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## The Relationship Between Midwifery Students' Attitudes Towards Marriage and Birth Fears

Ebelik Öğrencilerinin Evliliğe Yönelik Tutumları ve Doğum Korkuları Arasındaki İlişki

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### ABSTRACT

**Aim:** This research was conducted to determine the relationship between midwifery students' attitudes towards marriage and their fear of birth.

**Method:** A cross-sectional and relation-seeking study was conducted with students from the Department of Midwifery, Faculty of Health Sciences, of two universities in eastern Turkey. In the study, all midwifery students studying at both universities were tried to be reached, rather than sampling. The study was completed with 372 midwifery students who participated in the study on a voluntary basis. The data of the study were collected with "Personal Information Form", "Inonu Marriage Attitude Scale (IMAS)" and "Women Childbirth Fear – Prior to Pregnancy Scale (WCF-PPS)". In the evaluation of the data, number, percentage distributions, mean, standard deviation, Independent t-test, One-Way Anova, Tukey and correlation tests were used in SPSS (25.0) statistical package program.

**Results:** The mean age of the students was 20.71±1.55. 80.1% of the students have an immediate family, 54.3% live in the city center, 96.8% do not work, and 56.7% of them have income equal to their expenses. The total mean scores of the students from IMAS and WCF-PPS are respectively; 69.73±20.01 and 36.37±12.00. A statistically significant negative correlation was found between students' attitudes towards marriage and fear of birth (p<0.001).

**Conclusion:** In this study, it was determined that as the students' fear of birth before pregnancy increased, their attitudes towards marriage decreased. In line with this result, it is recommended to support the thoughts of future marriage by taking into account the pre-pregnancy birth fears of the students.

**Keywords:** Midwifery Students, Fear of Childbirth, Marriage Attitude

### ÖZ

**Amaç:** Bu araştırma ebelik öğrencilerinin evliliğe yönelik tutumları ve doğum korkuları arasındaki ilişkinin belirlenmesi amacıyla yapılmıştır.

**Yöntem:** Kesitsel ve ilişki arayıcı tipte olan bu araştırma Türkiye'nin doğusunda bulunan iki üniversitenin Sağlık Bilimleri Fakültesi Ebelik Bölümü öğrencileri ile yürütülmüştür. Araştırmada örneklem hesabına gidilmeyip her iki üniversitede öğrenim gören tüm ebelik öğrencilerine ulaşılmaya çalışılmıştır. Gönüllülük esasına dayanarak araştırmaya katılan 372 ebelik öğrencisi ile çalışma tamamlanmıştır. Araştırmanın verileri "Kişisel Bilgi Formu", "İnönü Evlilik Tutum Ölçeği (İETÖ)" ve "Kadın Gebelik Öncesi Doğum Korkusu Ölçeği (KGÖ-DKÖ)" ile toplanmıştır. Verilerin değerlendirmesinde SPSS (25.0) istatistik paket programında sayı, yüzde dağılımları, ortalama, standart sapma, Independent t-test, One-Way Anova, Tukey ve korelasyon testleri kullanılmıştır.

**Bulgular:** Öğrencilerin yaş ortalaması 20,71±1,55'tir. Öğrencilerin %80,1'i çekirdek aile yapısına sahip, %54,3'ü il merkezinde yaşamakta, %96,8'i çalışmamakta ve %56,7'sinin geliri giderine eşittir. Öğrencilerin İET ve KGÖ-DKÖ'den aldıkları toplam puan ortalamaları sırasıyla; 69,73±20,01 ve 36,37±12,00'dır. Öğrencilerin evliliğe yönelik tutumları ve doğum korkuları arasında negatif yönde istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bir ilişki bulunmuştur (p<0,001).

**Sonuç:** Bu çalışmada öğrencilerin gebelik öncesi doğum korkuları arttıkça evliliğe yönelik tutumlarının azaldığı saptandı. Bu sonuç doğrultusunda öğrencilerin gebelik öncesi doğum korkuları dikkate alınarak gelecekteki evlilik düşüncelerinin desteklenmesi önerilmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Ebelik Öğrencileri, Doğum Korkusu, Evlilik Tutumu

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## INTRODUCTION

Marriage, which is one of the important decisions people make during their lifetime, is an important life experience that affects the majority of their lives, and it is the union of two people of the opposite sex according to the law.<sup>1,2</sup> The process of change in family patterns and marriage institution, which is one of the social structures, can affect people's decisions and attitudes.<sup>1</sup> Smock (2004) states that attitudes and expectations of marriage have started to change in general, and accordingly, marriage has taken on a complex and incomprehensible structure.<sup>3</sup>

