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THE EFFECT OF PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS AND RESILIENCE TO THE MARITAL ADJUSTMENT IN OLD AGES

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Abstract: This work was conducted on the 210 elderly members of the Ankara Metropolitan Municipality – Elderly Services Center which serves to approximately 32,000 elders in 7 towns, whose problem solving abilities and resilience effects were to be studied on their marital adjustments of those who are currently married and have been registered in the last decade to the Ankara Metropolitan Municipality – Elderly Services Center. In order to determine the problem solving abilities and resilience of the participants, the Interactional Problem Solving Inventory” (Lange et al., 1991) and “Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale” (Connor & Davidson, 2003) have been used in the research, which were adapted to the Turkish language by Maçkan (2014). In order to measure the cohesion levels of the spouses, the “Dyadic Adjustment Scale” was used consisting of 32 items, developed by Spanier (1976) and adapted to Turkish by Fıfıloğlu & Demir (2000). In consequence of the research, when analyzing the dual and partial correlations between the predictor variables and marital adjustment, problem solving skills ($p < 0.001$) and resilience ($p < 0.001$) were found to have impact on the marital adjustment.

Keywords: Old age, marriage, marital adjustment, problem solving abilities, resilience

Introduction

Researches and theories on aging, related with lifespan, argue that social and emotional behaviors and experiences can change. These changes have an important impact on the relationships, including marriage, of the elderly individuals (Henry et al., 2007).

For many individuals, marriage is the most lasting and most intimate relation type among the affiliations (Levenson et al., 1993). Whereas the social and emotional support which marriage provides contributes the physical, spiritual and social well-being; a happy and adjusted marriage in the contemporary sense is possible if the two individuals complete each other, namely by an integrative adjustment of the spouses (Kalkan & Erganlı, 2008). The concept marital adjustment has a significant position in the researches on marriage and family relations (Spanier, 1976).

Marital adjustment is an important factor that affects the physical and psychological health of the whole family members given that it is a concept that its necessity is recognized for having a harmonious and effective marital relationship. It can be argued that those who have bilateral communication, who can find consensus on the topics that concerns the marriage and family and spouses that can solve their problems in a positive way, have an adjusted marriage (Soylu & Kağnıcı 2015). The quality of marriage governs the private evaluations of the spouses on their relationship. One can state that a quality marriage is related with good cohesion, sufficient communication, high satisfaction from marriage and happiness. In addition to above, this description revives the problem solving skills for discussion. Likewise, the problem solving interaction between the spouses are also considered to be in relation with marriage (Cheung, 2002). Crises and problems are common issues of the families. The skill to solve issues and conflicts with a good cooperation are seen as a key factor in resilient families (Black & Lobo, 2008).

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One of the issues within the family dynamics that is very hard to comprehend is that, whereas certain families continue to coexist and respond in the affirmative against challenges, other families in the similar states cannot cope with their challenges. Families' successful overcome of the transitions, stress or challenges in life are described as the resilience of family (Black & Lobo, 2008). It is known that during the elderly ages, in case the spouses receive necessary attention, provide rigorous care and continue their emotional, economic and social relations with intimacy; they will experience more happiness and during old ages, married couples are better-off than unmarried individuals where spouses can provide useful and efficient support on enjoying life, being happy, spending good free time, nursing and caring in case of a sickness and social support (Özgür, 1991; Güven, 2002; Özer & Fadiloğlu, 2006; Altıparmak, 2009).

In the recent years, the fact that strong marriages do not exist anymore is very thought-provoking from the views of the continuum of life and the future individualization with its potential problems arising from it. Although the positive-negative indicators of marital adjustment are known, researches have been limited regarding the drive of healthy marriages. This limited state scales up even more when the old ages are included in this equation.

By taking into account the emotional and cognitive features of the old ages, the purpose of this research which analyze the marital satisfaction of this period is; to determine the effect of the problem solving skills and resilience in the old ages to the marital cohesion, and finding out suggestions towards the problems arising in the marital relations of this period.

Material and Method

The research area is limited with the city of Ankara. The research population is comprised of the registered 65+ elderly spouses who are currently married, and have been registered in the last decade to the Ankara Metropolitan Municipality – Elderly Services Center who are known to provide care to 60+ elders in Ankara. The research applied the simple random sampling method which is one the probability sampling techniques. Including the losses in the last decade, the number of elders that are registered in 7 different towns is 6889. According to these data, the sample size has been determined as 210 at the confidence level of 95% (Bayram, 2009) which is usually a recognized value in the researches.

While gathering the research material, a form has been used comprising of 4 sections which was created by utilizing the related resources in the literature and from several previous researches (Spainer 1976; Lange et al., 1991; Fıfıloğlu & Demir, 2000; Connor & Davidson, 2003; Demiray, 2006).

In order to determine the problem solving abilities and resiliencies of the individuals who were under the scope of this research, the "Interactional Problem Solving Inventory" (Lange et al., 1991) and "Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale" (Connor & Davidson, 2003) have been used, which were adapted to Turkish by Maçkan (2014). For the purpose of measuring the cohesion levels of the spouses, the "Dyadic Adjustment Scale" was used consisting of 32 articles, developed by Spanier (1976) and adapted to Turkish by Fıfıloğlu & Demir (2000).

