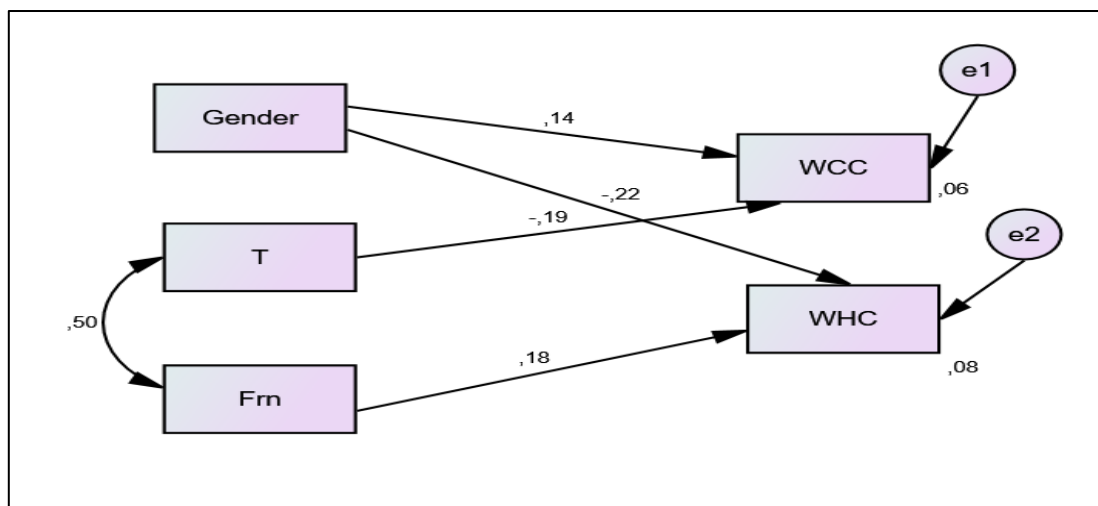


Figure 1. Mediation model (WCC = Attitude towards women's career choice; WHC = Attitude towards women having a career, T = Social Support From Teacher; Frn = Social Support From Friends)

**Structural Pathways**

In line with the research aims, the causal pathways between social support sources and attitudes toward gender-based career choices among children was investigated by means of path analysis based on observed variables. The hypothesis model was initially tested. Although the initial path analysis revealed sufficient fit to the data ( $\chi^2(4) = 5.82$ ,  $p = .213$ ;

GFI = .99, CFI = .98, TLI = .94, RMSEA = .04 95% CI [.01, .12], SRMR = .04, AIC = 39.81, ECVI = .20 90% CI [.19, .26], BIC = 95.37), there were insignificant paths in the model. T ( $\beta = .01$ ,  $p > .05$ ) and Fam ( $\beta = .04$ ,  $p > .05$ ) were not directly associated with WHC. Additionally, Frn ( $\beta = .02$ ,  $p > .05$ ) and Fam ( $\beta = -.10$ ,  $p > .05$ ) were not directly associated with WCC. After insignificant paths were removed from the model, the path analysis was repeated. According to the path analysis results, the model showed excellent fit to the data: ( $X^2(5) = 5.77$ ,  $p = .329$ ; GFI = .99, CFI = .99, TLI = .98, RMSEA = .02 95% CI [.01, .10], SRMR = .04, AIC = 25.77, ECVI = .13 90% CI [.13, .18], BIC = 58.45). All paths were determined as significant. AIC, ECVI and BIC values were also examined to determine which of the tested models was more suitable. According to the literature (Burnham & Anderson 2004; Raftery, 1995), the model with lower AIC, ECVI and BIC values can be considered more suitable. In line with the current values of AIC, ECVI and BIC, the final model was determined more suitable. T ( $\beta = -.19$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and gender ( $\beta = .14$ ,  $p < .05$ ) were directly associated with WCC. Furthermore, Frn ( $\beta = .18$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and gender ( $\beta = -.22$ ,  $p < .01$ ) were directly associated with WHC. T and gender accounted for 6% of the total variance in WCC. Finally, Frn and gender accounted for 8% of the total variance in WHC. The path diagram was presented in Figure 1.

Table 2

*Standardized direct effects*

Path	Product of	
	PE	SE
T→WCC	-.19	.02
Gender→WCC	.14	.32
Frn→WHC	.18	.01
Gender→WHC	-.22	.24

*Note.* WCC = Attitude towards women's career choice; WHC = Attitude towards women having a career, T = Social Support From Teacher; Frn = Social Support From Friends.

#### 4. RESULTS, DISCUSSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

##### Discussion

The emphasis on gender drew attention in the studies in which the opinions about women's career choice and having a career (Bergeron & Romano, 1994; Hackett & Betz, 1981). It should not be forgotten that information is transferred from one generation to another as cultural information in the evaluation of children's attitudes towards gender

(Fosten, 19\*\*). It was thought that the culture in which children live may have attitudes prone to gender stereotypes. However, it is very important to determine which social support source can be effective on these attitudes. In current study, the explanatory role of social support resources in children's negative attitudes towards women's career choice and having a career was investigated.