According to Blagojevic, while marriage attitude is a part of consciousness, it is also sensitive to changes. For this reason, the marriage attitudes of young people; It is affected by many factors such as the globalizing world order, family life, and the position of the individual in social life.<sup>4</sup>

It has been reported that there are many variables such as family structures, parental union status, perceived parental attitudes, attachment styles, love styles, relationship status and gender roles among the factors affecting attitudes towards marriage.<sup>5-7</sup> In a study conducted to determine the factors affecting marriage attitudes; It is reported that students' attitudes towards marriage decided by, the happiness of their parents, their family's views on marriage, their fear of marriage, their families' marriage status, their views on the ideal marriage age for men and women, and their gender.<sup>8</sup> Although the factors affecting the marriage attitude vary, there is no study in the literature examining the effect of fear of birth on marriage attitude. In this direction, it is thought that the fear of birth before pregnancy will affect the attitude towards marriage and that it may be related to the fear of birth and marriage attitude.

Birth is seen as an important event for most women and their families, but the fear of childbirth; It is a condition that is seen in nulliparous, primiparous and multiparous women and negatively affects women's health.<sup>9</sup> In a systematic review, it is reported that the rate of fear of childbirth varies between 6.3% and 14.8%.<sup>9</sup> In another study, it was observed that 25.9% of female students before pregnancy had clinical fear of childbirth, but it was reported that insufficient information about birth, expected labor pain, high level of anxiety, and physical anxiety were the causes of fear of childbirth.<sup>10</sup> Studies examining the fear of childbirth were mostly conducted in pregnant and postpartum women, but attitudes towards childbirth are acquired before pregnancy. Therefore, it is important to know the prevalence level of fear in young women who have never been pregnant.<sup>10</sup> Fear of childbirth can be experienced not only in pregnant women, but also in childless individuals.<sup>11</sup> Recent studies have focused on examining the birth-related fears<sup>10,12-14</sup> and attitudes of young people who want to have children in the future.<sup>2,8</sup> However, it has not been observed in any studies on this subject in the literature evaluating the relationship between university students' attitudes towards marriage and their fear of birth. In the light of this information, it is thought that students who experience birth odor may develop negative attitudes towards marriage. It is very essential to evaluate the marriage attitudes of the students who will establish the families of the future and to deal with different variables such as the fear of birth that may affect this attitude. In this direction, it is aimed to examine the relationship between midwifery students' attitudes towards marriage and their fear of birth.

## MATERIAL AND METHOD

The data of the descriptive and cross-sectional research were collected online via Google Forms in computer environment

between July and August 2022. The frame of the research consists of midwifery students who continue their education actively at the

universities where the research was conducted. Since the data of the research was collected by the Google Forms method, it consisted of 372 people who met the criteria for inclusion in the study on the specified date for the study with the snowball sampling method without determining any sample number and were reached via the social network WhatsApp.

#### **Inclusion criteria:**

- No diagnosed visual or psychological problems,
- Possession of the WhatsApp application on their phone and internet access,
- Active enrollment in the midwifery department.

#### **Data Collection Tools**

The data of the study were collected using the Personal Information Form, Women Childbirth Fear – Prior to Pregnancy Scale (WCF-PPS) and İnönü Marriage Attitude Scale.

#### **Personal Information Form**

This form was prepared by the researchers and consists of 7 questions about the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants (such as age, class level, family structure).

#### **Women Childbirth Fear – Prior to Pregnancy Scale (WCF-PPS)**

The scale was developed by Stoll et al. (2016) to measure the WCF-PPS of young male and female individuals<sup>15</sup>, and its validity and reliability were performed by Uçar and Taşhan (2017).<sup>13</sup> Although the scale consists of 10 items, it was designed in a six-point Likert type. The items in the scale; strongly disagree “1”, disagree “2”, partially disagree “3”, partially agree “4”, agree “5”, strongly agree “6”. The highest score to be obtained from the scale is 60 and the lowest score is 10. A high total item score indicates a high level of fear. Although the Cronbach alpha coefficient of the developed scale was 0.86, the Cronbach alpha of the scale was 0.93 in this study.