Evaluation of the Data

The first part of the research contains a survey on the socio-demographic data regarding the participants, whereas the second part includes the evaluation of the following scored choices that are a part of the 17 article Interactional Problem Solving Inventory's positive sentences (1, 2, 6, 9, 11), strongly agree (5), agree (4), neutral (3), disagree (2), strongly disagree; and negative sentences of (3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17) strongly disagree (5), disagree (4), neutral (3), agree (2), strongly agree (1).

In order to measure the resiliencies of the individuals, the "Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale" (Connor & Davidson, 2003) was adapted. For the answers given regarding the 25 articles in the scale, the following have been scored and evaluated: always valid (5), usually valid (4), occasionally valid (3), rarely valid (2), and never valid (1).

In order to measure the cohesion levels of the spouses, the answers to the sentences in the 32 article "Dyadic Adjustment Scale" were scored and evaluated (We always agree – we never agree, always – rarely, every day – nevermore, all of them – none; never – once a day).

In the second and third part of this research, charts have been created that shows absolute and percentage values and the t-test has been applied by only taking into account the gender variable.

In the last part multiple-linear regression analysis has been conducted through the SPSS 16 Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software that allows scientists to do multidimensional examinations on the relation between the variables in experimental and survey researches, for the purpose of finding the effects of resilience and problem solving skills on the marital adjustment.

Findings and Discussion

Identifying Socio-demographic findings of the elderly participants are given in Table 1.

The 55.7% of the participants were female and 44.3% were male. The ages of the elders were varying between 60 and 80 and the average age was 67.89 ± 5.72 . One can see that 9.5% of the elders were illiterate, 1.0% were literate, 56.2% were elementary school, 21.9% were middle school, 11.0% were high school and 0.5% were university graduates. The elders that were included in the scope of the research had marriage durations varying between 30 and 60 years, and average marriage duration was found to be 46.51 ± 7.19 . A significant number of the elders (95.0%) are members of multi-child large families and approximately one third (31.9%) have 3 children. As one can comprehend from the chart, 87.1% of the elders who participated in the research stated they had pre-arranged marriage. When looking into the frequency of the elders meeting with their families, 41.4% were found to meet once in a week, 22.9% were found to meet twice or thrice in a week (Table 1).

Table 1. Socio-Demographic data of elderly participants

Illustrating Features	n	%
Gender		
Female	117	55,7
Male	93	44,3
Total	210	100,0
Age		
65-69	150	71,4
70-80	60	28,6
Total	210	100,0
$\bar{X} = 67.89 \pm 5.72$		
State of education		
Illiterate	20	9,5
Literate	2	1,0
Elementary School	118	56,2
Middle School	46	21,9
Highschool	23	11,0
University	1	,5
Total	210	100,0
Duration of marriage		
30-40	49	23,3
41-50	113	53,8
51-60	48	22,9
Total	210	100,0
$\bar{X} = 46.51 \pm 7.19$		
Number of children		
No children	2	1,0
1	2	1,0
2	32	15,2
3	67	31,9
4	46	21,9
5	31	14,8
6	30	14,2
Total	210	100,0
$\bar{X} = 3.84 \pm 1.44$		
Form of marriage		
Pre-arranged Marriage	183	87,1
Acquainted Marriage	27	12,9
Total	210	100,0
Meeting frequency with family members (e.g. children, grandchildren)		
Once in a Week	87	41,4
Twice-Thrice in a Week	48	22,9
Once in a Month	31	14,8
Twice or more in a Month	34	16,2
Only on important days	10	4,8
Total	210	100,0

The average scores on the problem solving skills scale of the elder who participated are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Total scores of the problem solving skills scale of elder based on gender and T-Test results

Problem Solving Skills	Gender	n	\bar{x}	sd	t	p
	Female	117	54,57	1,22		
	Male	93	60,90	1,65		
	Total	210	57,38	1,46		

The problem solving skills scale total scores, based on gender variable, was found to show a significant difference ($t = -3.382$, $p < 0.05$), and male's problem solving skills scale scores were found to be higher than female's. It is known that problem solving is related to one's purpose, requirements, values, faith, skills, habits and tendencies; furthermore one converging to problem solving is in relation with courage, desire and self-confidence (Akkapulu, 2005).

Anderson (1980) focuses on cognitive operations and identifies the problem solving process as aiming cognitive operations respectively to a target. The author states that the problem solving process starts only when an individual realizes s/he has to react at certain levels and hence the person must have a target in order to give efforts on problem solving.

Heppner and Krauskopf (1987) argues on the other hand, the approach-avoidance mode of individuals, self-control and confidence for the resolution of problems can effect solving problems with success and coping strategies; and problem solving can be changed via certain skill trainings.

The average scores of the participating elders on resilience perception scale are given in Table 3.

The average scores of the sub-scales of "Individual competence, high standards and determination", "Confidence on instincts, Safe Relations and Coping with Negative Emotions" and "Control of Life", showed discrepancy in the statistical level of $p < 0.001$ based on gender variable; while males scored higher than females in the test. Yet, the sub-scale of "Positive recognition of the changes in life" showed no discrepancies amongst the participants, based on gender variable ($p > 0.05$).