As stated in the SCCT, there were variables that are out of control for women to have a career (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). One of the out-of-control variables was gender. However, it was known that the works experienced in the studies have positive effects on the feelings of competence (Bandura, 1976). This is why, it can be expected that there will be differences related to gender roles in the formation of attitudes towards career choice. However, as a result of the analysis in the present study, it was found that how gender differs in women's negative beliefs about career choice. When gender-based differences in women's negative attitudes towards career choice were evaluated, it was determined that men had more negative attitudes. Kağıtçıbaşı (2014) states that an individual's beliefs and attitudes can cause a change in the beliefs and attitudes of other people, that is, the existence of a social effect. It can be evaluated that the increase in negative attitudes of male children towards women's career choices is related to the fact that they are affected by stereotyped negative gender stereotypes in the society. Negative attitudes towards women having a career may appear as an important concept when it is considered that they will choose a profession in the future and that they will design their own careers. It can be very important to develop attitudes towards women's careers in a way that is sensitive to gender roles. In the present research, a negative relationship was found between the female children and the negative attitudes towards women having a career. It can be evaluated that in the interpretation of the information about the career of women who present gender-related information, female children move away from stereotypes that are negatively evaluated. The importance of discussing the effect of gender in the evaluation of research results was to make an assessment sensitive to gender roles. It can be thought that the interventions made by focusing on the gender that have negative attitudes towards women's career choice and having a career may be important to provide social benefit.

There were researches stating that women are victims of professional exclusion, especially in respectable professions in society (Günindi-Ersöz, 2016). Due to socio-cultural differences in the society, the value mechanism can be shaped and it was thought that their actions would be affected by their attitudes. Social dynamics may shape this value mechanism at micro-macro level (Özmete & Algan, 2021). Showing their existing potentials with maximum performance and approaching self-realization individually can be associated with both psychological health and development policies. Experiencing a social transformation and women who make up half of the society's ability to choose professions can be associated with general welfare. In the developmental theory regarding the career choice process proposed by Ginzberg et al. (1951), it was stated that individuals between the ages of 11-17 examine their own values about professions and

comprehend external realities. It may not be possible for children to establish values free of social elements in the formation of their own value judgments. Additionally, Gingzberg et al. (1951) emphasized that individuals with this age comprehended external reality. This understanding can enable them to realize both the attitudes towards women's career choice and having a career and the general views of the social support mechanisms. It was reported that the effect of the family on the career choice was important in the theory of needs developed by Roe (1957), which was a theory shaped by the phenomenon of parents' attitudes and needs. As stated in this theory, it was thought that the support received from the family and adults such as teachers may be effective in shaping the attitude towards career choice and having a career. Results from the present study revealed that there was a positive relationship between negative attitudes towards women having a career and perceived social support from friends. This finding can be associated with the social support mechanisms. It was found that children who receive social support from their peers instead of an adult have a negative attitude towards women's career choice and having a career, rather than a sensitive attitude. Individuals in this age group, who are in the stage of preparation for adolescence, can be expected to exhibit behaviors associated with adolescence, such as being among their peers and forming a clique (Ennett & Bauman, 1996). It was possible to talk about the existence of social influence, as there may be changes in the behavior of the individual due to others in the group (Arkonaç; 2001). The possibility of being an ardent defender of even the negative thoughts of popular individuals within the group they exist and support was evaluated (Dolge & Coie, 1987). Furthermore, it can be thought that a negative attitude towards women's career choice was common among the peer group. This information can be interpreted as the children do not have a gender sensitive peer group among themselves. Additionally, the existence of a relationship between a negative attitude and peer support provides important information to researchers and field workers.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

As a result of the research, a negative relationship was found between the negative attitudes of individuals who perceive social support from family and teachers towards women's career choice. Additionally, a positive relationship was determined between the negative attitudes of the individuals who received support from their peers towards women having a profession. There were studies in the literature that social support was positively associated with career awareness and career development (Jang, 2021). Investigating the negative attitudes towards women's career choice and their support mechanisms can reveal the novality of the current paper. In order to determine whether value mechanisms and social judgments are shaped by negative stereotypes in the early period, the present study was conducted with primary school students. Value judgments become laws by ossifying with life experiences (Yalom, 1999). It was known that these unrecorded stereotypes can affect many areas of life (Kilby, 1993). Examples of these life areas can be given such as the choice of career, friends, close relations. For individuals of



this age period, it can be recommended to give importance to values education and to evaluate related environmental stimuli.

Finally, it was recommended to conduct experimental interventions on individuals who have negative attitudes towards women's career choice and having a career. It was also recommended to evaluate the current research findings in experimental interventions. In addition, experts working as psychological counselor and career counselor in primary schools should be sensitive to individuals, who are likely to form negative judgments, in the light of research findings.

### **Research and Publication Ethics Statement**

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

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