#### **Inonu Marriage Attitude Scale**

The scale was developed by Bayoğlu and Atli (2014) as a measurement tool to determine the attitudes of young individuals towards marriage.<sup>1</sup> The scale consists of 21 items and is designed in a five-point Likert type. The items in the scale are answered as (1) strongly disagree, (2) rarely agree, (3) somewhat agree, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree. A high level of item total score means a positive attitude towards marriage, and a low level means a negative attitude towards marriage. In this study, the Cronbach alpha of the scale was 0.97.

#### **Data Collection**

The measurement tools were prepared by the researchers with Google Forms on the internet and sent to social networking (WhatsApp) groups. The participant, who opened the online form to fill out, was informed about the study and was able to view the questionnaire if he gave his consent to participate in the study. After completing the questionnaire, the questionnaire was terminated by clicking on the submit button and it was possible for one person to respond once. The survey response time was determined to be approximately 6-8 minutes. The study data obtained were transferred to the computer environment by the researchers.

#### **Data Analysis**

In the study, the data was evaluated using the SPSS (25.0) package program at a 95% confidence interval and based on the  $p < 0.05$  significance level. In addition to descriptive statistics (number, frequency, percentage, standard deviation, mean), t-test for independent groups, correlation, one-way ANOVA and Cronbach's alpha reliability analysis were used to evaluate the data.

#### **Ethical Considerations**

The purpose of the research was clearly explained to the participating individuals at the beginning of the survey, that any personal information would not be shared without permission, that they could withdraw from the research at any time, and that the answers could not be used for any personal purpose

other than contributing to the literature. All stages of the research were carried out in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. Approval was obtained from a local ethics committee for this study (Decision No: 2022/08-02).

### Limitations of the Research

As the participants and researchers did not come face to face during the data collection phase, collecting the research data more

objectively is the strength of the study. The limitation of the study is that the study can only be generalized to the institutions. In addition, the data collected in the study was limited to the responses of midwifery students to the scale items used.

### Acknowledgements

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## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The average age of the students is  $20.71 \pm 1.55$  (min: 18, max: 27). 37.9% of the students are first grade, 17.7% are second grade, 32.5% are third grade and 11.9% are fourth grade. 82.2% of the students have a immediate family, 54.3% live in the city center, 56.7% have a medium economic status and 96.8% do not work (Table 1).

**Table 1. Distribution of Students' Socio-Demographical and Individual Characteristics**

Variables	n (%)
<b>Class</b>	
First class	141 (37.9)
Second class	66 (17.7)
Third class	121 (32.5)
Fourth class	44 (11.9)
<b>Family type</b>	
Immediate family	298 (80.1)
Extended family	74 (19.9)
<b>Living place</b>	
Province	202 (54.3)
District	123 (33.1)
Village	47 (12.6)
<b>Economical situation</b>	
High	42 (11.3)
Middle	211 (56.7)
Low	119 (32.0)
<b>Working Status</b>	
Working	12 (3.2)
Not working	360 (96.8)
<b>Average age of students (Mean<math>\pm</math>SD): <math>20.71 \pm 1.55</math></b>	

SD: Standard Deviation

The total average scores of the students from WCF-PPS and IMAS are respectively;  $36.37 \pm 12.00$  and  $69.73 \pm 20.01$ .

**Table 2. Distribution of Students' Attitudes Towards Marriage Scale and Women Childbirth Fear – Prior to Pregnancy Scale Total Mean Scores**

WCF-PPS (Mean $\pm$ SD)	IMAS (Mean $\pm$ SD)
$36.37 \pm 12.00$	$69.73 \pm 20.01$

WCF-PPS: Women Childbirth Fear – Prior to Pregnancy Scale  
IMAS: Inonu Marriage Attitude Scale  
SD: Standard Deviation

In this study, some characteristics of the students and the average scores they got from WCF-PPS and IMAS were compared. A statistically significant difference was found between the grade levels of the students and the mean scores they got from WCF-PPS. The mean scores of first-year students in WCF-PPS are statistically significantly higher than fourth-year students. In other words, the grade level of the students affects the average score they get from WCF-PPS.