Table 3. Total scores of the resilience perception scale of elders based on gender and T-Test results

Resilience Perception	Gender	N	\bar{x}	sd	t	p
Individual competence, high standards and determination	Female	117	25,16	5,63	6,954	,000***
	Male	93	29,83	3,57		
	Total	210	27,23	5,35		
Confidence on instincts, Safe Relations and Coping with Negative Emotions	Female	117	17,72	4,69	4,421	,000***
	Male	93	20,25	3,26		
	Total	210	18,84	4,29		
Positive recognition of the changes in life	Female	117	22,53	3,51	,713	,476
	Male	93	22,96	5,15		
	Total	210	22,72	4,30		
Control of Life	Female	117	13,19	2,52	5,794	.000***
	Male	93	15,08	2,08		
	Total	210	14,03	2,51		
Scale Total	Female	117	78,61	12,58	5,992	.000***
	Male	93	88,11	10,39		
	Total	210	82,81	12,56		

The average scores of the participating individuals on marital adjustment are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Total scores of the marital adjustment scale based on gender and T-Test results

Marital Adjustment	Gender	N	\bar{x}	sd	t	P
	Female	117	115,009	21,201		
	Male	93	117,731	15,305		
	Total	210	116,214	18,826		

The marital adjustment scale total scores based on gender variable of the elder individuals participated in the research, were found to be statistically not significantly different.

The Multiple Regression Analysis result on marital adjustment is shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Multiple regression analysis on marital adjustment

Variable	B	Standard Failure	β	T	p	Dyadic r	Partial r
Constant	102,988	7,595	-	13,561	,000	-	-
Resilience	-,358	,091	-,239	-3,935	,000	-,064	-,264
Problem Solving Skills	,747	,078	,578	9,521	,000	,506	,552
R=0.554, F (2, 207)=45.938,		R ² =0.307 p=.000					

When the dual and partial correlations between the predictor variables and marital adjustment are analyzed, one can find the following: problem solving abilities and marital adjustment have a positive and medium-level relation between each other ($r = .51$); whereas there is no binary correlation between resilience and marital adjustment ($r = -.06$).

According to the standardized regression factor (β), the relative priority order of the predictor variables on job satisfaction are problem solving skills and resilience. When analyzing the t-test results on the regression factors' expressiveness, both problem solving skills ($t=9.51$, $p<0.001$) and resilience ($t=3.935$, $p<0.001$) are significant predictors on marital adjustment.

Resilience and problem solving skills together was found to produce with the marital adjustment scale scores a medium-level and significant relation ($R=0.554$, $R^2=.307$, $p<.001$). The mentioned two variables, namely resilience and problem solving skills, can explain 31% of the total variance in marital adjustment. In the recent years it can be stated that there are no works studying directly the effect of resilience and problem solving skill in old ages to the marital adjustment, yet there are researches that indirectly argues these topics.

Margolin and Wampold's (1981) works on marital relations and conflicts in the flirting period reveals that, spouses who are happy in their marriage have more competence in problem solving compared to unhappy couples. Additionally they argue that negative behaviors such as complaining, constantly expressing negative emotions and defensive behavior are in relation with the lack of happiness in marriage. Fichten and Wright (1983) have also stated similarly to the findings of this research, there are differences between the happy and problematic spouses on problem solving behavior; happy spouses have better behavior on solving their problems compared to the turbulent spouses, which dispute the most and demonstrate inappropriate communication methods.

Günay (2000) argues in the work where he researches for the relation between the way of thinking of the married couples and marital adjustments; those spouses who describe their marriage process as inharmonious, have less union of idea than discordant couples, less emotional expression, less commitment and less marital satisfaction level. Hünler and Gençöz (2003) expresses that the perception of deadlock in marriage issues has an important role on the embarrassing behavior and marital satisfaction, and one's embarrassing behavior increases the tendency to see the situation unsolvable or increase the unilateral faith of one's having lack of skills on finding solutions; thus this state may cause the individuals experience a decrease of marital satisfaction.

Güven and Sevim (2007) have researches finding that the problem solving skills in marriage predicts marital satisfaction as primary. In the above mentioned researches the findings in general suggests, inter-personal communication and cohesion are effective in explaining marital satisfaction, thus can be argued that they are coherent and related with the findings of this research.

Results and Suggestions

Consequently, the elderly male attended the research, compared to the elderly female, have higher average scores on problem solving and resilience scale; both problem solving skill and resilience have been found as a significant predictor on marital adjustment.

When considering the old age losses, in order for the spouses to put their marriage relations into an order, educations should be provided on; coping against inter-spouse conflicts and discords; to be prepared for the future problems and enhance coping skills; which will contribute to the sustain and develop the relation.

In addition, even if not remove the problem completely but decrease to the lowest levels, protective/preventive programs such as “marriage education”, “family life education”, “occupational training” will contribute to decrease the problems emerging in the old ages and reduce the individual, social and economic costs; if spread by state support.

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