**Table 3. Comparison of WCF-PPS and IMAS Total Scores According to Students' Socio-demographic and Individual Characteristics**

Variables	WCF-PPS	IMAS
<b>Class</b>		
First class <sup>a</sup>	$38.34 \pm 11.82$	$66.97 \pm 20.88$
Second class <sup>b</sup>	$35.76 \pm 11.16$	$72.27 \pm 17.93$
Third class <sup>c</sup>	$35.88 \pm 12.73$	$71.23 \pm 20.07$
Fourth class <sup>d</sup>	$32.32 \pm 10.78$	$70.59 \pm 19.58$
<b>F/t/Z value</b>	<b>F = 3.112</b>	F = 1.508
<b>p</b>	<b>0.026 a&gt;d</b>	0.212
<b>Family type</b>		
Immediate family	$36.30 \pm 12.04$	$69.60 \pm 20.25$
Extended family	$36.66 \pm 11.91$	$70.22 \pm 19.11$
<b>F/t/Z value</b>	t = -0.233	t = -0.235
<b>p</b>	0.816	0.808
<b>Living place</b>		
Province	$35.61 \pm 12.36$	$69.70 \pm 20.21$
District	$36.97 \pm 11.39$	$68.00 \pm 19.92$
Village	$38.06 \pm 11.98$	$74.36 \pm 19.05$
<b>F/t/Z value</b>	F = 1.021	F = 1.725
<b>p</b>	0.361	0.180



Table 3. (Continues)

Variables	WCF-PPS	IMAS
<b>Economical situation</b>		
High	36.18±11.63	70.65±19.53
Middle	34.69±12.12	68.33±20.70
Low	37.30±12.61	68.57±20.67
<b>F/t/Z value</b>	F= 0.795	F= 0.525
<b>p</b>	0.452	0.592
<b>Working Status</b>		
Working	30.67±12.86	68.42±19.82
Not working	36.56±11.94	69.77±20.04
<b>F/t/Z value</b>	Z= -1.563	Z= -0.426
<b>p</b>	0.118	0.670

WCF-PPS: Women Childbirth Fear-Prior to Pregnancy Scale

IMAS: Inonu Marriage Attitude Scale

t: Independent Simple T-Test, F: One-way ANOVA Test, Z: Mann Whitney U-Test

In Table 4, the correlation between the students' WCF-PPS and the total average score they got from IMAS was examined. A statistically significant negative correlation was found between the students' WCF-PPS and IMAS. In other words, as the average scores of the students from pre-pregnancy birth fears increase; Marriage attitudes are declining.

Table 4. The Relationship Between Students' Attitudes Towards Marriage Scale and Pre-Pregnancy Fear of Birth Scale Total Scores

		WCF-PPS	IMAS
<b>WCF-PPS</b>	r	1	-.195
	p		.000 <sup>a</sup>
<b>IMAS</b>	r	-.195	1
	p	.000 <sup>a</sup>	

WCF-PPS: Women Childbirth Fear-Prior to Pregnancy Scale

IMAS: Inonu Marriage Attitude Scale

a: p&lt;0.001, r: Pearson Correlation Coefficient

In this study, the relationship between midwifery students' attitudes towards marriage and their fear of birth was evaluated and it was determined that as the average scores of the students from fear of birth before pregnancy increased, their attitudes towards marriage decreased.

It is thought that during the university period, the idea of marriage for young people emerged and it was a process that included the stages of choosing a dream spouse. The criteria and expectations sought for marriage

take shape during the university period and positive or all negative attitudes towards marriage can develop in this period.<sup>16,17</sup> In this study conducted with midwifery students, the average total score they got from IMAS was 69.73±20.01, and it was seen that more than half of the students had a positive attitude towards marriage. Studies have shown that university students' attitudes towards marriage are positive and the findings are consistent with our study.<sup>2,8,17-19</sup> The fact that students have a high attitude towards marriage can be interpreted as their future plans are shaped at university age and they want to establish a more realistic and orderly life. It was observed that the family type, place of residence, working status and income status of the family did not affect the attitudes of the students towards marriage. This may be due to the age, socioeconomic and regional differences of the sample group.

Pregnancy and childbirth are seen as a joyful event for many women, but also as a fearful and worrying event.<sup>9</sup> These feelings can be experienced not only in pregnant women, but also in young individuals who have not had children.<sup>11</sup> The presentation of birth as a frightening and unbearably painful situation in our country and in the visual media, and the fact that those who have had a negative birth experience convey this experience cause individuals who have never given birth to perceive birth negatively and to fear childbirth.<sup>20</sup> In the study conducted by Thomson et al. (2017), it was reported that the negative birth stories that students heard from friends/family members and the images in the media about birth were associated with higher birth fear scores.<sup>21</sup> Kapisız et al. (2017) determined that the reason for students' fears is that they are afraid of harming the baby or spouse/self during vaginal delivery, experiencing pain at the time of delivery, being alone during delivery, even dying, and experiencing physical changes after birth.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Cleeton reports that students have pain as a dominant dimension of their fear of childbirth.<sup>22</sup>

Studies on fear of childbirth show that fear of childbirth is common among students. In a

qualitative study conducted in order to reveal the emotions, thoughts, perceptions and cultural perspectives of nursing students about birth; It is reported that students have fears about childbirth.<sup>20</sup> It was found that 25.9% of university students in Croatia<sup>10</sup>, more than a quarter of young women in the USA<sup>23</sup>, and 81% of single women in Turkey have fear of childbirth.<sup>11</sup> Again, it was determined that the mean pre-pregnancy fear of childbirth score of female students was  $41.63 \pm 9.49$ .<sup>24</sup> In this study, it was seen that the total score of the students' fear of birth before pregnancy was  $36.37 \pm 12.00$  and they had a lower level of fear of birth compared to the studies. It is thought that this situation is due to the fact that the students included in the sample are students of the midwifery department. In the study of Gür et al. to evaluate the fear of childbirth before pregnancy in childless individuals; The fact that the total score of women's fear of childbirth before pregnancy is  $40.25 \pm 11.04$ <sup>11</sup> and the fear of childbirth score average of midwife students in this study supports our view.

It was determined that the mean scores of first-year students from WCF-PPS were statistically significantly higher than that of fourth-year students. The fact that upper-class students have a low level of fear of birth can be explained by the fact that they took birth-related lessons during the school term and were informed about birth. In addition, it can be interpreted that the theoretical knowledge he received in school life affects his perspectives on birth and the fear of birth will decrease. In a study, it was reported that the level of fear of birth was lower in young people who reported a high level of birth knowledge.<sup>23</sup> In a different study, in accordance with our findings, it was determined that the students' fear level before pregnancy was higher than after the education.<sup>25</sup> In a study, it was reported that the increase in knowledge about pregnancy and birth and witnessing a birth professionally (doula, nurse, midwife or medical) reduced the level of fear of birth in

students.<sup>26</sup> In the midwifery student curriculum, midwifery and obstetrics courses are given for 4 years, but students who pass the course successfully at the end of the semester go to clinical practice. As first year midwifery students learn about birth for the first time and start practicing in the field, it can be considered normal to have high fears of birth. Contrary to the results of the study, it was found in a study conducted that the total scores of WCF-PPS did not differ significantly according to the status of students taking courses related to obstetrics and women's health.<sup>23</sup> In the qualitative study, it was determined that the births they witnessed in the practice of the course on obstetrics and women's health increased the fears of the students.<sup>20</sup> For this reason, an education curriculum that aims to advance students' learning and theoretical knowledge both in the clinical field and in the classroom environment should be implemented.<sup>24</sup> In our study, it was observed that the family type, place of residence, working status and income status of the family did not affect the students' fear of childbirth before pregnancy. Studies have found that students' fear of childbirth is not affected by socio-demographic variables and is consistent with our results.<sup>10,21,24</sup>

It has not been observed in any studies on this subject in the literature examining the relationship between fear of childbirth and marriage attitude. However, presenting birth as a frightening and unbearably painful situation may cause individuals to perceive birth as a terrible event and lead to fear of birth,<sup>15,20</sup> and this may indirectly affect the attitude towards marriage. These findings show that young people who have not experienced pregnancy should be professionally informed about the period of pregnancy and labor. In addition, it is recommended that midwives provide counseling to women about pregnancy and labor in the pre-pregnancy period and that the fear of childbirth should be determined at the premarital stage.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the research, it was determined that the fear of pre-pregnancy birth was lower in midwifery students studying in the last year and as the positive attitude towards marriage increased in midwifery students, the fear of pre-pregnancy birth decreased. In line with these findings; It is necessary to determine the prenatal fears of midwifery students and their attitudes towards marriage. In particular, midwives who take an active role in primary care should evaluate pre-pregnancy fear of childbirth and marriage attitude in the follow-up of women aged 15-49, and detect

existing risks early. The reasons underlying the fear of childbirth before pregnancy should be investigated and individuals should be counseled on this issue. It is recommended that more studies be conducted using qualitative research methods to determine the variables that may negatively affect the attitudes of university students towards marriage. It is recommended to prepare education programs for individuals on pregnancy, childbirth, marriage and family life, and to plan larger studies to determine students' perspectives and attitudes towards marriage.

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